



TORBAY CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELF ASSESSMENT



Contents

Introduction and Vision	2
Practice Model	7
Experiences and Progress of Children in Need of Help and Protection	9
Early Help	9
Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)	16
Children whose Responses are within the Single Assessment Teams (SATs)	20
Operational Services Teams	23
Children with Disabilities	27
Experiences and progress of cared for children and achieving permanence	30
Cared For Children	30
Fostering	45
Adoption & Permanence	49
Edge of Care	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Exploitation Team	53
The Impact of Leaders on Social Work Practice with Children and Families	64
What do we know about the quality of social work practice?	64
Corporate Parenting Board	66

Introduction and Vision

This document details the current position within Torbay's Children's Services. It reflects the ongoing progress to build on the improvements reflected within the March 2022 ILAC inspection report and further enhance the services that are provided to children and families in Torbay.

As outlined in the previous Self-Assessment, Torbay has fully acknowledged what has been required to make sustainable improvements to ensure are compliant and safe. The 2021-22 Self-Assessment was produced at a time when the first phase of improvement had been completed and the second phase was being launched with the aim to focus on improving service quality beyond what is required to secure safety and compliance.

Torbay had a full ILACS inspection in March 2022, and were judged as good across all areas, for the first time in many years. Ofsted found:

“Services for children in Torbay have significantly improved. This improvement is demonstrable and making a tangible difference for Torbay’s children. Strong political and corporate commitment to the improvement agenda has enabled the local authority to change the trajectory of social work practice so that services in Torbay are now good. This is an impressive achievement.

Strategic partnerships are now strong and there is good communication across both corporate and operational management. Despite this improvement, local authority senior leaders are not complacent. They have a strong awareness not only of what is being done well, but of areas of practice in which they could do better for children. Such areas include clearer expectations of workers when care leavers live in emergency accommodation and greater consistency of supervision and management oversight.

A highly effective approach to recruitment and retention has enabled the creation of a largely stable permanent workforce. As a result, manageable caseloads now enable stronger and more constructive relationships to be built with most children and families.”

This reflects the significant and consistent progress made in addressing the previous improvement objectives, and provides the platform upon which services can move forward to achieve our corporate ambition of sustaining a 'Child Friendly Torbay.' Whilst maintaining an acute and continuous focus on children who need help and protection, those who are cared for, and care experienced, we also aim to sustain progress in other areas. For example, preventative Early Help services based on the family hub model, and early intervention to provide consistent support to children with SEND at SEN K level, are two areas in which aspirational and innovative work has begun. This will be achieved through the robust implementation of Torbay Children's Continuous Improvement Plan, which is the driver for the process of partnership-wide

transformation in order to achieve the delivery of outstanding services to children and young people.

Our overarching ambition is for these outstanding services to be appropriately informed by enhanced understanding of our local community and the needs of children and families. They will be co-designed and co-produced and based on meaningful and impactful engagement, consultation, and participation. We want children and families not only to have a 'voice', but for this 'voice' to be at the core of service improvement and innovation. As we strive forward to build on the significant success of what has been achieved already, we are committed to ensuring that our workforce, our partners, our Members and our communities are involved and informed, and are able to share in what we do and how we do it.

Within the full inspection in March 2022, areas for development were identified as:

- ☒ The oversight of arrangements when care leavers move in and out of temporary accommodation.
- ☒ The focus on reading (literacy) in personal education plans.
- ☒ The quality of planning for some children in need.
- ☒ The frequency and quality of management oversight.

Work has already begun to respond effectively. For example:

- Our care experienced service has been subject to significant review. A robust process has now been implemented which ensures that any care experience young person who is living in temporary accommodation has the oversight of the Director through the Independent Placement Overview Panel. Following the inspection in March 2022, Torbay invited the National Adviser for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell, to visit and provide some feedback on the strengths and areas to strengthen in regard to the care experience service, and this has fed directly in to Torbay's Operational Corporate Parenting action planning.
- Our Learning Academy continues to offer a three-year program for newly qualified social workers as well as advanced and skills-based courses for our wider workforce, including non-qualified staff. The Learning Academy continues to make a major contribution to our wider and broad-based recruitment and retention strategy as well to the knowledge and skills base of our workforce, resulting in our current vacancy rate for front line social workers reducing to 8.33%.
- Our Cared For Service in conjunction with the Virtual School have progressed work to ensure that literacy remains a key focus for all cared for children. A new Literacy Policy is in place, endorsed by the Virtual School Governing Body; a reading target is a central part of each primary aged cared for child's PEP; from 1st February 2023a specialist teacher is leading on literacy; the enrollment in the Letterbox initiative continues which sees bi-monthly reading materials sent

to certain year groups; book tokens are being used as rewards for progress; and training is being offered to fostering families, so that they may support reading alongside the pilot project in place which aims to use new technology to support reluctant readers.

- Supervision and management oversight remains a core priority, and an area of development highlighted by Ofsted and our own audit activity. Through the Learning Academy, we have established a supervision workstream, to review the supervision policy and its associated delivery models. Once completed, the workforce development plan will be updated and include specific focus on the favoured 'four by four-by-four model'. We have also implemented cross-service bespoke buddying and mentoring opportunities, to ensure that peer support is provided consistently to the workforce. At December 2022, 66% of children under 18 have had either management oversight or supervision recorded in the last eight weeks;
- Quality of planning remains a significant service focus. SMART planning for restorative plans is a significant priority, with service guidance being written and provided to the workforce to support its development, in addition to bespoke training for managers, advanced social workers and the rest of the workforce. This is a regular topic at our established Practice Improvement Forum, where good practice is shared and thematic learning from audit activity is presented.
- Our Exploitation Team continue to work with those young people highly vulnerable to sexual and criminal exploitation. The maturity of this team is evident through the enhanced partnership working and data-sharing, include the January local profile, joint county lines risk assessments, the ongoing implementation of the CEMOG, MACE and triage processes, the workforce development plan and the involvement of the team in the reconfiguration of the LiquidLogic system. This work is central to the strategic exploitation plan which is monitored through the TSCP.
- We are progressing with the implementation of three localized Family Hubs as part of our wider early help model which will support us to create community resilience and support for families at the earliest opportunity. Through the development of the Torbay Family Hubs, Torbay families will benefit from improved outcomes and enhanced lived experiences through the reduction of the impact on families of poverty and deprivation, improved mental health and support, the reduction of reliance on statutory services and an increased sense of community-based services responses, thereby empowering families to overcome their own challenges.

We continue to be encouraged by significant sustained progress against our priorities over the last year. A sample of our achievements s which captures the current position is set out below. Compared to the position at the time of the previous Annual

Conversations with Ofsted, and particularly the position in 2021-22, it highlights the breadth and significance of progress in a wide range of areas. We draw attention to:

- the rate of contacts completed in 24 hours has sustained at 99% (December 2022) from 86.6% (2020) despite there being continued high levels of demand in the MASH in terms of contacts and referrals.
- the sustained timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days of a strategy discussion, 89% (year to date to December 2022) from the low point of from 56.9% in 2021.
- the continued work to ensure that proportionality is central to decision-making in relation to those children becoming subject to child protection planning has seen the rate of children subject to those plans reduce to 63 per 10 000, in line with our statistical neighbors at 61. Torbay have historically been an outlier for many years in relation to both statistical and national comparators. Despite the high levels of need, we continue to use early intervention to safely prevent the need for unnecessary escalation into child protection planning. The continued work to reduce the overall numbers of cared for children, with a reduction from 352 (2020-21) to 329 (end of December 2022). Of those 329 children, 29 were classified as Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, either transferred to Torbay through the National Transfer Scheme (6 of the 29) or as a result of the age assessment process (23 of the 29). The overall numbers of cared for children has been significantly impacted by the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who have needed to become cared for., The 'stand up' of a local asylum contingency hotel has resulted in 23 age representations alone to date.
- The improvement in the proportion of children living with Torbay foster carers has been sustained (62% at December 2022, an increase from 55.7% in December 2021). The reduction in the use of residential care has continued (with 15 children in residential provision at December 2022 compared to 22 at December 2021).
- significant improvement in the recognition and response to children vulnerable to exploitation with 215 exploitation assessments being completed in year to date (YTD) 22/23 compared to 179 at the same point in the previous year. Between April and December 2022, 42 children have been identified as at high risk, compared to 37 children in the same period the previous year, and our intervention had reduced risk for 39 children compared to 35 in the same period the previous year.
- There has been significant improvement in recruitment and retention data. Our annual turnover rate for permanent staff has significantly reduced from 26% in September 2020 to 15% in September 2021. We have maintained our turnover rate between 15%-17% (FTE) and report on this quarterly via our governance

arrangements which allows us to update our retention strategy accordingly. We hold regular listening circles, bench marking exercises, celebration events and have a weekly colleague recognition scheme as part of our determination to value staff for what they contribute. Our vacancy rate for Qualified Social Workers has continued to decrease from 38.7% in September 2020 to 22% in September 2021 and 13% in September 2022. Currently, in December 2022 the social work vacancy rate our vacancy rate is 10.3% in December 2022. These data confound the critical challenges in recruitment and retention experienced by almost all parts of the country and reflect the strength of our strategy and its implementation.

- Allocation of children to qualified social workers continues to be monitored through the strategic quartet as well as operationally. Presently the average allocation across the service is:
 - ASYE average caseload – 8
 - ASYE year 2 Cohort 16
 - Advanced Social Worker - 19.3
 - Experienced social worker – 20.3.

This is slightly higher than we would aspire to, however the impact of the age assessments is reflected within this position.

Torbay is most proud however of the aspirational learning culture which continues to be fostered within its Children's Services, and which means that, despite this progress, the continued aim is to strive forward to a point whereby we are delivering outstanding services to the children and families of Torbay.

This self-evaluation will, in line with the child's journey, outline how Children's Services work effectively in partnership to protect and keep children safe, promote their wellbeing and meet their needs. As part of our commitment to view need in its most holistic sense, and in line with our vision of becoming a 'One Children's Service', this self-assessment considers both social care and education, and the impact of both services on the outcomes for children.

Practice Model

In March 2022, Ofsted recognised Torbay’s restorative progress, stating:

“Child protection conferences take place within appropriate timescales and respectful work by social workers using restorative approaches supports parents to be engaged well in the process”.

“Stronger assessments, often carried out using Torbay’s restorative model of social work practice, explore effectively the impact on children of parental mental illness, domestic abuse and substance misuse”.

“Experienced and newly qualified social workers and other frontline staff value the considerable investment in their professional development. A restorative practice model focuses on working with families. An ethos of ‘doing with’ rather than ‘doing to’ is progressively becoming embedded across services, leading to more sophisticated and effective direct work with children and their families.”

Torbay Children’s Services and its partner agencies believe that the adoption of a restorative and relational approach to our work enables practitioners and children and families to develop positive relationships to ensure children and young people are safeguarded and the needs of the family are met. It recognises the importance of separating the behaviour from the person, placing a focus on the relationship as being key to achieving positive outcomes.

We continue to embed and enhance the implementation of the Restorative Practice model, with the maturity of this implementation underpinning our decision to successfully apply to become an accredited restorative organisation with the Restorative Justice Council scheme. In addition, the benefits of the restorative approach implemented within Children’s Services has been recognised corporately and has contributed to a proposal to embed a relational council approach, which combines both restorative and trauma informed practice. If Torbay adopts the relational approach, we would have a 'golden thread' connecting all services, staff and politicians

In July 2021, we extended our Restorative Practice training offer through the Torbay Children’s Safeguarding Partnership to a wider range of partners and this offer

continues. To date, 149 individuals from the voluntary sector, housing, other directorates within Torbay Council, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, supported accommodation providers, early years settings and primary, secondary and special schools have been trained.

Since September 2022, we have reviewed and revised the Social Care Practice Standards. This has required intensive consultation with the workforce and children, young people and families, and each standard is now written to the child or young person. A launch event is planned for the 27th of February 2023, to ensure this foundational shift in our practice is celebrated sufficiently.

Following feedback through a corporate-wide HR survey, Children's Services have also designed a staff pledge, which promotes a set of working behaviours which all of the Children's workforce can commit to and evidence in their day-to-day practice.

Torbay are also in the middle of a Restorative Recording pilot which ends on the 3rd March 2023, with the aim of moving towards more consistency in terms of our restorative recording, recognising that each and every time we record on a child's file, a contribution is made to their life story.

Held by the DCS and senior leaders, we continue to hold regular listening circles as part of our commitment to working restoratively and 'hear' the experiences and views of our workforce. These sessions are very positively viewed by participants. The feedback gathered and collected is put together in a 'You said, We did' presentation which is delivered to colleagues. We also make use of the weekly bulletin as a way to provide feedback. Where appropriate, we also feedback on an individual basis.

Experiences and Progress of Children in Need of Help and Protection

Early Help

Current Support to Child and Families

In March 2022, during a full inspection, OFSTED stated:

“A radical transformation and development of early help services mean that children and families in Torbay benefit from responsive, well-coordinated, universal and targeted early help services that help to reduce harm and to promote children’s welfare. Good-quality assessments are overseen by experienced early help managers. A ‘team around the family’ model delivers a holistic, multi-agency perspective on families’ needs. This is making a difference to most children’s lives, as it prevents risks escalating. The weekly multidisciplinary early help panel ensures that most children get the right level of help at the right time.”

As of December 2022, Torbay were supporting 1022 children across the Early Help partnership, compared with 952 at the same time last year (December 2021). 47% of children are supported by a lead professional within the internal Early Help Service with the remainder allocated lead professionals across Education, Health, Action for Children and the wider VCS. This figure is significantly higher than the figure of 23% the previous year. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, there is now a children with disability pathway within Early Help, enabling a more proportionate response to children with disabilities who require low-level support, and secondly the complexity of work being accepted into Early Help requires higher level interventions that are not available across the wider partnership. However, both these factors reduce the demand for statutory interventions for families. The robust management and success of support offered to families at the Early Help level is evidenced by just 2% of referrals to Children’s Social Care (27 referrals) in the period May 2022 to December 2022 came from Early Help.

It is noteworthy that the percentage of contacts progressing to Targeted/Early Help is continuing to increase, from 11% in 2019/20, to 17% in 2020/21, to 24% in 2021-22 and now 25% (2022-23 year to date as of December 2022), reflecting a more proportionate response to our families. In the period from 1st April 2022 to the 30th November 2022, Torbay started or completed Early Help assessments in relation to 745 children [Annex A data].

Background Summary

Early Help within Torbay has been subject to radical transformation and development following long standing challenge to the delivery model which was underdeveloped and fragmented. Service development has continued throughout 2022 with further services moved from the statutory area of service delivery in order to frontload support

to families and support a more robust preventative model. Most notably, the Family Group Conference (FGC) service is now managed under the Early Help umbrella. This allows for families to be offered FGCs at the point of referral into Children's Social Care in order to support family led planning from the outset of contact with social care. Moving FGC to Early Help has also made a significant impact on referrals with the number of children being referred to FGC increasing in the quarter to the end of December 2022 to 271 from 199 in the quarter to the end of September 2022. In total, 46% of all referrals (by family) for the quarter to the end of December 2022 came from Early Help compared to just 10% coming from Early Help the previous quarter.

