

Meeting of the Council, Thursday, 11 December 2025

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 members' questions will be limited to a total of 30 minutes.

Urgent Question

Councillor Steve Darling to the Chairman of the Harbour Committee (Councillor Strang)

Recent national reporting has revealed that a suspected Russian intelligence operative, previously observed inside highly secure Russian military bases, arrived at the Torquay dock earlier this year aboard a cargo ship originating in Finland. After disembarking, they travelled towards rural areas near the Lulworth Firing Range, where British forces are training Ukrainian personnel.

Maritime intelligence from Starboard indicates that both cargo ships used by suspected operatives had crews sourced from firms known for hiring Russian seafarers. One vessel entering the UK employed five Russian officers and used a crewing management office in Kherson. There is no indication that the ships' owners, captains or crews knowingly assisted espionage, but experts believe this method aligns with a Kremlin strategy of covert maritime entry, exploiting weaker port border checks.

Border controls at docks are widely recognised by defence analysts as "less rigorous" than at airports, providing Russian operatives with plausible deniability through legitimate crew postings. A NATO official has warned that while the vast majority of Russian seafarers have no malign intent, a small number may be strategically placed to act on behalf of the Russian state, using falsified documentation.

Given Torbay's role as a port of entry, urgent reassurance is required that vulnerabilities are being addressed, intelligence risks are being fully assessed, and that local communities will be kept informed where appropriate.

What specific immediate actions are Torbay Council and Torbay Harbour Authority taking, in coordination with national security agencies, to strengthen security and screening measures at Torquay, Paignton and Brixham harbours, to ensure hostile state actors cannot exploit "less rigorous" port checks to enter the UK via cargo or similar vessels?

Answer to the Urgent Question provided by Councillor Strang

Immigration and border control functions rest entirely with HM Border Force. Tor Bay Harbour Authority does not hold the legal powers to screen or vet individuals arriving in the UK. Immigration powers can only be exercised by Border Force Officers under the UK Borders act 2007.

The Harbour Authority undertakes a range of security measures to support the safety of both vessels and visitors across the three harbours within the bay.

This includes:

- 24-hour security presence at Brixham Harbour. This has recently been taken over by SWISCo and will improve the quality of security. Security patrols have been enhanced over the past months to include more formal patrolling requirements by security staff.
- Continuous out of hours cover has been introduced. This involves having a duty Harbour Master always available to respond to incidents and concerns, including security matters across the three harbours.
- A designated Port Facility Security Officer (PFSO), trained to the International Ship and Port Facility (ISPS) code and an appointed deputy PFSO. The PFSO oversees the security procedures for all three harbours.
- Counter-terrorism awareness training for relevant staff.
- Working relationship with HM Border Force, this includes direct contact with a Field Intelligence Officer for the Southwest and regular visits by Border Force to Torquay and Brixham Harbours, with the most recent meeting taking place last month November 2025.
- Promotion of Border Force's Project Kraken, encouraging harbour users to report suspicious vessels and activity to Border Force. This is promoted with printed publications in the Harbour Offices.
- Clear guidance for visiting vessels from outside of the UK on their statutory requirement to report to HM Border Force prior to any crew or passengers disembarking the vessel. This information is published on our website.

In addition to the existing security measures outlined above, the Harbour Authority will deliver awareness training with all harbour staff, both operational and administration covering the news article. This will also include refresher training on security awareness within their respective port.

During the last passenger vessel visit to Torquay, the Harbour Authority had an unannounced audit from the Department of Transport who reviewed our passenger screening security operations and paperwork. The results of the audit were positive with no follow up actions required.

First Round

Question 1

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

How has Torbay Council worked with the Department for Work and Pensions around promoting pension credit uptake?

Answer to Question 1 provided by Councillor Tranter

The Council has sought to promote Pension Credit uptake in our everyday operations. For example, our benefits team has written to individuals we believe may be eligible to promote the scheme; our Call Centre has provided support for customers to make an application for Pension Credit. In addition, the Community Helpline which is commissioned by Torbay Council, provides advice and support encouraging individuals to apply for pension credit.

Question 2

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

It is often reported that there is a very low level of property available at Social Rent in Torbay.

