

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

23 September 2024

-: Present :-

Councillor Fellows (Chairman)

Councillors Law, Foster, Nicolaou and Tolchard

Co-opted Members

Mike Cook, Voluntary and Community Sector and Alternative Provision (Education)
Tanny Stobbart, Play Torbay

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye and David Thomas)

10. Apologies

Apologies for absence was received from Pete Brown (Voting Co-opted Member) and Hayley Costar (Non-voting Co-opted Member).

It was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, the membership of the Sub-Board had been amended to include Councillor Foster in place of Councillor Twelves.

11. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Board held on 29 July 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12. Youth Provision in Torbay

Members considered the submitted report which provided an update on youth provision in Torbay. The Youth Hub within Children's Services provided the following support to young people:

- Youth Service;
- Young Carers;
- Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF); and
- Community Youth Clubs.

Members were advised that since the report had been written agreement had been made for the Youth Improvement Fund (YIF) for improvements to the Acorn Centre and work was due to start at the Acorn Centre in October 2024. The Board

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expressed their thanks and appreciation to everyone involved in securing the YIF money to improve facilities for young people at the Acorn Centre.

The Sub-Board asked a number of questions in relation to £100,000 for Community Youth Clubs and was there an indication on if the Government proposed to continue to fund HAF; Members wanted to look at accessibility to play parks with a review due to be completed by the end of September, what progress had been made on that and would it include a condition report of existing play parks; and a lot of funding streams were coming to an end in March 2025 what action was being taken to mitigate potential loss of future funding, was this the same for all local authorities and was there national work to lobby Government about funding for young people.

In response to questions around funding, Members were informed that the Council was looking at how we deliver youth services and if we want to deliver the same model for the HAF (which had very prescriptive criteria and outcomes) or if we could work with providers to help them to deliver more services to more young people in a different way. The Council was already supporting providers to become Ofsted Registered which would open up further opportunities for them including the ability to provide the free child care placements to those families who were eligible. Tanny Stobbart from Play Torbay welcomed this support and advised that she had been working with the Council towards getting Play Torbay registered. There had been reasonable feedback from the Government around funding and this was expected to be announced as part of the Budget Statement in October 2024. This did not allow a lot of time for the Council and partner organisations to plan their activities and to support families and lack of permanent funding does not give the voluntary and community sector a sustainable solution moving forward. The Council was looking at how it could use the £100,000 within the Children's Services base budget for youth provision. There was a lot of lobbying at a national level regarding funding, particularly temporary or one-off funding streams, also in the context of many local authorities struggling with their overall budgets. The Council was also working with other local authorities to explore the potential to pool budgets to support young people.

Members were advised that there had been a delay to the play park review to enable Participation Officers to engage with young people, which linked to our work with UNICEF to be a Child Friendly Torbay. UNICEF supported this approach. The Clerk advised that a timetable for the review had been sent to Members of the Board for the Overview and Scrutiny Board Monthly Briefing meeting on 24 September 2024. The final report would include a condition report on the existing play parks and had been provisionally added to the Work Programme for 27 January 2025.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Cabinet be requested to continue to support young people, ensuring young people have a voice and access to support in Torbay, and to ensure that the welfare of Torbay Council staff and the staff teams working with young people in Torbay is considered within decision making, planning and communications going forward.

13. 0 to 19 Services Procurement

Members considered the submitted report which provided an update of the recommissioning of 0-19 services which were proposed to be divided into three separate elements. The first being delivered by the current provider Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, contracts for advocacy services and independent visitor services would be going out to open market procurement and young people's substance misuse and missing and return home conversations would be delivered in-house as part of a wider Torbay Council Youth Service.

Members asked a number of questions relating to what did PSR stand for (Provider Selection Regime) and what input would there be from children and young people on PSR; and had young people and their families contributed to what was proposed for the services.

In response to questions, it was noted that the Provider Selection Regime was a process that necessitated following stringent legal process that determined whether a direct award was applicable. Because of this complex internal process, led by the Council's Commercial Services, children, young people and families were not consulted on whether or not direct award was the applicable procurement process. However, children, young people and families would be consulted on any new specifications and as part of ongoing service quality improvement once contracts were in place. Additionally, Insights work was commissioned to hear the voice of the children, young people and their families accessing 0-19 provision as well as working with Children's Services Participation Officers and accessing 0-19 and Family Hubs service user feedback, forming part of a Health Needs Assessment that had supported the commissioning process and development of the new specifications. Members were informed that the current providers were good at receiving and sharing both positive and negative feedback regarding service provision, forming part of contract management and hearing the voice of children, young people and families. The Public Health Team and Children's Services had utilised the information taken from those accessing services to ensure specifications align to the needs of children, young people and families including improving accessibility, people telling their story only once, and accessing support in single places. Once approved and agreed further, engagement would be carried out with young people and their families on how services can be developed and implemented. A written response would be provided on what involvement children and young people would have in the selection process for the elements that will be procured by open tender.

The Sub-Board noted the timetable for the Torbay 0-19 Service procurement.

14. Torbay Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Self Evaluation Framework (SEF)

This item was included on the agenda in error as it was discussed at the previous meeting. An update would be provided to a future meeting as requested.

