

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

10 March 2025

-: Present :-

Councillor Law (Chairwoman)

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

Voting Co-opted Member

Jo Hunter (virtually)

Non-voting Co-opted Members

Tanny Stobbart, Play Torbay

Mike Cook, Voluntary and Community Sector and Alternative Provider (Education)

(Also in attendance: Councillor Bye)

41. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Laura Colman (Parent Governor, Voting Co-opted Member) and Hayley Costar (Non-Voting Co-opted Member).

42. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Board held on 27 January 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairwoman.

43. Urgent Items

The Sub-Board considered the item in Minute 44, and not included on the agenda, the Chairwoman being of the opinion that it was urgent by reason of special circumstances i.e. the matter having arisen since the agenda was prepared and it was unreasonable to delay a decision until the next meeting.

44. Report of the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group

Councillor Twelves presented the submitted report from the meeting of the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group held on 18 February 2025. Performance continued to be strong and the Group heard lots of good news stories. Cornwall Council had proved to be a good partner since joining the Group in 2023.

It was noted that the Members of the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group were the Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services, Councillor Law and the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Councillor Long.

Members endorsed the report of the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group.

45. Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI)

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye, the Divisional Director for Learning and Partnership Hubs, Rachel Setter, and the Head of Safeguarding NHS Devon, Michelle Thornberry outlined the submitted report which provided an update on the implementation of the action plan arising from the Joint Targeted Area Inspection held in November 2023 and responded to questions.

The Sub-Board asked questions in relation to action 4 referred to 'no data from the Police yet' then 'now SafeLives DV data in its place', what was the current position regarding data from the Police and the timescales for the data being provided (a written response would be provided); action 6.2 referred to child and adolescent mental health (CAMHS) waiting lists would be cleared to under 18 weeks by Summer 2025, how significantly under 18 weeks would that be (a written response would be provided to this) and what ambitions were there to reduce waiting times for the CAMHS further; there were currently 682 children on the CAMHS waiting list for first assessment, how likely would NHS Devon meet the 18 week target by June 2025 (a written response would be provided); last time a Mental Health Sub-Group was being formed, this did not show on the structure chart, what progress had been made on establishing this Group; and did the Mental Health Summit take place in January 2025 and how did it feed into the Sub-Group.

In response to questions around CAMHS, Members were advised that as part of the new reforms over the next year there would be new data provided which would include both Police and health data specific to Torbay. This would include information on young people attending Accident and Emergency Departments, self-harming and safeguarding issues. It would be implemented during 2025 and would be used to report back to the Department for Education (DfE) to show the impact on children and level of CAMHS. Members welcomed the new reforms and requested that an update be presented to a future meeting so that they could understand the implications.

Members were informed that the Mental Health Summit did take place in January 2025 and a multi-agency action group was being established to pull together the actions arising from the Summit. There had not been a Torbay Safeguarding Children's Partnership Mental Health Sub-Group established, however, Su Smart, NHS Devon was Chairing an Emotional Wellbeing Sub-Group.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board welcomes the progress made in implementing the Joint Targeted Area Inspection Action Plan and acknowledges the actions still to be taken; and
2. that an update on the Children's Reforms is presented to a future meeting of the Sub-Board.

46. Schools Capital Programme Review

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye, and the Head of Education and Corporate Services Schools Capital, Clare Talbot, presented the submitted report which provided an update on the Schools Capital Programme and Torbay Schools Private Financial Initiative (PFI) and responded to questions.

It was noted that the STEPs provision run by Paignton Academy (part of the Thinking Schools Academy Trust) was an enhanced resource provision catering for secondary pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) and was the only one of that type of provision in Torbay. This provision was not specific for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and there were two providers of ASD, namely The Harbour and provision within The Spires.

The Sub-Board asked questions in relation to services moving out of Great Parks Community Centre and if they would be moving back in later in the year; how long the land at Inglewood could be held under the Section 106 Legal Agreement; had the delay in finalising the new accommodation at St Michaels Academy impacted on the expected intake numbers; the YMCA had an allocated portion from the Higher Needs Block, was this due to them accommodating large numbers of young people for alternative education provision and had this been offered to other providers; the Locality Pilot sought invitations to increase special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision, how many applications had been received; and there had been delays securing information from the provider for the PFI, did the surveys get completed within the February half term.

