



Torrige District Council
External Overview & Scrutiny

ANNUAL REPORT
2021/2022

Introduction by the Chair

Firstly, I would like to thank fellow members for their commitment and dedication to the committee. Also, for the support that fellow members and officers have given me in my first 12 months as Chair. I am delighted to be in the Chair (even though as this is being read, I am lying on a sun lounger in Spain) and I thank you all for having confidence in me to carry on.

This last 12 months has been a difficult time as we have slowly emerged from a pandemic which has had a devastating effect on all our lives. As we emerge, we find the world around us has changed socially and economically. We still have hard times to come, adding to this the war in the Ukraine, which is most terrible, and I am sure we are united when I say our hearts go out to those affected in this conflict.

We have covered a wide range of topics from water quality through to debt and living in poverty over the last few months which I am certain will remain high on everyone's agenda in the months/years to come. We also took opportunity to respond to partner consultations and question the impacts for the local community on changes to health services locally. As a committee we have learnt and benefited immensely from the partner organisations who have attended our meetings, and we hope they also feel the benefit of attending too.

As we move forward, it is clear it will be another busy year and I hope our committee will rise to the challenge.

Councillor J Manley
Chair – External Overview & Scrutiny

The Role of External Overview & Scrutiny

The Council has 2 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 External Overview & Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the performance of selected external bodies and organisations serving the community within Torridge.

The External Overview & Scrutiny Committee is also the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee.

Committee Membership

Chair	Councillor J Manley
Vice Chair	Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin
Councillors	Councillor S Harding Councillor C Hawkins Councillor S Langford Councillor C Leather Councillor S Newton Councillor P Pennington Councillor R Wiseman Councillor C Woodhouse
Non-elected Representatives	Louis Bach Kenton Baker
Support Officers	S Dorey, Head of Legal & Governance J Williams, Public Health & Housing Manager K Brown, Democratic Services Officer S Cawsey, Democratic Services Officer K Hewlett, Corporate Services Officer, Elections and Democratic Services T Vanstone, Senior Elections and Democratic Officer (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Work carried out in 2021/22:

Together Project – mental health, covid and drug and alcohol provision – 21 July 2021

Joni Nash, Head of Service and Development. Provided members with an overview of the Together Service and how they support their clients within the district and Devonwide.

The impact of providing a service during the Covid Pandemic and the way the service had adapted in response to these challenges was highlighted for members. It was clear that the service had responded to the challenges it had seen and taken away some positive ways to work in the future. Although pandemic restrictions had an adverse effect on access to provision and support, service users had benefited in some way from the diversification of access to support. However, a lack of mental health follow-on support was identified as having an impact on waiting lists and the Together Project were still experiencing challenges in relation to this at the time of the meeting, over a year later.

Outcome

Partnership work with TDC housing options and Together Project continued through the financial year and members agreed to provide support in relation to potential funding streams.

SPLITZ & NDADA – mental health, covid and domestic violence & abuse services – 1 September 2021

Julie Reeves, Manager at SPLITZ, and Heather Penny, General Manager for North Devon Against Domestic Abuse (NDADA), provided members with an update on their provision within the district and how the two services work in partnership across Devon, using a risk-based response model.

Both services explained the impact of the Covid Pandemic and how the services have adapted their response in the previous 12 months as a result. During discussions it was explained that both services are struggling to find follow on support for the people that have completed work with them. It was also stated that at the time of the meeting there were 150 people waiting for a place on their Pattern Changing course.

Outcome

District Councillors were emailed advising of the Pattern Changing course, and it was highlighted as a possible beneficiary of their Councillor Grant scheme.

It was resolved that a request for funding to run a Pattern Changing course in Torridge be considered as part of the budget setting for 2022-23.

Joint Community Safety Partnership – 8 November 2021

The joint meeting with North Devon Council was chaired by the Chair of North Devon's Crime and Disorder Committee.

The North Devon & Torridge Community Safety Partnership is a statutory body set up under sections 5-7 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. It is made up of representatives from several agencies involved with crime, disorder and community safety. There is a joint Community Safety Partnership (CSP) board between North Devon and Torridge which meets on a quarterly basis. The Chair of the Joint CSP, Superintendent Toby Davies, presented the CSP's annual update. Information and statistics were provided on a range of subjects from the impact of Covid, County Lines, ASB, road safety, domestic and sexual violence. New partnership projects like the trauma informed approach model and the establishment of the high flow group were also highlighted to members. As well as an update on funding and training delivery.

