

Torbay Citizens Assembly: Health Focus Report

From the Open Meeting on
September 26th 2025





Contents

- Introduction2**
- Engaging Communities South West2
- Background 3**
- Torbay Citizens Assembly3
- Assembly Open Meeting Details3
- Summary of Presentations 4**
- Workshop Findings 5**
- Workshop 1: Identify 3 things that keep you happy and healthy 5
- Workshop 2: Suggestions for Decision Makers..... 6
- Event Summary and Video Link.....7**
- Contact us 8**

Introduction



Engaging Communities South West

Engaging Communities South West (ECSW) is a not-for-profit organisation offering a range of services, including community voice, facilitation of engagement events, data capture and analysis, report writing, communications support, training and service/project evaluation and review.

We hosted an open meeting of the Torbay Citizens Assembly on Friday 26th September 2025 at Paignton Library and created this summary report of the event.



Background

Torbay Citizens Assembly

The Torbay Citizens' Assembly Vision is to provide an independent platform for residents to voice their interests and concerns, achieving change, and making Torbay the best place it can be to grow older.



The Assembly aims to:

- Identify age-relevant issues, develop plans to address them, and act upon those plans.
- Liaise with other organisations as an inclusive, independent, non-party political forum.
- Promote policies and practices that benefit residents and ensure that the views of our members are paramount.
- Keep members informed of proposed changes, drawing upon their knowledge and experience of Torbay, and encourage their active involvement in consultations.
- Challenge ageism whilst raising awareness of and promoting positive aspects of ageing and valuing people as constructive and contributory members of the community of all ages.
- Drive and support actions which support and sustain Torbay's Age Friendly status and the domains of specific interest to the membership.

Everyone who is a resident in Torbay is welcome. The Assembly also has Associate Membership (non-voting) from organisations including Torbay Council, Public Health, Healthwatch Torbay, Torbay Communities, Age UK Torbay, and Engaging Communities South West, who value and support residents of Torbay. Membership is extended to include other neighbouring communities and is free to all people qualified to join.

The Assembly is run by its members supported by the Associate Organisations. Each quarter, it holds an open meeting for all, with an agenda focusing on Health, Housing, or Transport. These are the key areas which members chose to focus on for 2025 and align with some of the themes which are part of Torbay's Age Friendly status.

Assembly Open Meeting Details

The Assembly Open Meeting was held on Friday, 26th September 2025, at Paignton Library. The event's goal was to gain a deeper understanding of Assembly Members' approach to keeping themselves healthy now and in the future.

The meeting was welcomed by Pat Teague and included presentations from five key speakers.



Summary of Presentations

The meeting featured five speakers who presented on various aspects of health and wellbeing in Torbay and South Devon.

Speaker	Topic	Summary
Dr Kevin Dixon (Chair of Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay)	The Three Shifts in the NHS 10 Year Plan	This presentation outlined the urgent challenges facing coastal communities like Torbay, including poor housing, an ageing population, and widening health inequalities. It outlined the three transformative shifts in the NHS 10yr Plan: moving care into communities, leveraging technology for self-care, and prioritising prevention over treatment. Coastal areas should be used to pilot solutions for a more resilient future.
Julia Chisnell (Consultant in Public Health with Torbay Council)	The South Devon Healthy Ageing Partnership	This collaborative initiative aims to shift the narrative around ageing, promoting dignity, independence, and respect. It focuses on developing age-friendly policies, preventing or delaying frailty, and improving care pathways. Key priorities for 2025–26 are enhancing falls prevention and enabling accessible, inclusive health and care services.
Jo Curtis (Senior Locality Commissioning Specialist, NHS Devon Integrated Care Board)	Neighbourhood Health in South Devon Local Care Partnership	This initiative aims to improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities by delivering integrated, person-centred care through tailored neighbourhood teams. These teams, comprising professionals from health, social care, and the voluntary sector, address both medical and social needs, especially for vulnerable and ageing populations. The programme focuses on shifting care into communities.
Simon Culley (Communications Lead for Engaging Communities South West and Digital Health Devon Lead)	Welcome to digital health – simple tools for your health and wellbeing	Digital Health Devon is a free, not-for-profit service promoting the use of digital tools like the NHS App for booking GP appointments, accessing NHS 111 Online, and finding trusted health information. The service offers in-person support at the Paignton Community Hub and online resources. The NHS App is highlighted as the future main gateway to healthcare, offering a secure, unified health record.
Sarah Lonton (Operational Lead for Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay)	How are we doing things differently in Torbay?	The Paignton Community Hub initiative was highlighted as a community-driven approach to health and wellbeing. The hubs provide services such as health screenings, vaccination clinics, digital inclusion training, and mental health support, with future plans to expand screening and outreach.



