



Torrige District Council

Internal Overview & Scrutiny

ANNUAL REPORT

2021/2022



INTRODUCTION

BY

THE CHAIR

I am pleased to present the 2021/2022 Annual Report that shows the work the Internal Scrutiny Committee has undertaken during a year following on from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report comprises:

- An overview of the purpose and structure of the Internal Overview and Scrutiny Committee.*
- Highlights of some of the activities undertaken by the Committee this year.*
- Proposals of key issues for consideration during 2022/2023.*

This year has been another challenging year which Members and Officers have embraced and continued to effectively scrutinise the work of the Council. As we have come out of the COVID-19 Pandemic circumstances have led us back to a bit of normality in the way of face-to-face meetings and staff returning to the office.

The two major projects that have been a constant item to oversee were the Grounds Maintenance Service and the new Leisure Services provision. The other major project to scrutinise going forward is the Housing Strategy.

I would like to extend my thanks to committee members and officers who have supported the Committee throughout the year.

Councillor P Watson
Chair – Internal Overview & Scrutiny

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

*The Council has two Overview & Scrutiny Committees, an **External** Overview & Scrutiny Committee and an **Internal** Overview & Scrutiny Committee.*

The Overview & Scrutiny Committees have the power to review the policies of the Council and its objectives and are entitled to 'call in' decisions made by the Community & Resources Committee which are not yet implemented. They can also recommend that the Community & Resources Committee reconsider such decisions. Issues that remain unresolved will be referred to the Full Council for determination.

The Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee exercises its functions in respect of the Council's policies, decisions, performance framework and actions with an "inward facing" emphasis.

The full Terms of Reference for the Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee can be found in Appendix 1 to this report.

**WORK
CARRIED OUT
THIS YEAR**

Reviews of:

*Quarterly Business Report 4 to end March 2021
Quarterly Business Report 1 to end June 2021
Quarterly Business Report 2 to end Sept 2021
Quarterly Business Report 3 to end Dec 2021
Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2026/27
Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/2023 –
2026/2027
The new QBR
Estuary Strategy
Capital PID Process*

Additional Work Carried Out:

- ❖ Social Values Task & Finish Group set up*
- ❖ Urgent Decisions*
- ❖ Grounds Maintenance updates*
- ❖ Leisure Services updates*
- ❖ Housing Situation/Homelessness Strategy*
- ❖ Peer Review discussion*
- ❖ Backlog of Housing Benefit Claims*

WORK CARRIED OUT THIS YEAR – HIGHLIGHTS

QBR / Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Committee looked at the council's financial performance against the objectives and goals set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as well as scrutinising the budget proposals for the next year.

Quarterly Business Reports were submitted over the year and these were closely scrutinised. Prior to the meetings, Members were invited to raise questions and responses were provided. This enabled a fuller understanding of the information presented and the opportunity to provide additional details.

A substantial array of questions was submitted on each quarterly report, linked to the wider strategic aims of the Council. Members had raised questions about corporate properties leases and rents; impacts of COVID-19; planning; new Burrows Centre; new Discover App; recycling; Harbour; budget monitoring; wages and job quality; carbon reduction and play areas; funding and Bridge Buildings; fees & charges; investments.

Recommendations were made that:

- *the surplus from 2020/21 be set aside to a leisure reserve.*
- *a decision on the utilisation of the projected surplus is deferred until after the spending review be agreed*
- *Members recommend to C&R the usage of the projected 2021/22 surplus as follows:*
 - *£100k to Apprentice Reserve*
 - *£153k to Trainee and Graduate Succession Planning Reserve*
 - *£600k to Transition in Government Funding Reserve*
- *the BV064 Empty Properties be moved just to be reviewed in the annual QBR4 Addendum analysis rather than leave it on a zero indicator be approved*

WORK CARRIED OUT THIS YEAR – HIGHLIGHTS

QBR / Medium Term Financial Strategy

Recommendations were made that:

- *Members recommend to Full Council*
 - *Torrige's Band D Council Tax for 2022/23 be increased by £5 (2.90%) from £173.66 to £178.66 per year*
 - *Torrige's Net Revenue Budget 2022/23 is £7.983m*
 - *The contributions to the Council's reserves as outlined*