The Public Health and Housing Manager provided an update on the work taking place in Torridge:

- The Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for Bideford town was reviewed and renewed in 2021 and as part of this work a consultation was carried out with the Police, residents and businesses in the town.
- An awareness raising campaign was carried out advising individuals and businesses of the new provisions under the renewed PSPO and regular joint patrols involving the police and council enforcement team reiterating the new provisions
- An anti-social behaviour steering group was set up with North Devon to look at hotspots to look at and understand issues and provide resources to tackle problems where necessary
- This steering group was open to Councillors as well as businesses to give their feedback and concerns on issues affecting them - an invitation was extended to members.

Play Strategy Update – 25 November 2021

Adrian Avery, The Community Engagement Lead for Torridge, attended the meeting to provide members with an update on the Play Strategy.

Members were advised that a working group had now been established to take forward the maintenance work identified in the play strategy and an update on the progress across play areas in the district was provided.

There were discussions in relation to maintenance of the parks and access to budgets. As a result, it was agreed that the Head of Operational Services would be invited to a future meeting to discuss the Grounds Maintenance contract and how this will impact on the maintaining of play areas.

Of particular interest for members was the Community Group for Victoria Park and planned ROSPA inspections at the park the following week. An update on these inspections was provided to members outside of the meeting.

Citizen's Advice – 19 January 2022

Vicki Rowe (Chief Executive Officer for Citizens Advice Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon) provided members with an overview of the service they provide locally and the impact of the pandemic on their service and the people they are supporting.

It was explained that most of the service provision remains via the phone, email, website and Facebook Messenger and that the office base in Bideford would be sold as they continue with this more agile way of working. Face to face appointments for the most vulnerable cases were gradually increasing, but they were looking for more locations in Torridge for these.

Following a discussion regarding funding it was proposed that Torridge look to increase their grant to Citizen's Advice for 2022-23 budget.

Outcome

As a result of the impending cost of living crisis a one-off grant of £12,000 for Citizen's Advice was recommended to Community & Resources Committee (C&R). C&R resolved to agree the one-off grant at their 15th March Committee, but this was subject to External providing the Committee with a full detailed report.

Health Trust Integration & Our Future Hospital Programme – 9 February 2022

Katherine Allen (Head of Strategy, NDHT) and Zahara Hyde (Programme Manager, Our Future Hospitals) both provided members with an update on the integration of Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust (NDHT) and The Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust (RD&E), and the Our Future Hospital Programme.

Of particular interest was the planned redesign of the Barnstaple Hospital site. There was also discussion regarding workforce issues and then finding suitable local accommodation for those moving to work at the site.

Members went on to discuss the changes to care pathways and the introduction of the new digital system for record keeping and case notes.

Joint Meeting with North Devon District Council to hear from Environment Agency & South West Water – 27 April 2022

Dave Trewolla from the Environment Agency and Andy Burrows from South West Water attended this joint meeting with North Devon Council's Licensing and Community Safety Committee.

Prior to the meeting members from both councils were asked to provide questions in advance, the submitted questions focused on how sewage outflows were being used

locally and how spills were being monitored and investigated. Of particular interest were the local bathing waters and the impact of spills on fish stocks.

During the meeting there was discussion regarding the designation and de-designation of bathing waters and the use of inland bathing waters. Members asked South West Water about specific concerns regarding Bucks Mills and queried the process of monitoring and how robust this was perceived to be, providing anecdotal evidence of the impact of sewage pollution locally.

Some positive examples of partnership work were also discussed, with specific mention of the work to improve the water quality of Combe Martin.

Outcome

Members requested further detailed updates in relation to the ongoing investigations of the Environment Agency and OFWAT and the scheduling of work at Bucks Mills.

There was also a request for more detailed written responses to the questions members submitted before the meeting, these were received and shared with members.

Partner Evaluations

The Committee have continued to invite external partners giving presentations to evaluate their experience of the Committee and its impact on their work with Council residents, where appropriate. The Partner Evaluation Form (PEF) is digitally delivered to partners after each presentation meeting, inviting them to rate and comment on key aspects of their working relationship with the Committee.

There was a 50% response rate this year and the External partners who provided feedback continue to positively evaluate their engagement with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, highlighting the importance of awareness raising regarding their service provision locally. One suggested improvement to the Committee was regarding consistent engagement with the partner organisation and it was suggested that a future focus could be on joint work opportunities.

A review of the evaluation process was due to take place this year, but due to a busy meeting schedule this has not been possible, the aim will be to consider a review of the evaluation process as part of the 2022-23 meeting cycle.

The Forward Plan

The Committee's Forward Plan aims to ensure topics are in line with TDC's strategic aims and we are pleased to report that the presentations above gave the Committee the opportunity to look in more depth at how the Council and its partners achieve stronger, safer, healthier communities; a prosperous and sustainable economy and an effective and customer focused offering.

Public Participation

Our Committee welcome the Public Contribution when a resident raises issues. External Overview and Scrutiny would welcome more. Unfortunately, there were no requests for public participation at the committees this year.