

PART C: LEA self-evaluation statement.

Torbay Council (TC) is a relatively new (since April 1998) and relatively small (population 130,000, with 44 schools) LEA established in April 1998. It has had a turbulent history with significant political swings, a "poor" CPA rating in 2002 and considerable turnover of senior staff in the last year or so.

That said, there has been more stability since May 2003 with a new political administration, a new Managing Director and a review of all Directors and structures of most Directorates. The rate of change has been that TC was one of only a handful of LAs in the country to be promoted from "poor" to "weak" in the CPA re-assessment of 2003.

The newly-created Learning and Culture Directorate (LCD) has had an equally unstable time followed by rapid improvement of late. The first Director of Education retired on grounds of ill health in 2001 and the second left after only eighteen months in post in July 2003. One of the original three Assistant Directors (ADs) left in December 2002 and another in August 2003. Although the OFSTED/Audit Commission inspection of 2001 was satisfactory overall, there were considerable and important areas of weakness leading to doubts about the LEA's capacity to improve. Arguably those doubts were borne out by the Audit Commission's school survey in the summer of 2003. However, since that low ebb matters have improved both rapidly and dramatically.

The Council comprises 27 Liberal Democrats, 8 Conservatives and 1 Independent member. That is in stark contrast to the previous administration which comprised 29 Conservatives and 7 Liberal Democrats. In turn, that administration replaced one with a clear Liberal Democrat majority.

The Council is in a position to continue to improve and there are both the will and ability among elected members and officers to ensure that the pace of change will not slacken.

The "poor" judgement of the CPA process announced in December 2002 precipitated a complete reappraisal of the Council's approach and methodology. The energy and determination to improve is palpable.

What contribution is education expected to make to the achievement of corporate priorities?

Three key documents set out and drive the vision for Torbay: The Community Plan, Transforming Torbay and the Change Management Implementation Plan (2003-04). Education is one of the political administration's five priorities and is seen as critical in providing increasing life chances for young people and in underpinning the regeneration of Torbay's economy.

The Council is very clear that its raison d'être is to serve the community. The well-being of Torbay's people lies at the heart of all that the Council does. Strenuous efforts have been taken to involve the wider community in the creation of the Draft Community Plan (Local Strategic Plan) in a determined attempt to ensure that the Council serves the community and is not seen as remote or divorced from the community's needs and aspirations.

The Council's Plans are embodied in Transforming Torbay and the Change Management Implementation Plan (2003-04). In turn, the LCD Strategic Plan 2004-2007 (in preparation) brings together the plans of all our areas of work – the EDP, the Asset Management Plan, the Behaviour Support Plan, the SEN Plan and so on. Beyond that those plans are underpinned by Business Plans for the four branches of the Directorate and for individual services.

In all these documents, and in the attendant processes that have led to their production, education in its broadest sense is seen as vital. Close relationships have been forged with the South Devon College and other partners to ensure that the statutory education sector is not seen as an end in itself but as the means to learners being able to learn and develop throughout their lives.

The Council has "modernised" the conduct of its business with an Executive comprising seven Members (see structure of the Council – taking key decisions and an open system of delegation to Chief Officers who take decisions in consultation with the appropriate Lead Member. Those delegated decisions are subject to a "call-in" procedure from all elected members. The Council and the Executive meet monthly.

There is also an Overview and Scrutiny Committee which has already conducted some robust examinations into Council policy and practice including a thorough investigation into Education finance and the budget-setting process for 2004/05 (Review of Funding to Schools within Torbay)

That scrutiny process has played a considerable part in restoring schools' confidence in the Council's decision-making and commitment to education through funding. It also prepared the ground for robust and forensic analysis of the education budget by the Budget and Resources Group (comprising Heads and Officers) and the Schools Forum. The impact is apparent from the Audit Commission's School Survey of December 2003.

The contribution of the LCD to the Council's priorities are clear and should be seen in the context of the overall desire to improve the quality of life for people in Torbay. It is self-evident, but deserves reinforcement, that education is a universal, rather than a residual or remedial, service and has the potential to improve people's life chances as no other service does.

