

**Mr S Hearse**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Torridge District Council**  
Riverbank House  
Bideford  
Devon  
EX39 2QG



Tel : Bideford (01237) 428700

Date: 8 October 2024  
Quorum: 6

## MEETING OF EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>On:</b>	Wednesday 16 October 2024	<b>At:</b>	6.00 pm
<b>Venue:</b>	Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS		

### NOTICE OF MEETING

The meeting will be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the YouTube channel - <https://tinyurl.com/TorrigeYouTube>

<b>To:</b>	Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Chair) Councillor A Brenton (Vice-Chair) Councillors: L Bach, J Craigie, S Harding, C Hawkins, P Shepherd, D Smith and H Thomas  Non elected Members: Vacancy
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**Members are requested to turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the meeting**

## AGENDA PART I - (OPEN SESSION)

1.	<b>Apologies For Absence</b> To receive apologies for absence from the meeting.
2.	<b>Minutes</b> (Pages 3 - 18) Confirmation of the Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 24 <sup>th</sup> April 2024, 18 <sup>th</sup> July 2024 and 4 <sup>th</sup> September 2024.
3.	<b>Public Participation</b> 15 minute period for public contributions. The deadline for registering to speak is by 2pm Monday 14 October 2024.

4.	<b>Action List (Pages 19 - 21)</b> To review the Action List.
5.	<b>Declaration Of Interests</b> Members with interests should refer to the agenda item and describe the nature of their interest when the item is considered.
6.	<b>Agreement Of Agenda Items Part I and II</b>
7.	<b>Urgent Matters Brought Forward With the Permission Of The Chair</b>
8.	<b>Citizen's Advice</b> An opportunity to hear from the Chief Executive for Citizens Advice Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon.
9.	<b>Taw and Torridge Voluntary Services (TTVS)</b> An opportunity to hear from the Chief Executive Officer for TTVS.
10.	<b>Draft Annual Report 2023-24 (Pages 22 – 32)</b> To review the Draft Annual Report for External Overview & Scrutiny for 2023-24
11	<b>Consideration Of the Forward Plan (Pages 33)</b> To review the forward plan.
	<b>Exclusion Of The Public</b> The Chair to move:- That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.
	Meeting Organiser: Democratic Services
	<b>Centre for Public Scrutiny – website</b> <a href="http://www.cfps.org.uk/">http://www.cfps.org.uk/</a>

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCILEXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETINGTown Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HSWednesday, 24 April 2024 - 6.00 pm

PRESENT Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Chair)

Councillors L Bach, J Craigie, S Harding, D Smith, H Thomas, P Pennington (substitute for C Hawkins) and C Hodson (substitute for P Shepherd)

ALSO PRESENT	S Dorey	- Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
	P Lewis	- Operations Manager, The Pickwell Foundation
	K Brown	- Democratic Services Officer
	K Hewlett	- Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

250. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hawkins and Councillor Shepherd. Councillor Pennington was present as substitute for Councillor Hawkins and Councillor Hodson was present as substitute for Councillor Shepherd.

251. MINUTES

Chair reviewed the minutes dated 13 March 2024 with members page by page.

It was proposed by Councillor Harding, seconded by Councillor Smith and – Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024 be agreed as a correct record and signed.

(Vote:7 For, 1 Abstention)

252. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Chair introduced Ron Skinner and advised that, because the issue to be discussed was not an agenda item it could not be debated.

Ron Skinner presented to members on the issue of the 'madness of net zero'.

Following the presentation Chair thanked Mr Skinner and advised that TDC had declared a climate emergency as a Council and also had an established Councillor Climate Change Working Group.

253. ACTION LIST

Chair reviewed the Action List with members and the following was agreed:

199 – Members were updated on plans for special joint committees with North Devon on Agriculture and Dentistry. Members raised if a Joint Committee would be taking place to follow up on CQC report for new healthcare trust. Chair agreed to contact North Devon regarding this.

212 – Chair updated members on progress since the Link Centre closures had been confirmed. During discussion Councillor Pennington requested Devon Carers be invited to the committee in relation to the support needed now Link Centres have closed.

Councillor Hodson updated on the outcome of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee at Devon County Council – it was confirmed that Members had committed to reviewing the impact of the closure within 12 months, to ensure that the commitment to find additional support networks had been achieved.

Councillor Hodson agreed to report back to committee and members agreed on the need to monitor the situation.

220 – It was confirmed that childcare provision was an item on the forward plan and Councillor Cottle-Hunkin provided members with an update on the national picture. It was suggested that the new Family Hub model be investigated.

237 – An update was provided by the Chair and members were invited to attend a school visit with Cllr Cottle-Hunkin for feedback at a future committee.

246 – Councillor Cottle-Hunkin declared an interest as a member of the Active Torridge Board.

246 – It was confirmed a letter had been drafted and would be shared with Lendology before being sent.

254. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

255. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

256. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

None received.

257. PICKWELL FOUNDATION

Chair introduced James Lewis, Operations Manager from The Pickwell Foundation. Members were advised that the purpose of the presentation was to an overview of The Pickwell Foundation and their work with Torridge District Council (TDC).

The Operations Manager provided a detailed presentation for members covering the work of The Pickwell Foundation.

The Community Sponsorship programme was explained, and it was confirmed that 9 families had been supported in North Devon and Torridge. Group work and housing provision were also highlighted and it was confirmed a new group was planned for the Bideford area.

The Pickwell Foundation's work in relation to Homes for Ukraine was then highlighted. It was confirmed that 383 Ukrainian guests had been supported, and further detail was provided on the support provided in the last 2 years. Including the work to support the Wings welcome hub in Bideford.

The Operations Manager went on to describe their work with Chivenor and the Ministry of Defence to support the resettlement of the Afghan community.

