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COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2012

The following document contains officer responses to the questions submitted to the Council meeting on 27 September 2012.

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Agenda Item 7

Meeting of the Council

Thursday, 27 September 2012

Questions Under Standing Order A13

<p>Question (1) by Councillor Faulkner (A) to the Executive Lead for Strategic Planning, Housing and Energy – Councillor Thomas (D)</p>	<p>The number of households accepted as homeless between January and March went up by 2% on the previous quarter and up 16% on the same quarter as last year, according to the new government statistics, whilst I realise that this is not appertaining to Torbay we are finding the increase is affecting us. Please could the Portfolio Member reassure me that all steps are being taken to alleviate this problem that we face, such as bringing pressure to bear on the government to help relieve our particular state of affairs in Torbay, and discussing with the housing associations if they are relocating residents from larger properties who have found that they are too big to cope thereby relinquishing them to larger families who require them?</p>																																		
<p>Councillor Thomas (D)</p>	<p>Torbay's household numbers accepted as homeless are not currently following the national trend, and increasing. We are continuing to maintain a fairly static level. However we are very aware of the potential implications that the Welfare reform changes may have and are working with our partners to identify those most affected, so that early information and assistance can be effective.</p> <p>Performance figs</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="400 1111 1584 1473"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Title</th> <th colspan="2">2009/10</th> <th colspan="2">2010/11</th> <th colspan="2">2011/12</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Target</th> <th>Actual</th> <th>Target</th> <th>Actual</th> <th>Target</th> <th>Actual</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Increase housing support in the Private Sector</td> <td>18%</td> <td>33%</td> <td>25%</td> <td>49%</td> <td>50%</td> <td>53% (3/4)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Number of households living in temporary accommodation</td> <td>150</td> <td>107</td> <td>100</td> <td>43</td> <td>60</td> <td>32</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SSH26 Number of applications accepted as homeless</td> <td>120</td> <td>109</td> <td>106</td> <td>58</td> <td>80</td> <td>57</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Prevention activities through early help is key to maintaining the lower numbers of accepted homeless. Some of the initiatives/ services we provide are our Bond Scheme to help access to private rented sector, access to supported accommodation and floating support, emergency and temporary accommodation, Housing Benefit, mortgage and Debt Advice.</p> <p>The housing options service has seen a 30% increase in demand for advice and assistance for each of the last two years, this is reflected in the numbers who have been prevented from becoming homeless rising from 370 09/2010- to 557 10/2011.</p> <p>Localism Act the government allocation guidance came into force 18th June .</p> <p>“The guidance encourages councils to adopt a modern measure of overcrowding and encourages them to give appropriate priority to tenants who want to downsize,</p>	Title	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Increase housing support in the Private Sector	18%	33%	25%	49%	50%	53% (3/4)	Number of households living in temporary accommodation	150	107	100	43	60	32	SSH26 Number of applications accepted as homeless	120	109	106	58	80	57
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	<p>helping them move to smaller, more manageable properties and freeing up precious social housing for crowded families. “</p> <p>Torbay is developing a local downsizing initiative and Devon Home Choice – our allocations scheme already gives a higher priority to those wishing to downsize.</p> <p>Devon Home Choice is also reviewing the recommendation that all under occupiers be put into the high priority band regardless of how many bedrooms they are freeing up.</p> <p>We will also need to consider how assistance is offered to those who under-occupy in light of the measure in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 which will reduce Housing Benefit entitlement for working age social sector tenants who under-occupy their property (measured in accordance with the Local Housing Allowance size criteria) from April 2013. We have started conversations with our housing partners how they can support tenants to transfer/ move and access financial/debt advice.</p>
<p>Question (2) by Councillor Doggett to the Executive Lead for Culture and the Arts – Councillor Butt</p>	<p>What is the level of room vacancy in Paignton Library and how are the Council addressing this issue, to raise money for the library service?</p>
<p>Councillor Butt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The library part of the building does not have vacancies. The building is managed and operated by TDA • The Registrar is to be / have been relocated into the offices, which were occupied by Sure Start. The only other offices which are vacant are to the front of the first floor. We have recently agreed that the TCT can take this space and the Council’s Legal Department have been instructed to prepare the draft lease for their consideration. • The Registrar is due to move into Paignton Library on 18 October.
<p>Question (3) by Councillor Pountney to the Executive Lead for Strategic Planning, Housing and Energy – Councillor Thomas (D)</p>	<p>Following the announcement that the Government is going to provide £300m towards Affordable Housing, please can you advise me what this Local Authorities plans are for bidding / applying for part of this money.</p>
<p>Councillor Thomas (D)</p>	<p>Below is an extract from the Ministers announcement on the 6th September:</p> <p><i>The need for affordable housing remains high. We will therefore be extending the use of guarantees to cover borrowing needed to deliver more affordable homes. Building on the success of the Affordable Homes Programme, the Government will</i></p>

