

# Annual Report to Torpoint Residents

## May 2026

Dear Resident,

This annual report looks back over what has been a demanding, challenging, and rewarding first year as your Cornwall Councillor for Torpoint.

Nothing fully prepares you for the workload that follows election to Cornwall Council. The first few months involve intensive training on Council systems, procedures, governance, finance, planning, audit, licensing, and the Code of Conduct. Alongside this, councillors are appointed to committees, political groups nominate members to key roles, and the Administration determines the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the main committees.

Once that process is complete, the real work begins.

Previous councillors told me that you can work as much or as little as you choose. My experience is different. Representing Torpoint properly is a full-time commitment, often extending into evenings and weekends. The role is not only about supporting individual residents with local issues, but also about scrutinising decisions that affect every resident across Cornwall.

## My Council Roles

During my first year, I have served on a number of committees and working groups.

### **Corporate Finance and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

I serve as Vice-Chair of this committee, which monitors Cornwall Council's performance in delivering agreed programmes of work to time, cost, and quality. It also reviews the performance and business plans of the Council's arms-length companies.

This has been a key focus for me, allowing me to apply my background in programme management, financial oversight, and delivery assurance to help improve Council performance and accountability.

### **Audit Committee**

The Audit Committee plays an important role in ensuring that the Council's processes, controls, governance arrangements, and risk management systems are robust. It also looks back at how those systems have operated and whether improvements are needed.

## **Budget Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

This relatively new committee examines the Council's budget over the next three years and beyond. Its purpose is to help ensure that the Council does not over-stretch itself financially and that the budget being proposed is robust, realistic, and defensible. The challenge, as ever, is a reduction in funding from central government. Cornwall was deemed to be remote under the original funding formula, however, this element of the calculation was changed and resulted in a reduced budget for Cornwall. It is now for our and other Cornwall MPs to fight for its restoration.

## **Miscellaneous Licensing Committee**

This committee considers licensing matters, including applications from taxi drivers. It is one of the most rewarding committees, because members have the opportunity to speak directly with applicants, understand their circumstances, and consider the challenges they face.

I also attend many of the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees as a Cornwall Councillor, even where I am not a formal committee member. This allows me to ask questions, raise concerns, and better understand the wider issues affecting Cornwall.

## **Working for Residents**

I am in County Hall at least once a week, and often more frequently. While some meetings can be attended remotely, I believe that for the main scrutiny committees and strategic planning matters, being present in person is important.

Residents regularly raise issues with me, and I log these through Cornwall Council's Casework Assist system. This allows councillors to provide a detailed explanation of the issue and, where necessary, escalate matters through the Council. The system aims to provide a response within 10 working days, and I have been impressed by the way it is managed.

## **Torpoint Library**

I was proud to hear the Portfolio Holder, Hilary Frank, speak positively at Full Council about the achievements of Torpoint Library, particularly its work supporting Afghan refugees who supported our Armed Forces.

The service provided by the library staff and volunteers is exemplary. I often work from the library and see first-hand the professionalism, care, and commitment shown every day.

Torpoint Library is far more than a place to borrow books. It supports children, families, community groups, learning, social connection, and residents who need help accessing services. It is a small but highly active community hub, and it reflects the best of Torpoint.

## **Thanckes Park Car Park**

The proposed introduction of car parking charges at Thanckes remains a significant local concern.

I have written to the Portfolio Holder, Dan Rogerson, placing on record the agreed actions from our meeting. At present, there is no confirmed programme for progressing this work, and I will continue to work closely with the Portfolio Holder to ensure residents' concerns are heard.

An annual review is expected to take place to decide whether pay-per-stay arrangements should continue for a second year.

## **Tamar Crossings**

As both a resident of Cornwall and a member of the Tamar Crossings Joint Committee, I share the frustration felt by many when ferry availability is reduced, particularly when the service drops to one ferry due to defects or two ferries during peak periods.

The Tamar Crossings Joint Committee meets every three months, and I attend as a committee member.

I did not agree with the proposal to increase the monthly management fee for TAG users and formally made my position clear to the Joint Chairs of the Committee. The outcome of the public consultation is awaited.

A letter has also been sent to Government requesting annual funding of £499,000 to support the operating and maintenance costs of Tamar Crossings. A response from the Minister is still awaited.

I believe our MPs must continue to press the case for Tamar Crossings to be taken under Government control. I welcome the fact that our MP, Anna Gelderd, has raised the issue in Parliament. The Labour MPs covering Plymouth, South East Cornwall, and St Austell and Newquay now need to continue pressing this matter with Government.

A presentation by the Tamar Action Group has also taken place with the Shadow Minister, who has indicated that he intends to visit the area in the near future.

## **Ferry Decarbonisation and Future Costs**

Under the finance and capital programme discussions, I raised concerns about whether decarbonising a ferry between 2027 and 2029 represents the right financial decision at this time.

My concern is that this could increase debt by around £3 million, reduce operations to two ferries for a prolonged period, and lead to higher debt repayments. That, in turn, could place further upward pressure on tolls.