Work with those using irregular routes and the work with the dispersal hotel in Ilfracombe was then highlighted. The partnership work with organisations such as the NHS, the County Council and community groups was noted, along with how The Pickwell Foundation worked with Clearsprings – the organisation contracted by the Government to house Asylum Seekers in the South West.

Members were advised a short film had been made of the work at Ilfracombe hotel and it was arranged for this to be shared outside of the meeting.

The working relationship with TDC was then summarised for members, along with the role of The Pickwell Foundation at a national level.

Members were asked for their questions.

Members asked for more detail when families move to new sponsors and inquired if these were local hosts still. The operations Manager confirmed that The Pickwell Foundation have continual recruitment in place for hosts and the vast majority of people are moved locally within northern Devon - the formal checking of host families and accommodation was also explained for context.

Discussion moved onto the impact, for TDC, of working with the Pickwell Foundation. The Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) referred back to the initial announcement of Homes for Ukraine, the complexities and lack of guidance and funding and how The Pickwell Foundation had helped minimise the impact. Their work to maintain relationships between hosts and guests was specifically mentioned.

The current housing crisis was noted but it was stated actual presentations for housing had been very small and where they had presented, the stays had been short – as a result the impact had been limited.

Wrap around support was also discussed and the Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) explained how TDC had been able to support people and their families individual needs. The important role of the Wings Hub - Friday's hub was solely for Ukrainians – was explained in relation to this kind of support.

However, funding was noted as a concern and it was explained that the tariff awarded to TDC per person was not ringfenced. It was explained this had to be used increasingly carefully given the continuing war in Ukraine and the ongoing nature of the support needed.

There was a detailed discussion in relation to the funding for Homes for Ukraine. The lack of long-term funding was highlighted, along with the impact on service provision for organisations like The Pickwell Foundation. It was noted there was a push from Local Authorities to continue funding and allow for longer term support. The lack of any consistency and the increasing uncertainty for families from Ukraine and hosts were highlighted.

There was a further discussion relating to the working relationship with Clearspring and their move to looking for houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs), rather than hotels, for housing those seeking asylum. There was some concern regarding a lack of communication with Councils and the potential impact of this.

Following this discussion it was proposed by Councillor Hodson, seconded by Councillor Pennington and –

Resolved

That Committee write to the MP for Torridge and West Devon and Central Government requesting that Clearsprings' contractual obligations are extended to engaging with Local Authorities when they are considering areas. As well as raising the need for clearer communication and a commitment to longer term funding after year 3 [for Homes for Ukraine].

(Vote: For, unanimous)

There was a continued discussion on the impact of ending funding for Ukrainians after 3 years and the potential impact for Local Authorities in terms of housing provision specifically. Members queried the Ukrainian Embassy's direct involvement in the provision of support to Ukrainians in the UK.

It was proposed by Councillor Pennington, seconded by Councillor Smith

That the Committee write to the Ukrainian Embassy to request they show they are supporting their nationals here.

(Vote: 3 for, 1 against, 4 abstentions)

Members then went on to discuss the changing policy in respect of visas for Ukrainians as well as the humanitarian crisis for Palestinians and visa schemes. Members asked about the future of the organisation and support for refugees, alongside the increase in conflict around the world.

The Operations Manager reflected on The Pickwell Foundation's partnership work in the area and what the organisation would like to see in terms of provision for those seeking asylum and the organisations and partners in service delivery.

Members commended The Pickwell Foundation and TDC for their partnership work and all the support they are providing in this area – specific mention was made of the need for a very responsive and fast paced provision.

Members asked what more Councillors could be doing. The Operations Manager reflected on the need for understanding and support on these resettlement issues and support for the families arriving in Torridge, as well as calling on The Pickwell Foundation when they are needed.

During discussion the Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) invited Councillors to attend the Wings Group.

Following a query about Household Support Fund and eligibility for Ukrainians and Afghans, it was confirmed they were able to apply. This led into a conversation around sharing information via the Council and it was agreed that

the Operations Manager would be able to share and link with TDC communications on joint social media.

Following a conversation around education and work with schools the Operations Manager mentioned the School's a Sanctuary programme and their role as part of this programme.

Members thanked the Operations Manager for his detailed presentation and question responses.

258. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Members reviewed the Forward Plan and made some provisional suggestions for future meetings:

Member's discussed arranging a panel to discuss the current childcare crisis. It was agreed this should include providers.

Members remained keen for Westward Housing to attend Committee, and it was requested that a residents group for Westward Housing be invited at the same time.

The Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) reminded members of the need to scrutinise the organisations that TDC fund.

It was confirmed that Royal Mail were on the list to invite for 2024-25.

Members raised the issue of domestic violence and abuse and the impact within the community. This was suggested as a possible training need for the bite size training.

The support offered by the local food bank was also noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.54 pm

Chair:

Date:



TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Petroc College, Barnstaple - G107, 1st Floor, South West Institute Development Building

Thursday, 18 July 2024 - 6.30 pm

- PRESENT                      Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Chair)
- Councillor A Brenton (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors J Craigie, S Harding, P Shepherd and D Smith
- ALSO PRESENT              S Dorey                      - Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
- K Hewlett                  - Electoral and Democratic Services Officer
- Councillors C Hodson

259.    APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bach, Councillor Johns and Councillor Thomas.

260.    URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

No items

261.    DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

262.    AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

263.    DENTISTRY

At the start of the meeting Councillor Spear, Chair of the North Devon District Council Policy Development Committee welcomed North Devon and Torrige District Councillors and the public and advised on the format of the meeting. It was confirmed that both Committees would first run through the formal items on their agendas.

