

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

11 March 2026

-: Present :-

Councillor Long (Chair)

Councillors Brook, Cowell, Douglas-Dunbar, Johns, Law, Spacagna (Vice-Chair),
Stevens, Strang and Tolchard

(Also in attendance: Councillors Billings, Bryant (virtually), Bye, Carter (virtually),
David Thomas, Jacqueline Thomas and Tyerman (virtually))

56. Apologies

It was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, the membership of the Board had been amended to include Councillors Strang and Brook in place of Councillors Fellows and Foster for this meeting only. Apologies were also received from Councillors Chris Lewis and Tranter (who were represented by Councillor David Thomas).

57. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 11 February 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

58. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brook declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the item in Minute 59 as a Member of the English Riviera Business Improvement District Board.

Alan Denby, Director of Pride in Place, declared a personal interest in respect of the item in Minute 59 as a Non-Executive Director on the English Riviera Business Improvement District Board.

59. Call-In of Cabinet's Decision on Implementation of the English Riviera Beach Standards

The Board had before it details of a call-in by five Members of the Council of the decision of the Cabinet regarding the implementation of the English Riviera Beach Standards (ERBS). The Call-in Promoter, Councillor Law explained her reasons for the call-in as set out in the submitted call-in notice. Members discussed concerns over lack of consultation and engagement in the development of the ERBS, evidence around zones for different activities and potential impacts on safety, and what benefit the ERBS had over the current Blue Flag scheme in terms of water quality and testing.

The Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking, Councillor Billings responded to each of the questions raised by the call-in notice – a detailed written response has been published on the website see [\(Public Pack\)Implementation of English Riviera Beach Standards Call-in Response Agenda Supplement for Overview and Scrutiny Board, 11/03/2026 17:30](#).

The key points included that the ERBS:

- Would apply to all beaches in Torbay, whereas the Blue Flag scheme only applied to six beaches, namely Breakwater, Brixham; Broadsands, Paignton; Meadfoot, Torquay; Oddicombe, Torquay; Preston, Paignton; and Torre Abbey Sands, Torquay. This did not include the most popular beach which was Goodrington.
- Would be used as a tool to promote all of the Council's beaches and include visual inspections by SWISCo and Harbour staff in addition to the formal water quality tests carried out by the Environment Agency.
- Would enable the Council to invest the funding previously allocated to Blue Flags to be spent locally on improvements to the beaches and facilities.

The Board heard representations from Ms Julie Brandon (member of the public) and Ms Grace Clifford (Ocean Conservation Trust). Ms Clifford welcomed working with the Council in the future to help promote Torbay's beaches and encourage use by as many people as possible utilising the expertise from the Ocean Conservation Trust.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that no further action be taken in respect of the call-in of the Cabinet's decision on the implementation of the English Riviera Beach Standards; and
2. that Cabinet be recommended to consider the lessons learned from the call-in of the Cabinet's decision on the implementation of the English Riviera Beach Standards regarding communication and engagement and review their approach to future decisions; and to include the Ocean Conservation Trust in the stakeholder panel; and
3. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board receive an annual update on the effectiveness of the implementation of the new English Riviera Beach Standards.

(Note: prior to consideration of the item in Minute 59, Councillor Brook declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of the English Riviera Business Improvement District Board.

Alan Denby, Director of Pride in Place, declared a personal interest as a Non-Executive Director on the English Riviera Business Improvement District Board.)

60. Performance Report 2025/26 – Quarter 3

The Board scrutinised the submitted Performance Report for Quarter 3 2025/2026 which provided an overview of the performance of the Council working towards the

ambitions and priorities within the Community and Corporate Plan and the Council Business Plan. 132 performance indicators had been identified and 32 projects.

Members raised the following questions:

- What barriers caused the slow uptake of Ward Funds across multiple wards?
- What support do Members need to ensure full spend of their Ward Funds within the financial year?
- What proportion of rolled-over funds remain unallocated, and what was the risk of underspend?
- What were the root causes behind fluctuating enforcement case numbers year-on-year and when was it expected to reduce case timescales and backlog to the target levels?
- What specific interventions were improving housing placements for care leavers?
- Why was the percentage of care-experienced young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) significantly below target?
- Why was BP86 number of people supported into work much worse than target and what was being done to address this?
- Why were some indicators still missing targets or data (e.g. BP03 MyView)?
- Why was BP30 Number of families in B and B accommodation longer than 6 weeks this quarter (to whom we owe a housing duty) showing worse than target?