	<p><i>invite bids to provide up to an additional 15,000 affordable homes through the use of loan guarantees, asset management flexibilities and capital funding. We also intend to extend our successful refurbishment programme to bring an additional 5,000 existing empty homes back into use. In total we will invest another £300 million.</i></p> <p>There is very little other information at this stage apart from an assumption that this will be an extension to the wider 'affordable housing programme' and the same funding and assessment criteria will apply. We have a meeting scheduled with the HCA to establish more detail on this and the wider initiatives being proposed and will be in a position to provide further detail after this.</p> <p>Having said all that we continue to explore opportunities to maximize affordable housing delivery in Torbay and this work includes assessing the suitability, feasibility and viability of different sites so that we are in a position to take advantage of any funding opportunities that arise. Once further detail has been made available on the funding then we will look to prioritise developments that fit most with the assessment criteria.</p>
<p>Question (4) by Councillor Pentney to the Executive lead for Involved and Healthy Communities – Councillor Alison Hernandez</p>	<p>At a recent meeting of Paignton Town Community partnership we were told that the geopark in Paignton had £27,000 of Torbay Council money earmarked for the park this year. The meeting was also told of further monies that the community partnership had been successful in obtaining. In light of this is it fair or equitable that one park should be allocated so much public money when other parks in Torbay have very little spent on them?</p>
<p>Councillor Hernandez</p>	<p>Yes. It is fair and equitable. The Council agreed to be responsible for the maintenance on its completion as part of the £1/2 million funding bid with the community partnership. The Geoplay park is becoming internationally renowned, and as you've heard tonight regionally award-winning and is a facility for residents and tourists. It has averaged 500 children a day in the first 6 months and is therefore not comparable to any other local park in our wards.</p>
<p>Question (5) by Councillor Darling to the Mayor</p>	<p>At the last Full Council on the 12th July I asked for written copies of your responses to my written questions number 1, 3 and 5. I also requested a written response from Councillor Excell. As I am sure you are aware the councils constitution states that you have 15 working days to respond to me in. Councillor Excell has furnished me with a written response, but at the date of submitting this question (12.9.12) you have not. I would welcome an explanation?</p>
<p>Mayor Oliver</p>	<p>I apologise that you did not receive written copies to your questions from the last council meeting. However, I did not have my answers in writing and the responses are available from the recording of the meeting. I do not consider that it is best use of officer time to prepare a written transcript from the recording. As you are aware, the Monitoring Officer has proposed updates to the Council's Standing Orders to reflect this and any written responses prepared by officers to be available on the Council's website after the meeting. These updates are subject for debate later at</p>