Councillor Patrinos (Dentistry Lead) was invited to start the discussion on Dentistry and welcomed the panel. Members were reminded of the reasons for

calling the meeting and case studies were used to highlight the issues around access to provision locally and nationally. It was explained that one of the panel – My Dentist - were now unable to attend the meeting, but had offered to answer any questions raised for them following the meeting.

The Panel introduced themselves and summarised their professional backgrounds in the local area:

- **Paul Waits** – Specialist Orthodontist and Dentist
- **Ian Mills** – Partner at Torrington Dental Practice and Associate Professor in Primary Care Dentistry at Peninsula Dental School. Chair of Devon Oral and Dental Health.
- **Chris Gooderham** – Dentist with specialist interest in Orthodontics.

North Devon District Council Policy Development Committee were asked for their questions

**The figure of £2 billion a year has been stated as the required level of funding needed to get Dentistry back to where it should be. The panel were asked if the figure felt right to them.**

Members were advised this would depend on the model of NHS dentistry care being provided. Detail regarding the current spend and allocation provided some context for members regarding the situation.

The panel reflect on the current economic situation and the impact this had on funding of NHS dental budgets. It was felt there needed to be responsible decision making at a higher level regarding what is done with the current dental budget and it was suggested this needed to be delivered more equitably than it is currently.

It was felt that NHS dentistry was not able to deliver the kind of service that was portrayed as the target with the current level of staffing and funding in place. The reliance on private sector to deliver aspects of care was highlighted. The lack of staff and training provision and the current NHS contract were highlighted as issues that needed to be considered and it was felt that just extra funding may not be the required fix.

**Why had the current situation come about, what were the main problems and possible solutions?**

Panel advised of the NHS contract changes launched in 2006 and explained in detail to members how the change in practice had impacted on provision – the banding and Unit of Dental Activity values were explained, in terms of treatment and their impact on provision of care – examples were then provided for context.

It was felt this was when a big exodus of staff began and the contract hadn't improved since being introduced. It was felt that the Unit of Dental Activity system needed to be changed before considering the financing of the sector.

The panel members also noted that NHS access had been in decline for a long time; the 2006 contract was seen as one of the key points in the decline in provision, along with the removal of registration - also in 2006. Members were advised of the National Audit Office 2021 report on the decline in funding, alongside patient experience of service provision and costs.

Implications for the workforce were also touched upon. This included workforce patterns, access to dental schools and the lack of statistical data to analyse how many full time dentists there are, and how many are working in the NHS. The importance of attracting and supporting international dental graduates to work in the area and stay was also noted.

During discussion on the understanding of dental health over the decades it was highlighted that child dental decay had significantly increased in the last few years alone. The importance of prevention work as a response to reduce future loading and suffering was explained – it was felt to be a key role for dentists and incentives to work with schools was suggested.

Some of the statistics on children’s oral health were shared with members.

In children between the ages of 5-9 the most common hospital admissions is due to dental extractions – 48,000 dental extractions every year and the majority would be preventable. It was noted that oral health in the country was improving but the burden of disease was within the most deprived areas.

Plymouth data was shared with members from 2021, which found 21% of 5 year olds had physical decay. When considering the data in terms of the wards 56% of decay was in children from the most deprived areas and 7% in the most affluent.

The impact for young people who experience these extractions, in terms of their future care and experience, was also highlighted.

**It was asked if the variance in costs between NHS and private dentists could be considered profiteering from overcharging?**

A case was provided as an example, but the panel felt it wasn’t possible to comment without all the details.

Overall panel members didn’t think there was profiteering and the costs of providing high quality healthcare were highlighted as a factor to consider. However, the opportunity for outliers was recognised and some of the charging practices of local providers were noted.

The lack of practitioners providing care was also explained as an opportunity for some practices to increase their charges.

**There is a perception that dental health is deteriorating, what were the reasons behind the decline?**

Panel members explained why they didn't think that there was a deterioration in oral health overall, but there was a deterioration being seen in terms of specific groups within the community.

It was recognised that there is still a group of patients within our communities who cannot access care, and oral health is deteriorating for them and this was felt to reflect the inequality in society. The Panel reflected that the NHS was established to address inequality and it was felt the current contract was actually exacerbating the problem. It was also noted that the population was also living longer and people's expectations of care provision had changed – all impacting on the demand.

Again, workforce was noted as an issue and the panel went on to provide a detailed explanation of the challenges around training and recruitment in the area. It was felt this could be an opportunity for cross-working with the councils.

Some statistics from a survey completed by Plymouth were shared with members:

- 57% of responding practices had a dentist vacant. Some had up to 6 vacancies for dentists at their practice.
- 48% practices also had a dental nurse vacancy.

The challenges around training were explained and it was felt there was an opportunity for joint work with the councils around marketing the area to dentists as a place to live and work.

**How can the council make it more attractive for dentists to work in the area and how can we promote dentistry as a career to homegrown students? How could this link to the Joint Economic Strategy?**

Panel felt this was one of the actions to take forward from the meeting. The need for shared working around lobbying, health promotion in schools and care homes and the discussed workforce issues were all highlighted.

**Panel were asked how somewhere like Petroc could link with Plymouth University around training to then overcome the issue of a lack of placements for graduates locally?**

The Panel advised that dentistry was a degree course, but highlighted work taking place to explore apprenticeships for other dental professions and noted work taking place in Yeovil College – members were advised contacts could be shared.

Torrige District Council External Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked the following questions.

**Do you think dentistry doesn't have the status that other clinical provision has in this country? Do you think the issue of a lack of premises is also an issue?**

As part of the question the newly established working group on Health and Well-being for the JPPC was noted and the links to dental health were felt to be an important strategic consideration in terms of the health of the population.

The panel reflected on the number of applications to study dentistry – 8 or 9 applications per place – and felt there is demand. It was felt there was an issue in terms of recruitment to positions in the NHS and looking at how to retain staff. The promotion of dentistry as a career path at school was also felt to be a way to inspire younger people to pick dentistry.