Can you inform me how many new dwellings for rental at Social Rent levels were delivered or were under construction by Torbay Council or its subsidiary companies, during the 4 years of the previous administration?

Answer to Question 2 provided by Councillor Alan Tyerman

No properties were built directly by Torbay Council, or its subsidiary companies for Social Rent, in the period 28 May 2019 until 16 May 2023.

However, across the same period, TorVista Homes built 9 homes at 286-288 Totnes Road (completed 22/08/23), and acquired 13 homes at Bishop's Place, and 10 individual homes throughout the Bay. All of these homes were delivered for Affordable Rent.

Question 3

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

Further to the response provided at the last meeting that work was on-going on the passenger lift, albeit awaiting the delivery of some parts and that a further temporary repair would be undertaken shortly thereafter on the escalator adjacent to Sports Direct. Can you confirm when repairs will be completed in light of it being a busy time of year for traders in the run up to Christmas?

Answer to Question 3 provided by Councillor Chris Lewis

Unfortunately, repairs to the Lift and Escalators have proven to be particularly problematic. However, I am pleased to confirm the Council is investing c.£200k over the next 3 months to address the matter. Action is now underway on the necessary repairs to ensure the longevity of Escalator 3 (adjacent to Sports Direct) and a programme of restoration of Lift 7, which provides the full access from pavement level to Level 9 at the top of the car park. The work to Escalator 3 is commencing very early in the New Year, with a pre-commencement meeting scheduled for 19th December. As explained previously the sourcing of parts and materials has been difficult, given the age of the equipment, leading to the further delay.

Regarding lifts we shall be undertaking these works on a 'lift by lift' basis, starting with Lift 7 as detailed above. Having experienced considerable difficulties with our previous lift engineers we now have a new provider and have agreed a programme of full restoration and costs. These have been agreed and the contracts being drafted.

Question 4

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

What assurance can be provided that cots are provided as a matter of course in temporary accommodation facilitated by Torbay Council for all children under the age of two?

Answer to Question 4 provided by Councillor Tranter

I can confirm that all households with children under the age of two are asked if they have a cot for their child, if they have their own cot, they are encouraged to take that into temporary accommodation with them. However, if they don't have a cot of their own, the temporary accommodation team keep a constant stock of new travel cots in the office and will deliver one to any families in temporary accommodation who need one.

Additionally, all households with children under the age of two are sent the Safer Sleep Guidance by the Lullaby Trust as part of their information pack.

Question 5

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

A Freedom of Information request shared with me has revealed that the Airshow in Torbay made a loss of £33,683.74 (on top of an allocation of £100,000 from Torbay Council and an overall budget of £285,224.20). Has the overspend fallen on the shoulders of local taxpayers to underwrite?

Answer to Question 5 provided by Councillor Tyerman

Any overspend on the Airshow would be part funded through the revenue budget. As with other revenue budgets, whilst an individual budget line may be overspent, this does not mean that the Council will be overspent as a whole at year end. The Council has a good record of delivering an overall balanced budget at year end.

Question 6

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

Animal charities have highlighted injuries being sustained by hedgehogs as a result of robot lawnmowers, with reports of serious harm including the loss of limbs. What measures has SWISCo taken to ensure that its robot lawnmowers are safe and not detrimental to local wildlife?

Answer to Question 6 provided by Councillor Billings

The Council is committed to maintaining our green spaces responsibly and with care for local wildlife. SWISCo takes pride in identifying ways in which they can deliver better for the Council and our communities, and an example of this is the introduction of robotic mowers. These mowers, like traditional mowers, can pose risks to small animals. To minimize these risks a site-specific approach and carefully planned timing has been adopted.

This practice forms part of SWISCo's wider commitment to biodiversity and the protection of wildlife in our parks and open spaces.

Question 7

Councillor Law to the Cabinet Member for Tourism, Events & Culture and Corporate Services (Councillor Jackie Thomas)

The Council's communications to residents about renewing their postal votes, suggests to people that do not have internet access, that they should "download" a paper copy of the application form. If people do not have internet access, then surely better customer service would have been to provide a phone number to request application forms, or to have them available at public libraries?

