

ANNUAL REPORT 2012/2013

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

I have written before about the funding cuts imposed by Central Government on Local Authorities which mean that your Council has no alternative but to continue to make severe reductions in the level and number of services that are provided. It is a legal requirement that the Council keeps its spending within the funding levels that we receive. This is referred to as a Balanced Budget.

Torbay Council will have to continue to make cuts to its budgeted spend over a period of 4 years. Irrespective of which political party is elected to Westminster to govern the Country after 2015, it is generally agreed by all political parties that the severity of cuts experienced over the past four years will be continued and even harsher cuts will follow after 2015. Locally provided services are under the severest pressure that has been experienced in living memory.

It is in this context that your Overview and Scrutiny Board has been heavily engaged in reviewing the Council's Annual Budget for 2013/14 on your behalf. No Torbay Councillor was elected to implement cuts to services but sadly the Council is largely dependent upon Government funding to provide the services that you receive. Your Board challenged were some of the services were planned to be cut in 2013/14. For example, we questioned the Mayor and Executive Leads on the cuts intended for the Citizens' Advice Bureau and on whether the reduction in school transport funding could be phased in.

I am privileged to be Chairman of your Overview and Scrutiny Board and I wish to place on record my sincere appreciation to all elected members who sit on the Board with me and to all Councillors who have engaged with scrutiny. Without their help and input the work would have been all but impossible.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Cllr John Thomas

Cllr Neil Bent

Cllr Mark
Kingscote

Cllr Ruth Pentney

Cllr Jane Barnby

Cllr Jackie
Stockman

Cllr Steve Darling

Cllr Ray Hill

Cllr Mark
Pountney

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.

This year, for the first time, the work of the Board's sub-committee, the Health Scrutiny Board, is contained within a separate annual report.

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Welfare Reform and Council Tax Support Scheme

The Board received a number of briefings of the impact of welfare reform within Torbay and, in particular the introduction of the Council Tax Support Scheme.

The Board challenged the findings within the Equality Impact Assessment and raised concerns about the support available to the community given the reduction in funding for both the Council and the voluntary sector.

[Link to Board's report to Council](#)

Children's Services

The Board has continued to receive progress reports from Children's Services against the Children's Partnership Improvement Programme. The Board has paid special attention to the vacancy rates within the Service and the impact of the reducing rates have on both performance and budgets.

Youth Unemployment

A review panel has been looking at how the Council could facilitate partnership working within Torbay to help address the problem of youth unemployment. The Panel's report will be available on our website in June.

Allocations Policy and Local Tenancy Scheme

Bearing in mind what the Board had considered on welfare reform, councillors gave their views recent review of how the Council made social housing allocations, managed its waiting lists and made use of its new powers under the Localism Act 2011.

[Link to Board's report to Council](#)

Economic Regeneration

The Board has invited the Mayor and Torbay Development Agency to three of its meeting over the year to discuss the important subject of economic regeneration. The Board has also spoken to the Chairman of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

The Board has ensured that its views on the Economic Strategy for Torbay were considered as part of its development.

[Link to Board's report to Council](#)

Plans for next year

The Work Programme for 2013/2014 will be agreed at the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. 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

Priorities and Resources

A review panel considered a number of specific items within the Mayor's budget proposals. It heard from a number of individuals, groups and organisations about the possible impacts of the proposals and also reviews the Equality Impact Assessments to ensure that the principles of fair decision making were adhered to.

www.torbay.gov.uk/pandr1314review.pdf

Call-ins

The Board has heard three call-ins over the last year whereby five councillors can ask for decisions of the Mayor to be reviewed.

The decisions called-in were:

- Anti-social behaviour and private sector landlords
- Princess Promenade Refurbishment
- Long lease at Occombe House