

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

6 May 2026

-: Present :-

Councillor Long (Chair)

Councillors Cowell, Douglas-Dunbar, Fellows, Foster, Johns, Law, Spacagna (Vice-Chair) and Tolchard

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye, Barbara Lewis, Chris Lewis, David Thomas, Jacqueline Thomas and Twelves (virtual), plus Ndbisi Obasi – Primary Academy Parent Governor Representative)

72. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Stevens.

73. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 8 April 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

74. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

75. Terra Firma - English Riviera Geopark Review

The Board considered a report and presentation on the Terra Firma project and the future governance and delivery of the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark from the Cabinet Member for Tourism, Events & Culture and Corporate Services - Councillor Jackie Thomas and the Chair of the English Riviera Geopark Organisation – Nick Powe. Key points included:

- The Terra Firma project was intended to strengthen governance, clarify delivery arrangements and improve long-term sustainability of the Geopark.
- Proposals included transitioning the English Riviera Geopark Organisation into a Community Interest Company (CIC), with clearer roles, governance and accountability.
- Geological and cultural heritage were closely linked to tourism and place promotion, and Torbay's Geopark status remained under-promoted.
- The Geopark revalidation process was outlined, including submission deadlines, evaluation visits and decision-making timescales.

Members raised the following questions:

- How frequently would the re-established Geopark Board meet and what themes would it focus on?
- How was specialist geological expertise being provided in the absence of a dedicated geologist?
- Would the lack of a geologist impact future UNESCO revalidation?
- How would the Community Interest Company improve awareness and interpretation of the Geopark for residents and visitors?
- What future funding streams were anticipated once current grant funding ends?
- What was the timetable and process for the next UNESCO Geopark revalidation?
- How would schools and young people be supported to engage with Geopark learning?
- How will partner organisations' roles be clarified and strengthened?

The following responses were received:

- The Geopark CIC Board was expected to meet four times a year, with themed meetings covering tourism, community engagement and education etc.
- Geological expertise was currently provided through partnership working with academic institutions e.g. Plymouth University, and this has been sufficient to date.
- It was confirmed that existing expertise and co-ordination arrangements were considered adequate for revalidation purposes.
- The CIC model was intended to provide clearer governance, improved communication, stronger branding and a more visitor-focused approach.
- Long-term funding will require a mixed model, including grants, partnerships and alternative funding sources; it was acknowledged that while continuing Council funding was vital, remaining the sole funder was not sustainable.
- Revalidation documentation must be submitted in January 2027, followed by evaluator visits in mid-2027 and a final UNESCO decision in 2028.
- Educational engagement will focus on toolkits, digital resources, school partnerships and improved website content.
- Core partnerships will be refreshed with clearer terms of reference and expectations around delivery and leadership roles.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Board welcomed the direction of travel for review of the Terra Firma – English Riviera Geopark Review and the proposed creation of Community Interest Company (CIC) and requested that the Board receives an update on the progress of the Review in the Autumn; and
2. that the Cabinet be recommended to review the signs for UNESCO English Riviera Geopark to ensure that they are up to date and fit for purpose and report back to the Board on any progress to implement this.

76. Annual Review of the Place Leadership Boards

The Board received the annual review of the Torbay Place Leadership Board, the Torquay Place Leadership Board and progress on the emerging Paignton Place Leadership Board as presented by the Deputy Leader of the Council (on behalf of the Leader of the Council) – Councillor Chris Lewis and the Chair of the Torbay and Torquay Place Leadership Boards – Jim Parker. Key points included:

- Governance and delivery arrangements have continued to mature and strengthen over the past year.
- Torbay Place Leadership Board has focused on presenting a clearer regeneration and investment narrative, while Torquay Place Leadership Board has moved into delivery with six local community projects being recently allocated funding.
- The Paignton Place Leadership Board was in its early stages, with strong community interest following an open recruitment process.
- The Torbay Story was highlighted as a valuable tool that now needs refreshing to be more people-focused and locally resonant.
- Opportunities and risks were identified around capacity, assurance workload and managing community expectations over funding.

Members raised the following questions:

- Will the Paignton Place Leadership Board remain limited to the current two defined areas, or was there scope for this to widen in future?
- How were the geographic boundaries for the Paignton Board determined, and was there flexibility to amend them?
- What skills, experience and representation were being sought for membership of the Paignton Place Leadership Board?
- How will the Independent Chair of the Paignton Place Leadership Board be appointed, and what criteria will be used?
- How will the Board manage community expectations given the scale of funding and the wide range of potential community needs?
- Given early challenges experienced by the Torquay Place Leadership Board, what lessons have been learned and applied to new Paignton Boards?
- How visible and well-understood was the Torbay Place Leadership Board and the “Torbay Story” across Torbay?
- How will the next phase of the Torbay Story better reflect people, communities and lived experience rather than solely investment messaging?
- What steps were being taken to improve digital and social media presence for the Place Leadership Boards?
- How will communities be engaged meaningfully, particularly those that feel disconnected from decision-making processes?
- What is the relationship between the Place Leadership Boards, Government funding conditions and political representation?
- How will longer-term, systemic issues be balanced against community pressure to address short-term practical concerns?
- How frequently was membership of the Torbay Place Leadership Board refreshed, and how was transparency maintained?