**Member noted that northern Devon was one of the more deprived areas in the country and asked what impact this had in terms of the access to NHS dentists locally and equality of care. It was also asked if newly qualified dentists were struggling to access affordable housing – in the same way nurses and teachers were?**

The panel reflected that it was more the challenge of finding accommodation rather than affordability.

In terms of the local community the scale of inequalities in Devon were recognised. The hidden nature of rural poverty was recognised and the importance of having an NHS dental programme for those people was re-stated – this was felt to be a possible area of joint work.

The challenges of working and running a practice within the current contract were noted, it was explained how running a practice was becoming increasingly expensive and it was felt the current contract hadn't yet taken this into consideration.

There was a detailed discussion on recruitment and retention of staff within dentistry and how to continue to attract people to the profession and working within the NHS. It was felt there needed to be some national incentive for students, given the levels of debt now incurred to study. The need for system reform so that graduates would be happy to work in the NHS was felt to be key.

The concerns around the current contract were restated throughout these discussions and the barriers this creates when trying to recruit and retain staff were highlighted alongside the need for reform.

**It was asked what one thing Joint Committee members could take back from the meeting to help.**

The Panel advised of the need to lobby national government and to be a voice for North Devon and Torridge.

With a focus on workforce, the following solutions were suggested

The need to map out dental practice and their vacancies to gain robust data was highlighted, and it was suggested to engage with dental practices regarding how to support with recruitment and retention.

It was felt there was an opportunity to work with the dental community to showcase northern Devon as a place to work. As well as to provide those professionals with a welcoming environment to come and work– with the provision of support and information on where to go for information and advice.

In the longer term it was felt there was a need to promote dentistry as a career within the local schools and colleges.

The Chief Executive of North Devon District Council (NDDC) went on to explain the role of the 2 District Councils and how they link to Devon County Council.

Following a question regarding how the 2 District Councils were able to support work in the future the NDDC Chief Executive went on to advise of the partnership work of the 2 district Councils and how they work with other Districts in the County, along with the County Council.

Panel were advised that work to attract skills provision in the area and promotion of the 2 districts as places to work was already something the Councils did and there was felt to be an opportunity to share this and work collectively to promote northern Devon to dental professionals interested in working in the area.

It was confirmed that both Councils would be able to lobby for change on a regional and national level. Devolution was also highlighted as a something to consider and feed into.

Members agreed on the importance of an evidence base to demonstrate what the issues are was highlighted. It was also suggested there was a potential to use the Local Plan working group on Health and Wellbeing. It was explained that this group could be an opportunity to highlight the need to include / give prominence to dental provision as one of the vital health provisions within the large planning applications that are received.

The Panel went on to highlight an additional role of schools in terms of Oral Health Promotion – toothbrushes in schools was one of the Labour Manifesto promises. The effectiveness of this in reducing decay in other areas of UK and nationally was explained. The logistics of delivering this locally were detailed - the Devon ICB were noted as commissioners – and it was felt that some work to coordinate this locally would be beneficial, especially in terms of those areas that fall through the net.

The Chair of External Overview & Scrutiny Committee for TDC went on to ask the following questions, some that had been raised by constituents.

- **Had there been an increase in mouth and throat cancers? Was this due to a lack of dentists and was this monitored?**

It was explained by the Panel that there had not been an increase in incidents, however dentists were seeing later presentation – the impact was explained to be higher for those from areas of deprivation. Lack of access to routine dental care and the impact of this on later presentation and then poorer outcomes.

- **Out of hours dental care - It was explained that the advice from 111 was to call the out of hours phonenumber, but there had been no response on this line when called.**

The impact of changes to dental access / registration were noted here, along with changes to the contract in 2006. It was explained how there had been a privately run Dental Access Centre, one in Barnstaple, but due to workforce issues this had been pulled back and the option now was to call 111 and A&E. Advice was given on how to access care in these situations.

- **The impact of rural inequalities and public transport links for rural areas, would there be a benefit to having a mobile dentist travelling in the rural areas?**

The impact of public transport for rural areas was noted, and the mobile dentist idea was felt to be ineffective for a rural area. A better form of care was felt to be getting the patients into the practice for their care. Domiciliary Services were noted and felt to be a better form of care.

The inequalities for rural areas when public transport was poor and the smaller dental practices in rural areas were closing, leaving larger hubs in the towns was noted. It was felt that a hub and spoke model was felt to be a more efficient form of care, though considered less cost effective.

The importance of fixing the NHS model was again restated in terms of improving outcomes in those rural and deprived areas.

The role of commissioners in terms of awarding these contracts, looking at the corporate model and the ethics involved was felt to be key to turning this around. The need to lobby Commissioners in relation to these issues were stated.

North Devon District Council Resolved:

That standing orders be suspended for the Policy Development Committee of North Devon Council to allow questions from members of the invited public present.

At the discretion of the Chair of External Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Torridge District Council members of the public were invited to speak.

Public Questions:

**Why is Dentistry not a part of the NHS? Why aren't dentistry professionals salaried employees? Would this help with the issues of provision and premises?**

It was explained that following the establishment of the NHS in 1948 dentistry was free at the point of care. However, within 2 years the Government had introduced charges. The differences in terms of dentists and GPs were explained, along with the impact of historic decision making at a national level.

The panel explained the role of Community Dental Services, who support those with additional needs. It was explained these services were hugely underfunded and that Dental Practices were more likely to forward those patients with additional needs on to these specialist services because of the UDA targets highlighted earlier in the meeting. The impact for patients was also explained.

