

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

29 July 2024

-: Present :-

Councillor Fellows (Chairman)

Councillors Law, Tolchard and Twelves (Vice-Chair)

Co-opted Members

Laura Colman, Primary Governor Representative (virtually)
Pete Brown, Church of England Diocesan

Non-voting Co-Opted Members:

Tanny Stobart, Play Torbay
Miranda Pusey, Devon and Cornwall Police (virtually)

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye and Kole Gjikolaj (Torbay Youth Parliament))

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nicolaou, Jo Hunter (who was represented by Pete Brown who would be the Church of England Diocese Representative from 1 September 2024 with Jo Hunter being his Deputy), Hayley Costar who was represented by Miranda Pusey), and Mike Cook (Voluntary and Community Sector and Alternative Provision – education).

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Board held on 22 April 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Care Experienced, Including Housing for Care Experienced Young People

Members considered the submitted report which provided an update on support to care experienced young people including housing which remained an urgent need to help provide a foundation of stability to enable them to achieve their full potential and achieve a sense of safety. The report highlighted that at the end of 2023/2024 there was evidence that 81% of Torbay's care experienced young people were assessed as living in suitable accommodation. As of June 2024, this was now 94% which was above the national figure of 88%.

It was highlighted that in May the Department for Local Government and Communities and Department for Education looked to increase joint working in housing and children with joint governance arrangements and joint decision

making. This aligned with the updated Youth Homeless Protocol and the recommendations from Mark Rydell had been included in the new Corporate Parenting Plan which was endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board in April 2024 to ensure that the placement was safe and meets the needs of the care experience young person. This also links to the Corporate Parenting Strand which had achieved 38% of its action plan.

Members asked a number of questions in relation to why the report did not include a more detailed update on the action plan around housing; what progress had been made around prioritising new properties for care experienced through the planning system; what was the likelihood of care experienced people being included in the YMCA housing proposal; when the bid for YMCA housing proposal was put in it was for a house with units for care experienced young people, they had previously said that they did not want to be identified in that way what has changed; and if a care experienced young person was offered a placement in the YMCA project and they turn it down what would happen.

It was noted that work was ongoing with the Planning department around Section 106 Agreements and also conversations with Procurement around social value and TOMS (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) for contracts to help provide support to care experienced people. This was part of the ambition for a corporate approach to Corporate Parenting. The Council's Business Plan had also been amended for care experienced young people to be given a priority in all references to housing.

Members were advised that the YMCA proposal was looking at two sites and that they would also provide transitional placements for care experienced young people. They would be part of the options offered, with a young person being able to refuse an option and then revisit other viable options including friends, family and other block contracts. Some groups, particularly asylum seeking young people wanted to see a sense of community being with other similar people.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Sub-Board endorses a joint update to the Youth Homelessness Joint Protocol by Children's and Housing, to incorporate the proposals to amend governance processes outlined in the submitted report. This will include an agreed process for senior leader sign off of intentional homeless decisions from both Housing and Children's; and
2. that all further updates regarding care experienced and housing/accommodation should be jointly authored and presented to the Sub-Board by Children's and Housing, to further enhance joint working and responsibility.

4. Youth Justice

The Sub-Board reviewed the submitted report which provided an update on the Youth Justice Services Improvement Plan. Since the report had been written the Youth Justice Plan was submitted at the end of June with the Cabinet signing it off at their meeting in July 2024. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) Worker was now in post. Out of 13 priority areas 9 were now green and

completed. However, there had been a slip in performance towards the end of last year and the Youth Justice Board and Chief Executive had undertaken a deep dive to see how progress could be made. One of the most important areas outstanding was the failure to find suitable accommodation. Work was currently underway with a new site and it was reported during the meeting that costs had been confirmed so that this could be taken forward. This was the 11th building that had been explored and this remained an outstanding action from the last inspection with the next inspection due in November 2024.

The Sub-Board asked a number of questions in relation the report identifying that Swifter Justice was likely to be in force in early 2024, what progress had been made; was there anything the Sub-Board could do to support the Youth Justice Service; why had the website not been moved forward; what work had been done to find out why more young people were entering the system; there had been a 41% increase in interventions how confident were officers that they were seeing the right children; what happens when the Targeted Prevention Funding ceases in March 2025; what was the reason for the peaks and troughs of young people entering the system; what was preventing the Service from securing suitable accommodation and what was the impact on the young people; and how much work was done with schools around prevention.

It was acknowledged that the Swifter Justice was a big area of work which was being impacted significantly by the length of time investigations into young people's crimes and offences took. Torbay does not have a Child First Investigation Team which Plymouth and other areas have. Many of the delays were as a result of forensic investigations which was a national issue. The Youth Justice Service was working closely with the Police and a new Niche reporting system had been introduced making tracking progress easier to monitor regularly. There was a commitment from the Police to help prioritise children alongside other priorities. There were now improved processes in place to understand who the youth cohort were going into custody, including structures to identify the children at most risk of harm. The Police was also looking at if they could move Policing around the child centred approach to support the new structures.