The new relationship-based Early Help Model is predicated on delivery by one of the three locality based integrated partnerships based in each of the three main towns of Torbay. These virtual teams meet on a bi-monthly basis to discuss challenges and ideas along with sharing good practice. The bi-monthly meetings are now maturing with attendance from a variety of members from the wider Early Help Partnership. Going forward, the three-locality based integrated partnerships will be aligned to the three Family Hubs strategically located across the local area (Torquay, Paignton and Brixham). This will allow the wider Early Help parentship to steer and contribute towards programmes of activity that form the Family Hub offer to children, young people and families as defined within the Family Hub development plan and the overall strategic Governance of Children's Social Care in Torbay.

The Early Help model was agreed by key partners in 2021 after a significant degree of co-production and has received a high degree of "sign up". Work has continued throughout 2022 to develop the operational delivery of the model in practice. This includes detailed guidance to ensure professionals across the partnership understand the guiding principles of Early Help as well as how support to families is delivered in a coordinated manner. A training package has also been developed with delivery to partners starting in September 2021. Uptake and feedback from the training continues to be positive. A further 33 practitioners trained in 2022 makes a total of 153 practitioners across the partnership trained over the last two years in the delivery of the new Early Help model and its associated processes. This includes the new Early Help assessment and revised Team Around the Family (TAF) planning processes. The number of new practitioners trained compared to the previous year is relatively low reflecting a pause in delivering the training whilst it was updated to fully reflect the incorporation of restorative practice into the content.

The effectiveness of the new model is seen in the fact that there is no longer a waiting list for families to receive early help as once an assessment is completed, and an initial TAF plan or specialist single agency referral is completed within a creditable 10 working days. Furthermore, it is argued that the reduction of contacts into MASH from 2021 and this being sustained throughout 2022 reflects the Early Help preventative work and approach starting to bed in.

To ensure the ongoing success and sustainability of the model, the formal governance arrangements for Children's Social Care in Torbay have been fully revised and re-

structured to ensure a joined up 'One Children's Service' vision. The Early Help Strategic Board is central to the new governance structure with the progress of Early Help being accountable to the Children's Continuous Improvement Board through the regular One Children's Service Focus meeting, which combines the Sufficiency Board, Children's Services Operational Board, QA Board and Workforce Development Board. Early Help has a significant role to play in each of these Boards.

Internal Re-Organisation – Phase 2

To ensure the Council's internal Early Help Service is robust and furnished with the right skills mix to deliver appropriate direct work and support to the overall Early Help partnership, phase two of the service re-organisation was delivered over 2022 which built on the major re-organisation seen in 2021. As noted above, Family Group Conference has now moved to the Early Help from the statutory part of the service. A new Service Manager took up post in September 2022. The Service Manager maintains full day to day operational delivery responsibilities for the whole Early Help service as well as supporting the process of service development on continuous change. The outgoing Service Manager has taken up the post of Head of Service for Safeguarding, Early Help and Business Intelligence. With the inception of the Business Intelligence Service, the team of Supporting Families Analysts will be moving in January 2023 from Early Help to the Business Intelligence Service to ensure all data processing and analytics is joined up across all services as part of the One Children's Services vision.

The main objective of keeping the Early help, safeguarding (which consists of the IRO and LADO service area) and Business Intelligence within one Head of Service portfolio is to ensure there is synergy between the preventative work and also the responsive interventions delivered by the statutory areas of the service. This will allow for clear pathways for children to step-down and ultimately out of statutory services and be supported at the Early Help level quicker via more robust and cohesive cross service working. To further facilitate this, A Child in Need IRO was appointed and will be in post in January 2023. This role will be directly managed under Early Help to ensure the focus for children subject to Child in Needs Plans remains step-down to Early Help at the early possible point.

To ensure the additional demands placed on Early Help can be met, agreement for an additional two-Family Intervention Team practitioners was gained in 2022 with the view to these being in post in early 2023.

Embedding Prevention into the Culture of the Early Help Partnership

As noted previously, there has been purposeful shift over 2022 with the emphasis in Early Help moving away from purely responsive work to early identification and preventative work. This has resulted in a widening of the early help remit to include such areas as youth homeless prevention and Family Group Conferencing. Coupled with stepping statutory plans down to Early Help plans, it means there is more cross service working with colleagues in the statutory areas of children's services. This has

commenced with co-working with the care experienced personal advisors in relation to homeless prevention for young people aged 18 to 25 who were previously cared for. Going forward with the CIN IRO coming on board, there will be more work undertaken to ensure step-downs from CIN planning to Early Help planning have 'warm handovers' between relevant practitioners. From a preventative perspective, the CIN IRO will have oversight of stepdown plans to reduce the risk of re-referrals into Children's Social Care.

Early Help are also working in collaboration with SEND, with an aim to reduce the number of EHCPs issued without intervention and support to front load and meet the needs of the child as early as possible. This is confidently predicted to reduce the need for escalation to statutory intervention.

There will be clear procedures in place, to ensure effective cross working between SEND and Early Help and partners will be fully aware of the transitions process and pathways, for all children, not just those known to statutory social care. There are plans to draft a joint working protocol between SEND and social care, outlining the need for an Early Help offer in line with SEND Support or RSA requests. This requires input from local primary schools and early years setting. In the true sense of preventative Early Help, this will focus primarily on children in the early years stage. This will then need to feed into the new Early Help Strategy, with SEND clearly defined within this. Alongside this, there will be a plan to implement a schedule of training and raising awareness events for partners in terms of transition pathways. A SEND representative now sits on the Early Help Panel and set of KPIs will be established in relation to this joint working protocol.

To further shore up the Early Help offer regarding SEND and to ensure a graduated response to SEND challenges for children and their parents, the plan going forward is to establish another team within the Early Help Service that focuses on SEND and supporting general educational achievement. It is envisaged that this team will consist of a SEND helpline Officer, an EHCP coordinator and will be led by a Designated Social Care Officer for SEND.

Family-Hubs – Phase 3 Implementation

The Early Help model includes several theoretical approaches such as a social prescribing model, a restorative strengths-based assessment through a resilience model, and the principles of Family Group Conferencing. In essence, this reflects a conscious move towards the community being self-supporting and reducing poverty of opportunity. With this in mind, the focus of the next phase of the Early Help model is to implement and conjoin a network of family hubs across Torbay. In order to make an immediate start to the implementation, the three Children's Centres located in each of the main towns in Torbay have been identified to be co-branded as the Family Hubs. The hubs will form the centre of the Child Friendly Torbay Early Help offering and the central locations for the delivery of services and support as prescribed by the Government's Family Hub programme in which Torbay has been identified to be a trail blazer.

The development of the hub network will be co-produced with the Early Help partners as well as the VCS who will play a pivotal role in support parent engagement via the development of parent/carer panels. Across the Early Help partnership there continues to be strong 'buy in' with a collection of established community assets already identified as potential early adopters.

Other Key Programmes/Activity the Early Help Service is Engaged with

Torbay Promise

This is a collaborative partnership set up to support families expecting a child and identified as vulnerable and living in a particularly deprived area of Torbay. The partnership consists of professionals from Health, Education, Social Care and the VCS and will form a team around the family to ensure the first 1001 days in a child's life are characterised by best start principles via the deployment of comprehensive support. Parents are being identified at the pre-birth stage with holistic 'conception to carer' support being offered so that post 1001 days families are able to sustain change. They will be equipped and given opportunities to provide their children with positive childhood experiences that reduce the risk of statutory intervention.

During 2022 thirty-three families engaged with the Torbay promise benefiting from the multi-agency enhanced ante-natal offer. The findings and outcomes of this work will now be fed into the main Family Hub work as well as informing the 'Born into Care' sufficiency workstream. This Sufficiency Strategy workstream has been devised to develop an investment and delivery plan to reduce the number of repeats 'born into care' situations. Not only will this reduce the number of cared for children, but it will also provide a number of potential mothers and fathers with an opportunity to have a family life safely caring for their own children in the future.

Operation Encompass (0–5-year-olds)

Following successful completion of a 5-month pilot project in 2021, Torbay have joined the 3-year research programme supported by the Home Office. The objective of the programme is to build on the established Operation Encompass programme that has been rolled out across primary and secondary schools by identifying pre-school aged children exposed to domestic violence. A multi-agency group meets daily to review police CARAs and determine actions that need to be completed with allocation of the work to the most appropriate agency across children's social care, the Health Visiting Service and Early Years. The objective of this programme is to ensure domestic abuse work is delivered at the earliest point in a child's life in order to prevent escalation and children experiencing chronic abuse. This work sits with FIT 1 which leads on the Early Help domestic abuse response.

This work has continued throughout 2022 and is now considered as 'business as usual'. Going forward, the preventative side of the work is envisaged to include ensuring a trained domestic abuse champion is available in every early year's settings across Torbay.

The Medical Research Fund Programme

This research led by Exeter University has been commissioned to explore the reasons for Torbay's historically high number of children receiving statutory services. A significant focus for this research is the focus on the preventive role of early help across the partnership. The research is being used to inform new ways of working and in particular how the VCS can be supported to play more of an active role within

the partnership. A secondary consideration within the research is the exploration of the links between poverty and neglect. As neglect is the major category for children requiring statutory services, this is a key piece of work. It has led to widening the thinking around poverty from the purely financial context to that of poverty of opportunity and will link into the work of the Homeless and Poverty Prevention Team within the new internal Early Help Service.

The initial findings of this work have been used to feed into the Neglect Group within the Torbay Safeguarding Children Partnership. From this the Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) tool has been identified as the preferred tool for identifying and addressing neglect. The preparation for the implementation of the GCP2 commenced at the latter part of 2022 with a number of practitioners trained to as part of a multi-agency train the trainer programme. Some of these trainers have now started to deliver courses to frontline practitioners which has resulted in 21 practitioners across a number of agencies now being trained to undertake the GCP2 with parents. The aim over the next 2 years is to have a register of 240 practitioners trained to undertake the GCP2 across the Early Help Partnership at any given time.

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

The MASH continues to be appropriately resourced with the involvement of key partners including police, health and education. Several partners are also utilised to support the MASH when necessary, including probation, the youth justice service, adult services and housing. There are three referral coordinators, 3.5 social workers, two Assistant Team Managers and one team manager who ensure a timely and robust response to all new contacts.

Torbay recognise the central function of the MASH in terms of the part it plays in ensuring that children are safeguarded. As such, we welcomed two additional quality assurance measures this year: an appreciative enquiry exercise undertaken internally undertaken in February 2022 and a peer review undertaken by Leeds in March 2022. Feedback from both of these important exercises is reflected upon within this section.

Demand in Torbay continues to be high. The number of referrals in the year to date at December 2022 would equate to 6439 if continued at the same rate for the rest of the year and therefore is likely to be in line with the figure of 6998 for 2021/22. The data below shows that response to contacts within 24 hours has been consistently better than good and in December 2022 (year to date) was 99%. We are pleased with the sustained step-down rates which reflects the investment made in developing Early Help.

Area	September 2019 (Annual conversation)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	December 2022 (YTD)
Contacts	3869 (YTD)	8689	7956	6998	4829
Contacts within 24hrs	86.6% (YTD)	91%	97%	97%	99%
Conversion Rate	17.7%	22.1%	28%	30%	31%
Re-Referral Rate	24%	22.2%	25%	27%	22%
Step down to targeted help		10.7%	17%	25%	25%

The last three months of data demonstrates a consistency in the timeliness of contacts being progressed through the MASH, with 99% of contacts being responded to within timescale in October 2022, November 2022 and December 2022; this aligns to an overall consistency of performance data since April 2022 for MASH contacts not dropping below a 97% completion rate.

This performance has been achieved in the context of some staffing challenges over the past year, due to staff sickness and vacancies which presented capacity issues throughout the year and into December 2022, which had to be mitigated against at times through a flexible approach to staffing within the wider 'Front Door' service. This has required social workers and CCWs from the Assessment Team to directly support MASH activity at various times. This has fed into a wider contingency plan which

recognises that, due to the size of Torbay as an authority and particularly the size of the MASH team, there is a need to ensure that mitigation is in place in the event that staffing capacity is impacted for any reason. Intensive recruitment and retention targeted activity has also been in place to address this identified need and, in the last two months positively, there has been an agency to permanent conversion within the MASH staffing group and all vacancies have now been filled, with all but two staff (one ATM covering maternity leave and one social worker) being permanent members of staff.

Alongside the quantitative data, the MASH continues to engage in dip sampling activity twice a week: one session is collaborative with a rolling schedule of key partner agencies, which supports the review of partner referrals and offers opportunity for learning, reflection, and feedback; and one session per week is a 'MASH only' activity to review internal operational consistency and to enable reflection on practice.

Conversion rates for contacts progressing to Early Help for six out of the last nine months have been equal to or above the end of year average for '21-'22 (25%) and dip sample data supports a view that partners appear to have increased confidence in completing comprehensive Early Help Assessments and a better understanding of thresholds and need. In turn, this increased confidence means that children are supported to get the right help at the right time, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

The MASH has also been heavily involved with updates to the LCS system, through working alongside BetterGov and our data performance team to build a much more comprehensive and 'live' reporting system using Power Bi. This work is paying dividends that are making a difference in our understanding of the work coming in at the Front Door and supporting Mash managers to work effectively across the partnership. The MASH has also worked with BetterGov on various other workflow improvements such as the Child Protection module and Private Fostering workflow for example, to ensure that LCS pathways are fit for purpose and initiated correctly by the MASH at the outset.

How do we know this?

Ofsted stated in the March 2022 inspection:

“When children’s needs or risks to their well-being increase, they are referred to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Clear and well-established systems provide timely and effective management oversight of referrals. The co-location of early help coordinators with professionals from partner agencies who have a responsibility for safeguarding adds value, leading to swift and proportionate threshold decisions. Workers in the MASH are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Most children receive the right level of help and support at the right time. Consent is sought from families when checks with partner agencies are necessary. Mature partnership arrangements in the MASH help to ensure that relevant information is shared swiftly.

Referral pathways are clear, with effective collaboration across teams and services. This is a significant improvement since Ofsted’s last inspection.

Robust checks with other agencies ensure that children at higher risk are prioritised quickly.”

MASH dip sampling and partnership dip sampling routinely evidence sustained strong performance in respect of the timeliness of responses within the MASH examined MASH performance in detail and found that safe decisions were made in a timely fashion, a finding endorsed by monthly performance data which demonstrates that year to date in December 2022, the percentage of contacts completed within twenty-four hours has never fallen below 97%.

Dip sampling activity also evidences that no children have been identified to be at risk through MASH decision making, further reinforcing the view from the Leeds Peer Review and the latest Ofsted inspection in that there is a consistency in the application of thresholds and that decision making is timely, proportionate and right for children and families.

Information from weekly MASH dip sampling activity evidences the following strengths in terms of practice:

- Dip sampling identified that 56% of children were allocated the same day as the referral and 44% the next working day.
- 100% had allocation case notes and management oversight on the direction of work required.

Full audit cycle activity in July 2022 identified:

- Actions undertaken by MASH were timely;
- Appropriate decisions are being made;
- There was a consistently good level of management oversight in relation to decision making.

Areas identified for further opportunity included:

- Considered work needs to be undertaken around chronologies.
- Involvement of birth fathers as a continued area of improvement when gathering information at the front door.

In terms of practice development, following feedback from dip sampling, there is still some work to be done in terms of consistency in the quality of our MASH chronologies and ensuring that we communicate with and capture the voice of ‘absent parents’. In February there is a learning set session organised with the MASH management group to look at how we involve the team in learning from feedback and putting the learning in to practice in an effective and collaborative way. MASH managers have also recently become involved in a Voice of the Child pilot and are currently trialling a more restorative and child focused approach to their Manager’s Analysis which they have embraced with enthusiasm.