**The commissioned UDAs in Barnstaple (it was explained there is a ceiling on these) were mainly held by a corporate body. It was asked why, given they have no dentist to fulfil the commitment, they continue to get commissioned UDAs and apply for funding for the service when they have no feasible way to deliver?**

It was suggested this was a question for the commissioners of the services and Devon ICB. The panel understood the frustration and the issues in relation to the workforce.

**A Parish Councillor raised concerns about emergency care for dentistry. It was explained that the local community (Braunton) had a lack of dentists and there were community concerns regarding access to emergency dental care for children and adults. There was a lack of knowledge regarding how to access emergency care and people were sharing their experience of being on hold for long periods and then missing emergency appointments for that day. It was explained this wasn't just out of hours and there were also concerns about the amount of travel people were doing to access emergency care.**

It was explained that Out of Hours care was provided through NHS England.

Panel advised that those responsible for the commissioning of emergency care within working hours -South West Area Local Team / Devon ICB - have identified a huge gap in provision and commissioned Urgent Dental Care sessions from specific practices. It was also confirmed they would back this up by commissioning Stabilisation Sessions - a course of follow-up treatment with a practice. The complexity of a fragmented service was recognised, along with the potential for patients to have to attend sessions in different locations across the district.



A follow up question was raised in relation to the problems people are having in accessing appointments in the first place and then the issue of those people without an NHS dentist. The panel sympathised with the situation being described and the continued need for lobbying in order for more rapid change. NHS England and Devon ICB and MPs.

The need to recruit dentists and dental therapists was again restated as key to improving the provision.

Need to ensure that this proposal above is thought out.

Members thanked the panel for the high quality of the answers.

During discussion members asked whether there was a need to lobby for incentives, so Dentists were able to increase hours. The Panel reflected on the working hours of dentists. It was explained that it would be better for focus to be on the issues around increasing staffing and training, increasing the skills within the sector and attracting more people to move to the region to work.

Members highlighted recent work by North Devon Council to promote the council at graduate fairs and asked if the same approach had been taken for dentistry. The Panel advised of the work that had taken place to promote dentistry and it was felt that joint working and sharing of work on this was a quick win.

### **Actions and Next Steps**

The Vice Chair advised that he had made a summary of the key points from the discussions held and the Committee would consider these alongside the formal minutes at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Chair of the External Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Torridge District Council thanked the panellists for their attendance at the meeting and their openness in the discussions of the issues and spoke of her desire to work together to see improvements going forward.

The Chair of the Policy Development Committee, North Devon Council thanked the officers involved in attendance at the meeting. She also thanked the Corporate and Community Services officer for North Devon Council for her support during the meeting and the Clerk to the Committee for her hard work behind the scenes to facilitate the arrangements in the run up to the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 6.32 pm and closed at 8.29 pm

Chair:

Date:



## ACTION LIST

Overview & Scrutiny (External) Committee – 18 July 2024

Minute No.	Raised by	Action	Allocated To	Progress Update	Status
199.	Cllr Cottle Hunkin	Work with North Devon District Council and consider joint committees on Dentistry and Agriculture.	Dem Services / Chair	Joint committees on Agriculture and Dentistry complete.  24/04/24 - Chair to contact North Devon re: joint committee on Healthcare Trust and the CQC report.	Ongoing
212.	Cllr Hodson	To speak with the Leader for TDC regarding what provision is in place following the closure of the Link Centre in Holsworthy and what options are being considered for the building where the Link Centre was housed.	Cllr Shepherd	Update requested at 01 Nov meeting.  31-01-24 – Update provided from Cllr James regarding use of building and provision for Link Centre in Holsworthy.  16-04-24 - email sent to Cllr James and Cllr Morrish for further info on use of link centre building in Holsworthy. Email also sent to Cllr McInnes requesting info re future use of Bideford Link Centre building  24-04-24 – Cllr Hodson to continue to report back to Committee	Ongoing
220.	Cllr Brenton	Contact Bideford Children’s Centre and request feedback in relation to childcare provision and the impact of reported childcare crisis locally.	Cllr Brenton  Dem Services	31-01-24 – Councillor D Brenton to follow this up.  13/03/24 – Local childcare provision to be added to the forward plan list for 2024-25	Ongoing

Minute No.	Raised by	Action	Allocated To	Progress Update	Status
				and Children's Centre to be invited along with other providers.  24-04-24 – Family Hub model to be investigated.	
230	Members	Bitesize training – look to reinstate these training sessions. Councillors to be asked for their feedback on issues they would like covered	Phil Gilbert	24-04-24 Await CSP meeting in April / May to confirm areas that can be covered by Partnership.	Ongoing.
237	Cllr Cottle Hunkin	Contact Pathfields and Devon County Council to request more detail on the proposed closure of the Discovery Centre.	Dem Services / Chair	16-04-24 Email sent to Pathfields School for more info.  Chair and Cllr Annie Brenton attended Pathfields, met with the headteacher and had a tour of the school to understand more about what was happening.	
246	Chair	Letter to be sent to MP raising the issue of lead piping and drinking water.	Dem Services	24-04-24 – Share letter with Lendology and send to MP. Sent 19 Aug 2024	Complete
257	Cllr Hodson	Letter to MP regarding the contract for Clearsprings and funding for Homes for Ukraine.	Dem Services	Sent 19 Aug 2024	Complete
257	Cllr Pennington	Letter to Embassy querying funding for Ukrainians in UK	Dem Services	Sent 19 Aug 2024	Complete
263	Joint Committee Actions	Raise dental recruitment within the Economic Strategy	Economic Development	Email confirming there is an action to support Petroc's efforts to bring a new dentistry learning hub to the area.	Complete

