

Meeting of the Council, Thursday, 22 February 2024

Members' Questions Under Standing Order A12

A member may only submit three questions for consideration at each Council Meeting. Each member will present their first question in turn, when all the first questions have been dealt with the second and third questions may be asked in turn. The time for member's questions will be limited to a total of 30 minutes.

First Round

Question 1

Councillor George Darling to the Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services, Public Health and Inequalities (Councillor Tranter)

Following Operation Loki, an increase in petty theft and antisocial behaviour was reported in St Marychurch and Babbacombe. Crime was dispersed from the town centre into our more peripheral shopping areas; what action is the council taking to prevent this from happening again with the proposed PSPOs?

Answer to Question 1 provided by Councillor Tranter

The main risk of such displacement would be through the enforcement of the proposed dispersal PSPO, which we recognise as a potential consequence of increased enforcement activity in any form. To address this, we will be developing an agreed approach to enforcing the PSPO with our key partners the Police and SWISCo prior to the commencement of any order made.

We will also agree the means to monitor the impact of its use so we can understand the full implications of enforcing in this way. Prior to instigation we know that for it to have most impact it must be enforced in a proportionate and responsible way – to ensure that it is effective and adds value to the enforcement powers of relevant officers by helping address issues as and when they arise. As we understand the actual impact over time, we can adjust our approach to achieve the best results.

Question 2

Councillor Harvey to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance (Councillor Tyerman)

The Household Support Fund wasn't included in the Autumn Statement, and the Government have since announced they do not intend to fund it going forward. This decision has been made as the cost-of-living crisis continues and families in Torbay continue to struggle. In light of, the Government's announcement, how is Torbay Council tackling this gap in funding?

Answer to Question 2 provided by Councillor Tyerman

There is currently ambiguity on what support will be in place related to the Household Support Fund (HSF) or similar next financial year. The Local Government Association have been lobbying for the scheme to be continued and Local Authorities were invited to comment regarding the impact of ending the support in March 2024. Clarity has been sought on the outcome and we are therefore awaiting the Spring budget announcement (6 March 2024) for further news of support for low-income households.

In the interim other government initiatives such as increases to the Local Housing Allowance rates have been announced, which will have a positive impact. If further HSF funding is not forthcoming the Council Welfare support scheme will still be in place to support those in need with financial assistance provided upon application.

Schemes currently in existence are the Council Tax Support Scheme, Discretionary Council Tax Discount, Discretionary Housing Payments, Exceptional Hardship Fund and S17 Children Act. The Crisis Support Fund was funded by the HSF, but there is a reserve we can access if needed.

Additional support is being proposed within the 2024/25 budget to support debt advice and the Torbay Food Alliance.

Details below:

Scheme	Who can access it	What can be accessed?	Funds available
Council Tax Support	People who are unemployed or on a low income	Discount of up to 75% on yearly Council Tax (increasing from 70% max)	Additional monies in budget - £529k
Discretionary Discount	Support for those not receiving council tax support if financial hardship	Reduced council tax bill	Financially dealt with as a write off, so no designated budget.
Discretionary housing payment	If in receipt of housing benefit or Universal Credit housing costs and are suffering financial hardship	DHP can provide temporary payments or one-off help with accommodation related costs	Grant funding £308k

Welfare Support Scheme	People in need of financial support during an emergency or crisis situation	Help to pay for essential items in an emergency or crisis situation or accommodation related costs	Reserve of £680k held,
Exceptional hardship fund	Must be in receipt of Council Tax support to be able to claim	Further reductions to a Council Tax bill that has already been reduced under Council Tax Support	£80k budget for 23/24.
S.17 Children Act	Power to provide support, including financial subsistence to families with children in need		Base Budget £480k

(NB S17 is solely for children in need and involved with statutory services as defined in legislation)

Question 3

Councillor Long to the Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services, Public Health and Inequalities (Councillor Tranter)

A recent report stated that modern slavery is reportedly surging in social care since ministers relaxed immigration rules to fill thousands of vacancies, with a growing wave of exploitation leading to workers being ripped off or living in squalor. How is Torbay Council taking account of this worrying trend?

Answer to Question 3 provided by Councillor Tranter

Torbay Council is working with key partners on a local level including Police, Social Care and specialist Charities such as Unseen as a part of the Anti-Slavery Partnership to understand and address the local risk and needs. This includes supporting access to training that improves partner agency's understanding and ability to identify potential modern slavery risks and appropriately respond. Recent training offered has focused on supporting the adult social care sector including commissioning.

Torbay Council is represented at the Local Government Association's Modern Slavery Network where national developments and best practice is shared. This enables Torbay Council to have up to date knowledge of risks and best practice from across the country allowing relevant and timely development of local evidence-based responses to Modern Slavery.

