

Revenue Budget 2018/2019

Report to the Elected Mayor

December 2017



1. Background

- 1.1 The Elected Mayor's Draft Revenue Budget Digest was published in October 2017. 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 2017. 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 In determining its areas of focus for the review, the Panel noted that the Council's Medium Term Resource Plan (as published in April 2017) identified a "gap" of £9.6 million between the Council's income and expenditure for the 2018/2019 financial year. The Elected Mayor's Draft Budget relied on over £7.5 million of savings that had been identified through the Council's Transformation Programme and through decisions which had already been taken by the Council. Therefore the Elected Mayor was proposing savings of just over £800,000 which would involve changes in service, income generation or efficiencies.
- 1.4 Given the level of oversight during the course of the year which members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board had already had of the Transformation Programme, the Panel determined that it would consider the Elected Mayor's proposed budget through two lenses:
 - What is the impact of the proposed budget on those with social need within Torbay?
 - Do the Elected Mayor's priorities, as reflected in his budget proposals, match the concerns and priorities of the residents of Torbay?

2. Social Need

- 2.1 Representatives of a number of organisations attended the meetings of the Priorities and Resources Review Panel and the Overview and Scrutiny Board to share their views on the Elected Mayor's proposals and the impact that they would have on the organisations concerned.
- 2.2 The Elected Mayor's proposals included a 10% reduction in the grant paid by the Council to the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB). This equated to a saving of £6,000. The Panel heard of the increase in work that was being undertaken by CAB as a result of a number of different issues such as: the introduction of Universal Credit; the change in profile of landlords in Torbay with more people falling into rent arrears; change in labour market practices including zero hours contracts; the closure of the Connections office in Torquay. The proposed reduction in grant from Torbay Council coincided with a reduction in a number of other funding streams to CAB. However, CAB were committed to partnership working and felt that there was a way that it and the Council could work smarter together.

- 2.3 Another proposal was that the provision of grants to local youth providers be ceased (a saving of £30,000) with providers being directed to the Torbay Lottery which had been established to enable local organisations to raise funds. A representative of one of the organisations which had previously been in receipt of a youth grants (the Acorn Centre) who recognised the financial pressures that the Council was under but highlighted the preventative work undertaken by the local youth providers. He also highlighted that the Youth Trust was not yet up and running and it was not yet clear the impact that this would make on youth provision in Torbay. The Director of Children's Services assured members that, as well as the local lottery, support would also be provided to organisations in order to facilitate their bidding processes for other external grants.
- 2.4 Representatives from the community swimming pools at Swim Torquay and Admiral Pool, Brixham spoke on the proposal to create a reserve fund which would continue to provide access to funding for the pools but which would result in a revenue budget saving of £47,000. However, it was unclear to the Panel, and the organisations concerned about what the proposed reserve fund could be used for. Therefore the Panel recommend that clarity on this issue is provided and that the reserve fund should be available to meet costs arising from both unforeseen capital expenses as well as reductions in income.
- 2.5 The Elected Mayor's proposals included a reduction in funding to the Community Development Trust of £60,000 which was in line with the organisation becoming self-financing as originally envisaged. The Panel heard from a representative of the Trust that it was not in a position to be self-financing at this stage as pressures in other funding streams have had a disproportionate impact.
- 2.6 The Panel also sought the views of the Elected Mayor on whether he was confident that the Council provided the right level of bus subsidies to meet the needs of the community. The Board will be writing to the Elected Mayor and his Executive Lead seeking answers to the questions that were raised during the review.

3. Community Concerns

- 3.1 In order to gain a sense of the matters which were important in the different local communities that make up Torbay, each councillor had been asked to identify the top five issues which their residents contacted them about. In addition, each Community Partnership was asked to provide a submission setting out the priorities in their areas. The main issues identified were as follows:
- Regeneration
 - Affordable Housing – Availability; Maintenance; Housing Standards
 - Highways – Potholes; Congestion (including in and out of Brixham); Speeding (especially in residential areas);
 - Public Street Scene and Green Spaces – Tree and Hedge Maintenance; Grass Verges; Road Gullies; Dog Fouling; Pavements
 - Parking – Charges; Enforcement (including road markings); Park & Ride for Brixham
 - Anti-Social Behaviour and Enforcement – Noise; Odour; Litter and Flytipping; Selling Cars on Streets; Planning Enforcement; Begging and Roughsleeping

- 3.2 It was agreed that regeneration and affordable housing would be added to the Work Programme of the Board. The Elected Mayor and Executive were invited to discuss the other issues identified.
- 3.3 It was recognised that many of the street scene issues were a result of previous decisions by the Council to reduce its spending. It was felt that communities wanted to help themselves and that a solution could be found if TOR2, the Council and the community worked differently together.
- 3.4 In terms of enforcement and antisocial behaviour, some of the issues highlighted were more serious than the cosmetic street scene issues. These were issues which were impacting on people's standards of amenity and privacy. There were external factors which were leading to an increase in demand and there were the cumulative effects of other public service reductions, in particular in relation to the Police and Police Community Support Officers.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 4.1 The Panel heard repeatedly through its meetings that the Elected Mayor and his Executive would be meeting with partner organisations to discuss the impacts of the Elected Mayor's proposals. Whilst the Panel recognise these discussions have been taking place with officers during the course of the year, the Panel believed that there is little evidence that the Elected Mayor and his Executive want to work in partnership with the many organisations across Torbay.
- 4.2 The Panel also believed that there appears to be a lack of strategic oversight demonstrated by the Elected Mayor and his Executive. They were unable to coherently articulate their priorities and how these priorities were reflected within the budget proposals. The Panel believes that issues which are a priority to the various communities across Torbay could be addressed both through partnership and community working and through re-directing and rebalancing funds across non-statutory services.
- 4.3 Given that the Board has made recommendations over a number of years for the Elected Mayor and Executive to work with partner organisations to develop solutions and these recommendations do not appear to have been heeded, the Overview and Scrutiny Board will be adding the following issues to its Work Programme for the current and coming year:
- Developing and extending the partnership working between the Council and the Citizens' Advice Bureau
 - Reviewing the outcomes of the Torbay Community Development Trust and whether the current grant provides value for money to the Council
 - Ensuring a consistent approach to how community groups can support the Council in improving the public realm and other outdoor spaces
 - Facilitating a joined up approach to promoting Torbay's cultural assets in accordance with the English Riviera Destination Management Plan
- 4.4 Many of the proposals within the Elected Mayor's budget are for relatively small amounts in the context of the Council's overall budget. However, they are significant sums to the

organisations that they support and impact greatly on what the organisations can achieve within the wider community. Therefore it is recommended to the Elected Mayor that:

- The proposals in relation to the Citizens Advice Bureau, museums and the youth grants are not implemented;
- A reduction in funding to the Torbay Community Development Trust of £10,000 be made rather than the £60,000 currently proposed;
- The amount proposed to be added to the Council's reserves be reduced in order to fund the recommendations in the two bullet points above; and
- The proposal in relation to the community swimming pools should be clarified to ensure that the proposed reserve fund will be available to meet costs arising from both unforeseen capital expenses as well as reductions in income.