The following responses were received:

- The areas covered by the Paignton Place Leadership Board have been defined by Government based on deprivation data. While there was limited flexibility, boundaries covered for the funding can be reviewed where there is a demonstrable community benefit, subject to Government agreement.
- The boundaries were based on a national statistical formula and include parts of neighbouring areas where deprivation indicators apply. The Board will have scope to consider how it presents and describes the area as part of its work.
- Membership was intended to include a broad range of skills relevant to delivery, including community leadership, regeneration, education, skills and economic development. An emphasis was being placed on people who may not have previously held formal leadership roles.
- The Independent Chair will be selected through an open application process, with candidates assessed against agreed criteria. The appointment will be confirmed by mid-July in line with Government deadlines.
- It was acknowledged that £20m over 10 years creates high expectations. Clear communication will be needed to explain funding constraints, delivery timescales and the balance between capital and revenue spend.
- Early challenges in Torquay highlighted the importance of community representation, clarity of purpose and strong governance. These lessons have informed the development of the Paignton Board, including earlier and deeper community engagement. Information on the Torquay Place Leadership Board can be found at [Committee details - Torquay Place Leadership Board](#).
- Awareness of the Torbay Place Leadership Board ([Committee details - Torbay Place Leadership Board](#)) and Torbay Story remains limited ([Torbay Story - Home](#)). While inward investment messaging was effective at a national level, local understanding needs strengthening.
- A new people-focused phase of work is planned, centred on local stories, lived experiences and community pride. This will aim to make the Torbay Story more accessible, relatable and relevant to residents.
- Digital and social media presence was currently limited. Plans include improving online visibility, encouraging sharing of content, and making better use of real stories and imagery rather than corporate messaging.
- Engagement will rely on listening exercises, grassroots outreach and working with trusted community organisations. The Boards intend to ensure that engagement is continuous and not limited to formal consultation points.
- The Boards are independent but operate within national programme rules, including limits on political representation for the Paignton Board, which includes no more than one Member of Parliament (MP) and one Ward Councillor.
- It was recognised that communities often prioritise immediate local issues such as facilities and amenities, while the programme also requires focus on long-term economic growth, skills and systemic change. Managing this tension will be a key leadership challenge.
- Membership of the Torbay Place Leadership Board was refreshed in 2025 alongside new Terms of Reference. Transparency is supported through published information and clearer communication of roles and responsibilities. It was acknowledged that information on the Torbay Place Leadership Board

was not easy to find through web searches and this should be explored to make the Torbay and other Boards more accessible.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board note the progress made by the Torbay Place Leadership Board, Torquay Place Leadership Board and the emerging Paignton Place Leadership Board, including the steps taken to strengthen governance, transparency and delivery assurance;
2. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board note the key issues and risks set out in the Supporting Information (including capacity, assurance workload and managing community expectations) and endorses the continued use of a proportionate Delivery Assurance approach to support Board decision-making;
3. that a new people-focused phase of work around the Torbay Story ("Our Story") is endorsed to increase understanding and use across the Bay;
4. that given the independence of the Boards, and the critical (and sometimes legal) role that Torbay Council plays in supporting them, the Overview and Scrutiny Board request an interim update if there are material changes to Government guidance, the funding profile (how much funding is available in each year), or Board arrangements. Otherwise, Overview and Scrutiny will receive the next annual review report in line with the established cycle; and
5. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board receive an interim update on the Torquay and Paignton Place Leadership Boards in October 2026.

(Note: during consideration of the item in Minute 76, Councillor Law declared a non-pecuniary interest as member of Torquay Place Board.)

77. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Update

The Board considered an update on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) improvement activity following inspection and ongoing partnership work as presented by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services – Councillor Bye, Director of Children's Services – Nancy Meehan, Assistant Director for Women, Children and Young People, Integrated Care Board (ICB) - Sadie Hall and Independent Chair of the SEND Local Area Improvement Partnership Board (SLAIP) – Alison Hurley. Key discussion points included:

- Significant structural, governance and service improvements have been made since the inspection.
- Progress has been achieved in local provision, workforce capacity, quality assurance and partnership working.
- Timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans, health waiting times and parental confidence remain ongoing challenges.
- SEND Reform and wider system changes present both pressure and opportunity.

