

## **Minutes of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board**

**27 January 2025**

**-: Present :-**

Councillor Fellows (Chairman)

Councillors Law, Nicolaou, Tolchard and Twelves (Vice-Chair)

Voting Co-opted Member

Jo Hunter, Church of England Diocesan

Non-voting Co-opted Members

Tanny Stobbart, Play Torbay

Miranda Pusey, Devon and Cornwall Police (virtually)

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye, Harvey, Chris Lewis, Long (virtually), David Thomas and Virdee)

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### **30. Opening**

The meeting was opened with a minute's silence to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. Today marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Soviet Allied forces.

### **31. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Mike Cook (Non-voting Co-opted Member) and Hayley Costar (Non-voting Co-opted Member, who was represented by Miranda Pusey).

### **32. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Board held on 18 November 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **33. Councillor Call to Action - St Margarets and Spires Hearing Unit Closures**

In accordance with Standing Order D13, Councillor George Darling outlined his reasons for submitting a Councillor Call for Action in respect of the St Margarets and Spires Hearing Unit Closures, which included concerns over the consultation and engagement process, evidence and data used to inform the decision and impact on sustainable staffing etc. Councillor Darling had also circulated to Members of the

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Sub-Board two letters from St Margarets and a letter from Spires, which were not part of the discussions for the meeting but would need to be considered alongside any officer report.

The Sub-Board had to determine whether or not to request officers to prepare a full report on the matter. Members were advised that the decision was an officer decision and not a Cabinet decision and that the decision could not be changed as a result of a report being presented to the Sub-Board and would still be implemented from September 2025.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Director of Children's Services be requested to prepare a full report on the service changes at the St Margarets and Spires Hearing Units and submit it to a future meeting of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board, with key lines of enquiry to include:

1. please provide details of the consultation that took place in the formative stage prior to the decision being made by the Council;
2. what were the results of this consultation for Torbay children with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) carried out by the Council and did it change the proposed decision taken forward?;
3. please provide details of any consultation which took place following this decision being made public and any action taken as a result;
4. what alternative options were proposed to Torbay parents for their child's Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision if they did not agree with the Council's proposed EHCP delivery from September? Where would the nearest Hearing Impairment Units be if they wished their child to attend a dedicated Hearing Impairment Unit?;
5. did the local authority consider the impact of this decision beyond children under their statutory care with an EHCP?;
6. how many children from Torbay are currently receiving some form of support from the hearing unit both with and without an EHCP, and how are these predicted to change over the coming 5 years?;
7. what assurance can be provided that future needs of all children in Torbay who need support with their hearing, including those with an EHCP and those without and an EHCP, will continue to be reviewed and met?;
8. was any external advice or support sought on the proposal, if so who from and how did this inform the process?;
9. why was the option to reduce the size of the units further or to close one and move the support to a single unit not considered as alternative options?;

10. what lessons have been learned from this process?; and
11. contextual information about the framework for SEND how it is structured and funded, what will change as a result of the decision and how can the voice of the child can be included; and

That, in light of the letters received from St Margarets and Spires, the Democratic Services Officer be requested to arrange a briefing with Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board to discuss the issues of concern and finalise the key lines of enquiry to inform the officer's report.

#### **34. Update on UNICEF work to be a Child Friendly Torbay**

The Cabinet Member for Children, Councillor Bye and the Head of Business Support, Lisa Chittenden outlined the submitted report which provided an update on the UNICEF work to be a Child Friendly Torbay and responded to questions.

The Sub-Board asked questions in relation to what was the consultation response; did consultation go out to schools and youth groups; an additional Project Manager had been appointed for twelve months when the project was three to five years, what was the reason for this; would there be training for Councillors as well as staff; when was the Discovery Day due to take place; and how were the voluntary sector involved in this work.

In response to questions around consultation, Members were advised that work had taken place with Participation Officers through various existing events and activities and there were over 100 children and young people involved. The online workforce survey achieved 80 to 90 responses and the online survey for children and young people was around 20 to 25. It was intended that the Discovery Day would be the main consultation and engagement activity to reach as many people as possible. The consultation had been shared with schools but had taken place during the summer. Schools would be invited to attend the Discovery Day (a written response would be provided on who from schools would be invited e.g. staff and children).