We actively work with all partners to support individuals who are at risk of modern slavery, or who have been identified as victims. Other partners include the Care Quality Commission and local providers of social care. Adult Social Care commissioners have close, supportive relationships with providers and are trained to identify the warning signs of modern slavery.

Question 4

Councillor Mandy Darling to the Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services, Public Health and Inequalities (Councillor Tranter)

According to the Department for Transport, more than one in 22 people in England have a disabled parking badge, a higher proportion than before the pandemic. Has there been a similar rise in Torbay?

Answer to Question 4 provided by Councillor Tranter

To	Badges Issued
31.12.2019	2330
31.12.2020	2533
31.12.2021	2770
31.12.2022	3155
31.12.2023	3821

Question 5

Councillor Steve Darling the Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking (Councillor Billings)

Why did it take until 15 January 2024 for Torbay to hold its first Bus Forum Meeting and what message does it send out to partners when the 3 Conservative members of the minority administration failed to attend this meeting?

Answer to Question 5 provided by Councillor Billings

The partnership board was formally established in April 2023 and met for the first time at the end of August 2023. Those board meetings are set to occur every 6 months, aiming ultimately to align to March and September. As set out in the partnership documents, a stakeholder forum was to be established to meet once between each board meeting. As such the first stakeholder forum was arranged for January 2024, ahead of the February board meeting date.

The councillors appointed to the forum are:

- Councillor Hannah Stevens
- Councillor Yvonne Twelves
- Councillor Steve Darling

Due to an administrative error, invitations were not circulated to members as far in advance as they should have been, and were only sent on Friday 12 January, ahead of the meeting on Monday 15 January. Councillor Stevens and Twelves were not able to attend.

Question 6

Councillor Johns to the Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth (Councillor Chris Lewis)

In 2020 the Council was awarded Future High Streets Funding for Paignton to regeneration Victoria Square, Station Square and Torbay Road

As a Paignton Councillor, I have regularly asked about the changes to Torbay Road and following the news of Lidl moving out from Victoria square can the Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth advise whether the Future High Street Funding has been spent or has the funding been returned to the Government?

Question 6 has been withdrawn by Councillor Johns prior to the Council meeting on 22 February 2022

Question 7

Councillor Penny to the Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth (Councillor Chris Lewis)

Residents, Traders, and even Visitors increasingly question the vibrancy of Paignton Town Centre. Our seafront and harbourside continue to perform overall and adapt to current expectations with private and public sector input.

Without vibrant hinterland support from outlets in e.g. Torbay and Torquay Roads, Victoria Street, Hyde Road, Palace Avenue and Winner Street, this can erode inexorably to a nothing.

Time-limited government funding is available for certain projects. Crossways has been knocked down without new growth, Torbay Road traffic flow is still unresolved, Station Square progress is stagnant, and now the loss of Lidl supermarket in Victoria Square.

Whilst Torquay gradually moves into the twenty first century, Paignton languishes in talk about plans and action, not in plans and action themselves. I realise the 'cost of living' crisis has had an impact and we cannot do everything at once. It takes time. However, could the Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth:

- publicly share the timescales for all the larger Paignton projects to make the most of time-limited government funds so the people are truly placed first? and
- take into account that improvements to the street scene a repaint, judicious road resurfacing, a tidying of a bin area and improved lighting, not only look good; they can encourage people to contribute to Paignton's vibrant future in partnership with the Council and local Organisations?

Answer to Question 7 provide by Councillor Lewis

Over several years Paignton has been the focus of the Council's attention. Since May 2023 the Council has secured investment for the proposed Technology Park at Long Road, cementing Paignton's position at the heart of Torbay's hi tech economy.

In the town centre the Station Square and Torbay Road public realm improvement works are scheduled for delivery between May 2024 and December 2024. The Council's appointed regeneration partner is on track with its review of the key projects in Paignton at Crossways and Victoria Square with a business plan scheduled to be presented in March.

I can assure Members that the allocated funding is being spent to deliver the projects in Paignton as agreed with Central Government. We would agree with the sentiment that improvements to the Street Scene and Public realm are essential in creating Civic Pride and commit the Council to continue work in partnership with Local Organisations.

Question 8

Councillor Virdee to the Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking (Councillor Billings)

A zebra crossing was due to be installed at Teignmouth Road by St.Cuthbert Mayne school, not a day goes past that a resident or student is risking serious injury crossing this road. I have seen it myself as my children attend Cuthbert Mayne school, the difficulty faced especially at peak times in crossing the road. We receive much correspondence from residents, one elderly resident finds it impossible to cross and requires assistance each time they venture out.

