

Revenue Budget 2019/2020

Report to the Elected Mayor

December 2018



1. Background

- 1.1 The Elected Mayor's Draft Revenue Budget Digest was published in November 2018. The Digest set out the proposed budget for each Council service for 2018/2019 including the proposals for service change, income generation and savings. The Priorities and Resources Review panel was established to scrutinise the proposals and to make comments, observations and recommendations as necessary.
- 1.2 The Review Panel comprised the councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Board and it met in November and December 2018. At its meetings the Panel heard from the Elected Mayor and his Executive Leads as well as from officers from the Senior Leadership Team.
- 1.3 The Panel met initially to identify those areas of the budget which it would wish to consider further and the findings from the subsequent meetings are set out in this report.

2. Joint Commissioning Team

- 2.1 The Panel heard from the Director of Public Health (as the commissioner of the Adult Substance Misuse Service) and from representatives from the provider, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, that there was confidence that the proposed saving in respect of the adult substance misuse contract could be made without impacting upon service delivery.
- 2.2 The Panel do, however, have concerns about the cumulative effect of changes in services over recent years and those planned in the coming year. These potential cumulative effects could be felt by individuals, communities and other services and organisations.
- 2.3 In terms of the proposals for Children's Services, it is recognised that if the funding is not set at the appropriate level, there will be pressures elsewhere within the Council as a result of in-year overspends. The Council and the Children's Service Strategic Partnership need to continue to address the factors which create the demand into children's social care with a long term shift of resources into preventative work, through taking a whole-system approach.
- 2.4 The Panel believe that actions which seek to reduce the numbers of agency staff need to be a priority, whilst also ensuring that we can retain staff and "grow our own".
- 2.5 As part of the Overview and Scrutiny Board's quarterly monitoring of Children's Services, the Board would wish to see evidence of the work to reduce demand and

reduce costs and the tangible outcomes of Torbay Council's partnership with Plymouth City Council.

3. Joint Operations Team

- 3.1 Highways maintenance is one of the main issues of concern which residents raise with their local councillors. The Panel is concerned that if the Council's expenditure on highways maintenance is reduced in the coming year, then it will face additional costs in future years.
- 3.2 The Panel heard from the Chief Financial Officer that the Government had announced funding for pothole repairs for the current financial year and therefore the current year's budget could be rolled forward into future years.
- 3.3 The Panel was disappointed that the impacts of a number of proposals (including those relating to playgrounds and natural environment) had not been sufficiently identified within the budget papers. The Panel was also disappointed that work to enable and encourage communities to maintain Torbay's green spaces had not been progressed. There continues to be a need to build on the successful voluntary groups that there are in Torbay in order to look at our parks, playgrounds and open spaces in a different, sustainable way. Further work also needs to be undertaken to see if efficiencies can be achieved across the range of public sector organisations in Torbay who manage green spaces, verges and planting areas.
- 3.4 It was highlighted that if the Council did approve such budgetary changes, that it is important to ensure that Torbay's communities (and local councillors) need to be effectively informed in advance of when the changes are implemented.
- 3.5 Arising from the debate around green spaces, questions were raised about the sports pitches in Torbay and whether, as demand decreases and facilities improve in schools, the Council needs to continue to provide and maintain as many pitches as it has to date.
- 3.6 The Panel considered a proposal to reduce the management fee paid to the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust. It was noted that the Trust was one of the Council's most successful partnerships.
- 3.7 The majority of management fee goes to managing Cockington Country Park and the scale of the land managed by the Trust means that the opportunities available to other organisations managing land are not open to the Trust.
- 3.8 Should the management fee be reduced, the Trust was likely to hand back to the Council a proportion of the land that it currently manages. The Panel felt that there were unknown costs to the Council in this scenario and therefore the saving was not likely to be at the level shown within the draft Budget.
- 3.9 The Panel raised concerns that the proposals in relation to the UNESCO Geopark, Illuminations and Events all relied on seeking external funding from the Torbay

business community. The proposal in relation to the illuminations did not specify clearly the likely impact should external funding not be forthcoming.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 That the proposed budget saving in relation to highways be reinstated.
- 4.2 That a timescale be developed, for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Board in March 2019, for enabling community and voluntary groups to assist in maintaining Torbay's green spaces.
- 4.3 That the proposals in relation to playground, natural environment and illuminations should not be implemented until the alternative arrangements have been agreed and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.
- 4.4 That the proposed budget saving in relation to the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust be reinstated.