In response to questions around Great Parks Community Centre, Members were advised that there was a 12 month pilot, similar to the locality based way of working, with some secondary schools to support non-exclusions working with the Thinking Schools Academy Trust. It would be them who would be using the Great Parks Community Centre in order to have the capacity to work with the number of people proposed.

Members were informed of the ongoing negotiations in respect of the Inglewood Site and Section 106 Legal Agreement. This included timing and if the land could be termed for education use rather than a Primary School to make options more flexible for its future use. It was noted that the agreement must be secured by May 2025.

Members noted that Primary School numbers had dropped but St Michaels Academy still remained a school of choice with 15 to 20 children per year group in order to manage numbers whilst they were still in temporary accommodation.

The Sub-Board was advised that there was an existing agreement with the YMCA to help fund some of their projects, with a number of surveys being carried out on the building. The YMCA also delivered SEND provision for early years. There was a current procurement exercise being undertaken looking at education other than at school (EOTS) with a view to developing a framework rather than spot purchasing places.

It was noted that 7 applications had been received so far for the Locality SEND Fund, the closing date was 28 March 2025 and it was anticipated that more applications would be received by that date.

Members were informed that the Surveyor for the PFI was on site in the February half term but due to a delay in getting some information and scale they would have to come back for two days in the Easter Holidays to complete the work. This would not delay the completion of the Survey Condition Report.

The Sub-Board noted the contents of the submitted report.

47. Update on Local Government Association Peer Review of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye, the Head of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities & Inclusion (SEND), Hannah Baker, and the Director of Women and Children's Improvement NHS Devon, Su Smart outlined the submitted report which provided an update on the implementation of the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review of SEND, and responded to questions. The Director of Children's Services, Nancy Meehan and the Divisional Director for Learning and Partnership Hubs, Rachel Setter, also attended the meeting and responded to questions.

Members were advised that action 7 recommended that 'the Council needs to assure itself that it is compliant with the Code of Practice and relevant caselaw around its statutory processes' this was taken from a dip sample of 16 out of 16000 cases and picked up as a result of one case going to tribunal. The Council had undertaken a further dip sample across all ages and was assured that it was compliant.

Members asked questions in relation to what SLAIP stood for (SEND Local Area Inclusion Partnership); concern over waiting lists (682 young people were currently on the waiting list for CAMHS), two or three years was a long time for a person to be on a waiting list and it was becoming more difficult to get an appointment with a GP, how many parents were not raising concerns at an early stage, how likely would Members be able to see a change, why was this still a challenge and when would families start to see a difference; were families on speech and language waiting lists given help whilst they were waiting for an appointment; how would older children in other settings benefit from the early years help that was being targeted through Primary Schools; what action was being taken to address schools not wanting to take excluded children under the Fair Access Protocol; does the Council understand why more parents were elected home educating their children; how were School Leaders responding to feedback; and three out of five secondary schools in Torbay had been judged as 'requiring improvement' by Ofsted, was there a common reason for this.

In response to questions around waiting lists, it was acknowledged that it was not good enough for children and young people to be waiting too long. Health waiting lists covered lots of areas e.g. mental health, autism etc. Lots of action was being taken by NHS Devon as well as investment and looking at what support parents and children could get whilst on waiting lists (e.g. Waiting Well and Neurodiversity Champions) to move away from only receiving support from diagnosis to needs led support. It was noted that this was not having as positive impact as NHS Devon