It was noted that the additional Project Manager had been funded in year from within the existing Children's Services budget and that the post had been included in the base budget for 2025/2026 which was still going through the authorisation process.

Members were informed that there was specific training that UNICEF offer to Councillors and all Councillors were encouraged to attend this session.

The Sub-Board was advised that a voluntary sector representative sits on the Project Board and was involved in the planning of the Discovery Day and will also sit on the Project Team. It was acknowledged that more needed to be done to widen the reach to the voluntary sector.

Members requested the next update on UNICEF Child Friendly Torbay include a timeline for the project.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board notes the update and the progress made to date on the UNICEF work to be a Child Friendly Torbay; and
2. that all Councillors be encouraged to attend the training and the Discovery Day and encourage as many people as possible to attend the Discovery Day to support the UNICEF Child Friendly Programme and help the Council to achieve our 'recognition' status.

**35. Adopt South West Annual Report 2023/2024**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye and the Divisional Director for Children's Safeguarding, Becky Thompson outlined the submitted Adopt South West Annual report for 2023/2024. The report highlighted the progress made during 2023/2024 as well as the ongoing issues in recruiting and attracting adopters and what was being done to address that.

The Sub-Board asked questions in relation to the 3113 co-ordinated exchanges between the birth and adoptive families throughout the year and if this was the same people or how many children this involved; and was the Think Again Scheme tracked.

In response to questions around contacts these were for 453 children across the region. Members were advised that inclusion of birth parents was embedded within the training for adoptive parents and adoptive families so that they understood the importance. Good progress had been made in this area.

Members were advised that the Think Again Scheme was tracked and work was done as part of the keeping in touch process and encouraging people to rethink who they may want to adopt once they had been approved. Focus was being done around older boys and children with additional needs with people who had existing approvals to look at the needs and skills to help the young people, which had contributed towards the 91.3% of children placed with adopters approved by Adopt South West.

Members welcomed the positive impact that Cornwall joining Adopt South West (Regional Adoption Agency) and the increase in the number of children being placed within the region compared to previous years.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board note the report as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report; and
2. that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the contents of the Adopt South West Annual Report 2023-24 as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report.

**36. Youth Justice**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye and the Youth Justice Service Manager, Jon Ralph outlined the submitted report on the progress made in

implementing the Youth Justice Service Improvement Plan and responded to questions.

Members asked questions in relation to where the Child Centred Policing Team would be based and how many people would be in the Team; the report mentioned deep dives and audits were the green areas the same for both areas; how was the Team seeing the impact of the audits and how were they helping and would they improve performance; what feedback had been received from young people on the new Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) worker; and were young people willing to engage with the CAMHS worker.

Miranda Pusey, Devon and Cornwall Police advise that the new Child Centred Policing Team was currently in the design phase and would include an additional Sargeant and investigators who were specialists in youth crime, young engagement and missing persons. It would be a relatively large Team and would be fully supported by the Executive of the Force. They would be part of the Neighbourhood Teams and would likely be based in Torquay but cover the whole of Torbay.

Members were advised that the green areas for the deep dives and audits were different. Assurance was given that the Youth Justice Board had a strategic grip on performance but the building had still not been resolved, although the finances had now been agreed and the details were due to be finalised over the next few months. Funding for the prevention service has been resolved for 2025-26, and first time entrant rates were much better but not better than national averages. Reoffending rates were difficult as this looked at young people reoffending after a year of finishing with the service and was then monitored for a following two years, with a very small case load which then skewed the figures.

In response to questions around CAMHS, Members were advised that feedback from young people was very positive with nearly 90% saying it was good or excellent. The challenge was how long they work with the young person and it was felt it should be longer, however, this was impacted by resources particularly around prevention and closing cases. Engagement was a gradual process and the Team was supporting young people to overcome barriers to accessing help and understanding the impact.

The Sub-Board noted the contents of the submitted report and requested a copy of the After Action Review to be circulated to them once it was available.

### **37. Exploitation and Children Missing**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye and the Exploitation Team Manager, Katie Buckley outlined the submitted paper which provided an update on exploitation and children missing and responded to questions.

Members asked questions in relation to what involvement do people working with young people have on the Contextual Safeguarding Working Party; there had been a fall in exploitation, was there a narrative around the spike; were people tracked once they had been released from prison; does Torbay have a big problem with modern slavery; there had been a drop in referrals, was there a way of streamlining the

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process; were exploiters becoming aware of process and adapting their approach; and when was Ofsted expected to inspect this area.

