TORBAY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

14 October 2026

-: Present :-

Councillor Long (Chair)

Councillors Amil, Douglas-Dunbar, Fellows, Johns, Law, Barbara Lewis, Spacagna (Vice-Chair) and Tolchard

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye, Foster, Bye, Foster, Chris Lewis, David Thomas and Jacqueline Thomas

---

28. Apologies

It was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group and Independent Group, the membership of the Board had been amended to include Councillors Barbara Lewis and Amil in place of Councillors Stevens and Councillor Cowell for this meeting only.

29. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 9 September 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

30. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

31. Water and Flooding

The Board considered the annual review of Water and Flooding and received presentations from the Director of Environmental Regulation, South West Water, Alan Burrows and the Head of Engineering, Torbay Council, Tim Jones.

Members were advised that all bathing waters in Torbay were currently classified as either excellent or good. Particular focus continued to be given to Goodrington Beach, with work ongoing to identify measures to secure an excellent classification. Members heard that investigations were being undertaken into the impact of the Goodrington Stream and wider catchment influences on bathing water quality. Work was also underway in relation to shellfish water designation, with a report expected in April 2027.

The Board heard that partnership working between South West Water and Torbay Council had improved significantly over the previous year, with regular strategic and operational meetings being held to address drainage, flooding and water

quality issues. Members were advised that the Council's historic knowledge of drainage infrastructure had supported collaborative working and informed ongoing investigations.

Members received an update on flooding activity, including the Paignton and Preston Coastal Flooding Project and joint work with the Environment Agency and South West Water on the River Fleet and Ilsham Valley catchments. It was noted that £3 million of Environment Agency funding had been secured for flood resilience projects across Torquay, Paignton and Brixham and that hydraulic modelling work was helping partners better understand infrastructure constraints and opportunities for improvement.

The Board was advised that the River Fleet and Ilsham Valley represented some of the most complex flooding challenges within Torbay. Work was underway to reduce the volume of water entering the sewerage network from the River Fleet, thereby reducing pressure on the network and improving water quality. Members heard that this would require a long-term programme of work over a number of years.

Members asked questions in relation to:

- the timescales for improvements relating to the River Fleet;
- responsibilities for maintaining watercourses passing through private land;
- action being taken to improve water quality at Goodrington Beach;
- the outcomes of seasonal water tariff trials introduced for residents in the Wellswood area;
- concerns raised by residents regarding increased water charges; and
- reservoir capacity and the continued hosepipe ban.

In response, Members were advised that:

- work had already commenced within the River Fleet catchment and funding was being targeted towards measures likely to deliver the greatest benefits;
- landowners were generally responsible for maintaining watercourses flowing through their land;
- water quality issues were influenced by a range of factors, including misconnections, animal waste and wider catchment management issues. Further investigation would be required to determine whether there was any impact arising from discharges associated with Paignton Zoo;
- provisional results from seasonal tariff trials suggested water usage had increased rather than reduced;
- additional evidence was continuing to be gathered before any decisions were taken on future tariff arrangements (written response would be provided by South West Water); and
- significantly above-average rainfall would be required to restore reservoir levels.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Overview and Scrutiny Board request that South West Water in collaboration with the Environment Agency and Torbay Council continue investigations to identify and better understand the wider catchment sources contributing to bathing water quality issues at Goodrington Beach, in order to support targeted interventions and inform future improvements to water quality.

32. Cockington Court Update on the Review of the Operating Model

The Board considered a report on the review of the operating model for Cockington Court.

Members were advised that Cockington Court remained an important heritage and economic asset for Torbay. The Council was exploring alternative operating models to secure a more sustainable future for the site whilst retaining Council ownership and supporting existing tenants and businesses.

The Board heard that engagement had recently taken place with businesses located at the site and that Officers were developing a market engagement process to seek expressions of interest from organisations capable of operating the site on a long-term basis. Members were advised that a range of operating models remained under consideration and that no decisions had yet been taken.