The findings of the Leeds Peer Review in March 2022 confirmed the outcome of the appreciative enquiry exercised undertaken in February 2022, in terms of the strengths within practice and areas to strengthen.

Strengths included:

- There was a stable, confidence and competent team of MASH workers and the team were well-resourced.
- There was consistent management oversight, including clear rationales for decision-making; all records considered for audit purposes demonstrated clear evidence of this management oversight.
- Strong achievements in terms of timescales.
- An understanding and commitment to restorative practice and building relationships with parents and carers.
- Effective and efficient strategy discussions.
- Good step down arrangements and relationships with Early Help.
- A strong quality assurance framework.
- Knowledge in regards to exploitation, including partners, and a commitment and enthusiasm to supporting children and young people whereby contextual safeguarding is an identified risk.

Areas for further opportunity included:

- Reconfiguration opportunities to streamline the case management system [this has already been fully actioned as part of the reconfiguration project].
- Continued development of the Early Help pathway and other preventative measures, including the use of Family Group Conference to enhance family-led planning from the very initiation of a child's journey through the MASH.
- Examples of inappropriate contacts from partner agencies.
- A renewed shared vision being progressed through the MASH Strategic Board.

This feedback has been incorporated into a specific action plan, which already evidences significant progress in regards to the areas for further development.

Children whose Responses are within the Single Assessment Teams (SATs)

What do we know about the quality of social work practice?

The Single Assessment service has a full, permanent managerial workforce, two of whom have been part of our succession planning scheme administered by the Learning Academy. Consequently, the two managers that have moved up into these roles has enabled others in the single assessment workforce to progress into Advanced Social Workers positions, contributing to the stability of the service. Of the twenty social workers in the service, 13 are permanent (65%) and the family support workers are all permanent, with two considering social work career pathways as part of our ongoing recruitment and retention strategy.

Area	September 2019	2020/21	2021/22	December 2022 YTD
Children Seen Within 5 Days	72.9%	80%	76%	%
Number of Child in Need post-assessment (excluding CfC, CPP and care experienced YP)	438 (19/20 – 595)	557 at November 2020	528	567
Number of Child Protection Plans	218	223	152	159
Percentage/number of children on a Plan for a Second or Subsequent Time	34.9% (83 children)	25% (74 children)	33% (63 children)	31% (55 children)
CP Visiting (within last 10 Days)	68.2%	88% (March 2021)	76% (March 2022)	62% (December)
ICPCs within 15 Days of Strat	56.9%	80%	92%	89%
Number of Children Allocated to Social Workers – FTE Caseloads	Lowest 3 – highest 29 (Average 22)	20.8	16.6 (September 2021)	17.7 (September 2022)

The timeliness of completion of assessment is 85% (as of December 2022), which is in line with the national standard and above our statistical neighbours. This is a slightly

reduced position from December 2021, when this performance indicator was 87%. Torbay acknowledge that this is in part due to the significance of the additional workload which resulted from the stand up of a local asylum contingency hotel, and the representations from 23 of those residents in terms of age assessments. We now have structures in place and a number of staff across all service have been trained to complete these age assessments which will reduce impact on particular service areas.

In line with Torbay’s restorative model, the single assessment service is working closely with the restorative lead to improve the quality of assessments by focusing on the voice of the child. This involves inclusion in the restorative recording pilot, whereby assessments will be written to the child.

Our expectation is that following a decision made within twenty-four hours of a contact, we have a maximum of five days to visit the child and commence our assessment. A system has been implemented which allows for more robust tracking of the expected five-day visit following the decision being made in MASH to progress to an assessment. Team managers all have access to the Power Bi DASH board that gives an updated overview of any children that have not been seen and this dashboard is used to monitor performance in daily briefings, weekly team briefings as well as the monthly performance surgeries. The percentage of these children seen within this timescale as at December 2022 was 69%, below expectations, and therefore has been identified as a service priority for improvement.

YEAR	Average Days to first visit (where visit was made)	% Visits in 5 days
YTD 2022/23		73%
2021/22	4.52	76%
2020/21	5.03	80%
2019/20	6.3	710%
2018/19	5.5	71%
2017/18	5.3	74%

How do we know this?

During the March 2022 Ofsted inspection, they found:

“Assessment and planning are effective and timely for most children. Social workers demonstrate good skills and professional curiosity in trying to understand and evidence what children and their parents or carers are telling them. Social workers do well at engaging and assessing the parenting strengths and weaknesses of fathers and male partners as well as mothers. Stronger assessments, often carried out using Torbay’s restorative model of social work practice, effectively explore the impact on children of parental mental illness, domestic abuse and substance misuse. Social workers sensitively evaluate the impact that these and other vulnerabilities have on parents but keep a clear focus on children’s need to stay safe. Most assessments are comprehensive and of good quality and include a family history. Children are seen regularly, and workers seek to gain their views about their lived experiences. Some direct work is powerful in enabling children to express their lived experiences, for example in pictorial ways, and this is an important tool in understanding the

harm they are suffering and ensuring that effective action is taken to address it.”

Our audit activity identifies the following areas of strength:

- Identification of risk in last Quarter for the single assessment service was in the 80th percentile from full audits. *“Timely identification of risk was evident and legal action was undertaken in a timely way to ensure the child was safeguarded.”*
- Within single assessments, there is consistent evidence of child and family involvement (between the 60-70th percentile).
- Dip sampling identifies that case notes for **100%** of the children and young people had a clear record of their wishes and feelings
- Single assessments are timely. Dip sampling activity evidenced 88% of assessments completed within 45 days.
- 100% had evidence of family history being considered.
- 100% had evidence of developmental needs, parenting capacity, family and environment being assessed.
- Supervision and Management oversight is in the 70th percentile for this service area.

Audit activity highlights areas of practice to strengthen as being:

- Evidencing direct work on the file and completing direct work through play with younger children.
- Father to be included in assessments- 64% in dip sample had both parents
- Stronger links to research to support analysis.
- CIN plans need to be SMART purposeful and reflect progress.

Operational Services Teams

The Operational Service consists of five teams comprising five full time equivalent Team Managers, five Advanced Social Workers and 30 Social Workers as well as 6.6 Community Care Workers.

In the Operational Service, there continues to be stability in the workforce following the successful recruitment of our international social workers and ASYE social workers. Out of the establishment of thirty social workers, twenty-eight social workers are permanent members of staff (93%). We have been successful in creating stability within the management structure with the permanent recruitment of a Service Manager. Three of five Team Managers are permanent, and we have in the last two weeks received some external expressions of interests relating to potential candidates for these permanent vacancies, and therefore we hope to fulfil the vision of an entirely permanent management structure within the operational service.

There continues to be focussed work in respect of the quality of child in need plans, which will be further supported by the newly appointed CIN IRO to provide an additional layer of support and scrutiny. It is anticipated that the identified work to enhance the quality of child in need plans, as well as the continued development of the Early Help pathways will lead to a reduction in the overall numbers of children who require child in need planning in the near future.

Of those children subject to child in need planning, 84% had been subject to review in the year to December 2022 (not all of the cohort had yet been due for review). Performance demonstrates that 71% of visits to children subject to Child in Need planning were completed within timescales in the year to December 2022. This compares to 65% for 2021-22 and 50% in 2019-20.

The operational service continues to work collaboratively with Torbay's revamped Edge of Care service, renamed Building Better Futures team, to offer high intensity support, reparative parenting, and intensive parenting intervention to work alongside families to reduce risk and stabilise safe permanence for children. This working relationship continues to be an area of development for the service and will involve ensuring ensure that earlier involvement of Building Better Futures is considered at the right time to prevent escalation of need.

Due to the positive work in collaboration with the IRO service, there has been a continued emphasis upon Child Protection Planning which has led to an overall reduction in our children subject to child protection planning over the course of the year. The reduction in child protection planning has been supported by increased management oversight and grip in relation to decision making, supported by reflective conversations to consider the proportionality of a Child Protection Plan. There is evidence of increased confidence and consistency by the workforce when considering Child Protection Planning, reflected in the rate of children becoming subject to child protection planning per 10 000 in December 2022 being 29, far below national and statistical comparators;

The operational service continue to work with the Learning Academy to continue to embed restorative practice when working with families, to consider how best to support

families to work with risks and develop strengths within the family network to meet children's needs, as opposed to escalation. The operational service is currently engaged in the restorative recording pilot, to consider how we can reflect the voice of the child in Core Group meeting, Child In Needs reviews and management oversight and supervisions, by writing our recordings to the child.

We are investing in our social workers to provide training to equip them with the skills to complete comprehensive parenting assessments and there is ongoing work being undertaken alongside the Court Quality Assurance Manager based in the Learning Academy, to enhance the quality assurance of the work presented as part of documentation submitted to court as part of care proceedings. Training will support the growth of expertise within our workforce, leading to reduced time within public law proceedings and better outcomes for children.

As part of our workforce and development planning in relation to the operational service, a buddying system has been implemented for social workers. This links the social workers to the IRO service to provide bespoke mentoring and additional support.

The operational managers have increased oversight through weekly performance meetings and data tools using Power Bi which is supporting improvements within performance.

At the end December 2022, there were 9 children subject to pre-proceedings and the average length of pre-proceedings was 26 days; this is a significant reduction from 37 days in 2021-22, 61 days in 2020-21 and 101 days in 2018-19. This evidences that there is no unacceptable and avoidable drift and delay.

As of December 2022, the snapshot figure evidenced 81 children subject to ongoing care proceedings; this is an increase from 57 children in December 2021. For 43 of these children, care proceedings has been ongoing for more than 26 weeks, with a number of issues impacting on delays for children, including Court availability [which continues to be a challenge post-pandemic], delays in expert availability or court requests for repeat assessments. This understanding and oversight feeds directly into the workforce development plan and has informed our decision to work with Mutual Ventures to more comprehensively understand the impact of this delay on children.

Operational services continue to robustly track progress for all children in pre-proceedings or proceedings. The responsible Head of Service as Chair of Legal Gateway Panel and in conjunction with a dedicated Court Quality Assurance Manager monitors and oversees all cases through the Legal Gateway Panel, to ensure that they remain on track wherever possible. Pre-proceedings are monitored mid-way and at the end of the 12-week process, ensuring consistent management oversight, decision making and completion of the process within the agreed timeframe.

Unborn children subject to assessment continue to be tracked through the Unborn Baby Tracker Panel and there are clear expectations in respect of pre-birth assessment and planning identified within Torbay Pre-Birth protocol. This has resulted in more robust oversight of the children concerned. For those children who require

court intervention at birth, there are stronger evidence-based plans in place, and we are encouraged to have seen a substantial reduction in the use of residential placements and better use of parent and child family-based placements.

Year	Residential parent and child	Foster placement for parent and child	Total
2019	8	17	25
2020	2	10	12
2021	1	11	12
2022	2	9	11
2023 year to date	0	1	1

How do we know this?

Ofsted found during the inspection in March 2022:

“Bespoke direct-work tools are helping children with complex needs, including some of the most vulnerable and exploited adolescents, to manage their behaviours and to express their views. Plans and planning are improving and all children in need have a current plan in place. The majority of plans are reviewed regularly to track progress. Most plans identify children’s most important needs and the key risks to them, although some are not updated following significant events or changes to children’s circumstances. The quality of this child in need work is not consistent for all disabled children. This means that a small number of children are experiencing delay in making progress in line with their assessed needs. However, inspectors did not identify any children left in situations of significant risk.

Rigorous monitoring and tracking of children subject to the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline is preventing drift and ensuring timely decisions about applications to family courts. Plainly written, authoritative and sensitive letters to parents explicitly outline what needs to happen. When necessary, legal proceedings are initiated quickly to ensure that children are not subject to neglect or living with other damaging home conditions for too long.”

The audit universe includes full audits in relation to children supported within the operational service on an ongoing basis; in addition, a number of dip samples have been undertaken (including children becoming subject to a child protection plan undertaken in July 2022 and the quality of Core Group meetings in December 2022).

Areas of strength within the operational service include:

- Involvement of children and families, particularly with regard to parent’s views being included in **87%** of plans. (May 2022)
- Collaboration with key agencies remains a strength in practice with a dip sample identifying **87%** of CP plans were multi-disciplinary and mostly involved school and colleagues from health (May 22).

- Improved outcomes were rated as good for 75% of audits completed in 21-22.

The recent dip sample undertaken in December 2022 in respect of the quality of Core Groups found:

- 100% had core groups recorded.
- 60% of plans were SMART/
- 75% had the child's view recorded on the plan.
- 100% evidenced at least one parents' view.

A dip sample was completed in September 2022 to consider those children who became subject to a child protection plan in July 2022.

Strengths of practice identified included:

- Involvement continues to be a strength within the full audits and the voice of the child and involvement of family within the case records meeting good falling with the 70th percentile of Quarter 1 (2022-2023) and 60th percentile in Q2.
- Improvements in the gradings and overall outcomes increased by 8%

The dip sample identified the following learning:

- Threshold was not consistently applied. Of the children considered, threshold was not felt to be met in respect of 25%.
- For a number of the children, who were child in need there was an disproportionate overreaction to incidents and progression to child protection process without consideration to strengthening the CIN plan and whether this could/ would reduce that risk.
- There needs to be more focus within plans on the role of the multi-agency group in facilitating change.

Areas to be further strengthened to achieve consistency and sustainably high standards are:

The operational service is focussing on supervision and management oversight; there has been a decline in performance in this area, in part due to two new team managers joining the service and adjusting to these new positions. Increased monitoring is showing a week-on-week improvement, alongside one to one mentoring support and investment within the Team Manager training programme which will continue to develop manager's leadership skills and highlight the power and value of reflective supervision, both for children and families and for the workforce.

Children with Disabilities

What do we know about the quality of social work practice?

The responsibility for the Children with Disabilities team is organizationally located within Regulated Services and managed on a day-to-day basis by the Head of Service and Service Managers within this area of service.

The Children with Disabilities Team is fully staffed consists of one Team Manager, an Advanced Social Worker, four permanent social workers (one of which is an interim social worker), three newly qualified social workers, a student social worker and two Community Care Workers.

Increasingly, members of the team are locating in special schools, to enhance the relationships and multi-agency working in respect of the children the team support.

Children are referred into the service directly via the MASH, where threshold decisions are made. Historically, the eligibility criteria for this team have relied heavily on diagnosis. This has been reviewed and is now solely focused on the impact of the child's disability on their lived experience, their functioning and needs and this change has been positively received by parents and carers. Decisions to do so depend on the complexity of the disability and therefore children who are assessed as having a mild or moderate need are supported by the operational or cared for teams. The focus of the Children with Disabilities Team is upon children with severe or profound needs including physical or learning disabilities, sensory impairments, and communication disorders.

At Torbay, we recognise that children with additional needs and disabilities and their families may require a variety of additional support, at various times in their lives from both universal and statutory services. We believe that children should be supported in the right way, and at the right level according to their assessed needs.

Whilst every child with a disability is a child in need, and every family caring for a child with a disability has a right to request an assessment of need, it may be the case that this assessment determines a low level of support, through the provision of Short Breaks or another intervention, which addresses the identified need to a point whereby statutory intervention is no longer required, and support can be provided under universal service through Early Help.