Members asked the following questions:

- What progress has been made since the most recent SEND inspection, and what were the key areas of improvement?
- What were the biggest challenges currently facing the SEND partnership?
- How was the partnership preparing for future monitoring activity and inspection, and what were the expected timescales?
- How will impact be evidenced, particularly where improvements may not yet be felt by families?
- What pressures were arising from the SEND Reform Plan, and how was the partnership managing these alongside existing improvement activity?
- How were delays in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) being addressed, and what improvements were being made to quality and timeliness?
- What progress has been made in reducing health waiting times, particularly for autism and ADHD assessments?
- What support was available for children and families while they are waiting for assessment or diagnosis?
- How were parental confidence and trust being rebuilt following historic issues within the system?
- What was being done to reduce reliance on tribunals and resolve disagreements earlier?
- How are the voices of children, young people and families being incorporated into governance and decision-making?
- What mental health and wellbeing support is available for parents and carers of children with SEND?
- How are schools being supported to improve inclusion, particularly in mainstream settings?
- How was transition from Children's Services to Adult Services being managed and improved?
- What was the potential impact of wider system changes, including workforce challenges and structural reforms, on SEND improvement activity?

The following responses were received:

- Since the inspection, there has been significant progress in governance, leadership and service delivery. SEND services have been restructured, provision has been expanded locally, quality assurance has improved and partnership working has strengthened across education and health.
- Key challenges include the pace of change, high demand for EHCPs, workforce pressures (particularly in health services), parental confidence, and the need to evidence impact consistently across the system.
- The partnership is subject to regular monitoring activity, including deep dives and stocktakes. Further monitoring is expected imminently, with a full visit scheduled for January 2027. Written feedback from the most recent activity was still awaited.
- While activity levels were high, demonstrating impact, particularly lived experience for families, was more complex and would take time. The focus is

now shifting toward evidencing outcomes, quality and user experience, not just processes.

- The SEND Reform Plan introduces additional pressure due to tight timescales and overlapping improvement requirements. Draft plans must be produced while continuing to deliver the existing Priority Impact Plan, placing strain on capacity.
- Clearer processes have been introduced to improve EHCP timeliness and quality, including enhanced audit arrangements and feedback loops. While volumes remain high, improvements are being embedded and monitored through performance reporting.
- Health partners have made progress in reducing waiting times, including improvements in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) access so that children are no longer waiting more than 18 weeks. Autism and ADHD assessment delays remain a challenge, but improvements were expected.
- “Support while waiting” arrangements are in place, including school-based support, community provision and interim interventions. Work is ongoing to ensure families are consistently informed about what help is available.
- Rebuilding trust is recognised as one of the most significant challenges. Action includes improved communication, greater transparency, regular engagement with families, publication of information, and visible changes in practice.
- Mediation services are being used more proactively to support earlier resolution of disagreements and reduce escalation to tribunal for EHCPs. A written response would be provided on the number of cases resolved without formal tribunal proceedings.
- Children, young people and families are represented through formal forums, including a SEND Youth Forum and parent networks. New approaches are being developed to engage less-heard voices through co-production and community-based engagement.
- Dedicated mental health provision for parents is limited; however, peer support through parent and carer forums is available. Parents can also access adult mental health services where needs are significant. Their lived experience is recognised as valid and influential.
- Schools are being supported through inclusion grants, strategic collaboration, and renewed focus on inclusive practice. An education conference has helped rebuild shared understanding across the local education system.
- Transition to Adult Services is being strengthened through updated guidance, closer collaboration between Children’s and Adult Services, and embedding transition planning earlier, particularly from ages 11–14.
- Workforce capacity, health system restructuring and concurrent national reforms present risks but also opportunities. New ways of working, including integrated neighbourhood teams and consistent local offers, are being developed to support sustainability.

The Board noted that the Children and Young People’s Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board was arranging a visit to Mayfield School and it was agreed that the main Overview and Scrutiny Board Members should also be invited to this visit.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board note the update on Local Area SEND improvement activity, including governance and monitoring arrangements;
2. that a SEND Improvement Task and Finish Group be established to:
 - a. review the implementation of the Priority Impact Plan focussing on one priority area per meeting, including a consistent set of measures of impact (timeliness, quality, experience and outcomes);
 - b. seek assurance on Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) quality and timeliness improvement by requesting quarterly reporting of: audit outcomes (including social care and health advice quality), learning actions taken, and feedback from families and settings about whether plans are usable and outcome-focused;
 - c. request a deep dive update on Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support and inclusion, including what is changing for children without EHCPs and how the partnership is addressing persistent challenges such as attendance, suspensions and exclusions;
 - d. request assurance on health waiting times and the 'support while waiting' offer, including how families are informed, what interim provision is available, and how equity of access is monitored;
 - e. request assurance on preparation for adulthood: transitions governance, pathways into employment/training, and how gaps in referral routes and tracking are being closed; and
 - f. request evidence of strengthened co-production and improved communication with families (including what has changed as a result of feedback as well as the voice of the young people, their families and carers) and how this is being measured; and
3. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board request a follow-up update once the actions and feedback from the 23 February 2026 monitoring/deep dive are formally confirmed and incorporated into the Partnership's action tracking and performance reporting.

(Note: Councillor Fellows left the meeting, prior to consideration of the item in Minute 77.)

Chair