What progress has been made since the last Inspection

The last inspection was like the curate's egg, with an unpalatable after-taste. The current dish is far more satisfying. This is well illustrated in comparing the Audit Commission's school surveys of March 2001 with those of June 2003 and December 2003. In short, progress has described a J-shaped curve with several services dipping before making a strong recovery.

Recommendations from the 2001 Inspection report have been acted upon (see Post Inspection Action Plan) and:

- There is now a robust budget setting process in place with clear consultation with schools and alignment with priorities. The Schools Forum has met frequently, informed by the activities of the Budget Advisory Group. Debate has been robust and detailed but well informed, and there is clear satisfaction with the transparency of the budget-setting process. There is a much better deployment of resources to reach areas of need.
- The LMS formula has been overhauled for 2004/05 although another piece of work needs to be done over the coming months concentrating on Special Educational Needs and the funding of special schools.
- Relations with secondary schools are now robust and cordial though there is still more work to be done to challenge the schools and to consolidate schools' confidence. Work on the 14-19 education has recently accelerated and there are much close relationships among secondary schools and between them and South Devon College of Further Education. The 14-19 strategy is being prepared, will be consulted on in May and implemented from July onwards.
- The work of the advisory service is more focussed, manageable and evidence-based. Although some work remains to be done, this year's target-setting round was much more challenging for schools and thereby more useful.
- Corporate Governance supports the aims of the Council and there are clear lines of accountability. The Executive/Scrutiny roles have worked well, notably in the scrutiny of the education budget for 2003/04 and the budget-setting process for 2004/05.
- Performance Management is a growing feature of the Council and of the LCD. The Performance Management Board for LCD is now in place and is beginning to raise challenging issues.
- Three new or re-designated Special schools have opened and new reviews of SEN and Behaviour Support are underway.
- Secondary schools' accommodation has been increased; the Council has adopted co-ordinated admissions schemes and schools are signing up to them. Primary places are being reviewed and a proposal to reorganise primary education Brixham is going through the system.
- An action plan for embracing diversity and combating racism has been produced.

The Post-Inspection Action Plan has been implemented although a few areas need continuing attention given the nature of the original criticisms and the turbulence of the last two years or so.

Much more important than processes and remedial activities are **outputs**, and these are encouraging in the main:

- The processes for forecasting numbers on rolls are sound though the broad picture of a declining population is complicated by considerable in-migration, incidentally with a significant impact on pupils' achievements.
- Translation of predictions of number on roll into Early Years provision and then into statutory provision has been good. There is a good match between numbers and accommodation, good communication with schools and a clear school organisation plan. A review of primary education in Brixham has been undertaken and proposals to rationalise provision have been made. Similar reviews for Paignton and Torbay are being developed.
- Admissions procedures have been overhauled and co-ordinated admissions scheme are nearly in place. Matters ran smoothly in September 2003 and this area of work is far stronger than it was at the time of the last inspection.
- The asset management plan is sound and school accommodation is much improved, including two new schools under a PFI programme, three new or extensively adapted special schools, a brand new primary school and significant building projects at many other schools.

- Support for attendance is widely acknowledged to be a considerable strength supported by carefully negotiated policies and outcomes. The Education Welfare Service is highly regarded and many EWOs are based in schools.
- There are no schools identified as under-achieving, with serious weaknesses or requiring special measures. However, there is evidence to suggest there are too few excellent or very good schools.
- SATS results are encouraging across the board though the rate of improvement has fallen. GCSE results in 2003 are a cause for concern although it remains to be seen whether that was an isolated occurrence. Ambitious targets have not always been met but the EDP activities reflect areas of under-achievement. The relatively low abilities and achievement of in-coming pupils are a particular concern, though there is evidence to suggest that their value-added scores are high.
- Data provision and analysis are other widely acknowledged strengths of the service, both within the LCD and in the schools. These processes inform the differentiation of financial and other resources.
- Many areas of social inclusion are well developed and new partnerships have been forged in, say, the areas of visual and hearing impairment to reflect changes in provision. However comprehensive provision in relation to behaviour needs to be developed and that is being addressed by the revision of the Behaviour Support Plan. Permanent exclusions increased considerably over the academic year in 2002/03 and that requires further work. Early indicators are that they will decline in this academic year.