Members received the following responses:

- the proposed timetable for market testing;
- future arrangements for the café operation;
- building maintenance liabilities and condition survey information;
- marketing and promotion of the site;
- public access arrangements;
- lease duration;
- relationships with existing tenants; and
- how proposals aligned with wider tourism, heritage and destination management objectives.

Members were advised that:

- the Council intended to seek expressions of interest from organisations capable of managing the site and increasing visitor numbers;
- the café operation would form part of future discussions and no options had been ruled out;
- the Council would continue to retain ownership of the site;
- maintenance information would be shared with prospective operators as part of any future procurement process;
- marketing support would continue to be provided by the Council as part of any future partnership arrangements;
- maintaining and increasing public access remained a key objective;
- all viable proposals would be considered, including cooperative-style operating models; and
- Officers were seeking to have a new operator in place by April 2027.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

1. note the financial and operational position at Cockington Court and the reasons for changing the current operating model;

2. note the progress of staff consultation, tenant engagement and the development of safe and workable interim management arrangements;

3. note the options considered and the work underway to develop a more financially sustainable operating model whilst retaining Cockington Court in Council ownership;

4. support the proposed marketing of the site to identify a whole-site operator under a long lease arrangement, whilst recognising that separate leasing arrangements may be pursued should a suitable whole-site operator not be secured;

5. recognise that any future operating arrangement should address financial viability, heritage stewardship, tenant management, operational capability, building responsibilities and the experience of residents and visitors;

6. request a further update following the completion of the consultation process and market-testing exercise be brought to the February meeting of the Board; and

7. that a written update be provided to the Board setting out detailed information on building condition matters and associated maintenance liabilities.

33. Torbay Heritage Strategy

The Board considered the draft Torbay Heritage Strategy.

Members were advised that the Strategy sought to balance heritage conservation with regeneration opportunities, attract external investment and provide a framework for delivering heritage projects across Torbay. The consultation process had received in excess of 800 responses, demonstrating the importance residents attached to Torbay's heritage assets.

The Board heard updates on a number of heritage projects across Torbay, including Oldway Mansion, the Pavilion, Paignton Picture House and Torre Abbey. Members were advised that the Strategy would be supported through annual action plans identifying priorities and delivery activity.

Members raised questions regarding:

- heritage assets not specifically referenced within the Strategy;
- opportunities to involve young people and apprenticeships;
- the condition of town centres;
- performance monitoring arrangements;

- the relationship between economic regeneration and heritage considerations; and
- links between the Strategy and the emerging Local Plan.

In response, Members were advised that:

- the assets included within the Strategy were linked to the heritage themes and stories set out in Part 2 of the Strategy, which had been developed following public engagement undertaken in 2021. The themes and stories had since been reviewed, updated and carried forward into the current Strategy, and that annual action plans would provide opportunities to identify and progress additional heritage initiatives where appropriate;
- work was ongoing across the Council and partnership organisations to increase opportunities for young people;
- funding streams existed to support property improvements within town centres;
- future performance monitoring arrangements would be included within annual action plans; and
- the Strategy had been prepared having regard to the emerging Local Plan and National Planning Policy guidance.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet:

1. that, the Heritage Strategy (2026-2031), as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 to the submitted report, be adopted; and

2. that delegated authority be given to the Director for Pride in Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth to approve any necessary minor amendments or typographical corrections to the documents;

That the Overview and Scrutiny Board receive annual updates on the delivery of the Torbay Heritage Strategy, including progress against key objectives and associated action plans.

34. Local Government Reorganisation

The Director of Corporate Services, Matthew Fairclough-Kay, provided a verbal update on Local Government Reorganisation.

Members were advised that no substantive update had yet been received from Government. Conflicting information had been provided regarding the anticipated timetable for further announcements. It was expected that greater clarity would be available later in October 2026.

The Board noted the update.

Chair