Workshop Findings

Two workshops were held during the meeting to gather feedback from Assembly Members.

Workshop 1: Identify 3 things that keep you happy and healthy

Participants identified the following key areas contributing to their health and wellbeing:

- **Physical Activity:** Regularly being active was key. Examples included walking (solo, group, and dog walks, e.g., Paignton–Brixham walks and Bay Walks group), gym/classes (e.g., the NHS 24-week strength and balance programme), swimming, dancing, gardening, and simply getting fresh air or being in nature.
- **Social Connections:** Social engagement was vital for combating isolation. This included attending classes, volunteering (which provided a sense of purpose, e.g., Orchard Forest School), maintaining variety in activities (rugby, cinema, creative groups), and even everyday interactions like chatting in the supermarket or using public transport. Owning a pet was also noted as beneficial for company and connection.
- **Mental Agility:** Keeping the mind active was seen as a way of supporting health and longevity. Activities mentioned included learning languages, reading, puzzles, tablet games, mahjong, and family history research.
- **Creativity:** Creative engagement fostered a sense of fulfilment through activities such as playing musical instruments, singing/choir, knitting/sewing, stained glass, and flower arranging.



Workshop 2: Suggestions for Decision Makers

Assembly Members provided suggestions on what providers can do to help them keep happier and healthier in Torbay in the future.

Theme	Key Suggestions Reported
Communication	Provide clear, plain-language information; consult before decisions are made; ask specific, non-vague questions; offer phone helplines for support; and use multiple channels beyond websites (e.g., libraries, banks, post offices).
Trust	Avoid repetitive surveys to combat apathy; ensure people feel heard; and provide feedback on whether opinions have influenced decisions.
GP Access	Face-to-face consultations are considered crucial; there is a need to standardise access across surgeries; improve ease of booking; ensure crisis help is available; and improve the reliability of GP call-back systems. Post-Covid access issues were noted.
Transport/Services Closer	Bring more NHS services closer to communities as transport is an issue. Specifically, improve transport links, including direct buses to Exeter Hospital.
Continuity of Care	Seeing the same clinician is important to build trust and efficiency. Services should be delivered by skilled professionals, and hospital and GP systems should be integrated.
Waiting Lists	Waiting lists for some services are lengthy (up to 18 months). The new Torquay diagnostic centre and extended opening hours were welcomed for accommodating working people.
Community Hubs	The Paignton Community Hub is valued, and it was suggested that a hub is needed in each town (Paignton, Torquay, and Brixham) due to transport issues. Privacy for groups and vaccinations in public spaces must be considered.
Minor Injuries Units	The location of Minor Injuries Units should be considered, with better bus links, especially from Brixham.
Preventative Services	More preventative and enabling care, including education, is needed.



Event Summary and Video Link

The Citizens Assembly Open Meeting on 26th September 2025 successfully brought together residents and health leaders to focus on local health and wellbeing.

The event highlighted key strategic shifts needed in the region, such as moving care into communities and leveraging digital tools, while also capturing valuable, practical feedback from members.

The workshops provided a clear view of what keeps residents healthy (activity and social connection) and detailed, actionable suggestions for decision-makers across key areas like communication, GP access, and community services.

A video recording of the day is available here:

[Video of the Torbay Citizens Assembly Open Meeting.](#)





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