Minute No.	Raised by	Action	Allocated To	Progress Update	Status
263	Joint Committee Actions	Draft a letter for MP and Wes Streeting			
263	Joint Committee Actions	Explore linking with schools	Dem Services	Suggested to raise with DCC – given their lead for Public Health and Education.  Link for DCC newsletters for schools sent to the Chairs for TDC and NDDC.	Complete
263	Joint Committee Actions	Press Release	Comms	Joint Press Release – media coverage in Aug.	Complete
263	Joint Committee Actions	Map Dental Vacancies	Cllr Patrinos, NDDC / Ian Mills		
263	Joint Committee Actions	Link dentistry colleagues into Local Plan working group on Health & Wellbeing – confirm membership.	Dem Services	Details for Ian Mills shared with Planning – advised that experts and professionals would be contacted to attend specific workshop dates and membership will be Councillors for both Authorities.	Complete



# **Torrige District Council**

## **External Overview & Scrutiny**

### **DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT**

### **2022-2023**

### **Introduction by the Chair**

We have had a very full and varied year in our first year of the External Overview and Scrutiny committee since being elected in May 2023.

We have welcomed a range of external organisations to our committee; many have been working in partnership with Torridge District Council such as the Pickwell Foundation and North Devon Plus, however others have been invited in due to the concern being raised by the local community (eg mental health provision and the closure of the Link Centres). As chair I would like to thank everyone who accepted our invites and took the time to come and present to us, for the quality of their presentations and detailed answers (I would also like to note here our disappointment that representatives from Devon County Council refused to attend).

Thanks must also go to all of the committee members for their input and questions raised at meetings, and to Karen Hewlett from Democratic Services for all of her hard work in organising the meetings and the subsequent minutes and actions.

Issues raised in our meetings have regularly been picked up by the local press and I would also like to thank the local democracy reporter Alison Stephenson in helping to raise awareness of the work we are doing as a committee to the wider community.

Many issues have been raised under “urgent matters” and it has been good to hear that members of the public are contacting committee members asking them to raise topics at the meetings. We have also welcomed in some members of the public to speak to the committee in public contributions and hope this will continue in future years.

An aim of the committee for the future is to work more jointly with North Devon District Council. There are a number of topics which affect us both and working together will help to bring a greater voice to those issues which affect the wider region (such as Dentistry, Agriculture and Childcare Provision).

**Councillor Cheryl Cottle Hunkin**  
**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 Cottle-Hunkin
Vice Chair	Councillor A Breton
Councillors	Louis Bach James Craigie Stephen Harding Carl Hawkins Peter Shepherd Doug Smith Huw Thomas
Non-elected Representatives	2 Vacancies
Support Officers	S Dorey, Head of Legal & Governance 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 2023/24:**

### **Scrutiny Training and Forward Plan Setting – 13 June 2023**

This was the first meeting of a new Committee, following District and Parish Elections on 4<sup>th</sup> May. As a result, Committee Members were provided with Scrutiny Training from the Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer).

The training covered the role of the 2 scrutiny committees at Torridge, the principles that those committees work in accordance with and the terms of reference that govern them. There was also an overview of the committee structure and the call-in procedure, as well as a list of external organisations that Torridge District Council fund.

Following the training members reviewed the forward plan for the 2023-24 cycle of meetings and agreed a list of potential organisations to approach to attend.

### **Outcome**

Training for Committee Members and setting of the Forward Plan for 2023-24.

### **North Devon Plus – 31 July 2023**

Members received a presentation from North Devon Plus. The Programme Delivery Manager provided a summary of the different aspects of the business, the staff that support this work and how they've supported local businesses and managed the impact of big change locally.

There was particular interest in the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) and detail on timescales and planned funding was shared with members. Further detail was provided regarding Councillor grants and other potential pots of funding that could be used for the benefit of the local community.

At the start of the meeting, with the Chair's permission, members of the public addressed Committee regarding the proposals for Bideford Link Centre.

### **Outcome**

Presentation slides were sent to all members and North Devon Plus were asked to return to Committee and report back on the effectiveness of the Rural England Prosperity Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund.

Agreement to arrange a Committee, and invite panellists, to consider the proposals for Link Centres in Torridge district.

### **Mental Health Provision - draft response to Devon County Council Consultation – 13 September 2023**

Following public participation at the previous Committee in July members held a Committee regarding the consultation process for the planned closure of Bideford Link Centre. Invitations were extended to all partners involved in the consultation, however not all invitees were able to attend the Committee.

Members had an opportunity to hear from Save Our Hospital Services and Friends of Bideford Link Centre, as well as a representative from Devon and Cornwall Police. The provision available from Bideford Link Centre was highlighted in terms of how this fitted within the referral routes and the care pathways locally. Service Users also provided members with insight into how the service had benefited them as individuals and they expressed their concerns regarding future of mental health provision in the local area.

Members discussed local provision on mental health and the Devon and Cornwall Police representative highlighted the 'Right Care, Right Person' policy - a national change to Police response in terms of mental health calls and first responders. Members were concerned that this change in Police response, along with the closure in Link Centre provision would increase the impact for those in need of crisis care.

There was also concern that the focus of services response was on high level interventions for crisis care, and the importance of early intervention for mental health was not being considered.

### **Outcome**

At Committee the following resolutions were made:

1. That External Overview & Scrutiny Committee for Torridge continues to extend an invitation by letter to Devon County Council (DCC), to attend and discuss the alternatives that they want in place of Link Centres.
2. To recommend, with agreement of the service, that Sir Geoffrey Cox MP and Councillor McInnes visit the Bideford Link Centre and for the MP to publicly support the continuation of the service. This invitation is to be extended to the relevant County Councillors as well.
3. That the External Overview & Scrutiny Committee support the petition to re-open all the referral routes to the Link Centres in Bideford, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe and reinstate staff led therapy groups as they were pre-covid, so people can get the help they desperately need. Committee also recommend that Full Council support this petition.

The following actions were also agreed:

- To contact the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) and raise concerns regarding potential impact of Link Centre closures – it was noted that Councillor Hackett attends regular PCC meeting.
- To speak with the Leader for TDC regarding what provision is in place, particularly for those with complex needs, following the closure of the Link Centre in Holsworthy and what options are being considered for the building where the Link Centre was housed.

Feedback from the committee was shared with the DCC Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee and the response was also taken into consideration as part of the DCC consultation process. Members continued to raise their concerns regarding the proposed closure at Committee.

On 13 March 2024 DCC Cabinet resolved to close the Link Centres – the decision notice is available [via this link](#). This was then called in by the DCC Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024 where, following debate, it was requested that a progress update be provided in 6 months.

### **Joint Community Safety Partnership – 30 October 2023**

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, with the main areas of focus confirmed as:

- Serious violence (including violence against women and girls)
- Safer Streets (including anti-social behaviour (ASB))
- Emerging Threats (including Hate Crime)

An update was provided regarding the achievements of the CSP in the last 12 months and officers from North Devon and Torridge provided an update on their projects over the last 12 months. Staffing of the teams was highlighted, as staff at TDC were only recently appointed to post.

The newly appointed Public Health and Community Safety Manager (TDC) advised the Sub-committee that:

- PSPOs for alcohol and ASB had been issued by the neighbourhood safety teams. Approximately 30 orders had been issued.
- To assist with the PSPO enforcement TDC had been looking at utilizing office space on Jubilee Square.
- CCTV operation would be included within the remit of the TDC community safety team.
- A small budget had been made available for the provision of Street Marshalls in Bideford over the Christmas period.

### **Outcome**

- The Chair of Licensing Committee was invited to sit on the Community Safety Partnership.
- Members requested that the reintroduction of bite-size training be explored. The Community Safety Partnership with a view to consulting with members on potential training needs.
- The TDC External Overview & Scrutiny Committee contacted senior officers at Stagecoach and requested that the Night bus provision trial be continued and potentially explored for other large towns surrounding Barnstaple. *(Note: Following a request to attend Committee to discuss bus services in the local*

*area Stagecoach were unavailable, so agreed to answer questions via email – this was co-ordinated by the External Committee for all members and included questions regarding the nightbus provision.)*

### **Education & Employment in Torridge District – 1 November 2021**

Members welcomed a Panel to discuss education and employment within the Torridge district. The panel members were:

- Peter Morrish, Technology and Customer Support Manager Condition Monitoring Technology Group (CMTG) Torrington
- Tom Hart, General Manager Harland & Wolff Appledore
- Tony Cole, Training Manager Harland & Wolff Appledore
- Chris Fuller, Economic Development Manger – regarding Northern Devon Futures

Following presentations from panel members the Committee discussed the growing importance of apprenticeships and work-based learning within the district, as well as the potential for growth in this area for the future. Member raised some of the barriers to accessing local employment and apprenticeship opportunities – such as transport links and infrastructure, housing provision and childcare provision were also highlighted.

The potential solutions to the above barriers were also discussed and members reflected on the positive work already taking place in the district. The importance of collaborative working and shared practice was recognised, along with the potential opportunities presented by Levelling Up funding. The Economic Development Manager highlighted some of the work taking place to support growing small businesses and improve connectivity.

### **Outcomes:**

A summary of actions was provided for the Committee at the end of the meeting.

It was agreed that an invitation would be extended to Petroc College, asking them to attend Committee to discuss apprenticeships and update on the work to achieve University Status.

### **Lendology – 06 December 2023**

This meeting was inquorate and was therefore cancelled.

### **Petroc – 31 January 2024**

Before the presentation from Petroc, members heard from a student at Petroc and their concerns in relation to recruitment and retention of lecturer staff.

Members heard from Sean Mackney the Principal and CEO, and Bill Blythe the Vice Principal Finance Resources & Regional Affairs at Petroc. Information on the College strategy, partnership working and the plans to explore University status.

During the meeting there was discussion on adult learning and the provision for those who are digitally excluded. Petroc provided a summary on how this work was being expanded with this in mind.

There was also discussion on how students are consulted and the issue of staffing and lecturer absences. Members were advised of the student engagement that is in place and went on to discuss the mental health and wellbeing support available to students.

Apprenticeships and T-Level programmes were highlighted and some of the barriers as a result of transport links were discussed as part of this.

Finally members discussed the Turing Programme and the predecessor to this – Erasmus. The benefits of both programmes were highlighted, but the complexities of the Turing Programme were noted, along with the potential impact. It was resolved to write to the Department for Education regarding these concerns.

### **Outcome**

A letter sent to the Secretary of State on behalf of Petroc providing feedback on the experience of the Turing Programme, this was also forwarded to the Department for Education and to the local MP for Torridge and West Devon. A response was received from the MP for Torridge and West Devon and the Department for Education in April, and this was shared with Petroc representatives who attended the Committee.

### **Lendology / Active Torridge - 13 March 2024**

#### Active Torridge

Judith Gentry (Non-Executive Director, Active Torridge) and Sean Kearney (Director, Active Torridge) provided members with a detailed presentation which covered the creation of Active Torridge as a company, the Board and the Governance arrangements and responsibilities that had been agreed.

Members were advised of the strategic direction and over all aims for Active Torridge. The work streams the Board regularly review were then detailed along with the progress in each area:

- A. Active Customers
- B. Active People
- C. Active Environment
- D. Active Compliance
- E. Active Ambition & Innovation

The Non Executive Director then provided further detail regarding the big ticket items planned for 2024-25 and members were asked for their questions.

Members discussed these big ticket items and the plans for Bideford Library to be used as a space for Active Torridge. There was discussion on staffing and retention, as well as in house progression and it was confirmed the new Chief Operating Officer was an internal appointment.