Answer to Question 7 provided by Councillor Jackie Thomas

As part of this year's annual canvass, we proactively chose to include an additional leaflet to raise awareness of the upcoming postal vote reapplication process, recognising that this was a fundamental change brought about by the Elections Act 2022. The aim of the additional leaflet was to raise awareness and encourage early reapplication. By doing this we have reduced the number of letters required to be sent out by circa 3,000, thus saving on postage costs, which we consider to be a worthwhile outcome.

The leaflet was supported by messaging on the annual canvass forms for electors affected by the postal vote reapplication. While the leaflet itself did not include contact details, the accompanying letter provided full contact information for the Electoral Services team, including both email and telephone. The volume of phone calls and paper form requests the Elections Team received demonstrated that electors know how to reach the team. However, for next year's canvass, we will ensure our printer includes clearer instructions directly on the leaflet.

We have now issued the main communication (letter) to remaining electors who need to reapply for their postal vote and for whom we do not hold an email address. This letter includes clear guidance for those unable to use the online service. The text reads:

"If you are unable to complete an application using the online service, paper forms can be downloaded from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-postal-vote>, or you can contact us by email at electoral.registration@torbay.gov.uk or by calling our helpline on 01803 208008 to request a paper copy of the application."

Question 8

Councillor Penny to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Councillor Bye)

How many employment mentors have the council recruited to support our care experienced community into work?

Answer to Question 8 provided by Councillor Bye

Our Care Experienced Young People have Personal Advisors, whose role it is to assist our young people to transition to independent adult life by providing support and advice on a range of issues, including training, skills and employment. In respect of specific employment mentors, we have not recruited any specific Employment Mentors, however mentorship will be supported by our corporate parenting champions, one of which is currently studying for a mentorship qualification and will be fully qualified in April 2026. We aim to replicate this to increase the numbers over time.

The Council also has a dedicated officer based in HR who is responsible for progressing the Council's offer, for example she has been progressing work experience and internships. This officer organised Employment Week earlier this year to enhance employment opportunities for our young people, raise awareness and visibility with employers in the community and also set up a Work Experience week in the council for our care experienced young people.

Moving forward, under the new Corporate Parenting Strategy even greater focus will ensure that we are being the best Corporate Parents that we can be.

Question 9

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

Earlier this year, Plainmoor residents and businesses made clear their wish to see a Sunday exemption for parking restrictions on the St Marychurch Road which was kindly supported by the Cabinet Member and Highways. Could an update on when this will be implemented, please be provided?

Answer to Question 9 provided by Councillor Billings

As the question acknowledges, the request has my support as the Cabinet Member and has been supported by professional Highways Officers.

To take the request forward requires a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) and this starts with consultation with residents, businesses and Ward Councillors in the affected area. This consultation is expected to commence in mid-December 2025. Subject to

the proposals being generally supported, the Traffic Regulation Order would then be formally advertised in early 2026.

The final stage of implementing a traffic regulation order involves the installation of appropriate signage or line markings. Overall, given the need for the consultation and then advertisement, this process is likely to take between 3-6 months.

Second Round

Question 10

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

What is the number of families and children in temporary accommodation in Torbay over the last 3 years?

Answer to Question 10 provided by Councillor Tranter

The size of households that are provided with TA since April 2021			
Household Composition	21-22	22-23	23-24
Family, 1 child	79	70	77
Family with 2 children	52	43	38
Family with 3 children	39	33	17
6-7 people or 4 children	10	12	9
8+ people or 5+ children	11	8	7
Total	191	166	148

HCLIC data for 24/25 is being compiled but based on localised reports is expected to be similar to 23/24.

Question 11

Councillor Pentney to the Chair of the Planning Committee (Councillor Brook)

Broken down by year and political groups for the last four years, how many times has the Planning Committee Chair;

- (a) agreed to a request from a ward Councillor for a planning matter going to Committee
- (b) refused a request from a Ward Councillor for a planning application to go to committee?