Can you give me a firm date when this zebra crossing will be installed?

Answer to Question 8 provided by Councillor Billings

The installation of a controlled crossing on Teignmouth Road, adjacent to St Cuthbert Mayne School was supported by the Transport and Parking Working Party in October 2023 as part of the current year's Road Safety Initiatives. A scheme of this type requires some significant engineering assessment to determine the extent of works concerned and to ensure the appropriate type of controlled crossing is implemented for the location. Consultation prior to finalising any design also needs to occur. The

engineering team in the TDA have been commissioned to undertake the design and implementation works for this scheme, on behalf of Torbay Council, and they have confirmed that the initial design and assessment phase is nearing completion.

At this stage we are unable to provide a firm date for installation, however the TDA are advising that outline design work is likely to be completed by the end of February 2024 with consultation with affected stakeholders to be undertaken in the early Spring. Subject to a positive response to the design and consultation phase, it is likely that works can commence during the Summer 2024 period with full implementation likely to be during autumn 2024, subject to the availability of equipment and contractor resources.

Second Round

Question 9

Councillor Long to the Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services, Public Health and Inequalities (Councillor Tranter)

An analysis of census data by charity Independent Age, has revealed that high rental prices are forcing older tenants to move to deprived communities with already overstretched public services. The analysis shows that ten of the top 20 local authorities seeing the largest increase in older private rented households are coastal areas, which includes Torbay. Older people – many of whom live with long term conditions and disabilities - can find it harder to access necessary services such as health facilities in coastal areas, particularly those which are deprived. How is Torbay Council dealing with the increase in older tenants?

Answer to Question 9 provided by Councillor Tranter

The Adult Social Care Commissioning team is working to deliver the Torre Marine Extra Care scheme, which will provide accommodation with support for people with dementia. In addition, home care services are available to support people to live independently.

The Council is funding the Community and Voluntary Sector to provide support to people, via Citizen Advice Bureau and the Community Helpline/Paignton hub. These services focus on supporting people with a range of issues, but housing support is key.

Support to people to maintain tenancies, when at risk, is offered via the Housing Options team and this focusses on helping all residents to stay in their homes.

The Council is part of a Healthy Ageing Partnership with the local NHS and Voluntary and Community Sector looking at how best to improve support and care as well as promoting physical, mental, cognitive and social activities to enable people to live longer and healthier in their own homes.

Carers are a key constituency here, and the Council has a strong partnership with the Carers organisations in Torbay, evidenced through the Carers' Strategy and associated action plans.

Question 10

Councillor Harvey to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Councillor Bye) – this question has been withdrawn

~~In October 2022, Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Advisor for care leavers shared some ideas on how Torbay Council and our community could enhance its support for cared for and care experienced youngsters and developed the following action:~~

~~*“Hold a business, community event which would further develop EET opportunities for care experienced young people.”*~~

~~Since the Conservatives have taken control of the council, what progress has been made in the 9 months since?~~

Question 11

Councillor Mandy Darling the Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Councillor Bye) – this question has been withdrawn

~~In October 2022, Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Advisor for care leavers helped Torbay Council shared some ideas on how Torbay Council and our community could enhance its support for cared for and care experienced youngsters and the following action was developed:~~

~~*“To set a clear target for ringfenced opportunities in the ‘family business’ and to maximise the local authority vacancies for care experienced young people.”*~~

~~Since the Conservatives have taken control of the council, what progress has been made in the 9 months since?~~

Question 12

Councillor Johns to the Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services, Public Health and Inequalities (Councillor Tranter)

I have received an increase in the number of complaints regarding dog fouling in the Clifton with Maidenway ward. Can we have a dog warden reinstated for Torbay Council or find funding for more dog poo bins?

Answer to Question 12 provided by Councillor Tranter

The dog Warden function will be transferred to Swisco in April 2024 as part of a wider Place based approach to service delivery. This will involve an increase in the number of officers being available to deliver dog warden responsibilities, including tackling matters such as dog fouling. Dog owners can put bagged dog poo in any Council owned litter bin, therefore negating the need for bins specifically for dog poo.

Third Round

Question 13

Councillor Harvey to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Councillor Bye) – this question has been withdrawn

~~In October 2022, Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Advisor for care leavers helped Torbay Council shared some ideas on how Torbay Council and our community could enhance its support for cared for and care experienced youngsters and the following action was developed:~~

~~*“Develop a Whole Council Approach and to consider holding a key partner event where each partner agency makes explicit their offer to care experienced young people, based on what operational staff and care experienced young people have said is important to them when services are being delivered. These offers should then be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board on the basis that this is good enough for our own children.”*~~

~~Since the Conservatives have taken control of the council, what progress has been made in the 9 months since?~~