3. How effective is the LEA?

The effectiveness of the LEA can be judged by inputs and in any number of ways but ultimately it can only be measured in terms of outputs and outcomes.

In terms of inputs, Torbay Council is an effective LEA. Sold services are well thought of and levels of buy back are relatively high. Other services to schools are similarly trusted by their recipients, such as Finance, Property and Human Resources, though Property Services have had their difficulties in the past.

Access services are effective across the board, in that the School Organisation Plan provides a solid platform, admissions procedures are much improved, Home to School Transport is efficiently run and the Education Welfare Service is very good.

The administration of pupils' Special Educational Needs is most efficient but strategy is being reviewed. Needs of pupils are met, though value for money requires closer attention.

School improvement processes are being overhauled and need to be more robust and methodical, but are effective and are generally appreciated by the schools.

Turning to results, there is much to be proud of. No school requires Special Measures, none has Serious Weaknesses and none is Underachieving. SATs results are generally sound but analysis shows areas for improvement. GCSE results dipped in Summer 2003 but Post 16 results are good. Work still remains to be done on under-achieving groups of pupils, notably boys.

The capital programme is and has been extensive, with several new schools and many new buildings.

The Audit Commission School Survey of December 2003 is encouraging in terms of schools' renewed confidence in the Council and speaks of considerable recent improvement. There is, however, a need to consolidate improvements in relations with schools and there can be no room for complacency.

Some 19,000 pupils have a place in Torbay schools and there are relatively few surplus places. The fall in primary rolls is being tackled, as is the rising secondary roll. Some 1,700 pupils are transported to school each day.

Budgets are well managed across the Board and sound financial procedures are in place.

4. What remains to be done and does the LEA have the capacity to improve further.

The agenda before the Council as LEA is clear, if difficult. Over the next three years the Council has to:

- Continue to monitor support, challenge and, where necessary, to intervene in schools in order to raise standards.
- Promote social inclusion by having clear policies and implementation plans across its services.
- Determine how to achieve the foregoing in terms of which services it wants to deliver directly and which to secure elsewhere.

The focus of attention will be on our support for school improvement and on Special Educational Needs.

Support for school improvement is broadly satisfactory in terms of pupils' achievements, judgment of schools made by OFSTED inspections and schools' broad perceptions. But more needs to be done on two fronts: raising aspirations through robust challenge and embedding the codification of our practice thereby ensuring a common understanding and approach across schools and the LCD.

The statutory framework for Special Educational Needs is secure. However, further work needs to be carried out in relation to the overall strategy and in securing value for money. This latter objective must be part of the greater challenge laid down to schools.

First, the Council has to decide the services it wants to secure; this represents the "challenge" of the four C's associated with Best Value. A relatively small LEA inevitably lacks capacity and there has been an underlying assumption that Torbay would continue services provided by Devon before Local Government Re-organisation.

The Council must revisit some first principles and question why, for example, it is involved in Adult and Community Learning when the Learning and Skills Council is the funding body and the Community Colleges are responsible for provision. Moreover the leadership and management of the service was found wanting in the Adult Learning Inspection in summer 2003. Arrangements are being explored with the LSC and with South Devon College of Further Education.

The Council must also ask itself whether it wishes to continue with the existing provision of Home to School Transport beyond the statutory minimum.

Second, once the Council has determined which optional services it wishes to continue to provide, it will consider, along with statutory services, how it might best secure those services. Many services are already provided in partnership with Devon County Council (DCC) such as Devon Youth Music, support for SACRE, Devon Learning Resources, Schools Library Service and ScoMIS.