Answer to Question 11 provided by Councillor Brook

Based on the information held, over the 4 years, 16 applications have been brought to the Committee, in agreement with the respective Chair and Divisional Director that could have been determined under delegated powers:

Chair	Cllr Brook	Cllr Maddison	Cllr J Thomas	Cllr Pentney
<i>Political Party of Chair</i>	Conservative	Independent	Conservative	Liberal Democrat
<i>Dates</i>	May24-Nov-25	Nov23-Apr24	May23-Mar24	Dec21-Apr23
<i>Number of Items to Committee</i>	25	15	20	43
<i>Number referred by a Councillor(1)</i>	6	4	4	2
<i>Political party of Cllr referring</i>	1 Conservative 4 Liberal Democrat 1 Independent	2 Conservative 1 Liberal Democrat 1 Independent	3 Conservative 1 Liberal Democrat	1 Conservative Remaining 1 requires further investigation
<i>%</i>	24%	27%	20%	5%
<i>Number Refused</i>	5 in total of which 3 Conservative 2 Liberal Democrat	N/A	N/A	N/A

Question 12

Councillor Long to the Cabinet Member for Tourism, Events & Culture and Corporate Services (Councillor Jackie Thomas)

How has the Council's Community Wealth Building Policy been taken into account in the forthcoming Christmas Market at Torre Abbey; and ice rink?

Answer to Question 12 provided by Councillor Jackie Thomas

Community wealth building is one element of the Council's approach to economic growth and a more prosperous Torbay. In this case by seeking to work with local suppliers and maximising the Council's spend in the area. For the Christmas Market we have tried to focus on infrastructure from local suppliers. It is not always possible to obtain what is needed from Torbay based businesses so we are often referred to other local branches.

We have also tried to focus on attracting local traders – caterers and craft traders – as a priority for the market and concessions. The bar provider is our local brewery who also stock other local products. Over 50% of all the traders across food and craft are Torbay based and the remainder are from Devon, with only one further trader from Somerset.

For the ice-rink it was not possible to use a local ice-rink supplier, however other infrastructure is from local suppliers and the marquee for the ice-rink is from a local supplier. The associated bar and food traders are also local. The ice-rink operational staff will come from the local community (other than the experienced ice-rink manager) and will largely be South Devon College students. Providing them with seasonal employment, skills and development opportunities.

Question 13

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

Following the implementation of the 20mph speed limit on Cricketfield Road, residents have raised concerns that traffic continues to travel well above the limit. Monitoring has confirmed that the average speed remains close to 30mph. Could the Council look at further measures to bring down speeds outside one of Torbay's largest schools, such as additional traffic calming or speed-activated signs?

Answer to Question 13 provided by Councillor Billings

The effectiveness of the new 20mph zones around schools was discussed at the last Road Network and Travel working party. There was general consensus from Members present that speeds had reduced and were perceived to be under the Police's threshold for issuing speeding tickets of 24 mph.

Highways officers have liaised with the Police, through the Vision Zero South West Partnership, to ensure they are aware of concerns around vehicle speeds, and they have already carried out some targeted speed enforcement along Cricketfield Road. Any further enforcement will be subject to their available resources.

Since May 2023, Highways have purchased 4 portable Vehicle Activated Warning Signs. These can both record vehicle speeds for monitoring purposes and illuminate to reinforce driver awareness of the speed limit in place. Improving driver awareness of the new 20mph zones is one priority which will inform deployment of the Vehicle Activated Warning Signs, but each deployment site will assessment to ensure there is the appropriate street furniture to mount the signs.

Residents in the immediate vicinity may also wish to consider volunteering to become involved in setting up a Community Speed Watch Team for their area. Details on how to apply for this can be found on the Vision Zero South West Website.

The Council's road safety initiatives programme is reviewed annually by the Road Network and Travel Working Party and in accordance with the statutory duty on the Council priority is given to casualty reduction schemes. Priorities will next be reviewed in summer of 2026. There are no current plans to introduce additional traffic calming measures at Cricketfield Road, but these could be brought forward for consideration when these priorities are discussed as a Member led initiative.

Question 14

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

Following the failure of the sewage pipe and highway on Ilsham Marine Drive, I understand the local authority has obtained a geological report, can this be published now?

Answer to Question 14 provided by Councillor Billings

Following the recent issue with a damaged sewer, which caused a hole to appear in the carriageway on Ilsham Marine Drive and the road to be closed, advice was sought from Geologists to assist Torbay Council and South West Water to effectively implement any proposed remedial works whilst minimising any risk to the structural integrity of the road.