Members were advised that the website had not been updated as it had fallen in priority with other work. It was hoped it could be included on the Children's Hub website but this was deemed inappropriate. There was information on the Youth Justice Plan on the Council's website to signpost people. Part of the reason was funding as the content had been written it just needed someone to create the pages. Members highlighted the importance of good signposting of relevant support particularly to parents and carers.

It was noted that between June and November 2023 30 young people had entered the system, this was due to a high rate of offending in Paignton, lots of antisocial behaviour and repeat offending. Since December 2023 there were no more than 2 young people in a month coming into the system and this was expected to continue. Work had been done to identify people at risk of offending earlier and the Service was working with the Police to review out of court and disposals.

The Targeted Prevention work was carried out by three full time workers with the main funding 'Turnaround Fund' ending in March 2025 and there was no guarantee of any other funding after this time from this or the other two funding

pots. Evidence demonstrated that young people supported through the Team 79% did not go on to commit an offence. If future funding was not identified, then the Team would come to a point before March 2025 when they would stop taking referrals. There was a concern also that the existing staff would look for other jobs.

There were a number of reasons why the Service had not been able to secure suitable accommodation. The impact was that staff were seeing young people in cafes, libraries, parks and cars which may not be safe or confidential.

The Youth Justice Service did not work with schools directly due to capacity but helped to provide resources to the Police who did go into schools. Most referrals come from Children's Services or the Police and the Service only had capacity to work with 30 young people at a time.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Torbay Youth Justice Board be recommended to find suitable resources to enable the Targeted Prevention Programme to continue post March 2025 when the existing funding streams cease as this is a demonstrated invest to save project which reduces the numbers of young people offending as well as exploring other potential funding opportunities to support the Youth Justice Service; and
2. that the Clerk be requested to write to the Chief Executive Officer of Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust and the Police and Crime Commissioner on behalf of the Sub-Board to raise concerns about the lack of a partnership approach to finding suitable accommodation for the Youth Justice Service and encourage wider partnership working for the benefit of our children and young people.

5. Exclusions and Absence

Members considered the submitted report which provided details of absence from schools in Autumn to Spring 2023/2024. This included details on the levels of exclusion and suspension, number of Electively Home Educated (EHE) children and young people, school attendance and number of children on part time or who were educated other than at school (EOTAS).

The Sub-Board asked questions in relation to 75% of exclusions being children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), 88% of those were primary age, does that not demonstrate that their needs were not being met by mainstream school, as well as 8.3 children per week leaving school; does the Attendance Officer link into the Family Hubs to reinforce to parents how important school was; how many children who become EHE had poor attendance; what impact has the Attendance Officer meetings had (a written update was requested around the attendance work and penalties especially for those educate other than at home (EOTAH) and from the most deprived communities and what was being done to support those children); how had the knock-on impact of Covid-19 been addressed; how was evidence gathered on the impact of the roles introduced; and was there any data on absence during exam seasons for children with SEND (a

written update on the data to see if there was a link with the exam aged students and absence was requested).

It was noted that Mayfield School had made new provision after school in term time with the Head Teacher and SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services) with parents coming to the sessions and booking space to talk to SENDIASS reaching at least seven parents a week. It was suggested the voluntary sector could help provide some play activities for children whilst their parents speak to professionals.

Members were informed that a number of children on part time timetables were following an improvement journey and had previously been coded incorrectly and were not attending school. This resulted in improved attendance. Work was being undertaken in the Family Hubs to help families get ready for school, in 0-5 early years settings and at families' homes especially around speech, language and communications, but the impact of this work would not be seen for a few years. This needed to be rolled out to Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 with primary schools in deprived areas being targeted first. The impact of the Attendance Officer and Early Help Panel was to work with families and to help understand the barriers to attendance and to work with them. Penalties had a mixed impact and if a school puts in a claim and the parent was engaging with early help, they do not have to pay the penalty.

It was noted that some schools had embedded a graduated response to attendance and it was working well and needed to be rolled out to all schools.

Members were advised that when a child was excluded from a primary school support was provided to families to get their child into a suitable primary school, with the Local Authority having to direct schools in some cases and to provide wrap around support around reintegration. Following a second exclusion they would likely to be placed at Mayfield Chestnut Centre and then look at alternative provision. As a partnership they discuss disruption around attachment.

It was noted that there was a need to go through the data to understand fully the reasons behind why parents elect to home educate their children. Looking at parental confidence and if children's needs were being met.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that future reports include the number of children coming off a part time timetable; and
2. that the Director of Children's Services be requested to explore with partners, including the voluntary and community sector, what support parents might need to enable discussions with professionals about attendance.

6. Special Educational Needs and Disability Update (SEND)

The Sub-Board considered the submitted report which provided an update on the Co-production of the Self Evaluation Form (SEF) of Torbay Local Area for Special Educational Needs (SEND) Provision and a report of the SEND Area Engagement

meeting with Ofsted on 27 February 2024. It was nearly three years since the original inspection and now the new SEF was being developed with work also focussed around gathering the annex documents to provide evidence to support the response. The Torbay way was to co-produce work and had seen benefits of working with parents, carers, services and users. The co-produced Charter and Pledge had big momentum at the start but communication had not been maintained, this was being picked up to ensure that the message was reinforced. Good feedback had been provided from children and young people that they were seeing change but this was not reflected in confidence from the parents and carers.