Often, the needs of a child with a disability are unlikely to significantly change in a short period of time and the support identified will need to be ongoing as opposed to short term basis; this can mean that children with disabilities are disproportionately supported as Children in Need for significant period of time, which for children and families can feel unnecessary, invasive, and intrusive. We do not believe it is fair or proportionate for children and their families to be supported at level four in terms of threshold, at statutory Child in Need (s17), simply because the provision of a low-level service is required as a result of the child's needs and there are no other support or

safeguarding issues identified. We have therefore introduced a Children with Disabilities Early Help pathway. In terms of the process, at the point of step down, the most recent single assessment will form the foundation of the assessment driving forward the child’s Early Help plan.

Unlike other services, the Children with Disabilities Teamwork with all children who meet their criteria for support regardless of legal status. Therefore, the team supports children who are subject to:

- Early Help planning;
- Children in Need planning;
- Children subject to Child Protection Plans;
- Cared For Children planning;
- Children subject to Public Law Outline; and
- Children with a plan of adoption.

Children with disabilities team	December 2021	December 2022
% of CP visits on time	No data for December 2021 available due to migration issue	73% (8 of 11 visits; YTD is 92%)
% of CiN visits on time	46%	59% (26 of 44 visits; YTD is 61%)
% of CfC visits on time	86% (6 of 7 visits)	75% (3 of 4 visits; YTD is 58%)

All visiting rules have been updated in respect of every individual child, in line with the assessment of their need. A bespoke performance report is being built, separating Children with Disabilities performance from that of other areas of service. Performance is monitored daily, through daily briefings, and through monthly performance surgeries.

We have sought to strengthen the strategic and operational links between the Children with Disabilities team and the SEND agenda. As part of the Written Statement of Action, there is a renewed commitment to improve the quality of Appendix E and social care contributions to Education, Health and Care Plans. In addition, the post-sixteen officer from SEND forms part of the Transitions Panel, which reviews and monitors transition planning for all children supported in the Children with Disabilities Team from the age of fourteen.

A Parent Carer distinct assessment has been created which is now embedded within the assessment proforma on Liquid Logic.

The Team Manager in Children with Disabilities meets regularly with the Carers' Services Delivery Manager, in terms of the services available to parent/carers within the local area.

How do we know this?

Children with disabilities assessment and planning was considered in the November 2022 audit cycle specifically.

Areas of strength included:

- Identification of risk.
- Involvement of children and families.

Areas to strengthen include:

- Ensuring all children are subject to timely, reflective supervision.
- Ensuring that single assessments take into account family history and the impact of the support of wider family member.
- Ensuring plans include measurable outcomes, which can then be reviewed through the CIN or Core Group process.

Experiences and progress of cared for children and achieving permanence.

Cared For Children

What do we know about the quality of social work practice?

The Cared For Children's Service comprises two teams, both of which are managed by their own Team Manager and there is one Advanced Social Worker whose role is to work across both teams. The service consists of 10.6 experienced social workers (incorporating two ASYEs), and four permanent Community Care Workers. The cared for service has three vacancies for social workers currently, and five interim workers within the service; this is reflective of some challenges we have experienced over the last year in recruiting to the service.

Torbay are corporate parents to a reducing number of cared for children, from a height of 362 children and young people in the 2018-19 period to 329 children as of December 2022. This included 29 asylum-seeking children either transferred to Torbay as part of the National Transfer Scheme or subject to the age assessment process. As of the 2nd February 2023, the time of writing, this has reduced further to 321 children (including 28 UASC).

The following table provides profile data relating to the Cared for Children Service. As has been highlighted in the introduction, it demonstrates a high number of areas in which improvements have been achieved, some of which is significant. Narrative explaining the specific data reflected within this table can be found below.

Area	September 2019	November 2020	December 2021	December 2022
Cared for Children				
Number	352	326	295	329
Placement stability	Short term – 15.2% Long Term – 65.6%	Short term – 9.8% Long Term – 61.7%	Short term – 14% Long Term – 67%	Short-term – 20% Long-term 66%
Visiting	77.6% (YTD) - 55.1% (19/20 YTD)	68.4%	75%	79% YTD
Initial health assessments	47.4%	80%	25% YTD	34% YTD (possible late recording issues)
Annual health assessments	84.1% (August 2019 data)	88.1%	75%	86%
Dental checks	45.8%	85.8%	34%	57%
SDQ	60.8% (53% 19/20 YTD)	56.9%	[no data]	66%
In Residential Care	42	22	22	15

Cared for children more than 20 miles away	60%	26.5%	27% (November 2021)	32%
--	-----	-------	---------------------	-----

Placement stability

Torbay are proud of the fact that the greater number of cared for children achieving permanence through long term placement stability has been sustained this year, at 66% as of December 2022. This is reflective of a number of initiatives which are being progressed, to consider other forms of permanence for our cared for children, for example the Former Foster Carer Special Guardianship Offer, which is described in more detail below. However, it is recognised that this remains slightly below both the national and statistical comparators and therefore enhancing permanence and placement stability remains a key priority area for the service.

To ensure that intensive support is available at the point that placement instability is identified, the pathways within our edge of care provision, Building Futures Together, have been enhanced to ensure that there is a clear offer of support to all cared for children, their fostering families and their placements.

There has been a decline in terms of short-term stability performance and this is for a number of reasons. This group of children includes those for whom changes of placement are purposeful and necessary, for example children with a plan of adoption. In 2022-23, it also increasingly included those UASC who have made representations in respect of age assessment. This meant that Torbay needed to urgently identify a number of placements for 22 young people who presented at approximately the same time. Interim options had to be explored to ensure the welfare and safety of the resident in the immediacy whilst longer term options were identified. This cohort also includes a number of cared for children with highly complex needs, whereby interim solutions have been necessary due to immediate notice being given by placement providers. This demand generated by providers, often with little or no notice has been an ongoing challenge nationally. We always challenge these decisions and re-enforce to providers the damaging impacts their actions cause.

We advocate 'Staying Put' as a beneficial option for our cared for children as they prepare for transition and pay foster carers competitively to continue to support young people once they turn 18. This reflects in the fact that, of the 16 young people who are now 18 and who left care on or close to their 18th birthdays, 12 (or 75%) remain in Staying Put arrangements.

Visiting

The increased use of PowerBI dashboards to monitoring visiting compliance on a daily basis, and through weekly team and service meetings, has contributed to a sustained improvement in those children being seen on time in line with their visiting schedule. Daily briefings, weekly team and service meetings as well as monthly performance surgeries are able to make use of this child-level data to explore the rationale for any visits completed outside of timescales and, most importantly, the impact of this on children.

Health

Torbay continues to support all children to access therapeutic support when they need it, and when threshold for statutory CAMHS intervention is not met.

As of December 2022, the year-to-date figure for the timely completion of Initial Health Assessments is 34%. This is disappointing, as a number of initiatives have been embedded to ensure that the significance of a child becoming cared for, through a holistic lens, is fully recognised and that all statutory duties are complied with in a timely manner. This includes the introduction of a 'Becoming Cared For' guide for practitioners, which includes prompts for consideration before, during and after the process of a child becoming cared for. In addition, a 'Becoming Cared For' meeting is chaired by the Divisional Director of Safeguarding for every child who becomes cared for, to allow for greater senior leader scrutiny and oversight of the planning for the child at this pivotal point in their life. Through data scrutiny, Torbay are currently investigating potential late recording issues which may be impacting on performance in this area.

We remain in a recovery period in terms of health-related performance. However, there are now encouraging signs of improvement. As of December 2022, 57% of children who have been cared for over a year or longer had had a dental check in the year; 86% of children who have been cared for over a year or longer have had a health assessment in the year. We are aware that our sixteen and seventeen years olds are a significant proportion of the 14% who had not had a health assessment, as they have not provided consent. This remains a focus for the newly established Health Steering group, the IRO service and the Corporate Parenting Board, with the aim of ensuring that cared for young people understand the benefits of this assessment in terms of their short- and longer-term outcomes and aspirations.

The Health Steering Group that has been established, brings together children's social care and various health representatives, to identify solution-focused actions to overcome barriers to the appropriate access to health services and wider health performance. This includes a review of Torbay's SDQ process, to ensure that we are maximising the intelligence this provides in relation to the emotional health of our cared for children. It enables earlier intervention to prevent escalation into mental health crisis and the wider implications this has for the child, including its impact on placement stability.

Historically, there has been a service level agreement in place between CAMHS and Children's Services and this is currently under review with a view to significantly revising the role of this service to meet the changing and current needs of our cared for young people.

Children in Residential Placements

Torbay's ethos remains that every child deserves, where possible, to live in a family setting and it is this conviction which has underpinned the intensive work undertaken by the service to safely reduced the number of Torbay cared for children in residential provision. In in December 2022, 15 children lived in residential settings a significant reduction from 46 children in the 2018-19 period. Exit planning is in place from the

moment a residential provision is identified to establish what is required to enable a safe step-down into a fostering family as soon as possible, subject to it being consistent with the child's needs.

As a result of the National Panel Chair's phase one report, Torbay undertook its own assurance activity in relation to all cared for children with Education, Health and Care Plans in residential provisions between September 2022 and October 2022. Whilst Torbay did not identify any children placed in residential specialist schools that are registered as children's homes and who are cared for, there was an appetite to apply this quality assurance exercise to provide partnership assurance in respect of the quality being provided to our children. This exercise involved joint visits and quality assurance activity with the placement provision and education setting for each child, conducted jointly by our Placements Auditor and the child's social worker and consultations with the wider partnership.

Cared for children placed more than 20 miles away

Torbay continue to promote a child's right to be cared for in the locality of their home, their family and peer network and in line with their wishes and feelings. The increased number of children placed more than 20 miles away includes a significant number of UASC for whom the placement has been deliberately selected in accordance with their wishes to live in a more urban setting.

In line with Torbay sufficiency strategy, we are committed to increasing local provision to help our young people to live in closer proximity to family and friends when it is right for them to do so. We are offering choice and not subjecting them unnecessarily and avoidably to out of borough living arrangements.

Participation

Participation continues to be a significant focus and priority for Children's Services, particularly in respect of the voice of our cared for and care experienced children and young people. Such is its importance that a Strand Lead through the Strategic and Operational Corporate Parenting Boards has been dedicated to it, exploring how we can embed a culture of co-production, consultation and true participation and learn from what children, young people and their families tell us. This has in part been motivated by the wealth of invaluable information and learning which was extracted from Torbay's roll out of the Bright Spots Your Life In and After Care surveys undertaken in 2021.

Torbay continues to have an active Cared for Community represented by the Circle (previously known as the Children in Care Committee) and a participation group for care experienced young people called My Voice. Previously, this service was commissioned to the Torbay Youth Trust. However, in line with our evolving and strengthened participation agenda, this service is now delivered in-house, through the Learning Academy's two dedicated Participation Officers.

The Divisional Directors of Safeguarding and Education and the Director of Children's Services meet on a monthly basis with a child with involvement from social care and two cared for children, to discuss with them their views on their experience of all aspects of social care including perspectives on being a cared for child, and These meetings are then fed into an ongoing participation feedback loop, with the notes and learning shared across Children's Services, with specific actions arising from each meeting. Some of the ideas arising from this participation work, such as the Act of Kindness Certificates and Celebrating Achievement nomination for cared for children, have now been actively embedded into practice and are proving to be a powerful and positive way of celebrating with our cared for and care experienced children and young people.

Torbay is also establishing a Children and Young People's Panel (name to be confirmed by the young people themselves) from January 2023 which provides a regular forum in which young people can scrutinise and provide feedback in relation to policy, practice and quality of service.

Special Guardianship

As of March 2019, all Special Guardianship assessments and Special Guardianship Support has been held within the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Assessment team is responsible for the assessment process itself, including support for the prospective Special Guardian and input into the formulation of the Special Guardianship Support plan. Once a Special Guardianship Order is made, Special Guardians can access support through the Fostering Support team.

All Special Guardianship Order assessments are now undertaken by social workers within the Fostering Assessment Team; all support for children subject to these Orders and their families is coordinated through the Fostering Support team. Referral routes, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and established.

A flowchart outlining social work responsibility in respect of Special Guardianship support plans, how these are recorded and the recording of communication of this to applicants. This has been communicated to all teams across Children's Services.

Information leaflets for assessment and support are in use by both the Fostering Assessment and Support teams. Consultation was offered by legal services in the creation of these leaflets.

A Special Guardianship Order tracker is being maintained, to include all those children subject to the Order, the status of the support being offered to them and the dates for review of the Special Guardianship Support plan. This will include trigger dates for the children at the age of fifteen years and six months, which will then prompt a letter explaining their rights to access from the Care Experience service.

Each Special Guardianship Support plan is then reviewed annually, in line with the month the Order was made, and a letter is sent to every Special Guardian at this point, outlining the support available to them, information in respect of our work with Family Action and our Family First support leaflet. For those Special Guardians receiving

active support from the team, more frequent reviews of the Special Guardianship Support plan are undertaken in line with the child, Special Guardian, and family need.

In conjunction with the Learning Academy, Special Guardians will now also have access to specific training opportunities and also benefit from our growing Corporate Parenting Offer. In addition, Special Guardianship support groups are in place, and we will look to develop this over the next year in line with the Fostering workstream.

The number of SGOs made in 2021/22 was 19 (17% of children ceasing to be cared for); the year-to-date figure at December 2022 was 9 (15%).

Transitions

Transitions remain a key area of focus and improvement for Children's Services.

Children within the Children with Disabilities team and the Cared for Children teams, and all young people with an EHCP, are tracked from their fourteenth birthday; this is through the implementation of a Transition Tracker and through the newly established Transitions Panel, which went live on 21 September 2021. The Transition Panel is held weekly, and oversees transition planning in respect of the following key areas:

- Current placements and support packages.
- Transition planning and joint work with adult services.
- Issues in relation to liberty protection safeguards and restrictive measures if identified.
- Joint work between the allocated social worker and Personal Advisor where appropriate.
- Preparation for independence work.
- Post-eighteen accommodation and support planning
- What actions are required to achieve better outcomes for the young person?

The membership of this Panel includes a representative from adult social care, health and SEN, as well as key individuals from Children's Services. The Panel will also serve as a means of consistent managerial oversight in respect of the allocation of Personal Advisors at fifteen years and nine months. A pre-transfer referral is now made to the Care Experienced team three months before the young person's sixteenth birthday. This is to allow for a Personal Advisor to be co-allocated, and for relationship-building and information gathering to take place at a much earlier point than it has been historically, to aid the transition of the young person from cared for to care experienced.

The Transitions Panel also forms a means of identifying and tracking parent/carers who may need additional support during the period of the child's transition; this is highlighted to the adult transitions team, in order that appropriate support can be accessed by the parent/carer when the child becomes an adult.

The remit of the Panel has now been extended to include those assessed as at high risk of exploitation, those supported through the youth homelessness pathway, young parents, young people supported through a child protection plan and those subject to the NRM process. Any young person can be referred for consideration through the

Panel if this is felt necessary and beneficial. Most important, all young people with an EHCP are also now considered as part of this Panel, in line with our Written Statement of Action improvement work relating to preparing for adulthood and our vision of becoming a One Children's service.

The joint transitions protocol has also been reviewed jointly between Children's, adult social care and all other relevant partners, including Young Carers, Carers services and adult mental health. This review focused on a consultation with young people and parent/carers as well as SEND Family Voice, to ensure lived experience was reflected throughout. This document is now explicit in terms of what transition to adulthood is, and how this can be experienced by young people, as well as outlining the characteristics and expectations in terms of good transition planning.