This advice resulted in updated geological monitoring. This not in the form of a standalone report. Rather, it is in the form of the continuation of ongoing coastal stability monitoring, which has been undertaken in this location for many years across multiple Council administrations.

Presenting the information in a usable form would require pulling together and published the previous monitoring results.

My priority has been on ensuring our Officers are focused on delivering the road improvements which will enable the road to re-open. I am pleased to confirm contractors began on site this Tuesday.

Question 15

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

I understand people in Torbay have suffered from parasitic worms under their nails and fungal infections due to poor hygiene practices in beauty salons, other local authorities have implemented inspectors for this, when do the local authority plan to appoint an inspector?

Answer to Question 15 provided by Councillor Tranter

The Food and Safety Commercial Team and Public Health have not received any complaints or notifications regarding such matters in Torbay. Both teams work closely together, and any concerns would be referred for investigation. Health and Safety inspectors within the team have powers under the Health and Safety at Work. Act to enter nail salons and assess hygiene standards. While inspections can be carried out under these powers, evidence of specific issues would be required to justify inspecting.

Previously, Torbay Council's Food and Safety Commercial Team conducted several health and safety visits to nail salons to assess compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act. Most salons were found to be compliant, with the main issues relating to individuals working without permission to work in the UK.

A recent survey commissioned by the UK Health Security Agency involved sampling at skin-piercing establishments such as tattoo studios, with findings expected in a report next year. Further guidance is anticipated from central government regarding the new legislation under the Health and Care Act 2022, which will give local authorities powers to introduce licensing schemes for aesthetic procedures. However, this is unlikely to include nail salons.

Audits of skin-piercing establishments are recorded and published on the Torbay Council website [List of audited premises - Torbay Council](#). As nail salons are not classified as skin-piercing premises, they are not routinely inspected or listed.

Question 16

Councillor George Darling to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Councillor Bye)

A recent FOI (16257490) revealed that the council brought 136 prosecutions against parents for school non-attendance in the 2024/25 academic year. Yet it does not record what proportion of these parents are caring for children on the SEND register. Parents believe that families of children on the SEND register are disproportionately represented in prosecutions. Will the Council agree to monitor this information going forward, with the aim to identify whether there is any subsequent action necessary to support these families?

Answer to Question 16 provided by Councillor Bye

All families are treated fairly under the code of conduct for penalty notices; the law does not allow the Council to differentiate between the families of those with children with SEND and those without.

Prior to any penalty notice and when concerns are raised about a child's attendance colleagues from the school and Local Authority work together with other partner agencies to support the child to improve their attendance. As per the statutory guidance, for all absences (other than unauthorised holidays), consideration is given to a family's support needs, including any SEN provision. Warning Penalty Notices only form a small part of the activity surrounding attendance with much of the resource spent on support and intervention.

Third Round

Question 17

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

How has the Council's Community Wealth Building Policy been taken into account for the proposal for a hotel at The Strand in Torquay?

Answer to Question 17 provided by Councillor Chris Lewis

The Community Wealth Building MoU signed previously by the Council has been drawn into the overarching framework for Social Value, to be delivered at strategic and tactical level through both programme and project level interventions.

With the more recent creation of Build Torbay within our Economic Development service working with colleagues in our Social Value team we have created a Social Value policy measure for procuring services which sets out minimum requirement for suppliers. This includes a preference for a local sustainable supply chain to be given access to contracts and sub-contracts from Torbay Council.

Specific to the Strand the social value requirements of the Regeneration Partnership with Willmott Dixon and Milligan are being delivered through both the professional services supply chain, and directly by both Willmott Dixon and Milligan in supporting community organisations to deliver their mandate where it is coincident with our social value objectives. Examples are both organisations support to Build Torbay events, supporting the recent Riveria Connect conference for local businesses.

We are also gearing up to create opportunities for apprentices and trainees in the construction works which we hope will start on site in 2027 and then subsequently in the recruitment of hospitality staff for the proposed development of a branded Hotel.

Question 18

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

With traffic continuing to flow up and down Fleet Walk unrestricted, as if it were an open highway, what measures are the council undertaking to enforce the regulations that designate this as a restricted area, will the Cabinet consider whether it is now time to implement a barrier system before a pedestrian is seriously hurt, in order to ensure that only minimal and permitted vehicles are accessing this road?

Answer to Question 18 provided by Councillor Billings

The Prohibition of Driving Traffic Regulation Order, which is in place in Fleet Street, Torquay, can only be enforced by the Police at the present time and they are aware of concerns regarding the illegal use of the road.

Highways have considered the feasibility and merits of a barrier system to prevent illegal access, however this is extremely problematic to achieve for several reasons:

- There are several competing access requirements to deal with, including access for loading between 6:00pm and 10:00am, access for emergency vehicles, access for cyclists and access for buses, which require access at each end throughout the day.
- An 'access only' exemption is required for vehicles needing to exit Braddons Hill Road West and the Terrace and Taxis also now require access from the Terrace to serve their Fleet Street Rank.
- A rise and fall bollard system may not be physically possible, due to the high number of utility services and other pipework, which is under the Street and within the depth required to install such a device. Diversions of services may be possible and investigation would be needed to assess, but this is likely to be very expensive and highly disruptive work to achieve.
- A rising barrier is another option; however this would impact cyclists and would almost certainly become an ongoing maintenance issue as it would be susceptible to acts of vandalism.

There may be an opportunity in the future for Torbay Council to consider applying to government to obtain powers to carry out enforcement of moving traffic offences, such as this, however it should be noted that investment and ongoing funding to provide the necessary resource and back-office functions to undertake monitoring and enforcement will be required with a low probability of cost recovery through penalty charge notices, if this were to be successful in preventing offences. In the meantime, enforcement powers rest with the Police.

Question 19

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

Over the term of this administration, how has the Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth worked with the community in Clifton with Maidenway to utilise the Old Monastery for community use?

Answer to Question 19 provided by Councillor Chris Lewis

The Council has a range of properties that are utilised by the community. Some properties are at or in some cases beyond useful economic life, which is the case for the Old Monastery. Investing in those assets is difficult given competing priorities and the significant high level of back log maintenance found across the Council's

estate. However, it is recognised that communities can lever in funding and support from the community that if successful could see this property preserved and repurposed. To this end the Council is supporting the community in Clifton with Maidenway by offering the property for purchase for £1 as part of a community-led regeneration initiative.

Question 20

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

The lighting at Melville Hill Car Park has been inadequate for a number of reasons despite several reports about the issue. When will we see the upgrades required?

Answer to Question 20 provided by Councillor Billings

A lighting survey has been requested for this car park and once the recommendations are known and the associated costs, the process for funding will be followed.

Question 21

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

I understand from a Trustee at the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, that the cost of the National Insurance Contribution hike was an additional £100,000 for the Trust. How much money did the local authority offer the Trust to bridge this gap?

Answer to Question 21 provided by Councillor Chris Lewis

When the Trust set out the extent of the issues facing it, in April 2025, the impact of the National Insurance rise was one of many factors that needed to be taken into account. There was no specific ask by the Trust for the Council to bridge the gap created by the NI rise. The Council worked with the Trustees to find a sustainable and affordable way forward for the Trust and has, over a long period of time, extended generous additional support for the Trust, including amongst other things; buying back assets to provide capital, making available loan finance for the commercial developments which ultimately proved not to be viable as well as an increased management fee to help address the financial challenges faced.

Question 22

Councillor George Darling to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Councillor Bye)

From the recent FOI (16795525), there was concern that fines on parents for school non-attendance disproportionately impact families on a low income. Has an equality impact assessment been undertaken to assess this, if not what action is the council taking to investigate this concern?

Answer to Question 22 provided by Councillor Bye

The law does not differentiate between the families of those with children with parents of low or high incomes. The law states that a child must not be taken out of school during term time unless under exceptional circumstances. As there is not therefore a decision to make in this regard, the Council has not undertaken an equality impact assessment.

The Council does however work intensively with schools and families to improve attendance through our Attendance Improvement Service. For example a recent case study details that our Officers coordinated multi-agency efforts with school staff, social workers, and external services to address complex barriers to attendance for 'Child A' and their family, providing persistent engagement, individualised support planning, and flexible interventions that ultimately enabled Child A to re-engage with school through a phased return and ongoing support, resulting in much improved outcomes for both Child A and the family.
