

DRAFT Annual Report 2015/2016



Foreword

I have been in the post of Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator since May 2015. I have found the role both exciting and challenging. I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of my predecessor Cllr John Thomas over many years. I would also like to thank the Vice-chairman of the Board, three Scrutiny Leads and the Board for their hard work over the past twelve months.

Thanks must also go to the staff at the Town Hall and in particular Kate Spencer. They have supported us, given us sound advice and kept us on the right track.

It has been a challenging time for overview and scrutiny over the past six months, we have adopted many of the recommendation of the Cade report and are now operating in a completely different way from the past. We are focussed on both overview and scrutiny, having set up a number of panels to look at the major issues affecting the Bay.

I am sure the next twelve months will be as challenging as past twelve months! We will need to help the Mayor and his Executive find further savings in the budget and there are some important issues that will come forward for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to discuss and provide recommendations.

I would like to think that overview and scrutiny has made a difference; I hope it will continue to do so.

Councillor Chris Lewis
Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator

Introduction

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 2015/2016.

The Principles of Overview and Scrutiny in Torbay

Following its work with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) in 2014/2015, the Council adopted a set of principles for overview and scrutiny in February 2015 (often referred to as the Cade report) as follows:

- The Council as a whole, and therefore overview and scrutiny, need to focus on the issues that really matter. There are no longer any easy decisions to make. The luxury of looking at the more marginal issues has long passed. It is important that there is an “all Council” approach to tackling the challenges now being faced.
- “Holding to account” must continue as a vital role of overview and scrutiny. But “policy development” is of equal importance. And national experience has shown that this is where the contribution of the non-executive members can be most effective.
- The Forward Plan should be seen as a key tool for managing the decision making process throughout the Authority. There needs to be more informal discussions about what is coming forward for decision in the coming months.
- Overview and scrutiny should be seen as an important element in delivering good, sound decisions. The relationship between overview and scrutiny and the executive should not be adversarial, but rather of seeking to complement one another.
- There should be the ability for all councillors to have the opportunity to help shape policy decisions at an early stage.

A new Council

A new Council was elected at the Local Elections in May 2015 and the previously adopted principles of overview and scrutiny were used to inform the induction programme. Councillor Lewis was appointed as the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator supported by Councillors Barnby, Bent and Stocks as Overview and Scrutiny Lead Members.

The membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Board comprised Councillors Barnby, Bye, Bent, Darling, Lewis, Stockman, Stocks, Tolchard and Tyerman.

The Health Scrutiny Board was not appointed this year with the work of that Board being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Monitoring and pre-decision scrutiny

In the first half of the year, the Overview and Scrutiny Board undertook a range of monitoring on issues such as the revenue budget, the capital plan, the Children’s Services Five Year Plan and the Torbay Retail and Tourism Business Improvement District proposal.

The Board reviewed the draft Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy and gave its recommendations to the Mayor and the Council.

The Mayor and members of the Executive were asked to attend meetings of the Board to answer questions and respond to the Board's debates.

Call-ins

The call-in process is one of the mechanisms which can be used to hold the Mayor to account.

The purpose of call-in is to examine the decisions reached by the Mayor (or other decision maker) and the reasoning behind those decisions. The process enables further public debate to be held on the subject. The Overview and Scrutiny Board can then consider whether the decision was appropriate and make recommendations accordingly.

Over the course of the year, the Overview and Scrutiny Board have received four call-ins:

- Establishment of the Policy Development Groups
- Trial Closure of the Torquay and Brixham Connections Offices
- Proposed covenant on Churston Golf Course
- Proposed Helicopter Landing Facility

Priorities and Resources

Between November 2015 and January 2016, the Priorities and Resources Review Panel reviewed the Mayor's proposals for service change, income generation and savings. The Board questioned the Mayor and his Executive Leads on the rationale for and implications of the proposals. The report from this review is available on the Council's website at http://www.torbay.gov.uk/osb_priorities_and_resources_2016-17.pdf

Health Scrutiny

Health scrutiny is a fundamental way by which local councillors are able to voice the views of their constituents, and hold NHS bodies and health service providers to account. The primary aim of health scrutiny is to help to improve the health of local people, ensuring their needs are considered as an integral part of the commissioning, delivery and development of health services.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board has received reports from NHS Trusts operating in its area on changes in service and has provided feedback on both the consultation undertaken and the proposed changes. It has provided commentary on the Local Account for social care and the Quality Account of the NHS Trusts.

As identified in last year's Annual Report, the relationship between the health scrutiny function, the Health and Wellbeing Board and Healthwatch Torbay still needs to be developed to ensure the roles and responsibilities of each function are fully understood by both the public and all partners.

Corporate Peer Challenge

In November 2015, Torbay Council welcomed a Local Government Association review team to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge to specifically challenge the financial viability of the Council and the effectiveness of its leadership and governance arrangements. Recommendations were made around the need for more effective working practices in relation to governance and the Council was advised to revisit the report on the Principles of Overview and Scrutiny in Torbay.

Building on the Induction Programme and taking account of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, all non-Executive members of the Council met to discuss how they would wish overview and scrutiny to operate and what they would wish to see included on the Work Programme for the remainder of the year and into 2016/2017.

Moving Forward

The Overview and Scrutiny Board has agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Vice-chairman of the Board and the Overview and Scrutiny Lead Members will meet informally on a regular basis with the Mayor, Executives Leads, Executive Director, Directors and Assistant Directors to discuss forthcoming issues. Feedback will be provided to all non-Executive members at a monthly briefing which will enable informal discussions.

Task-and-Finish Groups will be established to review specific issues with formal reports and recommendations being agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

The emerging Work Programme of the Board takes account of those Principles agreed in February 2015:

- Focusing on the issues which matter:
 - A more commercially focused Tourism Strategy
 - An Economic Development Strategy which meets the needs of Torbay and increases the Council Tax and National Non Domestic Rates bases
 - Delivery of the Children's Services Five Year Plan
- Policy Development is of equal importance
 - Parking Strategy
 - Future operating model for sports and leisure services
- The Forward Plan is the key tool for managing the decision making process
The Forward Plan will be reviewed monthly to identify issues for review. To date, the following have been added to the Work Programme:
 - Self Build Affordable Housing
 - Torbay Youth Trust Business Plan

- The relationship between overview and scrutiny and the executive should seek to complement one another
 - The Mayor has started to refer forthcoming issues to the Board for its consideration and it is hoped that this will continue, especially as the Liaison Meetings become established.
 - Proposed amendment to the lease of the GeoPlay Park, Paignton
 - Proposed Investment at Torbay Business Park

- All Councillors should have the opportunity to help shape policy decisions at an early stage
 - Future operating model for the library service

Future Work Programme

As outlined above, the Overview and Scrutiny Board has been taking on board the views of all non-Executive members in developing an emerging Work Programme for 2016/2017.

As the Corporate Peer Challenge articulated, “the financial challenges facing the Council are clear and pressing now and this will continue into the medium term. They will require prioritised attention and pace to address and then drive to deliver the changes needed.”

The Work Programme will continue to be built keeping in mind the Principles of Overview and Scrutiny and the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge. The Board will aim to be involved in forthcoming issues from an early stage and hopes that the Mayor and Executive will abide by these Principles as well.

The formal Work Programme will be agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at its meeting in May 2016 although it will continue to have the flexibility to react to issues as they arise, including holding the Mayor and Executive to account for their decisions and performance.

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