15. Our Promise to You - The Torbay Pledge to care for and care experienced children/young people - Revised Children's Pledge

Members received a paper which provided an update on the revised Children's Pledge 'Our Promise to You – The Torbay Pledge to cared for and care experienced children/young people 2021-2022' as there had been a change in the way the Council was engaging with young people. Since its adoption the Torbay Youth Trust had moved back in-house and the Cared for Council had been reset. There was a need to go back to our cared for and care experienced children and young people to ensure that it was still relevant and reflected the views of the whole community on how they want us to work with and support them.

The Sub-Board asked questions in relation to the Cared for Council not working as a group and them working on separate projects; and how many young people were on the Cared for Council.

In response to questions Members were advised that there were 12 to 14 young people who do not currently wish to meet as a group but that it was important to ensure that more of the 290 cared for children were represented in the review of the Pledge. The Team was exploring options to encourage a wider group of people to come together in a safe environment as well as looking at how they could bring in the voice of the young people who live outside Torbay.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board note the contents of the submitted report and the plans for next steps to review the existing Pledge;
2. that an updated Children and Young People's Pledge is scheduled on the agenda for the Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board meeting in 4 months time; and
3. that an informal meeting be arranged with our Cared for Young People and the Sub-Board on the development of the revised Pledge.

16. Fostering Annual Report

The Sub-Board considered and noted the submitted Annual Fostering report for 2023/2024 which set out the activities and achievements of the Fostering Service over the past twelve months. Members noted the need to continue to recruit and retain new Foster Carers and were encouraged to spread the word to encourage more people to sign up.

Members asked a number of questions how many Foster Carers keep young people when they reach 18 years old and if they received financial help; how would the Mockingbird project be co-ordinated; how often do Foster Carers meet; and part of the Mockingbird project was around respite/staying overnight without the need for the Foster Carer to get permission to let them stay elsewhere, was that element included.

In response to questions, Members were informed that 31 young people were currently Staying Put with Foster Carers but there were some challenges as they do not receive the same payment as a Foster Carer but get support for rent and housing. It was acknowledged that more work needed to be done to help people understand what this looks like to the Foster Carers and young people. Whilst this was a positive step and good for the young person, it means that the Foster Carer cannot take on any new children, which was another reason for the need to recruit around 10 new Foster Carers a year to keep up with demand. The Fostering Service would co-ordinate the Mockingbird Project and identify the lead Foster Carer with 8 or 9 coming together to support each other and become like an extended family network. All Foster Carers have a supervising Social Worker on top of the support from the Fostering Service and meet when they need to.

Members particularly welcomed the Mockingbird project pilot in Brixham which provided a constellation where Foster Carers would be supported by a lead Foster Carer and become part of a wider family network which would also enable cared for young people to sleep over at other members of the constellation's homes as this would be a safe environment for them with other families which they would become part of and would give them more autonomy.

The Sub-Board requested their formal thanks be recorded to Foster Carers and the Foster Carer Service.

17. Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Board

The Chairman, Councillor Fellows, presented the Report of the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group meeting held on 24 July 2024, which he had attended as the Council's representative on this Group. By the end of 2023/2024 196 children had a plan for adoption an increase of 15.2% and of the 109 children placed 91.3% (100) were placed with Adopt South West adopters, 8% higher than previous years.

Members acknowledged that the number of days for adoption in Devon was twice as high as others. Torbay had the best timescales for adoption which had improved month on month identifying children who required adoption and matching them quickly through the process was welcomed by the Sub-Board.

Members reviewed the Terms of Reference for the Group and noted that Torbay's governance required the relevant Cabinet Member and Director to be present when scrutising topics so that they can be held to account as well as any external partners, however, only the Clerk had been invited to the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group be requested to update the invite list to include the following:

1. Torbay Council Scrutiny Representatives – Chair of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board and Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator; and

2. Invitees – Director of Children's Services, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Democratic Services Team Leader.

18. Ofsted Annual Conversation Letter

Members received and noted the Annual Ofsted Letter which had been prepared following a meeting on 29 May 2024. It was noted that the letter had been delayed due to the General Election. It was noted that there was a more positive trajectory regarding paragraph 2 on page 126 with a portal being put in place to enable families to access Family Hubs and early help themselves without the need for a statutory referral. Work was being done to align the children in need and early help model with the child in need no longer requiring a qualified social worker but instead could use a lead professional.

The Sub-Board asked if there had been any changes since May and if anything was missing from the letter. In response Members were advised there was 21 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and there were now 23. It was hoped to welcome another five who would move to care experienced. Previously 25% of care experienced young people were not living in suitable accommodation and now 91% were living in suitable accommodation. Staff vacancy rates continued to be a concern and had increased from 15% to 17% which was the same nationally. National guidance had been published on how to manage agency workers on a regional basis which was now due to be implemented in October rather than April this would cap the agency rate and set an expectation of the number of years Social Workers were required to work before they could move to agency. As a region Torbay Council was looking at how we could bring this forward sooner. This was being monitored closely through the Children's Services Strategic Quartet.

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

The Sub-Board noted the contents of the submitted action tracker. The Director of Children's Services was positive about the accommodation for the Youth Justice Team with further discussions required around funding.

Chairman