A Young Person's One Page Guide to Transition has been created, following feedback from young people about this protocol and the need for something more concise and young-person focused. Next steps are to create a Parent/Carer specific guide also.

In addition, we are seeking to utilize the Transitions Panel, to undertake an aspiration audit of young people, and then tailor bespoke opportunities in relation to employment and education aligned to these wishes and feelings.

Children with a plan of reunification

We have continued to focus on those children who can return to parents' care and our Building Futures Together team continues to assist with this area of work, with a reunification pathway included within our edge of care intervention. We are also committed, where it is right for children, to ensure Court orders are discharged at the earliest opportunity.

In 2021/22, 46 children returned home; in December 2022, the figure for the year to date was 10, with a number of children's plans in progress and awaiting final confirmation through the conclusion of care proceedings.

Our children who are placed with parents (this currently relates to eighteen young people as of the 2nd February 2023, an increase from twelve at December 2021) are reviewed by the Permanence Panel in order that there is no drift in considering the discharge of orders. A Schedule 3 Tracker has also been established, to track pending and current plans of reunification, dates of completion and review of Schedule 3 assessments and agreed projections for presentation to Legal Gateway Panel when a plan for revocation has been confirmed through Permanence Panel.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Torbay has been working with the National Transfer Scheme since August 2021, on both a voluntary and the mandatory basis, and have welcomed 18 unaccompanied young people as part of this scheme to date, having offered placements for over 25 referrals.

In September 2022, an asylum contingency hotel was established in Torbay. As a result, 23 representations have been made in respect of age disputes, triggering the age assessment process.

As of the 2nd February 2023, Torbay support 28 UASC cared for young people (above the 0.1% figure for Torbay of 25), 10 care experienced UASC young people and one further representation remains in triage.

The Cared For and Care Experienced teams therefore support a growing number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) from all over the world who are cared for or care experienced. All UASC have access to interpreters when they become cared for, a facility extended to all care experienced young people who need this support. We link UASC into education, health services and language classes to improve their life chances. We work closely with young people, their carers, solicitors and our legal team regarding the young peoples 'remain' status and during the appeal process. Where necessary we attend Court (appeal / 'bail') and solicitor appointments with the young person. We support young people to make contact with lost or otherwise displaced family members through organisations like the Red Cross.

Placements

The Placement Team is overseen by the Service Manager for Specialist Services, and comprises one Placement and Contracts Officer and two full time equivalent referral co-ordinators. The team is responsible for identifying and commissioning all placements for children in our care. The Team also actively tracks placements and completes due diligence checks, on providers in conjunction with the Placement Auditor noting Ofsted inspection judgements and outcomes. The Team liaises with the social workers and team managers around timely completion and quality of placement plans and All About Me (child-centred front pages) for our children requiring a placement.

The commissioning arrangements to procure semi-independent provision and housing for care experienced young people have been reviewed and a block contract and Framework Agreement for semi-independent living arrangements have been developed and are in place.

A Placement Auditor has now been in post for a significant period of time and this role is instrumental in undertaking audits of placement provisions across the range of placement options for young people. The Placement Auditor has already had an impact, in working with providers to undertake child-focused and outcome-focused quality assurance visits to semi-independent and residential provisions. The Placement Auditor is also contributing to a local quality assurance framework and its associated set of standards to ensure there is consistency across the Southwest in respect of expectations for semi-independent provision, thereby improving the quality and oversight of semi-independent provision and the service this provides to our young people. The Placement Auditor will also be joining Torbay's Fostering Panel in the quality assurance role.

How do we know this?

Ofsted found during the inspection in March 2022:

"Children in care are seen and seen alone regularly by their social workers, who work hard to build meaningful relationships, often using creative ways to engage and

communicate with them. This is ensuring that children's voices are heard and that their views are informing planning. Not all children have effective life-story work carried out to help them understand their history and circumstances.

Children return to their parents' care when it is safe for them to do so. Good consideration is given to children's wishes, to the level of risk and to the support required to give the return home the greatest chance of success. Family time is encouraged and supported to ensure that children maintain links with their family and people important to them. When children cannot remain with their parents, other family members are considered and assessed to enable children to continue to live with their extended family whenever possible.

For most children, permanent homes are being found in a timely manner. Children benefit from timely adoptions or placements with special guardians and connected carers. Early permanence and parallel planning are very well considered, foster to adopt is well established and a number of children have benefited from such arrangements. Staff are tenacious in finding adoptive families for children, including older children with additional needs.

When family arrangements are not possible, most children live in alternative stable placements that meet their needs well and where they are making good progress. Children's needs are well considered when matching and placing them with foster carers. When placements are at risk of breakdown, effective additional support is provided by the edge of care team and stability meetings are held to consider what other support can be provided to help make placements more resilient.

The right support and interventions are in place for most children in care to enable them to flourish. Most children's care plans contain the right actions to promote progress for children. Children's plans are regularly monitored through timely reviews. Most independent reviewing officers contact children just before their review and maintain relationships with them.

Health assessments are completed in a timely manner and good use is made of them in plans for children. The assessments, carried out by healthcare professionals, contain clearly recorded discussions with children about their health needs. Children in care are supported with leisure and enrichment opportunities, which promote their well-being and enhance their peer relationships."

Audit activity identifies the following areas of strength:

- Overall outcomes of meeting a good standard of outcomes for our Cared for children has remained in the 80th percentile across Q1 and Q2 of 2022.
- Risk is being identified well. The majority of audits graded the identification of risk for our cared for children and meets good or exceeds good in q1 and Q2 scoring within the 80th percentile.
- There is clear evidence of working well with agencies with this ranging from the 80th and 70th percentile in Q1 and Q2 respectively.
- Living arrangements for our cared for children are also graded as meets good or exceeds good for 83% of the audits completed across Q1 and Q2

- Whilst supervision remains an area for development in this service area, it is positive to note within the dip sample there was evidence of 89% supervision records identifying the aspirations we wanted to achieve for our children.
- Voice of the child is a strength within practice and recording with audits meeting good or exceeds good being within the 70th percentile. **87%** of the young people's views were clearly recorded within the case file for cared for children and young people.
- Cared for child have plans which consider and offer permanency with audits showing this as meeting good in over 70 percent of those examined.

A February 2022 dip sample undertaken in relation to the circumstances of the last ten children accommodated showed:

- 80% of children had a care plan and 70% were visited in the first week of placement.
- 90% files evidenced placement planning meetings.
- 80 % of children considered in placement move dip sample had clear IRO oversight evident.

Areas of opportunity through audit activity are identified as:

- The quality of assessments for cared for and care experienced children and the timely update of assessments at points of significant change for a child.
- The quality of plans, being timely and SMART and purposeful is an area of ongoing development.
- Frequent and consistently reflective supervision and management oversight.
- Rationale for matching to be more clearly recorded on children's files.
- More consistent recording of stability meetings and outcomes and actions.

We know our children, what they need, what their parents, carers and providers need, and we implement creative plans of wrap-around support in a timely way to safeguard against placement instability, with the full knowledge of what placement breakdown can mean for a child in terms of their outcomes. The areas of opportunity as outlined above will therefore be progressed with that full understanding, and in consultation with our children and families.

Care Experience Services

The care experienced service comprises of a full-time Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager who are both qualified social workers, and there are eight Personal Advisors, one of whom we are currently supporting to undertake their studies in order to become a social worker.

There are currently, as of December 2022, 116 former relevant young people aged 19-21, however the service supports young people who are cared for by Torbay Children's Services are currently provided with a Personal Advisor when they reach 16 and this is co-ordinated through the Transitions Panel.

Area	September 2019 (annual conversation)	November 2020	December 2021	December 2022
Care experienced– in touch	100% (82.5% 19/20 YTD)	70.3%	95%	92%
Visited	83.3% (63.9% 19/20 YTD)	40.6%	51%	63%
In suitable accommodation	90% (88.1% 19/20 YTD)	85.7%	87%	82%
EET	63.2%	68.1%	46%	58%

Young people in contact

In the current 2022/23 year, there are 116 Former Relevant young people who have or will have their 19th, 20th or 21st birthday during the year (the cohort on which we are required to report to the DfE). 107, or 92%, have had a care experienced contact (CEC) recorded in the period from three months before to one month after their birthday. This is in line with national comparators in 2021-22.

We also monitor regular visiting. At December 2022, 63% of care-experienced young people aged 18, 19 and 20 had had a visit recorded in the last eight weeks.

Pathway Plans

At December 2022, 95% of Former Relevant young people aged 19-21 had a Pathway Plan, and 23% had had their plan updated in the last six months. The timely updating of pathway plans has also been highlighted as an area for development through audit activity and is a service wide priority reflected in the care experienced action plan.

Education, Employment and Training

Supporting our cared for and care experienced young people to maintain engagement in education, employment and training remains a key priority for the service. As at December 2022, 58% of the Former Relevant cohort aged 19-21 were in contact and

in EET during the four-month period around their birthdays. Of the young people who were not in EET:

- 5 were unemployed because of illness or disability;
- 3 were unemployed because of pregnancy or parenting;
- 8 were unemployed for other reasons.

The table below evidences the impact pre pandemic and post pandemic in respect of our care experienced young people engaged in education, employment or training and we are beginning to see positive signs of recovery back to pre-pandemic levels, with performance in this area remaining consistently above 55% in every month since April 2022 (the highest being 66% in October 2022):

Measure	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Dec 22
Number of former relevant care-experienced children and young people aged 19-21 in employment, education or training				46	52
Percentage of former relevant care-experienced children and young people aged 19-21 in employment, education or training	57%	54%	66% (55% LAIT)	44%	58%

We are committed to enabling young people to remain in education and actively support them in identifying and securing college and university places. We are currently in discussion with South Devon College to enable broader space educational offer to be available to care experienced young people and have also worked with a number of local businesses in respect of bespoke work experience and employment opportunities for care experienced young people. We have focused primarily on those young people who are not in employment, education and training, with nineteen offered bespoke opportunities through this joint work with local businesses. In addition, we are imminently piloting a project with our Human Resources department, to provide bespoke preparation for employment intervention, as well as targeted work experience opportunities, for both our care experienced young people and young people with SEND.

Our Human Resources department also ensure that all internal opportunities are provided to the Care Experienced Team on a weekly, basis so that bespoke matching to potentially suitable opportunities for our care experienced young people.

The broadening of our Corporate Parenting Offer has also enabled connections to be made in the community, which are proving beneficial in ensuring that opportunities for links to employment providers can be specifically matched to the individual aspirations

of cared for young people. For example, this approach is currently benefitting a cared for young person with an ambition to join the Army.

We will be looking to utilise the Transitions Panel, to undertake an aspiration audit in relation to all of our cared for young people aged fourteen and above, to enable targeted and bespoke opportunities to help these young people achieve their ambitions in line with their individual wishes and feelings.

Suitable accommodation

As at December 2022, 82% of the Former Relevant cohort aged 19-21 were in contact and considered to be in suitable accommodation during the four-month period around their birthdays. Twelve young people were in contact but not considered to be living in suitable accommodation.

Following the Ofsted inspection, immediate action was taken to address the small number of care experienced young people living in bed and breakfast, hotel or temporary accommodation. Any care experienced young person in such accommodation now has oversight not only through the Youth Homelessness Prevention Panel but also at DCS level through the Independent Placement Overview Panel. Unless a capacitated care experienced adult is actively choosing this type of accommodation, all alternative options are explored, to ensure that appropriate accommodation is secured without delay. A bespoke risk assessment has been created, to ensure that risks are appropriately identified for any young person choosing to live within such accommodation.

Like every Local Authority, we know that we need to do more in relation to living arrangements for our young people and we continue to work collaboratively with our colleagues in housing to ensure that our care experienced young people have access to safe, secure, sustainable, and affordable accommodation. Care experienced young people particularly are in need of move on accommodation, which offers them their first step into accommodation independence. Our young people are very clear that this should not be further types of supported accommodation, but safe and affordable housing options which do not further stigmatise them enable the young people to become fully part of their chosen community. Improved access to appropriate accommodation is not only a Children's Services priority but is also adopted as corporate priority for Torbay Council and their partnership.

We are also keen to support young people in living with their existing carers under Staying Put arrangements. As at December 2022, 12 of 23 young people who left care in the year aged 18, and who were in foster care at the point they left care, remained in Staying Put arrangements, which equates to 52% of the total. This is the same figure as in the 2021/22 year. There is no published comparable national figure, but the DfE expects performance to be in the 10% to 50% range.

To sustain this, the service has undertaken a co-produced review of the Staying Put Policy and Offer, with both cared for and care experienced young people and fostering families, and this is due to be presented for endorsement by April 2023.

How do we know this?

Ofsted found during the inspection in March 2022:

“Care leavers are well supported by dedicated personal advisers who work hard to keep in touch with them and offer the support that they need, when they need it. This includes care leavers who are aged over 21. The local authority is in meaningful contact with the vast majority of care leavers. When this is not the case, determined efforts are made to re-establish contact.

The move to introduce personal advisers for all care leavers at age 16 has been well received. While not consistent, this has enabled some care leavers to build valued supportive relationships with their workers prior to the personal adviser taking on key-worker responsibility when the young person turns 18. This has enabled care leavers to be better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of adulthood.

A high number of care leavers are in higher education, with young people actively encouraged and supported to embark on such journeys. When care leavers are not in education, employment or training, personal advisers actively focus on trying to engage these young people in such activities. The local authority recognises it has more to do to expand opportunities for all care leavers to find employment, apprenticeships, and enriching opportunities in the wider council and in private industries and businesses in Torbay.

Some pathway plans do not consistently involve young people in their creation and are not updated in response to a significant change in circumstances. The majority of care leavers do know what actions are being taken as a result of their pathway plans and are making measurable progress against pathway plan objectives.

There is a range of supported accommodation for care leavers. Shortages in supply have meant that a very small number of care leavers have been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Oversight of these arrangements is not sufficiently robust, particularly in terms of visiting arrangements and supporting young people with everyday needs. During the inspection, the local authority took immediate and well-considered steps to strengthen the support offered to these young people.

Senior leaders are actively trying to respond to the lack of housing options through a range of approaches, including internal and external commissioning. The recent introduction of paying for a deposit and six months’ rent in advance has enabled some care leavers, who would not previously have been able to, to move into more suitable accommodation.”

Following the recommendations made by Ofsted, Torbay took immediate action to review the service and invited the National Advisor for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell, to visit Torbay on the 2nd and 3rd November 2022 in order to provide objective feedback on the plans to improve to provide outstanding services to our care experienced young people.

Strengths identified from this visit included:

*Impressive leadership and management which was ambitious and aspirational.

*Leadership reflected a passion and commitment to provide excellent services to care experienced young people.

*Exceptional offer in some areas.

*A Local Offer which is good and above statutory requirements.

*Strong strategic direction from the Corporate Parenting Board.

*Transitions policy and practice of allocation of Personal Advisors at sixteen is good.

*Use of data and performance is good, and stories are starting to be used as a new way of looking at data.

*Very positive feedback from care experienced young people.

Areas for further opportunity included:

*Broadening the membership of the Corporate Parenting Board.

*Asking partners to write and own their own offer to care experienced young people.

*Holding key partner and business events to broaden the Corporate Parenting Offer and EET opportunities.

*Create opportunities in the 'family businesses.

*Work on the transition's pathway with adults services, to ensure care experienced young people are given more than one chance to engage.

*Reconsider a priority definition for care experienced young people in terms of housing allocation.

*Housing to develop a care experienced approach in respect of debt and arrears.

*Formal development of a Guarantor Scheme.

*Consider a post-21 distinct offer within the wider Local Offer.

This feedback has informed an action plan aligned to the Strategic and Operational Corporate Parenting Board, which sets out immediate actions to progress the areas for development.

Areas for continued opportunity also include, through the Becoming an Adult Steering Group initiated as part of our Written Statement of Action SEND response, exploring more about what we need to do to help young people budget and manage any difficulties with their money and put in the right support for young people who are experiencing difficulties in this area. This will become a focus of the young person's future pathway plans.

We have updated our local offer, taking account of young peoples' experiences and views, in order to secure immediate improvements to the service while we consider its future direction and ensure that young people have access to the right practical, emotional and financial support at the right time for them. This has already reflected the feedback from the National Advisor, in terms of having concise 'golden nuggets' in terms of what care experienced young people can expect from us as their corporate parents, as well as distinct offers for care experienced parents, those in custody and those with SEND.

The Care Experienced Team has strengthened its links with our exploitation team, and now attend regular safety planning meetings with colleagues. We have built strong links to the Child Exploitation Missing Operational Group and use the exploitation tool to risk-assess our young people, when we have consent to do so. However, an area for further opportunity is the wider support available to those young people who do not meet Care Act eligibility.

Fostering

What do we know about the quality of social work practice?

The social work staff establishment comprises

- Two Team Managers
- Two p Assistant Team Managers
- Seven supervising social workers (Fostering Support)
- Seven assessing social workers (Fostering Assessment)
- Five Community Care Workers
- One Recruitment and Events Co-Ordinator
- One Fostering Panel Chair
- Fostering Panel members
- Advanced Therapeutic Fostering Social Worker

In the whole of the service, we have one interim social worker which reflects a significant improvement in the stability and permanence when compared to the position in 2021-22.

The vision of the Fostering Service remains in line with Torbay's restorative model of practice and is fully outlined in the Fostering Statement of Purpose, the Fostering Annual Report and in Torbay's new Fostering Family Charter.

Our Fostering Assessment Team focuses on recruitment activity, assessments of prospective foster carers and support for prospective fostering families going through the Panel approval process.

Our Fostering Support team focuses on the support and supervision offered to approved foster carers, support through the Annual Review process, ongoing or updating assessments and investigations, participation and feedback work, training

and development and the implementation of support groups and other celebratory and collective opportunities for our cared for children and their fostering families.

Torbay has its own Fostering Panel that meets regularly to make recommendations for the approval of foster carer candidates as well as to receive reviews of approval. The panel also consider other matters that are brought to them by the social work team.

In line with the implementation of the restorative model of practice, the vision of Torbay Fostering Service is to place children and their needs at the forefront of everything we do. Considering the crucial and integral role of our fostering families in achieving this vision, the aim of the Fostering Service is to ensure that our foster carers feel like a central part of the team around the child.

Torbay Fostering Service strive to create a sense of 'family' assessment, planning and support for fostering families, whilst ensuring children always remain at the core. Every child and fostering family are different and has specific needs; the service wishes to fully understand these needs in order to achieve fully child and person-centred planning which is fluid and adaptive and considers change and development. The goal is to ensure the provision and delivery of a high-quality fostering service that focuses on achieving the best possible outcomes for children.

Torbay Fostering Service aspires to be self-aware, to be understanding of its strengths and able to quickly identify any vulnerabilities or opportunities for learning and respond appropriately. The service aims to provide a targeted and focused operational and strategic response to areas of service improvement, in order to be responsive and dynamic in adjusting and adapting to the needs of our children and fostering families.

Performance

As at December 2022, 97% of carers had completed the minimum TSD training. 100% of carers had an up-to-date DBS check. 97% had an up-to-date medical assessment. 91% of carers (excluding connected carers) had had their annual review within timescales.

Significant focus has been given to the tracking of these key performance indicators, which have remained consistently high over the last six months.

Fostering family level data is made available through the monthly performance surgeries, in order that the context and action required can be fully understood and progressed by the service.

Recruitment and Retention

The conversion of enquiries to approval during 2021/22 has decreased by 50% (to 9% enquiry conversion from 19% the previous year), even though recruitment activity generated only 12 less enquiries than the previous year. When analysing and exploring these figures, it is important to recognize a number of national factors which are impacting on fostering recruitment across the country. Firstly, the impact of the pandemic has been significant on our fostering community. Nationally, 66% of foster

carers are above the age of fifty; many, have underlying health conditions, or health vulnerabilities within their own families. This naturally has caused some of Torbay's carers to re-evaluate their ability to foster, when the expectation (in line with the child's best interest) has been to maintain face to face family time throughout the pandemic. This knowledge has been a factor which many new prospective carers have raised as personal concerns in terms of their decision to foster.

As a baseline expectation, the Fostering Service aim to increase the number of fostering households by a minimum of ten per year. While nine fostering family households were approved in the year (one less than the target), there were also a number of resignations which have impacted on the total number of approved fostering families which stands at 77 families as of the 2nd February 2023. It is therefore recognized that the overall number of approved fostering households has decreased overall since April 2020 (at which point we had 86 approved fostering families), despite our recruitment success. This decrease is in line with regional data and aligns with the cost of living crisis. As such, some prospective carers are re-considering whether now is the right time to pursue their ambition to foster. They are aware that there is no guarantee of a placement full time, and that placements are made on the basis of the matching process and the needs of the child in line with the skills of the carer. As such, some are seeking more consistent forms of employment at this time.

Despite these challenges, a range of activities are in place to promote Torbay as the right service for which to foster. The service continues to mature in relation to how it uses data and evidence to review and inform marketing strategies, with an evidence-based Fostering Recruitment Strategy due to be presented for endorsement by April 2023. Continued corporate wide efforts to build on and expand our corporate parenting offer to fostering families ensures that the Torbay offer to them is more than a financial package. Efforts to ensure consistent consultation and participation opportunities for our fostering families are implemented to recognize their value in cared for children's lives and helping them to feel supported as part of the Torbay workforce. It is hoped that these wider efforts will see an impact in terms of an increased cohort of fostering families in 2023-24.

Fostering Support

Torbay Fostering Service is absolutely committed to supporting and developing our fostering families and runs a number of support groups, which are organised at various times throughout the year and through various platforms. Torbay is committed to learning from feedback and participation and is constantly looking for ways in which we can make our training as accessible and purposeful and meaningful for fostering families as possible.

It is intended that support groups provide an opportunity for fostering families to meet with each other and share their views and experiences of fostering. In addition, fostering families can access support, guidance, and signposting through these groups, and receive information about recent changes to policies and guidance and practice.

Currently, Torbay Fostering Service offers:

- A group run by CAMHS which offers support through a therapeutic lens.
- Special Guardianship Support Group for all Special Guardians receiving support from the dedicated team.
- A general foster carer support group.

Torbay Fostering Service also commissions specialist support, for example mediation or advocacy services, in situations whereby this is required to support foster carers through the allegation process.

An additional role has been introduced to the service, the Advanced Therapeutic Social Worker, to ensure that fostering families have access to therapeutic support to enhance placement stability.

Feedback from fostering families

Torbay foster carer: “the feeling that your comments and feedback are being listened to and your thoughts/ideas are being taken seriously” [on what is working well].

Torbay foster carer: “overall it was probably the best event that I have personally participated in to date” [on the 2021-22 Foster Carer Workshop].

Torbay Special Guardian: “thank you to Torbay Council, I am very happy with the help and support I have received and I am very grateful”.

Torbay foster carer: “thank you for all the hard work you are all putting in to make a difference” [on the developed Corporate Parenting Offer].

How do we know this?

Ofsted found during the inspection in March 2022:

“When family arrangements are not possible, most children live in alternative stable placements that meet their needs well and where they are making good progress. Children’s needs are well considered when matching and placing them with foster carers. When placements are at risk of breakdown, effective additional support is provided by the edge of care team and stability meetings are held to consider what other support can be provided to help make placements more resilient.”

Assessments of foster carers are timely and generally of good quality. Foster carers spoken to by inspectors commented positively about the ease and timeliness with which they can access support, including out of office hours. All foster carers spoken with were highly positive about the support that they receive from their supervising social workers. Supervising social workers have achieved a good balance between professional vigilance and challenge and providing support to foster carers.”

Audit activity

Dip sampling activity has evidenced:

- Fostering families access regular supervision.
- Training and continued professional development opportunities are discussed in a high proportion of supervisions.
- Strong compliance with DBS checks, medical reviews, training minimum standards and annual review.
- Involvement of fostering families in the endorsement of their supervision.
- Bespoke support being offered to all fostering families.
- Compliance with the expectation of at least one unannounced visit per year.

Areas for development:

- Ensuring that supervisions reflectively explore the progress of the cared for child's plan and the role of the fostering family in this.
- SMART actions to be recorded within the supervision visit.
- Greater specificity in regards to training that has been completed, including specific details.
- Clearer recording within supervision in terms of how foster carer's recordings are being seen, their appropriateness and the communication of these to children's social workers

Areas for development and opportunity are fully outlined in the Fostering Annual Report, and service plan. The service is keen to continue the work we are undertaking to enhance the ways in which fostering families can feel part of the service, and feedback their experiences and their ideas, including regular survey activity as well as monthly participation meetings with senior leaders.

Adoption & Permanence

What do we know about the quality of social work practice?

Adoption is managed in Regulated Services, with two adoption focused social workers forming part of the cared for children's teams. They are in turn line managed and supported by one permanent Team Manager.

Adoption is consistently considered for all children, and there are some significant performance indicators which would suggest that the projected improvements as a result of the intensive work within this service and practice area are now starting to show in terms of the impact on performance.

There have been four children adopted through FFA in the 2022/23 year to date at December 2022. This is a decrease from the exceptional figure of 9 children in 2021/22 however early permanence remains a significant focus for the service moving forward.

Number of children adopted:

There were 16 adoptions in the 2021/22 year and there have been 16 to date in the first three quarters of 2022/23. This includes five children who were five or older (one private adoption). Of children ceasing to be cared for in the year, 26% were adopted. This compares to 16 adoptions in the full year for 2021/22, of whom six were five or older; this was 14% of children ceasing to be cared for. The statistical neighbour figure was 13% and for England 10%, and therefore the current year's performance is above average.

Placements for adoption:

13 children have been placed for adoption in the 2022/23 year. Two children have had their plans for adoption reversed in the year, the same figure as in the 2021/22 year. At the end December 2022, there were 12 children placed for adoption and two in FFA placements.

Plans for adoption:

There were an additional 10 children not yet placed for adoption with plans for adoption, of whom five are subject to Placement Orders. Five of the ten have been waiting for more than a year since their plans were made:

*one child for three years [this relates to a child with medical uncertainty whereby extensive family finding efforts have been made sadly without an imminent resolution

*two children for two years [this relates to a male sibling group of two who have experienced pre-Order disruption.]

*two children for 18 months [for one child, a period of time was required to update the psychological assessment in line with the plan endorsed by the Court; the other child has neurodiversity need, and therefore the matching process has to be sensitively considered].

The other five children have been waiting for less than six months.

As always, raw data does not always tell the full story of a multi-faceted and highly complex set of needs and circumstances for an individual child or sibling group. Whilst always mindful of the need for permanence to be secured for a child at the earliest point, a number of the children referenced above have been assessed as significantly likely to benefit from the enhanced permanence adoption can offer, and therefore ADM

review maintains the careful balance when considering the right and appropriate time to seek revocation for example.

Twelve decisions that adoption is in the child’s best interests have been made in the current 2022/23 year. This compares to 16 in the previous year. The number of best interest decisions therefore is lower than the previous year. These data need to be considered in light of the reduction in overall cared for numbers, and therefore an associated reduction in the number of children subject to proceedings and permanence planning.

Adoption timescales:

For adoptions in the current 2022/23 year, the average time from placement order to matching was 125 days. This compares to 317 in the previous year and to 199 nationally. Average time from becoming a cared for child to placement for adoption (adjusted for children adopted by their foster carers) was 402 days. This compares to 539 in the previous year and to 459 nationally. Local performance on both these timescales has improved in the current year and significantly exceeds national performance.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	YTD Dec 22
Number of children adopted	26	13	16	16
% of children adopted	18%	15%	14%	26%
Average time between entering care and moving in with adoptive family	421	624	539	402
Average time between court authority to place and deciding on the match	165	302	317	125

A monthly tracking meeting continues between the Head of Service for Regulated Services and Adopt Southwest and the Court Quality Assurance Manager.

An Adoption Tracker is maintained and is held by the Court Quality Assurance Manager to those children who have been adopted, who are placed for adoption or who are subject to Placement Orders. It also tracks the completion of life story books and later life letters. This ensures senior leadership oversight and reduces drift and delay.

Adopter Recruitment

Adopt Southwest are prioritising applicants who have expressed an interest in adopting older children, or children with additional needs. Prospective adopters are completing a training module in respect of sibling adoption and there is an accompanying adopter recruitment campaign in respect of sibling adoption.

Life Story Books and Later Life Letters

In February 2020, Torbay commissioned Families for Children to complete life story books for adopted children. Sadly, during March 2020, the pandemic resulted in those workers being furloughed and therefore there was no external or internal capacity to

complete the life story books for our children which meant that life story work was disrupted and some children did not have a completed life story book by the time of their adoption. As a result of this difficulty, Torbay made the subsequent decision to ensure that capacity has been created internally and there is now a dedicated worker in place who is prioritising the completion of life story books for our children.

The service continues to address this legacy and ensure that all children with a plan of adoption receive a later life letter and life story book of the highest quality in a timely way. The mitigating action has included the addition of additional resource within the cared for service. As of December 2022, 52% of children adopted in the last twelve months had received their later life letter; 67% of children adopted in the last twelve months had received their life story book. This is in comparison to 27% and 55% in November 2022 and reflects the incremental progress being made in this key area of adoption practice.

How do we know this?

Ofsted found during the inspection in March 2022:

“For most children, permanent homes are being found in a timely manner. Children benefit from timely adoptions or placements with special guardians and connected carers. Early permanence and parallel planning are very well considered, foster to adopt is well established and a number of children have benefited from such arrangements. Staff are tenacious in finding adoptive families for children, including older children with additional needs.”

The service has also reviewed the ADM decision letter and the match letter for birth parents to bring these in line with our restorative model of practice.

The introduction of an ADM prompt and checklist for social workers has seen an improvement in the quality of CPRs and the information being presented as part of the ADM decision-making process. Similarly, the confidence of the workforce in terms of adoption practice is growing and is supported by the implementation of two one page process and practice guides, one in relation to adoption generally and one in relation to fostering to adopt.

Training in adoption practice for all social workers will continue to be offered in conjunction with the Learning Academy.

Building Futures Together

What do we know about the quality of social work practice?

Ofsted found in March 2022:

“Targeted work has enhanced the impact of practice by ensuring that all out-of-hours staff have been trained in the local authority’s social care practice model. The creation of an edge of care service has reduced the number of children entering care in an emergency. Staff in this service now feel valued, as leaders are responsive, and

solution focused. Inspectors saw examples of recent tenacious work by police, health and the edge of care social care team helping to prevent harm to children.

When placements are at risk of breakdown, effective additional support is provided by the edge of care team and stability meetings are held to consider what other support can be provided to help make placements more resilient.”

The Building Futures Together team (previously, the edge of care team) currently consists of a Team Manager, a Senior Keyworker, and six Edge of Care workers, an increase in establishment from four in December 2021, reflecting further investment into this invaluable resource.

The Building Futures Together practice standards have been revised, with pathways of support including edge of care, reunification and placement stability. The team also plays a critical role in the youth homelessness response by re-examining the possibility of reunification as one of the options.

Building Futures Together are currently working with 27 children, a significant increase from quarter one of this financial year. Further evidence is being compiled in terms of impact and outcomes; this will form part of the monthly performance surgery, with a report provided on a quarterly basis.

All audit activity considers the use of FGC and edge of care, at appropriate points in a child’s plan.

No decision for a child to become cared for is made without appropriate oversight from the Divisional Director of Safeguarding and this includes review of all alternative options, and additional support, including the right for children and families to access an edge of care offer.

Formal feedback is being requested from young people and their families following the conclusion of every intervention and this information is used to identify how the service can be improved as well as what is working well. The resulting data are collated by the quality assurance team to inform future developments.

Through the Learning Academy, there are plans to promote further specialised training opportunities for existing and new practitioners. This will also include some wider work in terms of the training offer for support services (including Community Care Workers, enablers and Family Support Workers).

Exploitation Team

What do we know about the quality of social work practice?

Following the service redesign in 2020, The Exploitation Team was formally established with additional resource (see below). The Team is structurally located as part of the Front Door response alongside Early Help and MASH and is responsible for addressing exploitation and supporting children who are at most risk. The Team does not case hold but provides support, guidance and challenge to social workers working with our most high risk and vulnerable young people.

The purpose of the Team is to:

- Prevent exploitation by developing an understanding of trends and patterns and directing resources accordingly. It identifies individuals who are at risk of or subject to exploitation and the team works with police colleagues to identify people of interest within the four Ps agenda [prevent, protect, pursuit, prosecute];
- Pursue and prosecute people involved in exploiting children, young people or vulnerable adults;
- Protect children and young people who are being exploited; and
- Disrupt exploitation.

The Exploitation Team comprises

three staff members, employed by Children's Services: a Team Manager; an Exploitation Co-Ordinator and a Business Support Officer.

Reports and intelligence are also regularly provided to the Torbay Safeguarding Partnership Exploitation Sub-Group and to a range of strategic meetings relating to safeguarding and community safety in Torbay. Practice and performance updates are also regularly shared across the South West Peninsula, and with neighbouring Local Authorities.

The Exploitation Team works closely with safeguarding partners to share information and continue to build a mature understanding of the needs of children within the community in relation to exploitation and contextual safeguarding. There are centralised processes to ensure robust oversight of all children in Torbay who go missing and/or are at risk of exploitation. Completed Missing Episodes documentation and Exploitation Screening Tools are inputted to our management information systems following quality assurance, and resultant aggregated information and intelligence is shared with colleague professionals and partners.

A PowerBI Dashboard as been created in relation to Missing Children and a partnership exploitation dashboard is in the process of being designed and created. The Missing Children dashboard allows practitioners and managers access to a live picture within a specified time period of:

- missing episodes by team;
 - missing episodes by case status;
 - missing duration;
 - the number of children returned;
 - the number of RHIs completed;
 - the number of RHIs completed within three days;
-
- the number of RHIs declined;
 - the overall number of missing episodes and children;

- the percentage of cared for children missing placed inside and outside of Torbay boundaries.

This is in addition to child level data.

This maturing use of data enables accurate assessments of current risks.

Key performance indicators are outlined in the table below:

Measure	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	YTD 2022/23
Number of exploitation/vulnerability assessments completed	168	144	241	257	215
Number of exploitation/vulnerability assessments identifying children and young people as high risk	14	23	35	50	42
% of assessments where child was identified as at high risk	8%	16%	15%	19%	20%
Number of review assessments where risk has reduced	no data	no data	no data	55	39
% of review assessments where children's risk had reduced	n/a	n/a	n/a	22% (approx)	19% (approx)

In December 2022, we reviewed regular reports on children who are missing, and redefined some measures to ensure a clearer focus on outcomes. These measures are set out below.

	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22
Number of children			
Number of children going missing in period	40	47	31
Number of cared for children going missing	9	8	9
Number of children subject to CP plans going missing in period	6	5	6
Number of children in need and children with Other case status going missing	20	29	14
Number of children receiving EH services going missing	4	5	2
Proportions of children			
% of CiN going missing as a % of CiN at the end of the period	4.6%	5.3%	4.5%
% of CfC going missing as a % of CfC at the end of the period	2.8%	2.4%	2.7%
% of CP going missing as a % of CP at the end of the period	3.4%	3.1%	3.8%
Number of episodes starting			
Number of episodes starting of children going missing	59	71	53
Number of episodes starting of cared for children going missing	16	16	19
Number of episodes starting of children subject to CP plans going missing	12	12	11

Number of episodes starting of children in need and children with Other case status going missing	25	38	21
Number of episodes starting of children receiving EH services going missing	5	5	2
Number of episodes ending which lasted more than 24 hours	14	18	9
Number of episodes per child			
Number of children with one episode starting in the month	29	38	23
Number of children with two episodes starting in the month	5	2	2
Number of children with three or more episodes starting in the month	6	7	6
Return-home interviews			
Number of children returning home from being missing in period (count of children)	42	46	32
Number of children offered at least one RHI in the period	22	16	6
Number of children returning home who had at least one RHI following their return	16	13	5
% of children having at least one RHI in the period	38%	28%	16%
Number of children declining all RHIs	6	3	1
Number of RHIs taking place	17	14	5
Number of RHIs within 72 hours	8	7	3
% of RHIs within 72 hours	47%	50%	60%

This allows us to focus on the overlapping vulnerabilities of some of these groups of children, showing us that 22% of children during this three-month period who were missing were cared for children and 14% children who were subject to child protection plans.

We have internal and commissioned services responding to children for whom contextual harm is a concern, and we are in the process of considering how these services can work together to deliver evidence based, focused interventions for children and their families.

Torbay has an exploitation toolkit which is embedded and used by professionals across our Safeguarding partnership when there are concerns for any type of exploitation.

Torbay has clear and embedded missing children's protocols which trigger child protection strategy meetings for repeat missing episodes and episodes which are 72 hours or longer. These have now been captured within an agreed Missing Strategy. Torbay's Exploitation Team attend and contribute to as many meetings as possible for any child with an exploitation toolkit.

Torbay has three distinct operational/practice forums for multi-agency discussion about any child where there are contextual safeguarding concerns. These are embedded and include:

Triage – which meets weekly and considers all children who have had a missing episode in the previous month.

CEMOG (Child Exploitation and Missing Operational Group) Practice and Process Panel – which meets every twelve weeks and reviews the multi-agency response to children missing, subject to exploitation toolkits and at risk of being trafficked.

MACE (Missing and Child Exploitation) Forum – which meets on a monthly basis and is a multi-agency meeting focusing on identifying and addressing adults and location of concern.

How do we know this?

Ofsted found during the inspection in March 2022:

“Significant progress has been made in addressing child exploitation in Torbay. Multi-agency strategic arrangements to track and assess risks are embedded. Tenacious work across the partnership ensures that most exploited and missing children are at the centre of all work and interventions. Staff are rightly proud of the strategic and operational improvements that have been achieved. Work has progressed from information-sharing to effective collaboration and joint working. This is making a tangible difference to how well children are protected from harm and how successfully their wider welfare is promoted.”

Dip sampling activity has noted significant improvements in terms of the use of assessment to inform planning with 20 of the 23 children considered (87%) found to have a comprehensive and up to date assessment in place.

Torbay has recognised that there is a need for a contextual safeguarding model of practice and pathway, which takes into account the mature understanding that has now been developed in respect of the holistic needs of our children and young people. As such, it has been agreed that a multi-agency Task and Finish is to be established through the Torbay Safeguarding Children Partnership to progress this work in line with the Exploitation Strategic Plan 2021-24.

The operational/front line practice that is being developed now needs to be supported by a clear framework and process. There is identified development work to be completed with our Child Protection Conference Chairs/IRO's, and we are in the process of identifying Practice Leads for training and supporting others to embrace the theories and principles of Contextual Safeguarding.

The Safeguarding and Reviewing Service

Child Protection Conferences and Chairs and the Quality of CP plans

What do we know about the quality of practice?

In December 2022, the number of children subject to a child protection plan was 159, a rate was 63 per 10,000 children, compared to 42 nationally and 61 for statistical neighbours. The number of child protection plans as of 31st December 2022 was higher

than the same point the previous year, (139 children, equating to 55 per 10,000). There was an unexplained but marked increase in the number of children becoming subject to child protection plans over the summer of 2022. Subsequent analysis and intervention has led to a steady and safe reduction in the number of children subject to plans We are confident that the downward trajectory will continue.

Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) continues to show improvement. The data for the year to date at December 2022 was 89% which compares favorably to the most recent national figures of 79% and 82% for statistical neighbours. Despite the sustained improvements over the last two years (data for 19/20 evidenced only 63.1% ICPCs were held within 15 days and data for 20/21 88% held within 15 days), this position is still not considered by Torbay leaders to be good enough. A concerted effort over the last four months of 2022 saw average timeliness over those four months increase further to 96.25% of ICPCs held within 15 days which is the position that is considered acceptable.

Compliance to timescales for review of child protection plans were 80% in 2021/22 and for the year to date at December 2022 are 91%. This is above national (89%) and statistical neighbour averages (90%).

At December 2022, 64% of children were categorised as at risk from neglect, 23% from emotional abuse, 6% from physical abuse, 1% from sexual abuse and 7% were at risk in multiple categories. This compares to 47% for neglect nationally and 41% for emotional abuse nationally. The challenges regarding neglect have been triangulated with the work undertaken in Torbay with The Medical Research Fund and the TSCP Neglect Strategy resulting in the implementation of the Graded Care Profile.

Child Protection Chairs (CPC) have now started to undertake formal midway monitoring reviews of each child's child protection plan. These mid-way monitoring reviews along with the use of the Dispute Resolution Process (DRPs) are in place to ensure that there is positive improvement in the lives of children who are subject to child protection plans. However, these processes are still not always leading to the consistent level of incisive oversight of plans by CP chairs that the service requires. In the year to date at December 2022, 68 DRPs had been raised (count of DRPs rather than children) which is low comparative to the number of challenges children have experienced within their child protection planning over the year. This is the focus of work for the Head of Service and new Service Manager with the support of the Divisional Director. To aid and formalise this process, a new CP Planning midpoint report has been mapped into the Liquidlogic child protection processes with auto-prompts being sent to the allocated IRO at the six week or three-month stage of the child protection planning cycle.

Too few young people and children attend meetings, or have their voices heard in others way, such as through advocacy or other means of participation. In the year to date in December 2022, six children attended their conferences. Advocates from Children's Rights and Barnardo's were recorded as attending conferences for 23 children and were consulted in the case of another two children. Participation is a major area for development over the next year and will be led by the new Service Manager to ensure work is linked up between the IRO, the allocated social worker and the advocacy service to ensure all children of a relevant age have the opportunity to

participate either directly or indirectly in their child protection conferences. Despite the picture portrayed by the data here, there have been some positive examples of children being supported to lead on their child protection conferences over this last year that have yielded positive outcomes for them. Nevertheless, there is a need to transform the pockets of good practice into routine expectations for all children.

	1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020	1 April 2020 – 31 Dec 2020	1 July 2021 – 31 March 2022	1 April 2022 – 31 Dec 22
% conferences quorate	44%	51%	89%	80%

How do we know this?

During the Ofsted inspection in March 2022, Ofsted stated:

“Child protection conferences take place within appropriate timescales and respectful work by social workers using restorative approaches supports parents to be engaged well in the process. Most child protection plans are detailed, with a good focus on children’s outcomes and the actions required to achieve them. Most work with children and families is purposeful. Workers take the time to get to know children well, visiting often to see children at home or in school and seeing them alone when this is appropriate. Core groups are timely and well attended by a good range of relevant professionals, but the plan is not consistently updated in response to progress made. Children are supported to contribute to meetings about them, either by attending themselves or ensuring that their views are shared in other ways.”

Monthly performance surgeries are in place and chaired by the Head of Service. Within these surgeries, the data is viewed from a child’s journey perspective. By this, it is meant the data is not just used to track and improve service performance. it also looks at what that means for the children in terms of impact analysis. The monthly performance surgeries are minuted and actions identified. The minutes are shared with both the Quality Assurance Service and the Divisional Director who collectively maintain oversight on service performance and development.

Throughout 2022, audits have identified that “the quality of child protection plans continues to be variable and CP chairs and IRO oversight is inconsistent.” Progress with regards to consistency has been hindered somewhat by the reliance on agency IROs during 2022, coupled with other challenges within the IRO workforce. To address this, a concerted effort was made to recruit to the vacant permanent IRO posts with a target to establish a fully permanent IRO team for the first time in over six years. At the end of December 2022, this aim was met with the service in the midst of inducting a number of new IROs into the team leading into the early part of 2023. Permanency and stability within the IRO team will allow for consistent practice standards to be established and maintained through a shared vision, culture and commitment to the children of Torbay and the eradication of short-termism that comes from an over-reliance on agency workers.

Family feedback at all conferences was introduced in December 2019. Key areas for feedback were:

- Preparation prior to conferences needs to improve;
- Engagement with families during the conference is variable; and
- The current model can be improved and simplified.

This feedback will further support the required improvements in this area.

Multiagency participation will be monitored, and performance will form part of a regular 12 weekly report to CSLT and the newly established TSCP Business Group so that partnership practice will be held to account.

In 2022, the feedback forms were digitalised and facilitated via a web link sent to parents and carers. Uptake to the new method of gaining valuable feedback has been slow which may mean that a hybrid method is considered going forward.

Independent Reviewing Officers

What do we know about the quality of practice?

In December 2022, Torbay were corporate parentings to 329 cared for children which is a reduction from 368 at our highest' this included 29 UASC. IROs are increasingly challenging delay in achieving care plan objectives both within the reviews and through the mid-point reviews. Early reviews are being held in response to significant events in children's lives.

At December 2022, 91% of reviews taking place were on time, and 95% in the year to date.

The IRO Service is continuing to make steady and purposeful improvement on many of its key activities. Children and young people continue to be provided with an IRO within three working days of becoming cared for or within two days of notification to the service, and changes in IRO have reduced and have been kept to a minimum during the year.

How do we know this?

During the Ofsted inspection in March 2022, Ofsted stated:

“The right support and interventions are in place for most children in care to enable them to flourish. Most children's care plans contain the right actions to promote progress for children. Children's plans are regularly monitored through timely reviews. Most independent reviewing officers contact children just before their review and maintain relationships with them.”

Robust challenge through effective use of the Dispute Resolution Policy is an area where improvement work is required as a priority. We have simplified the mid-point review format and have weekly automated reporting on the DRP. However, further action is required for this to become a robust process. This is a focus for the new Service Manager with the support of the Head of Service and Divisional Director.

Audits continue to highlight that the “footprint” of IROs is still not sufficiently robust and evident across all of the children’s records. While this is improving, the challenge of the IRO oversight is not yet having a significant impact for all our children and this is still variable. Discussions within supervision in relation to permanency and decision making at the second Cared For Review highlights that drift and delay is not being sufficiently challenged. It is envisaged that the new Service Manager being in post will address these matters via more robust supervision that is both supportive and challenging for the IROs.

Performance surgeries evidence that the participation of children in their cared for reviews is too low. As previously noted, this is an area of focus for the new Service Manager going forward.

What are our plans to improve practice?

The service plan continues into 2023 with the addition of the following actions that were identified as a result of the findings of the IRO annual report for year 2021/22:

- i. **Service stability** – this will include the appointment of a permanent Service Manager and the appointment of a full crew of permanent IROs to replace all agency staff by the start of Quarter 4.
- ii. **Address the long-term sickness issues** – this will include the utilisation of the Human Resource absence review mechanisms for current staff on long-term sick as well as monitoring and addressing further absenteeism as it arises.
- iii. **Ensure reviews are held within Statutory timescales** – this will include a revision of the invite reminder system and tracking of reports that inform the reviews to ensure they are completed prior to the reviews and reduce the risk of reviews being rescheduled.
- iv. **Increased participation** – This will be a piece of work allocated to the new Service Manager to ensure all children have access to advocacy and further work is undertaken to support children to chair their own reviews.
- v. **Partner attendance at reviews** – work will be completed with partner agencies to ensure the right professionals are present to inform reviews and care planning for children.
- vi. **Cared for children’s health needs are met** – more work to be undertaken with social workers and health partners to ensure health assessments, dental checks and immunisations are completed in a timely manner.
- vii. **Restorative relational work** – more link work to be completed across all service areas to ensure more improved understanding of the IRO role across service areas through stronger relational and partnership working.

- viii. **Parent and child feedback** – the implementation of an online feedback form so the service can learn from the experiences of children, young people and their parents regarding the care planning and review processes.
- ix. **Practice improvement** – this will include more wider use of the DRP procedure to ensure poor practice is identified and addressed appropriately by translating concerns into learning opportunities across all the service areas.

Torbay Youth Justice Service

The Torbay Youth Justice Service is a partnership service which consists of a Head of Service, two Team Managers, three Youth Justice Officers, a Youth Justice social worker, a Youth Justice police officer, a victim and reparation officer, a volunteer office, a substance misuse worker; a CAMHS worker, a speech and language therapist, an educational and attendance improvement officer, a parenting worker, a probation officer, a careers advisor, a business analyst, two senior admin officers and some sessional staff.

The vision of Torbay's Youth Justice Service is to:

Keep young people and their communities safe by working in collaboration with other services to help children recognise and repair the impact of harmful behaviour and develop a positive future.

The following strategic priorities have been agreed as part of the consultation for the Youth Justice Plan and will be the basis for the Service Improvement Plan for the next year:

- Child First approach to all we do.
- Secure access to suitable child friendly, safe, accessible premises for delivery of face-to-face work.
- Further development of the Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) through an Enhanced Case Management (ECM) approach with Child and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
- Review the role and provision of CAMHS to the Youth Justice Service
- Increase Targeted Prevention and Early Intervention work with those coming to the attention of the youth justice systems.
- Ensuring children in contact with the Youth Justice Service are in appropriate education, training or employment.
- Swifter Justice - reduce delays across whole youth justice system.
- Hear and respond to the voice of the child and carers not only in the delivery of their intervention but in the development of the service.
- More positive activities and opportunities for children and young people.
- Improve the visibility and understanding of Youth Justice Service work – telling the good stories of children & the work of the YJS
- Be Victim focussed in all we do and develop further our restorative offer
- Improve communication between the Management Boards and the staff team.

- Improve the quality and quantity of data and analysis to ensure the board and the service is meeting the needs of children
- Revise and update quality assurance framework for the service
- To form and sustain working arrangements with all partnerships and service providers to ensure that children receive coordinated support that meets their needs.

The number of Torbay children who received an outcome for an offence in 2021/22 was the highest recorded over the last four years, an increase of 18 (22.5%) on 2020/21. This includes all outcomes including diversionary outcomes such as Community Resolutions and Deferred Prosecutions (Outcome 22), Pre-Court substantive outcomes (Youth Cautions and Youth Conditional Cautions), first tier outcomes (e.g., Referral Orders and Fines), community outcomes (e.g., Youth Rehabilitation Orders), and through to custodial sentences such as Detention and Training Orders.

Number	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of offences	179	154	162	160
Number of offenders	87	92	80	98

Despite the increase in number of offenders, the number of offences remained static. The number of offences per offender decreased from 2.03 in 2020/21 to 1.63 in 2021/22, highlighting the impact of more prolific offenders in 2020/21.

A higher proportion of children were diverted away from the formal Youth Justice System in 2021/22 than at any point in the previous four years. 80% of outcomes were within the pre-court tier, an increase of 12 percentage points on the year before. This has had a positive impact on the number of First Time Entrants in Torbay.

The children receiving an outcome for committing an offence are predominately male (87%) which is a similar percentage to the year before (88%).

As with most other areas, females are under-represented (13%) and this is much lower than in 2018/19 when they accounted for 24% of outcomes – a decrease of 38%.

The children receiving an outcome for committing an offence are predominately male (87%) which is a similar percentage to the year before (88%).

As with most other areas, females are under-represented (13%) and this is much lower than in 2018/19 when they accounted for 24% of outcomes – a decrease of 38%.

The age profile of Torbay children has remained constant for several years but there was an increase in younger children offending in 2021/22. The biggest increase was in the number of 13-year-old children from 14 (20/21) to 21 (21/22).

The large proportion of children and their families who are receiving additional support from Children's Services highlights the vulnerable nature of many of the children the

service works with. Torbay YJS and Torbay Children's Services are working to improve joint planning and working relationships through increased sharing of assessments, planning and risk management systems and processes.

A formal threshold and referral mechanism for prevention work has now been agreed and it is envisaged that a high proportion will be children that are likely to be coming to the attention of Children's Services but not yet being offered a service.

The Impact of Leaders on Social Work Practice with Children and Families

What do we know about the quality of social work practice?

The quality of social work practice is informed by reliable performance information and an established quality assurance framework. Quality Assurance tells us the identification of risk and risk being responded to in a timely way is a considerable strength.

There is robust evidence of collaborative practice where partner agencies are involved in assessment and planning meetings. Capturing the voice of children and young people within assessments and care planning has also been identified as an area of strength. Quality of reviews have continued to improve this year with a significant improvement within the cared for and care experience service.

Quality of assessment within the children in need of help and protection have shown significant growth in the numbers meeting good over the year. Audits indicate that assessments are timely and consider lived experience, have clearer analysis and are involving partner agencies.

Quality Assurance identifies we need to remain focused on strengthening:

1. Recording the use of direct work tools. A direct work tools champion group has been established.
2. Ensure supervision is reflective and provides a clear rationale for decisions. All audits and dip samples will now include a focus on supervision and management oversight. Reflective supervision training is being procured and a champions group has been established.
3. Care plans by ensuring plans are SMART, purposeful, reviewed and updated regularly. Care plan quality is a focus of the Principal Social Worker.
4. Family group conferences are being offered and supported at the earliest point of intervention for children and young people and their families. This should be

supported by the Family Group Conference Service being based within Early Help.

Through the triangulation of data and qualitative activity, leaders at every level fully understand the areas for improvement and work alongside the Learning Academy to take robust action to ensure that the services delivered are fit for purpose and have a positive impact on outcomes for children. The Quality Assurance Framework ensures audit activity has a direct impact on the lived experience for children which is tracked and reported on via our governance structure.

We hold practice weeks involving all members of the senior leadership team and key councillors. We have expanded practice week to include key partners and the findings are reported to the Children's Continuous Improvement Board.

We have also strengthened Quality Assurance through capturing the voice of children and families as part of an audit and widening participation and feedback through the development of a participation officer role.

Children's Services has achieved great success in maintaining a balanced budget without in any way compromising service quality. It is our strong assertion that by clear focus on what is right for our children and young people we have in fact significantly improved service quality and access. Characterised by the initiatives set out in this report, they have been unerringly focused on 'what it takes' to improve children and young people's lived experiences while keeping them properly safeguarded and protected.

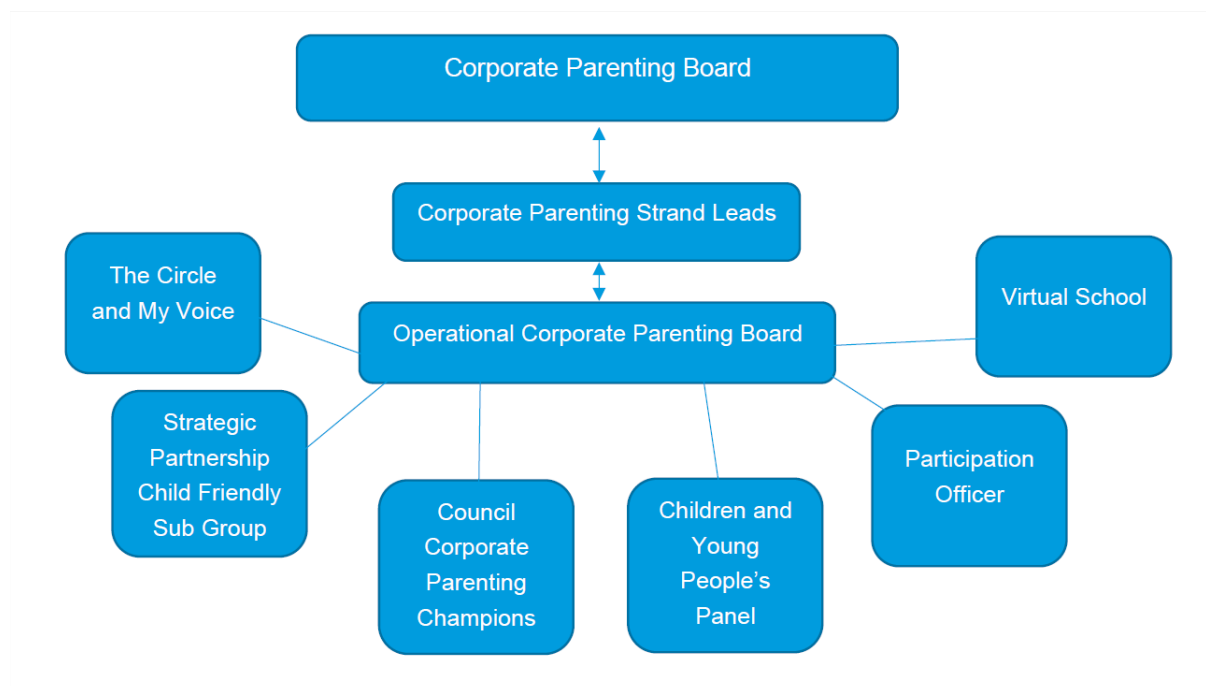
Children's Services have maintained a permanent and stable senior leadership team including DCS, Divisional Director, Heads of Service and Service Managers. The impact of stability means areas of strength are maintained and areas for improvement have consistent focus and clear direction.

The impact of all the changes that we have made and the relentless focus on improvement means that a child or family who require our support will receive a better-quality service than previously.

The Director of Children's Services, political leaders, and the local authority's chief executive has worked assiduously over the past three years, transforming the quality of help, protection, and care for their vulnerable children. A clear and ambitious improvement plan and associated sufficiency strategy, underpinned by a 'root and branch' analysis, have effectively addressed the long-standing history of inadequate practice in Torbay. The services that children now receive are consistently effective.

Corporate Parenting Board

Our Corporate Parenting Board continues to evolve and develop, as outlined by the visual representation below:



Corporate Parenting Board

This Board is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children and comprises of a wider group of members drawn from all political groups together with partner representatives and senior officers from Children's Services.

The Board meets every two months and forms a key element within the Council's Constitution, providing a forum for regular, detailed discussion of issues and a positive link with our cared for and care experienced children and young people.

An Operational Corporate Parenting Board has also been established, which is chaired by the Chief Executive. The Operational Corporate Parenting Board provides an operational oversight of all of the Corporate Parenting activities being undertaken and operationalises decisions of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Corporate Parenting Strand Leads

In line with the priorities outlined above, we have established five Corporate Parenting Strand Leads who focus on education; fostering and employment; housing; mental health and wellbeing; and participation. Each Strand Lead is an elected Member who

is also part of the membership of the Corporate Parenting Board They each have their own job description. Strand Leads meetings also include Lead Officer support and key officer and partner representation. Strand Leads take the strategic direction from the Corporate Parenting Board in respect of their area of focus, use the meeting to scrutinise and explore relevant performance data and information and this then feeds into the action plans which sit under the Operational Corporate Parenting Board.

In addition, there are two identified underpinning Strands: the Council Corporate Parenting Champions (see below); and preparing for and transition to adulthood.

Council Corporate Parenting Champions

All departments across the Council and our wholly owned companies will have designated officers as Corporate Parenting Champions. The Champions come together on a quarterly basis to help to shape their department's role in ensuring that we are good corporate parents and to contribute to Council wide initiatives to enhance our Corporate Parenting Offer.

The established aims of this group are:

- To become an authority who thinks first about our corporate parent role and ensure that it is fully embedded in all we do as an authority.
- To provide a corporate parent offer for our children on top of the care plan in place.
- To provide a corporate parenting offer for foster families.
- To raise awareness of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

Children and Young People's Panel

Torbay are in the process of establishing a Children and Young People's Panel, which will consist of a diverse group of young people that can represent all children within Torbay. The panel will include representatives from different educational providers, children and young people with SEND, cared for children and cared experienced young people. This would not only be a means of bringing together the existing participation groups as a way of centralising feedback from children and young people, but will also support the expansion of representation within these groups, thereby reflecting the voice of a wider range of children and young people.

In addition, this will create a sense of community and collaboration for our young people as they unite to advocate for themselves and their peers and have their voices heard.

Torbay Corporate Parenting Board in collaboration with key partner agencies is committed to working towards achieving its vision of delivering excellence for cared for and care experienced young people. It is well-researched that local authorities that have a strong corporate parenting ethos recognise that the care system is not just

about keeping children safe, but also to promote security, resilience and well-being. We want our cared for and care experienced children and young people to have a happy and secure childhood which enables them to become confident and successful young adults. We will help them develop and achieve their aspirations as we would our own children. In addition, the Corporate Parenting Board will support and join with our foster families in a shared endeavour to enable our children and young people to benefit from their lived experiences.

This ethos and commitment is reflected in a revised Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-25.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-25 outlines Torbay's corporate parenting vision, an introduction to the importance of corporate parenting, the legal context of Torbay's corporate parenting responsibilities, Torbay's key principles and priorities and our subsequent pledges to cared for and care experienced children and young people. It sets out the governance arrangements associated with corporate parenting and provides a valuable reminder and advice to children and young people about the mechanism through which they can continue to talk to and feedback to us.

In updating this Strategy, we have drawn upon a wide range of feedback sources. This has included but is not limited to: feedback from cared for children as part of the Your Life in Care survey undertaken in July 2021; feedback from care experienced young people as part of the Your Life Beyond Care survey undertaken in April 2021; specific consultation sessions undertaken by the Participation Officer, the Divisional Director of Safeguarding, the Divisional Director of Education and Skills and the Director of Children's Services; the views of care experienced representatives as individual contributors to both Children's Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Corporate Parenting Board; feedback through the Circle and My Voice groups; and feedback through other surveys undertaken as part of a rolling schedule of ongoing consultation with our fostering families.

The Strategy is now out for wider consultation prior to presentation to full Council as a policy framework strategy, reflecting its significance and importance.