Similar concerns apply to the introduction of ANPR, although it is understood that those costs may be recovered over time.

A study and options analysis is currently being developed regarding the future of the ferry service. The preferred option at present appears to be a battery-powered ferry charged from shore.

## **Street Lighting**

Street lighting remains an emotive issue, and rightly so.

A recent press article highlighted significant safety concerns arising from Cornwall Council's assessment of switching off street lighting as part of its decarbonisation project. The Council's own Decision Wheel assessment was rated RED, which should have triggered appropriate mitigation measures.

This information came to light through a Freedom of Information request. I have now written to Cornwall Council requesting all relevant documents and further information so that these can be properly analysed.

This evidence may help support a stronger case for reinstating street lighting where it is needed.

I will also be issuing a survey to Torpoint residents seeking their views on the street lighting switch-off. The results will be compiled into a report and used as evidence to argue for street lighting to be turned back on in areas where residents believe it is necessary for safety and security.

## **Torpoint Community College and YMCA**

It was disappointing to learn that the YMCA is withdrawing from Torpoint due to financial pressures. However, it was encouraging to hear from YMCA Plymouth that Torpoint Community College has been proactive in supporting the withdrawal process.

I understand that handover of the facility and termination of the lease may take place shortly.

I look forward to seeing the facility reopened to the community under a new operating model, although details of that model have yet to be announced by the College. Torpoint Town Council is currently working with the College on a potential operating model, and the outcome is awaited.

## **Potential Funding Routes**

Following several meetings at Cornwall Council, potential funding routes are being identified and will be passed to the College for consideration.

As part of the Together for Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, chaired by Cllr Kate Ewert, I have asked for a copy of the future SEND review programme requested by

Government. This strategy document is due to be submitted to Government by 19 June, and I look forward to reviewing the outcome.

A further possible funding route may relate to defence investment, particularly given the £4.4 billion earmarked for Plymouth over the next 10 years. There may be opportunities for the College to explore whether some of this investment can support skills, training, and community facilities linked to defence and the wider local economy.

## **Mount Edgumbe House and Country Park**

For another year, Mount Edgumbe House and Country Park has featured among the top 10% of travellers' favourite businesses worldwide, based on reviews and ratings collected over 12 months.

This is a significant achievement and a credit to all the staff and volunteers who support the Country Park.

If you have not visited recently, I would strongly recommend doing so. Buildings have been restored, the history is increasingly visible, and the park continues to be one of the most important heritage and green spaces in our area.

### **Current and Future Investment**

A number of important projects are now moving forward.

The Garden Battery works are due to begin in June, with a design team and contractor selected through procurement. This £960,000 project forms part of the New Horizons National Marine Park project and is fully funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Garden Battery, unused since the war, will provide free access and act as a heritage hub, telling the story of Mount Edgumbe's important role in protecting the Sound. Works are expected to begin in June and end in October.

The Higher Level Stewardship application is currently with the Rural Payments Agency for consideration. If approved, it will provide around £75,000 per year in revenue for the Park. A larger capital works grant is also expected to follow, helping restore many of the Park's landscape features. This could include Victorian-style fencing in the formal areas, improved access and interpretation at Penlee Battery, formal tree planting, and restoration of historic vistas.

A Woodland Grant Scheme is also being prepared, which would support woodland management across the Park for the next decade and could bring in around £20,000 in revenue. This scheme is expected to be submitted to the Forestry Commission in June.

Funding has also been received from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Conservation Management Plan, worth approximately £70,000. A consultant is expected to be procured this summer.

Work inside English Garden House continues, directed by Historic England and the conservation architect. This follows a £320,000 grant from DEFRA, National Landscapes,

Historic England, and the Friends of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park for replacement of the roof. This year, work is also taking place to restore the fire station doors.

The Park historically costs around £1 million per year to operate. Last year, it cost each council only £50,000, with the rest raised through other sources. That is a relatively small contribution for one of the largest and most important country parks in the UK.

## Looking Ahead

My priority remains clear: to represent Torpoint, support residents, challenge poor decisions, and ensure that Cornwall Council delivers value for money for the whole of Cornwall while protecting essential frontline services.

That means continuing to focus on issues that matter locally, including the ferry service, street lighting, parking, community facilities, youth provision, SEND, and support for older residents.

It also means continuing to scrutinise Cornwall Council's finances, capital programme, performance, and governance arrangements to ensure residents are properly served.

**St James Church** The strategy to address the long-term parking issues have been agreed and implementation will take place this year

**Bellview Square** I am now pressurising the Council to resolve this issue with Wildernet as a matter of urgency. Having such a Health and Safety issue going for such a protracted period is unacceptable.

**Cemetery Water** I have contacted Cormac about this long standing issue from before my time and I am pressing the organisation to develop a cost effective solution that will reinstate water supplies.

Thank you to everyone who has contacted me, raised concerns, provided evidence, or offered support during my first year as your Cornwall Councillor.

I will continue to work hard for Torpoint and to ensure our town's voice, and that of South East Cornwall, is heard at Cornwall Council.

Cllr Robert Parsonage  
Cornwall Councillor for Torpoint