Partnership work with Torridge was highlighted and the Community Referral Scheme was noted, which had supported around 100 people – it was stated that Active Torridge were looking to continue to collaborate with TDC on this.

Carbon use and energy efficiency were then discussed and the work taking place to measure the efficiency of the buildings.

Members reflected on the progress of Active Torridge since taking over from the previous providers and reflected on the issues this raised in terms of capacity.

### Lendology

Members then heard from Ellie Lister, Operations Director at Lendology.

A detailed presentation provided members with an overview of the work of Lendology and how the investment from councils like Torridge were used. The compliance and auditing procedures were highlighted, as well as the accreditation process.

The presentation focused on the loans available and how these could benefit people. The figures for Torridge were shared with members alongside the case studies of Torridge residents who had applied. The Operations Director also explained how Lendology promoted their services.

Members discussed the impact these loans could have in terms of the private rented sector, however it was noted that take up from private landlords was low. This came about following a discussion regarding lead piping in homes and members agreed to write to the MP raising concerns.

Discussion then moved on to the types of loan products that would be available to applicants and how these were used to suit the clients needs. There was a great deal of positive feedback from members on the work of Lendology and the impact they were having to people in the district. It was agreed the Torridge would continue to link up with and promote the work of Lendology to Councillors and the public.

### **Outcome**

It was resolved that Committee would write to the MP for Torridge and West Devon raising concerns regarding the use of lead pipes and drinking water.

## **Pickwell Foundation – 24 April 2024**

Members heard from James Lewis, Operations Manager from The Pickwell Foundation.

The Operations Manager provided a detailed presentation on the work of the Pickwell Foundation, which focused on their work with Torridge and the Community Sponsorship Programme and Homes for Ukraine, along with their work in North Devon, their national work lobbying and future work plans.

During discussion members reflected on the impact of the working relationship with the Pickwell Foundation and the benefits of the partnership work when responding to the Home for Ukraine initiative. The support offered by the Pickwell Foundation was felt to be an essential part of the provision available locally and one of the reasons for the small number of presentations to Housing. Their work to support host families and guests was specifically mentioned.

There was lengthy discussion regarding funding streams. The lack of consistent long-term funding and the challenges this presented to the Pickwell Foundation and the families they supported.

Members also discussed the working relationship with the provider Clearsprings and concerns were raised regarding the lack of communication with local areas they work within and the potential impact of this.

### **Outcome**

Members resolved to write to the MP for Torridge and West Devon to raise concerns regarding a lack of long-term funding streams for those supporting the Homes for Ukraine scheme. It was also agreed to raise the concerns regarding communication with Clearsprings.

### **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.

In July 2023 we heard from public speakers regarding the potential impact of proposed closures to the Link Centres, this resulted in Members requesting a special meeting arranged for 13 September and a response to Devon County Council consultation was submitted by the Committee.

In January 2024 we also heard from a student at Petroc College, who raised concerns about the recruitment of a lecturer for A-Level Law Studies at the college, explaining the impact this was having for students wellbeing and their study.

In April 2024 we heard from a member of the public regarding their thoughts on the net zero targets.



**EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – FORWARD PLAN 2024/2025**

<b>Cycle 1</b> <b>5 June 2024</b> <b>10am</b>	<b>Cycle 2</b> <b>18 July 2024</b> <b>6pm</b>	<b>Cycle 3</b> <b>4 September 2024</b> <b>10am</b>	<b>Cycle 4</b> <b>16 October 2024</b> <b>6pm</b>	<b>Joint Community</b> <b>Safety Partnership</b> <b>Update</b> <b>13 November 2024</b> <b>10am</b>	<b>Cycle 5</b> <b>27 November 2024</b> <b>10am</b>	<b>Cycle 6</b> <b>08 January 2025</b> <b>6pm</b>	<b>Cycle 7</b> <b>12 February</b> <b>2025</b> <b>10am</b>	<b>Cycle 8</b> <b>02 Apr 2025</b> <b>6pm</b>
<p>Cancelled – Joint Agriculture Meeting with NDDC on 23 May 2024</p>	<p>Joint Committee with NDDC – Dentistry Provision</p>	<p>One Northern Devon</p>	<p>Citizen’s Advice - Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon</p> <p>Taw &amp; Torridge Voluntary Service (TTVS)</p> <p>Draft External O&amp;S Annual Report</p> <p>OND (discuss recording)</p>					
<p><b>To be invited 2024-25</b>                      Westward Housing &amp; residents group                      TTVS - Carers                      Post Office / Royal Mail                      Devon Highways – Full Council Notice of Motion, invitation sent to DCC, awaiting response.                      Foodbank Provision                      Provision Domestic Violence and Abuse</p> <p><b>Funded by TDC &amp; date last attended External O&amp;S:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active Torridge 13 March 2024</li> <li>• Burton Art Gallery 7 December 2022</li> <li>• Citizens Advice Bureau 19 January 2022</li> <li>• North Devon + 31 July 2023</li> <li>• North Devon Biosphere</li> <li>• One Northern Devon 04 September 2024</li> <li>• TTVS 20 January 2021</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggestions from Committee dated 13-06-23:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment Agency invite regarding flood defences work and partnership working</li> <li>• Health and Social Care within the Torridge area – the extent of child poverty and food poverty rates. Head of Legal and Governance (&amp; Monitoring Officer) advised that TDC are working closely with TTSV, Encompass and Navigate on the household support fund and would be happy to attend.</li> <li>• Invitation to local Housing Providers regarding the issues being experienced in terms of help for homelessness, housing issues.</li> <li>• Invitation to DWP and the impact for those who are not in employment or education.</li> <li>• North Devon Plus.</li> <li>• Encompass.</li> <li>• Citizens Advice</li> </ul>								