The same question will be asked of other areas of work, such as Outdoor Education. Some services previously supplied by DCC are now supplied by other partners, for example, support for Hearing Impaired Pupils as provided by the Royal School for the Deaf in Exeter and support for pupils with Visual Impairment by the West of England School also in Exeter.

Discussions were also held against the prospect of our not being able to appoint an Advisor for ICT, although in the event a successful appointment has been made.

Similar discussions are taking place with secondary Headteachers to discuss how secondary advice might be provided and the LEA's statutory duties met without the appointment of a new full-time secondary adviser.

Work remains to be done on which services the Council should provide. The reviews of Special Educational Needs and Behaviour Support are likely to highlight the prospect of some delegation for services in those areas.

Third, beyond the LCD, contributions from schools need to be strengthened and extended. The promotion of learning is a priority for the Council and figures prominently in the Community Plan. There must be further engagement of the broader community and in particular of the business community. The creation of a strong 14-19 Strategic Plan should drive this forward.

Whilst the introduction of a Single Education Plan is welcome, that is still some way off and existing plans need to be developed and polished. Some are well embedded (such as the School Organisation Plan) – others need to be reviewed in the light of rapid change, such as the Education Development Plan and the Early Years and Childcare Development Plan – whilst still others have served us well but now need to be overhauled (such as the Special Educational Needs and Behaviour Support Plans).

Fourth, perhaps the greatest challenge for the LEA is to unite all its services for children in the putative Children's Services Directorate. The Director of Learning and Culture has been appointed as the Chief Executive (Designate) of the Children's Trust, an indication of the Council's intentions. There are good links between the Learning and Culture and Social Services Directorates at all levels, but they now need to be consolidated and ensured. Similarly there are good links with Torbay's Primary Care Trust, but once again those links to be at all levels, not reliant solely on good personal relationships or other elements of chance.

Above all, there needs to be continuity. A period of consolidation is a vain hope and, in any case, rapid change needs to take place. Given the personnel and structures that are now in place both at political and management levels there is every reason to suppose that that continuity is in place and will lead to rapid progress.

Capacity remains a critical issue. At elected member level there is a relative lack of experience, but that is outweighed by a commitment to succeed and to promote educational achievement. The Managing Director provides strong leadership and there is now sufficient capacity in central Directorates to support the LCD and ensure it is fully involved in the corporate effort.

Within the LCD there is now sufficient capacity to drive the ambitious agenda that lies ahead. The additional of several experienced officers has bolstered existing staff and has provided the leadership and management required to gain the confidence of elected members, fellow officers, governors, heads, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and the wider community. Leadership skills have perhaps not permeated all parts of the Directorate, and there remains a certain lack of confidence in one or two members of staff. However, the new team is fresh to the task, has high expectations and has a determination to succeed. Those key staff are used to working in successful environments, working with partners, enjoying positive relations with schools and managing performance.

A significant factor in the LEA's capacity to improve lies with the schools. Provided they continue to support the Council then the Council can support them and ultimately, the learners. Much time and effort has been expended in the past in monitoring, questioning and criticising the Council's activities. That mistrust has been replaced by positive attitudes and staff from schools are working within the Directorate on, for example, Workforce Reform, 14-19 Strategy and statementing of SEN pupils. This "blurring of the edges" between schools and the Directorate is also apparent in Directorate staff being recruited from schools and vice versa. That can continue in relation to secondary advice, Workforce Reform, secondments to schools from the Directorate, staff visiting schools and so on. Only in this way can capacity be sustained in the longer term and the problems of a small LEA overcome.

There is every reason to anticipate continued improvement and consolidation over the next few years. There is an energy and commitment among members and officers to support schools and the wider community, in raising standards and improving the life chances of those whom we serve.

Number	Required Inspection Judgement	Previous Inspection Grade	LEA self-evaluation grade
0.1	The progress made by the LEA overall	Not previously graded	4
0.2	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	4	4
0.3	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	6	3

Signed, on behalf of the Authority: