

**Torbay Council
Corporate
Parenting
Strategy
2015 – 2019**

Foreword

Welcome to Torbay's Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Looked After infants, children and young people and care leavers face a number of challenges as they grow up and develop in care, then move on to independence. In order to make this journey through care as smooth as possible and to ensure they go on to fulfil their potential, it is vital that all Members, Officers and Services across the Council work together in their interests.

This strategy therefore outlines our key aspirations for these children and young people and sets out the actions we intend to take to achieve them. It provides the framework for all Torbay Council Officers, Managers and Councillors to fulfil their roles in the lives of these children and young people.

Our commitment to corporate parenting in Torbay is embodied in the following statement:

In Torbay, we believe that ensuring the effective care and protection for children who are looked after by the local authority is one of the most important responsibilities held by Councillors, officers and professional agencies working with children and young people. In order to provide high quality services we must all work together to meet their needs.

We are confident that this strategy demonstrates the Council's commitment to fulfilling this enhanced role and taking corporate responsibility for improving the life chances and outcomes of every child and young person looked after by Torbay Council.

Signed:

Lead Member



Executive Lead for Children



DCS = Richard Williams



Executive Director = Steve Parrock

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Section 1

Introduction to Corporate Parenting

What is Corporate Parenting?

'Corporate Parenting' is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council to provide the best possible care and protection for infants, children and young people who are 'Looked After', that is, those who are in public care. The term 'Looked After' refers to any child or young person for whom the authority has, or shares, parental responsibility, or for whom the authority provides care and accommodation to the child or young person on behalf of their parent. The majority of these children and young people need alternative care and accommodation due to the inability of their parent, for a range of reasons, to offer safe and effective caring within the family home. Many, but not all, have suffered abuse or neglect of some form prior to coming into our care. The term "child" refers to any child or young person between 0-18 years. The Authority also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave their long term care from the age of 16 years until they reach the age of 21 years, or 25 if they are in higher education. Effective corporate parenting will need a commitment from all council employees and elected members and an authority-wide approach.

What are the Legal Duties?

This collective responsibility for Local Authorities was first laid out in the Children Act 1989. Previous Government guidance for Councillors "If this were my child" (DfES 2003) reiterated the leading role of Councillors in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every infant, child and young person in care, actively supporting standards of care and seeking the high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child. The question and mindset should be 'if this were my baby', if this were my child in their school years, if this were my son/daughter moving into independence'. As well as local authority responsibilities to their Children Looked After and young people, section

27 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on the NHS as well as housing and education services to assist children and young people's social care services to fulfil their functions under the Act – providing help, support and services as part of the corporate Parenting responsibilities.

The Children Act 2004 emphasised the role of collaborative service agreements in achieving the right services for children and young people. Other key legislation and guidance governing the provision of children and young people's services are detailed in Appendix 1.

Who are the Corporate Parents?

When a child or young person becomes 'looked after', the tasks of their parent become the responsibility of everyone working for the Council, including the elected Members and partner agencies and not just Children and Young People's Services.

Like any good parent, the corporate parent should put its own children first and want the best for them now and for the future. That means being a powerful advocate for them to receive the best of everything and help children and young people to make a success of their lives and be the best that they can be.

This concern should include their education, health – physical and psychological – what they do in their leisure time, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive encouragement and praise for their achievements.

All departments in the Council are expected to work in partnership with those people who have key roles in the life of a looked after infant, child or young person. Similarly, we expect to work with the local health community services and Mental Health Trust to ensure that Children Looked After and young people have access to the universal and specialist health care services available to other children and young people. Members have a crucial role in making sure that the interests of Children Looked After and young people come first. Councillors set the strategic direction of the Council's services and determine policy and priorities for the local community within the overall framework set by Government.

Who are our Children Looked After and Young People?

Our role as corporate parents covers any infant, child or young person looked after by the local authority - either through an agreement with their parents or through a Care Order made by the Courts – whether with other members of the extended family or friends, with foster carers or residential children's home.

The majority of the children and young people need alternative care and accommodation due to the inability of their parent, for a range of reasons, to offer safe, nurturing and effective care within the family home. The majority of our children and

young people have suffered abuse or neglect of some form prior to coming into our care.

In the last few years Torbay Council has had approximately 300 Looked After Children in our care at any one time, although over the period of a year up to 450 children may have been looked after. Children and young people can be looked after for a short period either returning to their families or moving to alternative permanent arrangements such as adoption or permanent foster care.

Legally the term "child" can refer to any infant, child or young person between 0-18 years. At the age of 18 young people are no longer looked after and leave care.

Who are our Care Leavers?

Our role as corporate parents does not end when children exit care. Our responsibilities continue beyond to cover young people who have been looked after by the local authority and whom the local authority has a duty and responsibility to support and keep in touch with when they leave care after the age of 16. The responsibility lasts up to the age of 21 or up to 25 if they are in higher education or training.

Section 2

Children Looked After and Care Leavers in Torbay

National Context

The national trend over the last three years has shown a near 7% increase in the number of children and young people becoming looked after. The national figure for Children Looked After in 2014 was 68840*. The number Torbay children who were looked after increased almost twofold during the authority's recovery journey. Torbay now has one of highest relative rates for Children Looked After per 10,000 of the general population 0-17 years, compared with the average of our statistical neighbours (127 compared with 80 in 2014)

*Department for Education, BIS, National Statistics for 31 March 2014.

Our Placements Strategy for Children Looked After in Torbay

In Torbay, our Children's Commissioning Plan and Sufficiency Strategy is about supporting families to stay together in the interests of children and young people, as well as providing positive experiences in care where children cannot stay safely with their birth families.

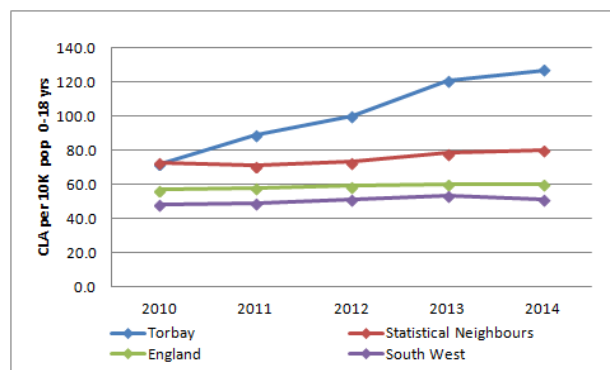
Torbay's Children's Commissioning Plan and Sufficiency Strategy was developed at the end of 2014 in response to a rise in the number of Children Looked After to over 300 in 2014 from 180 in 2010. Along-side the Strategy, a five year plan was also put in place to secure the financial underpinning to deliver a safe and sustainable reduction to the number of Children Looked After. The five year plan has begun to calm the previous sustained rises in the numbers of Children Looked After and the attendant demand this generated for higher cost independent sector placements. The second year of the 5 year plan, like the commissioning strategy, is focusing on increasing the capacity and capability of services to provide more effective support for families in Torbay.

The goal of the strategy and the plan is on delivering a long-term strategy for care placements but also on reducing the number of children coming into care, by providing support for families before they reach the point of crisis. We acknowledge that there is a significant cohort who came into care during the recovery journey that will remain looked after for some time to come. However we are carefully reviewing all existing Children Looked After plans to ensure we have the right child in the right placement.

The strategy also acknowledges the part played by all services in identifying and supporting vulnerable families and raises the profile of Children Looked After beyond the Social Care sector. The five year plan also focuses on the practice and service changes that Children Services itself needs to make that will help the move away from longer term care placements. However we recognise that schools, universal settings, health services, voluntary organisations and partners across the children's workforce in preventing children becoming looked after as the social workers working with families in crisis.

The early impact of the strategy has been encouraging. The numbers of children in residential care has started to come down and greater use is being made of in house 'local' foster care. This is in line with a strategy to reduce the number of Children Looked After being placed at some distance from their communities, enabling them to maintain school places, social and familial links. The changes made have taken place with no change to the threshold for accommodation.

The Total Number of Children Looked After in Torbay



Torbay's trend is in contrast to the experience of other Local Authorities in the South West region, our statistical neighbours and nationally who have

not seen the same steep rises in their care populations. However Torbay's experience is similar to other authorities that have been on a recovery journey.

Outcomes for Children Looked After and Care Leavers

This chart shows the educational attainment of children looked after by Torbay (who may live and be educated outside Torbay) against the performance of all pupils in Torbay schools. This very low school attainment is reflective of a range of other complicating barriers facing young people who have been looked after makes it much more difficult for care leavers to successfully move into continued learning, training or work. For example, nationally about 66.6% of Children Looked After has a Statement of Special Education Need and about 76.6% of all Torbay Children Looked After and young people have some form of special educational need. This level of need is significantly higher than that experienced in the general population where 2.8% of all pupils have a statement*.

Over the last five years results at KS2 have improved over five years. The year 2012/13 was exceptional with a small cohort and the gap between our CLA and their peers was only 4.7% in English and 4.3% in Maths. The gap between all CLA and all children nationally was 25% in English and 26% in Maths. The following year in both subjects the results dipped but the cohort was nearly 3 times bigger and whilst lower in Maths than 2013 it was still above the figure from 2012 and the gap was 25% between our CLA and their peers. In Reading the results in 2014 indicate a gap of 13% between our CLA and their peers.

Clearly the results demonstrate that we need to focus on end of KS4. The results in 2010/11 were excellent and really started to challenge the gap between CLA and their peers. The gap in 2013 between CLA and their peers nationally was 42.7% and whilst the gap has narrowed in recent years it is still higher than it was in 2009.

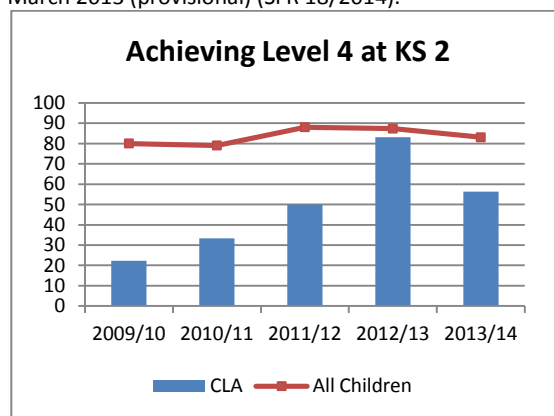
At 31 March 2014, nationally 52%* of care leavers aged 19 were in Education, Employment or Training (EET) compared with only 43%* for Torbay's Children Looked After and 72.1% for general 18 year old population**.

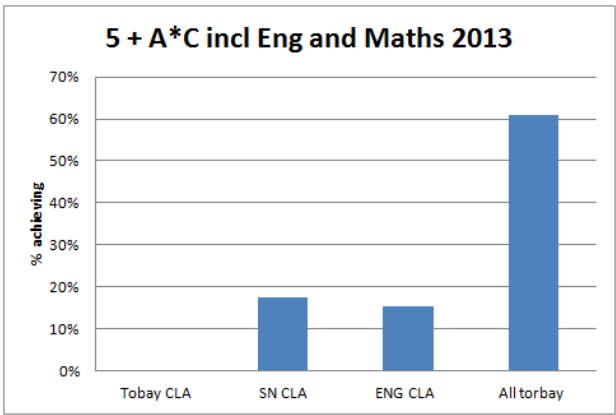
The differential between attainment and post-16 outcomes for Children Looked After and their peers also extends into others areas such as health, mental health, income and crime and these statistics emphasise the huge importance of our role as corporate parents in helping these children and young people overcome the challenges they face. For example, although offending rates are coming down nationally, nationally 5.6% of Children Looked After have offended, Torbay's rates are much lower**. CLA is a key factor in reoffending, although the number of CLA who offend is low, 50% of these reoffend compared to 25% of the non CLA cohort.