	this meeting.
Question (6) by Councillor Pentney to the Executive Lead for Safer Communities and Transport – Councillor Excell	It is in the Street Warden's job description that they leave their area of patrol and attend the town hall in order to assemble and remove the stalls outside of the building; many of which are for private enterprise?
Councillor Excell	The Street Wardens work in partnership with the BID and cover the Tormohun Ward as part of their daily duties. In the early days of the market extra resources were drafted in across the team to assist with the erection and dismantling of the street stalls. However it was a temporary measure with the process now being streamlined and additional resources have been utilised from elsewhere including the BID, volunteers from Leonard Stocks, other volunteers and Community Payback. The events at Castle Circus are part of an initiative to tackle antisocial behaviour, which is within the Street Wardens, and is assisting in providing a long term solution to enable the resources to be managed more effectively.
Question (7) by Councillor Darling to the Executive Lead for Finance and Audit – Councillor Tyerman	At the beginning of the current economic turn down Torbay Council made a commitment to pay contractors within 10 working days of receipt of their invoice, as recommended by the Government. In light of above, can you please advise what invoices from contractors both to Torbay Council and TOR2 remained unpaid more than 10 working days, over the past 18 months?
Councillor Tyerman	<p>Payment Terms for Council invoices are 30 days from receipt of the invoice or the goods whichever is the latter.</p> <p>Payments achieved within 30 days since April 2011 are:</p> <p>2011/12 - 90% paid within terms</p> <p>2012 /13 - 93.05% currently paid within terms</p> <p>Payments achieved within 10 days from receipt of goods or invoice whichever is the latter.</p> <p>2011 /12 – 37% paid within 10 day terms 2012/13 – 58.6% paid within 10 day terms</p> <p>Since April there has generally been a gradual improvement in meeting the target of 10 days, this is broken down as:</p> <p>April 12 – 48.64% May 12 – 56.59% June 12 – 51.86% July 12 – 65.93% Aug 12 – 67.22%</p>

<p>Question (8) by Councillor Faulkner (J) to the Mayor</p>	<p>Can you please update the Council on any legal action to recover the £50,000 owed to Torbay Council by the operators of the High Flyer Balloon?</p>
<p>Mayor Oliver</p>	<p>There continues to be extensive dialogue between the parties respective Solicitors, with a view to resolving this matter without recourse to the Courts. However if matters are not resolved in the near future, the Council will commence proceedings for recovery of the debt. Given this situation, it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this time.</p>
<p>Question (9) by Councillor Darling to the Executive Lead for Children, Schools and Families – Councillor Lewis</p>	<p>It is a disturbing fact that Looked After children are more likely to go to prison rather than University can you please advise what additional commitments Torbay Council are making to improve the life chances for our looked after children?</p>
<p>Councillor Lewis</p>	<p>From a CTC (Leaving Care) perspective: CTC has made education/ training/work a priority for every Care Leaver which mirrors the Leaving Care Guidance 2011, which became active from April 2011. Every member of staff is supervised monthly, and the supervision note records for each young person if they are in education etc. Accordingly, there is always a discussion in supervision about if anything is needed to ensure continued participation in education. The Personal Advisors actively encourage young people to go to University, and set that goal as early as possible. There are generally, two routes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School route, e.g. continuing into 6th Form and then straight to University. • Leaving school and attending South Devon College to : • Resit GCSE's before A-levels • Sit A-levels for University • Complete an Access course for University. <p>Those young people that are in South Devon College (SDC) are entitled to a Bursary, which CTC ensures has been applied for, of approximately £30 per week, which is based on attendance, and is a real motivator for Care Leavers. There is however, discussion between the Care Leaver and SDC about how the bursary should be spent as it is to assist their educational learning. CTC has had discussions with SDC and has contributed to buying individual laptops that are needed for learning, and the young person has contributed from their bursary. The college has bought these computers.</p> <p>Those Care Leavers that are not of sufficient academic ability to do access to University courses are encouraged to enrol on more practical courses such as bricklaying, plumbing, hairdressing, etc. Those that have been out of education and/or cannot cope with formal Education are help back into education at SDC using</p>