The Sub-Board was informed that a range of core statutory partners, including those working with young people, were involved in the Contextual Safeguarding Working Party and Sub-Groups working on various strands, with a Senior Officer from Probation Chairing the Working Party. This included looking at children and young people and targeting some care experienced young people who were at risk but were no longer at risk and looking at getting involved. They would look at what does good look like, to know when to offer support and when not to overwhelm young people.

In response to the spike in exploitation, 2024 saw a few peer groups coming in and escalating quickly with young people missing, substance misuse and other safeguarding concerns. All the young people were assessed at the same time which caused the spike. There was training that goes out to all providers and multi-agencies, which was well attended and sometimes this could also cause a spike as people become more aware of what to report.

Members were advised that people who were released from prison were tracked through the Probation Service and have protection orders against them. Probation colleagues were now part of the MACE (Multi-Agency Child Exploitation) Forum. Communication had improved beyond what a lot of other local authorities had been able to achieve as a result. Contextual safeguarding and online safety were key issues.

Members were informed that there were not high numbers of young people subject to modern slavery in Torbay but when referrals were made decisions were made quickly. Such referrals did not come with additional support and were the responsibility of the Safeguarding Teams, modern slavery support only kicked in when a person was 18 years old. It was important to ensure the right referrals were made for children.

It was noted that referrals completed online included drop down menus to the relevant toolkits so that they could all be completed at the same time as part of the referral. This was trying to be streamlined future as there was a need to ensure that the right toolkits were being updated for each young person.

Members were informed that through local information sharing the Council was getting better at tracking locally adults who were exploiting networks or groups of children. This was more difficult nationally as the national crime groups have resources to move to a different area at very short notice.

Members were advised that the Council was expecting a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) inspection at the end of February/early March which would impact on when other inspections were carried out. The Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILAC) last took place in March 2022 and could happen at any time and Torbay was also on the next cycle for the HM Inspectorate of Probation's inspection for the Youth Justice Service.

The Sub-Board welcomed the work with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

Members noted the contents of the submitted report and that a Safeguarding Conference was being held on 28 January 2025, the Clerk circulated a link to the livestream to all Councillors and invited them to watch. It was suggested that all Councillors should be invited to future conferences.

**38. Our Promise to You - The Torbay Pledge to cared for and care experienced children/young people**

Bethany Dallow, Care Experienced Young Person provided feedback on behalf of herself and other care experienced young people, who had provided feedback through the Children in Care Council on the Cared for Pledge as set out in the revised presentation. 86% had not heard of the Pledge and 14% did not know what it was. 44% of Council staff had heard about the Pledge. This highlighted the need for more communications, more training and better engagement to raise awareness and embed any revised Pledge. The main priorities of the Pledge were:

- Honesty – it was felt that young people get lied to a lot, people tell them things will change and promise to do things but do not follow through. We should not promise to do things unless we can 100% follow through. Young people should be told the truth and information where appropriate given their age. If young people were to trust the Pledge they need to be sure that they were listened to and being prioritised. It was not fair to be told one thing and something else happens.
- Safety – this was created through a nurtured space where young people were more likely to open up and engage. Done in a space that was welcoming and comforting. There was a risk that without trust and safety young people would not want to open up with social workers or other responsible adults when something goes wrong.
- Support on young people's terms – do not organise meetings without consulting the young person. Cared for and care experience young people have no control over themselves, they feel that someone else owns them, a stranger who was available 9 am to 5 pm. They need to feel that they have control over themselves as children and adults. Support givers need to recognise that there were times when a young person does not want to receive support. It should be person centred care and not one size fits all. Lots of young people have a history that they would not want known about them before they meet a social worker. They want to tell their story themselves and want to be asked about it themselves.

The following was identified by young people on how to raise awareness of the Pledge:

- they would rather be informed about the Pledge from a trusted person – social worker, teacher, parent, carer; and
- they would rather be told about it through school by teachers and the Pledge should be posted on community boards or be given out as flyers as schools.

Participation Officers, Sarah Evans and Alex Diviney attended the meeting and helped respond to questions.

Members discussed the feedback from the 7 members of the Council in Care Council. It was noted that they represented older children with the youngest being 11 years old. They highlighted a real need for mutual respect.