would like. There had been positive feedback through writing to every family on the waiting list for Autism support so they know what support was available and working with providers to give more information, it was suggested that lessons could be learned from this approach to see if it could be rolled out wider. The Council was working with 30 Primary Schools on a model which would see Speech Therapists linked with every Primary School from June, they would be able to provide support with observing children, strategies and looking at referrals and what support they could provide. SENDCOs had been trained with Language Enrichment Groups to provide a targeted intervention programme. As well as collaboratively working with health and education in a way not previously done before to help primary children with their speech and language, this linked to the Locality Model Pilot. 12 Primary Schools had early years within their schools which would help pick up problems with speech and language at an early stage as well as through the Family Hubs. NHS Devon plan to roll out support wider than the Locality Model Pilot Schools as part of a speech and language programme, but there was a need to make sure the approach was right for all the education settings. A lot of early intervention work was carried out as part of the 2 ½ year old checks looking at speech and language which would trigger a Section 23 notice. Early Talk Boost training had been rolled out to look at school readiness, working with Health and the Family Hubs. There was a need to increase the confidence of those working in early years settings to carry out the Early Talk Boost conversations to identify needs at an early stage and make appropriate referrals.

Members were advised that in response to action 9 in respect of children being out of school, there was a proposal from the Thinking Schools Academy Trust on a Secondary School based locality pilot to focus on preventative work to stop suspensions and exclusions and enable greater inclusion. The Director of Children's Services, Nancy Meehan, advised that an Education Leaders Group had been established comprising herself, the Chief Executive, Schools Forum, Torbay Association of Primary Schools (TASH) and Torbay Association of Secondary Headteachers (TASH) who were having challenging conversations about this topic as well as resetting with those schools who were sceptical about the Locality Model Pilot, with focus on an education strategy looking at the best outcomes for our children. It was noted that there were currently 547 children who were elected home educated with 54 children leaving schools this academic year. Extra resources had been put in place and this was being closely monitored by the Children's Strategic Quartet, which noted that a survey of 50 to 60 parents had highlighted the main reason was dissatisfaction with the School their child attended. The paper would be shared wider with the Local Education Board and Chairs of other Forums to look at how the Council and our Schools could do things differently. There was also concern over the potential lack of peer socialisation and isolation outside of the School setting. It was acknowledged that this was a National Issue and there were proposed changes as part of the Children's Bill, but Torbay was an outlier, with some Schools having more people leaving than others. There was approximately £2.5m not going into Torbay Schools as a result of children not attending Schools. School Standards were acknowledged and part of the reasons for three of the Schools being judged as 'requiring improvement' related to how they delivered education for those with SEND but that was not the only reason. The Sub-Board wished to monitor this area in more detail as part of its future Work Programme.

Tanny Stobbart provided an overview of a group of mums that had raised money to run a forest school for children who were not in school with support from Play Torbay. They had decided to establish themselves as a community and put in an application to carry out research with Exeter and Plymouth Universities to gain evidence on why people were choosing to elected home educate their children. They proposed to take the research to Parliament and were working with the two Local Members of Parliament who had agreed to support them. It was noted that there were colleagues in the voluntary sector who could work with children and parents to help them achieve better outcomes. Tanny to bring back the results of the research to a future meeting of the Sub-Board.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board welcomes the progress made in implementing the Local Government Association Torbay SEND Peer Challenge Action Plan and acknowledges the actions still to be taken;
2. that the Sub-Board reviews the reasons for children being elected home educated and what can be done to reduce the numbers, and the links to exclusions part of its Work Programme for 2025/2026; and
3. that the Sub-Board reviews the Secondary Schools standards as part of its Work Programme for 2025/2026.

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

The Sub-Board noted the contents of the submitted action tracker. The UNICEF Child Friendly training had been confirmed for 29 May 2025 2pm to 6pm, in person and the Corporate Parenting Board on that day was being moved to another date.

Councillor Twelves advised that she had passed her details to Beth but had not received a response. It was agreed that the Clerk, Teresa Buckley, would provide Councillor Twelves with the contact details for the Participation Leads so that she could make contact through them.

Councillor Nicolaou provided feedback on the event held on 7 February 2025 with young people. The event was a real success, the young people performed in front of the Councillors and they then had the confidence to perform at the Apple and Parrot in front of the wider public. It was a good night to celebrate young people locally. The event had a positive impact on the confidence of the young people as well as on their families. It was agreed that Councillor Nicolaou would consider inviting Councillors to future events with young people. There was a further event planned with young people to celebrate their work at Torre Abbey in Summer.