

Revised Memorial Bench Policy – Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Report to Cabinet on 18 August 2026

Background

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Board met on 3 June 2026 to consider the submitted report which provided an update on the revised Memorial Bench Policy and fees following the submission of a Notice of Motion and responded to questions together with the Director of Pride in Place – Alan Denby.
2. Members raised the following questions:
 - How was the rationale for the zoning approach determined and how were areas classified, including the reasons why Torquay Harbour was included in Zone 1 while Paignton and Brixham Harbours were placed in Zone 2?
 - Why do apparent inconsistencies exist between the policy narrative and the tables, particularly where harbours and Paignton seafront are described as Zone 1 in the text but listed as Zone 2?
 - Which factors were used to define higher-use areas, including tourism, footfall and environmental standards, and how were these applied consistently across Torbay?
 - On what basis were cost differentials between zones justified, including variations in cleaning, maintenance and inspection requirements?
 - Does the higher level of charges in Zone 1 areas indicate that income was being generated from bench locations?
 - How can the zoning approach be clearly explained to residents and community groups, particularly those involved in local competitions or voluntary initiatives?
 - How fair was the application of different charges across residential and tourism areas, and how does this compare with approaches used by other local authorities?
 - Would a single, standardised charging structure across all areas provide a more equitable solution?
 - How do inspection and maintenance frequencies differ between zones and how do these differences influence overall costs?
 - In what way were vandalism and damage levels factored into the pricing model?
 - What was meant by “cost neutral” within the policy and which elements of the charges were subject to annual review?
 - What was the purpose of the £35 administration fee and was it intended to remain fixed or subject to change?

- How was the cost structure for shared benches determined, particularly where costs appear higher in Zone 2 compared to Zone 1?
- What level of demand exists for shared bench arrangements and how does this influence the pricing assumptions?
- Are maintenance standards applied consistently across all zones, including residential areas?
- To what extent were benches in high-footfall areas already maintained through existing service provision?
- Why had Torbay adopted a multi-zone approach when some other authorities operate a single-zone system?
- What would be the implications of moving to a single-zone approach across Torbay?
- How would existing benches be treated if they were located in areas that may change designation under a revised zoning structure?
- What type and quality of benches would be used if a standardised approach were introduced? and
- How do considerations such as bench quality, location and durability align with wider place-based objectives, including “Pride in Place” and investment programmes.

3. The following responses were received:

- Differences between locations were based on factors such as setting, environmental quality and presentation, with certain areas subject to higher aesthetic standards and expectations.
- Inconsistencies between the policy wording and tables were acknowledged and would require clarification.
- Zone 1 areas were identified as having higher footfall and usage, resulting in increased cleaning, maintenance and inspection requirements.
- Cost variations between zones reflected differences in service demand, including frequency of inspections and likelihood of damage or vandalism.
- Higher usage areas were more prone to wear and damage, which had been factored into the pricing structure.
- A flat-rate approach would need to consider that lower-footfall, residential or rural areas generally require less maintenance and fewer inspections.
- Torbay’s geography and range of locations were not uniform, making a single approach more complex to apply.
- The current model was based on professional officer advice, taking account of differing operational demands across locations.
- Inspection frequencies were higher in Zone 1 areas, contributing to increased costs compared to Zone 2.
- The £35 administration fee was intended to recover administrative costs and maintain up-to-date contact records for sponsors, with a history of lost contact details previously causing issues with renewals.
- Fees and charges, including administration costs, would be subject to review through the Council’s annual budget-setting process.
- The higher costs for shared benches reflected assumptions about lower demand, with benches often only partially sponsored for extended periods;
- In some cases, sponsors of shared benches may have exclusive use until additional sponsors come forward.

- Maintenance standards apply across all areas, although demand and associated costs vary depending on usage levels.
 - Some authorities operate a single-zone system, and this approach could be considered as part of the policy review.
 - Feedback received to date had mainly focused on overall costs, with concerns about zoning not previously raised through engagement processes.
 - Existing benches were located across different settings, and consideration would be required as to how any revised zoning or standardisation would apply to them.
 - Consideration would need to be given to the specification and quality of benches if a standardised approach were adopted.
 - Higher-quality benches may be appropriate in prominent or aspirational locations, aligned with wider place-based objectives.
 - In practice, benches would continue to be installed in public spaces regardless, with sponsorship contributing towards installation and maintenance costs; and
 - Some newer benches had been installed through separate funding programmes and were not directly part of the current sponsorship scheme.
4. The background papers can be found at [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Board on Wednesday, 3 June 2026, 5.30 pm](#).
5. The Board formed the following recommendation to the Cabinet. On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

6. Recommendations

6.1 That the Cabinet be recommended:

that consideration be given to implementing a single zone to consider all areas in Torbay including parks , regardless of residential or tourism designation, and that the Cabinet report back to a future Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting with an amended strategy based on this single-zone approach with costings, in accordance with Governance process.