The following responses were received:

- Ward Funds were rolled over from the previous year where they were not allocated, partly due to a slowdown at the end of the year, and reminders had been sent to Members. Processes had been streamlined, particularly those involving SWISCo which was working better. It was noted that Shiphay had not submitted its bid as it was awaiting further information about parks use. It was suggested that a more open bid would be submitted to enable the funds to be allocated.
- The number of open enforcement cases had reduced to 544, showing consistent sustained effort, but it was not possible at this stage to confirm when the target would be met. There had been improved cross-Council working and clearer performance expectations had contributed. A Planning Lawyer had been recruited to support enforcement which would also help resolve cases quicker.
- Since the report had been written there were now 296 cared for children, which was moving in the right direction.
- It had been a good year for recruiting foster carers and there had been a reduction in the number of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation since new accommodation had come on stream.
- The NEET target for care experienced young people was very ambitious and Torbay Council was broadly similar to other authorities, but we want to do better. The Council was establishing an employment hub at Parkfield for care experienced young people.

- The support into work target (BP86) was lower than expected due to slow recruitment of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) provider and challenges engaging relevant partners. The Council was actively working with the provider and businesses to help place people in work.
- Targets were blank where indicators were annual measures and data was not yet available e.g. MyView.
- BP30 was showing worse than target due to one family being in B and B accommodation at the time of the report, they have since been placed into more suitable accommodation. Performance in temporary accommodation was seeing good movement, and the Council was helping people move into their permanent homes.

61. Annual Review of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan

The Leader of the Council, Councillor David Thomas outlined the submitted report which provided an annual update on the Torbay Council Climate Change Action Plan 2024-2026 and the Torbay Climate Partnership's Greener Way for Our Bay Action Plan and responded to questions, together with the Principal Climate Emergency Officer, Jacqui Warren.

Members asked questions in respect of the following:

- Why was Torbay's baseline carbon year 2008 rather than aligning with national 1990 baselines?
- How far down would you have to drill to get to the heat source for geothermal energy and did we believe we would get geothermal at Brixham?
- What was the number of homes receiving heat pump advice?
- How many households that received advice successfully accessed grants or installed measures?
- What was the plan for supporting residents after current funding streams close?
- Has Make It Net Zero Torbay ended, and if so, what alternative funding sources were being explored?
- What proportion of the Stagecoach electric fleet was operational, and what challenges remain?
- How will the Council quantify the carbon impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud-based data storage moving forward?
- What policy changes may be needed to include digital energy use in carbon footprint reporting?

The following responses were received:

- Although the national Net Zero Emission baseline was 1990, central Government only started collating local authority territorial emissions (including Torbay) from 2008 onward, making it the practical baseline.
- The geothermal feasibility study was funded by the South West Net Zero Hub. (A written response would be provided on the depth reviewed under this study.) More generally for geothermal projects, drilling would be 3,000–5,000 metres and entail high financial risk (potential cost £2m). Based on the study carried

out Officers were advised to pursue alternative low carbon options, which would be more cost effective.

- Energy efficiency support was offered through Eco Advice, who offer home visits to assess suitability. Approximately 300+ residents have received advice, over the last two years. (A written response would be provided on the specific numbers helped with energy efficiency support and the amount of grants provided.)
- Make It Net Zero programme had supported 200 businesses. One business had a 68% reduction in fuel bills as a result of this support. The programme ends in March 2026 and was now oversubscribed. The Council was looking at alternative grants.
- There was a total of 55 electric Stagecoach buses, this includes the original fleet of 49 electric buses and an additional 6 secured through additional funding, which will enable electric buses to be used when the operational fleet is in for service. About half of the new busses were currently in operation, with driver training ongoing to roll out the remaining fleet.
- Where AI is used on site already, the carbon emissions are included in the Council's carbon footprint. If off-site they are not. In respect of offsite digital emissions. Currently all projects should use a tackle climate change impact assessment tool to consider a range of environmental impacts and to build in actions to reduce any negative environmental impacts. This would include AI projects. Specifically on AI, the Council's Redesign Programme Board have initially reviewed the broader environmental impacts of AI and data centres. As a result of this review, a small group of officers across Procurement, IT and the Climate team will now explore practical actions that can be carried out to reduce the environmental impacts associated to the use of AI across the Council.
- Officers are exploring how to incorporate decarbonisation of the Council's supply chain, and subject to approval from Directors, will ask for large value suppliers for specific carbon reduction plans. This would include suppliers of AI projects.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board note the good progress being made to deliver the Torbay Council Climate Change Action Plan 2024-2026 and that more work will be required to work towards meeting the 2030 net zero carbon council target and the 2050 zero carbon Torbay target; and
2. Members thanked those for their hard work in delivering the targets within the Torbay Council Climate Change Action Plan and Torbay Climate Partnership's Greener Way for Our Bay Action Plan.

62. Social Mobility in Torbay

This item was deferred to enable sufficient time for a full discussion.