Members asked questions in relation to how long do we need before we get to a good place if we were inspected; the Government had announced there would be a big reform for SEND how does that fit with our written statement, and would the ISOS research paper on SEND get taken into account by the Government; do we know if the Family Hubs would receive future funding; how would the Board track progress; and was there anything the Sub-Board could do to help.

Members were advised that it would depend on the timing of the next inspection as to how we would be judged as a partnership for SEND. The Partnership was monitoring the areas they know they can have impact e.g. schools, early help offer, mental health support in schools with Teams getting the biggest reach.

It was acknowledged that SEND was a national issue which would require huge systematic change which would take a while to affect. There was a need to base everything on the lived experience of the young person. It was hoped the Government would take into account all relevant research papers on SEND. Changes to NHS policies were starting to emerge, they had been asked for a community recovery plan whereas in the past it was always a focus on acute services. The Government had advised that any future funding would be picked up in the October spending review.

The Partnership acknowledged that work was not happening fast enough but there was a commitment, and a huge amount of work was being undertaken and colleagues now need to realign it to look at impact versus activity.

A graduated response toolkit to support those with additional help had been rolled out and was working well in some schools but needed to be rolled out to all schools.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Self Evaluation Framework be presented to a future meeting of the Sub-Board;
2. to circulate the appendices to the Sub-Board; and
3. that Members be encouraged to promote the Graduated Response to schools and the community and share the video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWHt3tbwjms>

7. Exploitation and Children Missing

Members received an update on the partnership approach to exploitation and children missing. The Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) in January 2024 had provided positive feedback mainly around multi-agency partnerships, forums, focus on identified children and perpetrators, networks and the impact they had. Currently 177 children were being tracked through the system.

Members asked questions in relation to what was the Professional Difference Policy; who were the main partners; when a child was given a toolkit what work goes on with the school; what were the barriers around addressing domestic abuse; and what percentage was the younger cohort and what was the youngest person.

It was noted that the Professional Difference Policy was a safeguarding policy which was used when professional colleagues had a difference of opinion to ensure that the young person and/or their families were safeguarded. The main partners were the Police, Education, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Health, Checkpoint, Benardos and Early Help. The Team also worked with over 30 care providers, the Fire Service etc.

Members were advised that the toolkit was completed with the parent, child and school and it was expected that schools would have copies of the toolkit and any action plans arising from the discussion to help with implementation. A large cohort of children were under early help support with many toolkits being completed by Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools.

It was noted that where there was anything adverse happening at a child's home including domestic abuse and violence the vulnerability of the child significantly increased. The child has their own lived experiences and wider vulnerabilities at home and with peer relationships. This was addressed through a partnership approach rather than seeing a case in isolation. There was a national campaign #LookCloser which encourages members of the public and businesses to look closer at young people – more information can be found on the website at [#LookCloser To Spot Exploitation | The Children's Society \(childrensociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/look-closer). It was agreed that #LookCloser cards would be provided to Councillors.

Members were advised that the youngest person being supported was 9 years old. Training had been provided to primary schools to help them think about identifying children which need early help. Toolkits were also being completed for younger siblings of older children.

A case study was referred to at the meeting from a parent who ended up giving up their daughter to social care because she did not know how to deal with her exploitation. This was a long time ago but highlighted the huge impact on the family of exploitation and the length of time it could take for families and the young person to recover.

Members thanked the Exploitation Manager, her Team and Partners for all their hard work and dedication supporting young people and their families around missing and exploitation.

8. Young Carers Strategy

Members considered the submitted report which provided an update on the Young Carers' Strategy and Young Carers' Service which transferred back to the Council in June 2023. The Service had undergone a slight structural change and separated from the Youth Service with more focus on delivery. The Service undertakes its statutory role undertaking assessments to anyone deemed as a Young Carer and the impact on their caring role, education, opportunities in life with the aim to raise awareness and identify Young Carers at the earliest opportunity. They support children Elective Home Educated (EHE), in primary schools, in secondary schools and elsewhere. They also offer activities and a group environment for Young Carers and their families who see a huge benefit.

Members asked questions in relation to the value and savings made to the NHS and Adult Social Care by Young Carers; and if the voluntary and community sector work with the Young Carers' Service.

The importance of having events that Young Carers have permission to attend which were free to attend was acknowledged as invaluable and Members supported the continuation of such schemes.

It was noted that the Service worked with the voluntary and community sector and they were also involved in supporting events for Young Carers.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board supports the development of a financial business case to seek investment in the Young Carers' Service to ensure that it remains sustainable for the Young Carers within Torbay;
2. that the Director of Children's Services be requested to consider writing to NHS and Adult Social Care Partners to demonstrate the costs saved by Young Carers and if they would consider contributing towards the Young Carers Service; and
3. that the Director of Children's Services be requested to consider exploring options to fund a free bus pass for Young Carers for school holidays.

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

The Sub-Board noted the contents of the submitted action tracker.

Chairman