- *the Capital Programme is updated for building cost inflation*
 - *The Vehicle Programme is updated for inflation*
 - *The Vehicle Programme is Balanced long term, by increasing the contributions from revenue.*
 - *Recommend PIDs that meet the minimum recommended project score of 65, for inclusion in the Capital Programme:*
 - *C202 Core Server*
 - *C201 Grounds Maintenance*
 - *C200 Caddsdwn Disabled Access Pathways*
 - *C199 Revs & Bens Digitisation*
 - *C204 Sandymere Road*
 - *With the PIDs that fall below this score being referred back to officers for further work/refinement, and possible future consideration.*

WORK CARRIED OUT THIS YEAR – HIGHLIGHTS

Review of the New QBR

In April 2021 the Committee unanimously agreed to adopt the new style QBR (with a Trend Analysis Quarter 4 addendum). Following the Committee's adoption of the new format it was agreed to review the new QBR format after a couple of cycles to see how it was working and if any further improvements were required. To facilitate the review an online survey was sent to all Councillors, non-elected members of Internal Scrutiny, the Strategic Management Team and Operational Management Team.

The results of the survey were presented at the December 2021 Committee meeting. Fourteen responses were received which were overall very positive. It was also agreed at the meeting that moving forward the QBR be sent to all Councillors to gain more involvement.

The new QBR format was seen as a big improvement and will assist the Committee in monitoring the Council Finances and Performance.

WORK CARRIED OUT THIS YEAR – HIGHLIGHTS

Estuary Strategy

In April 2021 it was decided that a task and finish group be set up to explore the Estuary Strategy before referring the document back to the Harbour Board. The group consisted of Councillor Watson, Councillor Hames, Mr Dengate, Mr Harper, the Head of Communities & Place, the Operational Services Manager and the Strategy, Performance & ICT Manager.

The group met on several occasions to review the Estuary Strategy with the final version being presented to the Committee on 28th September 2021. It was agreed at this meeting that the review of the Strategy be added to the Economic Development Team's Business Plan for 2022/23.

Capital PID Review

It was agreed in June 2021 that a task and finish group be formed to review the Capital PID process. This group consisted of the Senior Capital Accountant, the Strategy, Performance & ICT Manager, Councillor Watson, Councillor Newton, Mr Dengate and Mr Harper.

The updated form and process was presented at the September 2021 Committee where it was resolved that a Climate & Biodiversity statement be added to the form and the new form and process be approved.

ADDITIONAL WORK CARRIED OUT

As well as the formal reviews stated above additional work that was carried out during the year included:

- *A Social Values Task & Finish group was established which consists of the Chair, Councillor Inch, Councillor Hames, Councillor Newton, Councillor Langford and Mr Stephen Dengate. Once the national legislation is published the group will meet to progress this work;*
- *Urgent Decisions made under the Urgency Procedures since March 2020 were presented and discussed with the Leader and Chief Executive in attendance;*
- *The Grounds Maintenance Contract and bringing the service back in house was a regular agenda item throughout the year. The Operational Services Manager attended many meetings to provide verbal updates on the work being carried out for the transfer and how the transfer was implemented;*
- *The Leisure Service provision was also a regular item on the agenda with updates being given by the Chief Executive;*
- *The Housing situation was brought to the Committee following concern on the situation. The Public Health & Housing Manager attended to give an overview of the service the Housing Options Team provide and the pressures they face. A Housing Strategy is being progressed and will be brought back to a future meeting;*
- *The Peer Review process was discussed;*
- *The backlog of work that had built up within the Revenues & Benefits Team was brought to the Committee following concern raised by Members. Work is ongoing within the team to alleviate pressures.*

FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

To continue to scrutinise/monitor:

- *the council's performance, budget, and financial strategy through quarterly business reports*
- *the Grounds Maintenance and Leisure Services Provision*
- *Housing Situation & Strategy*

To look at:

- *Social Values*
- *Other matters throughout the year as the Committee see appropriate*