

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

22 April 2026

-: Present :-

Councillor Long (Chair)

Councillors Brook, Cowell, Douglas-Dunbar, Fellows, Foster, Law, Nicolaou, Stevens and Tolchard

(Also in attendance: Councillors Barbara Lewis (virtual), Chris Lewis, David Thomas and Tranter)

69. Apologies

It was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, the membership of the Board had been amended to include Councillor Brook in place of Councillor Spacagna for this meeting only.

70. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

71. Social Mobility in Torbay

The Board received a report on Social Mobility in Torbay, introduced by the Cabinet Member for Place Development and Growth – Councillor Chris Lewis. Members were advised that the report focused on partnership working aimed at improving life outcomes for residents, ensuring that starting circumstances do not determine long-term outcomes.

The Board received a presentation from the Director of Public Health – Lincoln Sargeant, UK SPF Programme Manager - Gemma Fitsimmons, Consultant in Public Health - Julia Chisnell and Liz Muir - Torbay Communities covering (see [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Board on Wednesday, 22 April 2026, 5.30 pm](#)):

- Progress achieved through multi-agency working.
- Improvements in early years and school readiness.
- Work to prevent young people becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- The contribution of programmes funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).
- Risks associated with the ending of UKSPF funding in March 2026.
- Recent investment proposals to support economic growth.

Members questioned the following points:

- How could successful projects and partnerships be sustained following the ending of UK Shared Prosperity Fund funding?
- What long-term benefits were expected from continued investment in social mobility initiatives?
- How early should intervention begin to have the greatest impact on aspiration and outcomes?
- How many supported businesses remain operational after two years? (A written response would be provided.)
- What work was being undertaken with local businesses to engage children from age 11 onwards?
- How were children eligible for free school meals being supported to narrow development gaps?
- How effectively were young people being tracked across education and employment pathways?
- What was being done to connect young people from different areas to successful existing programmes?
- Was there an overarching strategy for engagement between schools and employers?
- How were mental health services being integrated into education and employment support?
- How were barriers unrelated to skills or motivation being identified and addressed?
- What support was available for people requiring long-term or intensive assistance into work?
- What provision was available locally to support speech and language needs?
- How could the legacy of community-based programmes be secured once funding ends?
- What work was being done to support children in Brixham to link with the Torquay Coastal Navigators?

The Board received responses which included the following:

- Early years and school readiness are key priorities, with ambition to improve the proportion of children with Good Level of Development (GLD) scores and narrow the gaps with those eligible for free school meals through targeted intervention.
- Engagement with local businesses is taking place through work experience, site visits, careers hubs and employer-led activities, although practice varies between schools.
- There is currently no single overarching strategy for business-school engagement, though multiple programmes are active.
- Targeted employment support programmes are in place for different cohorts, including those ready for work and those requiring wrap-around support.
- Mental health challenges are a significant factor for many individuals; relationship-based support and trust-building are essential to addressing underlying barriers.

- Government-funded employment programmes are supporting individuals who would not otherwise be work-ready, with early positive engagement.
- Improvements have been made in SEND support and speech and language provision although there is still more to be done (further details on the number of speech and language officers and provision to be provided in writing).
- UKSPF-funded programmes have delivered strong outcomes but are coming to an end; alternative funding sources are being explored.
- Officers are working to align existing and future initiatives, including employment, health and regeneration programmes, to maximise impact.
- The work of the Torquay Coastal Navigators Network project will be replicated across all networks in Torbay.

Members welcomed the progress made to date and acknowledged the strength of partnership working across public, voluntary and private sectors.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Cabinet be recommended:
 - a. to explore options for an external careers fair inviting representatives across all different sectors including professional and creative sectors; and
 - b. to identify the financial gap in funding following ending of UK Shared Prosperity Fund and consider how they will address this as part of the budget setting progress; and
2. that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board writes to the local Members of Parliament, Local Government Association and Torbay and Devon Combined County Council, on behalf of the Board, and recommends them to lobby Government on how they will address the gap in funding following the ending of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support social mobility in Torbay, highlighting our demographics and the success of the work to date using that fund.

Chair