

# ANNUAL REPORT 2013/2014

## Introduction from Cllr John Thomas, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator

Your Overview and Scrutiny Board is a cross party Board of elected councillors who meet regularly throughout the year to consider the source and application of funds proposed and made by the Council. Our key task is to represent you, the citizen of the Bay, and to hold the Council's Executive to account in their use of such funding.

All local authorities are facing difficult times resultant upon the recent 4 year programme of reductions in grants given to local authorities by central government when Torbay has been obliged to implement budgetary reductions of more than 30%. Torbay Council has now had to implement a further reduction in its budget spend of £22 Million for the two years 2014/16 and the theme of ongoing reductions will continue up until at least 2018 by when it is estimated that Torbay Council will have been forced to reduce its Budget by over 60% over a period of 8 years.

The 2014/16 cuts to all services are severe, but in particular, it was evident to us that the proposed cut of more than 70% to the Supporting People Budget would have a major, and perhaps terminal, effect on some of the services provided to the vulnerable and the disadvantaged in Torbay.

Your Overview and Scrutiny Board invited and received representations from many external organisations that were to be affected by the cuts. Many representations called for a one year delay in the Supporting People cuts to provide time for the organisations to find alternative ways of funding their activities. Amongst its many final recommendations for the Budget, your Overview and Scrutiny Board supported these calls for a one year delay and I am pleased to be able to report that our recommendations were largely accepted. However, it is a fact that this can only be a delay as the reduction in central government grants to Torbay Council continues to bite.

I wish to thank all members of your Board and all elected members for the manner in which they undertook the task of scrutinising the proposed budget. No member was elected to preside over cuts to services but sadly the budget reductions are inevitable. It is the means by which they are implemented that we can hope to influence.

### Overview and scrutiny...

- is one of the ways the Council improves services and the quality of people's lives in Torbay
- acts as the Council's "watchdog" and challenges decisions taken by the Mayor and looks at decisions in more detail
- reviews existing policies and issues of concern
- is a constructive and independent way of looking at an issue, highlighting areas that work well and suggesting where improvements can be made

This report gives details of the work which has been undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Board over the course of 2013/2014.

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### **Priorities and Resources Review Panel**

The Priorities and Resources Review Panel met over the course of the year to review the proposals being put forward for changes in service provision given the reduction in funding for the Council.

Earlier in the year, the Panel considered the proposals in relation to services for victims of domestic abuse. It also considered how Children's Services were making changes to address the overspend it was facing in its budget.

In January 2014, the Panel held a series of meetings to look in detail at the specific proposals put forward by the Mayor for savings from 1 April 2014. The Panel invited community groups, service providers, service users and members of the public to share their views on the proposals.

The Report of the Panel is available [here](#).

### **Welfare Reform**

The Board have continued to review how the Council, together with its partners, are responding to the impacts of Welfare Reform. This is likely to continue to form part of its Work Programme in the coming year.

### **The Skills Gap in Torbay**

In agreeing its previous report on Youth Unemployment, the Overview and Scrutiny Board recognised that many of the issues surrounding employment skills were beyond the control of the Council, as commissioning and funding comes via other agencies in Torbay.

The Board held an Inquiry Day to hear the views of various organisations on how the whole community could work together to address the skills gap within Torbay both now and in the future to ensure a thriving and sustainable economy.

The Board will be meeting with representatives of schools early in the new year to see if it can influence how students can receive the best advice, guidance and training to equip them for the world of work, especially within the diverse sectors operating within Torbay.

The Board have held the Mayor to account on a range of issues over the course of the year. These issues include **Livermead Sea Wall**, **Torre Valley North Playing Field**, and the **Housing Allocations Policy**. Agendas and Minutes of meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board are available [online](#).

### **Plans for next year**

The Work Programme for 2014/2015 is currently being developed. However, as the reducing financial outlook for the public sector continues, the Board will be looking to ensure that resources are used to the best effect and that the views of the community are considered when difficult decisions are ultimately made.

The Board will continue to operate using the principles of good scrutiny:

- provide "critical friend" challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers
- enable the voice and concerns of the public
- carried out by "independent minded governors" who lead and own the scrutiny role
- drives improvement in public services

### **Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board**

Cllr John Thomas

Cllr Neil Bent

Cllr Mark Kingscote

Cllr Ruth Pentney

Cllr Beryl McPhail

Cllr Jackie Stockman

Cllr Steve Darling

Cllr Bobbie Davies

Cllr Michael Hytche