

Annual Report 2014/2015



Foreword

This is my final annual report under the term of the present Administration. I consider myself to be privileged indeed to have served as the Chairman of the Torbay Overview and Scrutiny Board for an unbroken period of almost eight years having been unanimously re-elected to the office of Chairman of the Board annually by the cross party members of the Board. In closing my nearly eight years of service to the Bay I wish to thank all elected members of the Council and all Officers for their professional help and advice to both myself and to the Overview and Scrutiny Board. I also thank the members of the public who participated in the programme of work. Our job as Scrutineers is to hold the Executive to account and to drive improvements to the public services that your Council provides. Another huge task that we undertake is to examine the source and application of the increasingly limited funds that Torbay – in common with all Local Authorities - are experiencing in these times of financial austerity.

Key amongst the matters that your Board has examined are keeping a watching brief on the impact of welfare reform and the Council's economic strategy. We have closely scrutinised the Elected Mayor's savings proposals and taken an in depth look at the impact of the Supporting People budget reductions, and the future of housing in Torbay. The call-ins relating to the Mayoral decisions on the Churston Covenant, the Sports Facilities and Playing Pitches Strategy and refusal of a Cary Green Covenant were all matters of great public interest. There was very close scrutiny of the Children's Services Budget and five year plan and the Board have developed links with the Torbay Children's Safeguarding Board. Your Health Scrutiny Board examined the issues Mental Health services in Torbay

All in all a very busy year in an environment of ever reducing funds.

Thank you to all who have played any part in the process during the past year and may I wish you all well.

Councillor John Thomas
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 2014/2015.

Membership

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board over the past year have been Councillors Bent, Darling, Davies, Hernandez (from December 2014), Hytche (until December 2014), Kingscote, McPhail (until October 2014), Pentney, Stockman, Thomas (J) and Tyerman (from October 2014).

The Members of the Health Scrutiny Board over the past year have been Councillors Bent, Davies, Doggett, Faulkner (A), Hernandez, Hytche, McPhail (until October 2014) and Thomas (J).

Priorities and Resources

The majority of the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for the year has been taken up by reviewing proposals for the Council's priorities and resources for the coming year. The Board asked to hear the views of service users, communities and partners when considering the Mayor's savings proposals in September 2014 and January 2015.

The Board were able to question the Mayor and his Executive Leads about his proposals and made a number of recommendations and conclusions. The reports from both stages of the Board's work are available on the Council's website.

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 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 three call-ins:

- Proposed covenant on Churston Golf Course
- Sports Facilities and Playing Pitches Strategies
- Proposed covenant on Cary Green

In each instance, members of the public and members of the Council were able to raise their concerns with the Overview and Scrutiny Board. The Board then requested additional

information and questioned the Mayor on how he had reached his decision. The outcomes from each of these call-ins are available on the Council's website.

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.

Torbay Council's Health Scrutiny Board has met twice over the past year although the Overview and Scrutiny Board has also considered health scrutiny matters during the year.

Discussions were held with social care and NHS colleagues on issues relating to mental health and learning disabilities. The Board have kept a watching brief of these issues through updates provided to both the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Board also received a formal update on the review of Learning Disability Services in Torbay later in the year. The Health and Wellbeing Board has recently asked the Health Scrutiny Board to carry out a further in-depth review of mental health services in Torbay in the new Municipal Year.

The Board also received updates on the progression towards an Integrated Care Organisation, the Living Well at Home contract and the redevelopment of Brixham Hospital.

Moving forward the relationship between the health scrutiny function, the Health and Wellbeing Board and Healthwatch Torbay will be reviewed to ensure the roles and responsibilities of each function are fully understood by both the public and all partners.

Scrutiny Development Area

Torbay Council was successful in its bid to become a Scrutiny Development Area as part of a programme run by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). Council officers and the CfPS worked with Executive and Non-Executive members to:

- Undertake a high level evaluation of overview and scrutiny
- Agree how overview and scrutiny should operate given the challenges the Council faces
- Determine how the Council can better harness the skills of non-executive members to enable them to make a more meaningful contribution to the work of the Council

The project established a set of principles for overview and scrutiny in Torbay and provided a framework for a wider review of the governance structure of the Council which will inform the induction process following the elections in May 2015.

The report that was produced at the end of the project was adopted by the Council in February 2015 and is available on the Council's website. The principles which were agreed are:

- 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.

Future Work Programme

The Work Programme for 2015/2016 will be developed following discussions with all members and the Senior Leadership Team after the Local Elections in May 2015.

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