	<p>“Flex” courses that are basic skills courses designed to get young people back into education. Some Care Leavers have been assisted to attend “Princes Trust” courses as a way back into education.</p> <p>Those Care Leavers that apply for University are supported to attend “Open Days” at those Universities on their lists. This can be anything from helping fill out the paperwork, to paying their train fares and overnight accommodation costs, to their Personal Advisor taking them to interviews at University. CTC provide an allowance of up to £100 per week to help towards accommodation costs whilst they are on their degree course. The allowance is a great help to our University students and really does allow them to meet their study commitments. This meets the Guidance that states a one off bursary must be paid of £2000.</p> <p>Where care leavers of 16 and 17 yrs old refuse to be engaged in education/ training/ work, and they receive a personal allowance as per legislation. Those young people are encouraged to attend Careers South West for advice and guidance. Where they have refused CTC looks at every individual case and works out how to try and get them to engage. Some examples of this are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care Leavers personal allowance is left with Careers South West to be given at the end of a careers session with advisor. • Care leavers have to collect their personal allowance from their Personal Advisor weekly to ensure weekly contact and weekly discussion about Education etc. <p>CTC had a duty from April 2011 to assist Care Leavers over the age of 21 back into Education. This is a duty to assess and help which can include financial assistance. This is a new duty but has been used since its enactment. CTC advises all young people of 21 whose cases are closed (because they are not in education) that they have a right to assessment for help with education up to the age of 25yrs old. CTC has a wide ranging duty to assist Care Leavers with their Education at all ages. This duty has been actioned by asking the question “What would a good parent do?” Accordingly, CTC has paid for books, equipment needed for course (e.g. knives for catering course), and even paid for specialist Health and Safety course for care leavers wanting to join the fishing boats (which has led to jobs).</p> <p>All the above issues are planned within Care leavers Pathway Plans which contain information about their career aspirations and ambitions.</p> <p>Torbay has had a good record of a high number of Care Leavers entering University, and at the present time is collecting information about entrants for 2012.</p>
<p>Question (10) by Councillor James to the Executive Lead for Finance and Audit – Councillor Tyerman</p>	<p>There are reports that Plymouth council are putting aside £1 million to cover the expected non-payment of council tax under the government’s benefit reforms. Have councillors and officers considered this and will Torbay be taking this risk into account in the upcoming budget?</p>
<p>Councillor Tyerman</p>	<p>There are a number of significant changes to the system for local government finance in 2013/14 including the requirement for all local authorities to implement a local council tax scheme from April 2013.</p> <p>Members and officers are fully aware of the risks associated with the implementation</p>

	<p>of this new scheme (and other changes) and will be addressing these as part of the budget proposals which will be presented to Members later in the financial year. Members should be aware that as the government are unlikely to announce the local government finance settlement until after the 5 December 2012, there is a considerable amount of uncertainty and risks associated with the 2013/14 budget process.</p>
<p>Question (11) by Councillor Cowell to the Mayor</p>	<p>In view of the structural changes of senior officers and the inevitable reshaping of the council due to central government imposed cuts, does the Mayor and Leader of the Council agree with me that reshaping political governance is equally as important. If he does agree, can he explain why the Political Governance Review Panel has been removed from the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme?</p>
<p>Mayor Oliver</p>	<p>I am in absolute agreement that it is essential that the political governance structure is reviewed. The Employment Committee/Group Leaders Task Group are to review the Governance arrangements in parallel with their consideration and identification of long term options for an alternative to the post of Chief Executive. Given that this group are to undertake a review, in order to avoid duplication it was removed from the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.</p>
<p>Question (12) by Councillor Cowell to the Executive Lead for Finance and Audit – Councillor Tyerman</p>	<p>When considering the serious nature of the centrally imposed budget cuts, will the Executive Lead for Finance provide assurances to the residents of Torbay that this year's consultation and budget process will be much more transparent than last years and will include forecasts for the coming years?</p>
<p>Councillor Tyerman</p>	<p>Last year's budget process followed the time scales and release of information as in previous years, difficulties did occur with the timeliness of information for some meetings, caused by tight time constraints.</p> <p>However we recognise the importance of the processes and therefore for the first time the Mayor will be releasing his budget proposals in November, which will provide a longer period for consultation, to help support this process we will also be putting into the public domain details of the services provided by the council, which along with the budget digest and the Mayors budget proposals provides a detailed picture of the funding and activities provided by the council.</p> <p>Consultation is an integral part of the decision making process, and the council will carry out these processes, as it did last year, in accordance with the expectations set by Government, (revised principles issued in July 2012) and the general principles derived from case law.</p>