It was noted that the original Pledge had been written by cared for and care experienced young people with the intention of it being given out to children when they came into care, but that the needs of young people changes very quickly. It was intended to show the Council what the young people wanted from us, as we want to know how we can be the best for them. It was acknowledged that there was a need whenever staff come into the Council that their role as a corporate parent is included in their induction as every officer in the Council is a corporate parent. An example was given of a report from North Tyneside where every person in the Council and some agencies had their responsibility as a corporate parent added to their job description.

Members were disappointed that the Pledge was not more widely known and recognised the need for a review and refresh of the Pledge to make it work for the young people. Wider communication and roll out would be needed to embed the revised Pledge and enable the Council to monitor its impact.

It was also acknowledged that there was a need to make the Pledge meaningful to people and not just a piece of paper, it would mean something different to every child and young person. The key part going forward as part of the implementation was how we make the Pledge and social contract (consider rewording from promise, following feedback) turn into reality for the children and young people.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that Beth Dallow be thanked for attending the meeting and sharing her views and the views of other care experienced young people on the review of Our Promise to You - The Torbay Pledge to cared for and care experienced children/young people and that Beth be welcome to attend future meetings;
2. that Councillor Twelves as Strand Lead for Participation meet with Beth Dallow and other young people to help understand their views and champion this through the Corporate Parenting Board;
3. that the revised Our Promise to You - The Torbay Pledge to cared for and care experienced children/young people be presented to a future meeting of the Board so that Members can be assured that it has been updated to reflect the views of young people and how it will be communicated and rolled out; and
4. that in light of the importance of the role the Director of Corporate Services be requested to include responsibility as Corporate Parents in all staff job descriptions and as part of their annual appraisal to demonstrate what staff are doing to support our cared for and care experience young people.



**39. Virtual School Annual Report 2023/2024**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye and the Head of the Virtual School, Dan Hamer outlined the Virtual School Annual report for 2023/2024 and responded to questions.

Members discussed how had the Virtual School managed around social worker and kinship care to meet the data requirements for the new extended duties. Members were informed that the Vulnerable Pupils Team was already doing a lot of work looking at children missing out on education and those at risk of suspension or exclusion. The Team was recruiting new staff following two vacancies. They were working with schools to try change and modify the behaviour of adults in schools that had led to suspension and exclusion. There was a trauma informed project working with South Devon College working in a wider context with young people who have a social worker, some of whom would be impacted by changes in social care or change in parental consent.

It was noted that the Government had acknowledge that the new extended duties would imply new burdens, but that it was not expected that the Government would put any penalties on parents who do not tell the local authority that their children were not on a school register.

It was noted that the Annual Report would be presented to all Councillors at the Council meeting on 6 February 2025 in their role as corporate parents.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board endorses the Virtual School Annual report for 2023/2024.

**40. Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board Action Tracker**

The Democratic Services Team Leader, Teresa Buckley advised that she had met with Rebecca Rushton, Alex Diviney and Sarah Evans Participation Officers/Leads to discuss the best way of getting young people engaged in the meetings of the Sub-Board. It was suggested that this may be different people depending on the topic e.g. representatives from the Children in Care Council, SEND Youth Forum or Young Person's Panel. It was suggested that Teresa Buckley should liaise with the Participation Officers on the topics coming up and which ones would be most appropriate for young people to come along and engage and participate in meetings. In light of this it was recommended to amend the Membership of the Sub-Board two remove the two young people and enable a more flexible approach to participation.

Members discussed different options for engaging with young people through the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board and were encouraged to attend an event on 7 February 2025 with young people.

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Resolved (unanimously):

1. that Council be recommended that the Membership of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board be amended to remove the Care Experienced young person and Young Person Panel Non-Voting Co-opted Member representatives from the Board but request that the Democratic Services Team Leader to work with the Participation Officers to invite representatives from the Children in Care Council, SEND Youth Forum or Young Person's Panel to participate in meetings where there are specific areas of interest to them so as to hear the voice of the children and young people at the meetings;
2. that Councillor Nicolaou send an invite to Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board for the event with young people on 7 February 2025; and
3. that Members of the Sub-Board identify other groups that would want to be involved and come along to meetings of the Sub-Board and report back to a future meeting.

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Chairwoman