Despite the many challenges and scale of the gap that needs to be narrowed, Children Looked After do succeed and make good progress. For example, in 2014, 7 Children Looked After were in University and one of our care leavers obtained a Masters Degree (2015).

*Department for Education, BIS, National Statistics for 31 March 2013 and 2014 (SFR 49/2014).

** Department for Education, BIS, National Statistics for 31 March 2013 (provisional) (SFR 18/2014).





Section 3

Objectives of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Delivery Principles

Children and Young People's Plan Priorities

Torbay Children and Young People's plan 2014-19 priorities are:

- Children have the best start in life
- Children and young people lead a healthy and happy life
- Children and young people will be safe from harm, living in families and communities
- Opportunities to participate and engage in community and public life

In order to deliver these outcomes the Council recognizes that the majority of Looked After Children and young people start from a position of increased vulnerability and disadvantage and will need additional help to overcome the factors which contribute to unacceptably high levels of poor educational attainment, mental illness, criminal activity, and homelessness in this group of children nationally.

Council services will therefore be required to prioritise the needs of these children, in partnership with Children and Young People's Services, to ensure that such poor outcomes are avoided through early prevention and effective intervention and support.

Specifically for Looked After Children, the Council acknowledges that there is a need to focus on:

- Improved long term stability of placements offered to looked after children:-
- Fewer children being placed Out of Authority;
- Increased educational attainment;
- Improved employment and training opportunities for care leavers.
- Sustained low incidence of involvement in criminal activity

The Objectives of the Corporate Parenting Strategy

The specific intention of the Corporate Parenting strategy is to improve the life chances of Looked After infants, children and young people and care leavers by widening the ownership of responsibility for the care of Children Looked After beyond Children's Social Care and other direct support services and ensuring that all councillors and employees in all departments are aware of the roles they should play.

The strategy aims to drive forward, support and strengthen the areas of good practice and work with a whole-authority approach to corporate parenting, which includes strong and effective working with key partners in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

The strategy aims to achieve and support improvement in all the key performance indicators relating to Children Looked After and young people in line with national and local targets and to strive to continuously improve the outcomes for Looked After infants, children and young people in line with their peers.

The strategy acknowledges Torbay's CYPs priorities, the Placement Strategy for Torbay Children and Young People's plan (2014-19) and the need for strong and effective prevention to ensure that the vast majority of children who are in need, are supported to remain living within their own families and communities. Children and young people become looked after only when this is necessary to safeguard and promote their welfare.

For councillors specifically, this means;

- Councillors having a clear understanding and awareness of the issues for Children Looked After in their authority so that they can ensure that their responsibilities as corporate parents are reflected in all aspects of the work of the Council;
- Communication between Councillors and Children Looked After is facilitated to achieve participation and inclusion, so that children and young people have a say in how decisions are made about the services that affect them, and that they have an opportunity to influence those decisions;
- Members are supported by officers to promote partnership working as a prerequisite for delivering effective services to Looked After Children, and to ensure that the joint planning

and commissioning framework continues to deliver to this agenda;

- The Council provides effective scrutiny of corporate parenting duties.

For service departments, specifically, this means;

- Auditing the ability of all services to deliver to the corporate parenting agenda, and reinforce mechanisms to monitor and review their service's contribution to positive outcomes for Looked After Children;
- Ensuring employee awareness and commitment to the Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Creating human resources policies that support the needs of employees who provide care to our Looked After Children;
- Establishing recruitment and employment practices that offer supported work experience, apprenticeships and employment opportunities for young people who are in or have left the Council's care;
- All relevant services promote access for Children Looked After and their carers through both policy and practice.
- Ensuring the commitment to corporate parenting is realised through a quality of care and range of opportunities that lead to measurable improvement in the life chances of Children Looked After - enabling them to succeed in line with their peers;

Principles in Corporate Parenting

Torbay Council must work to the following principles when carrying out its responsibilities as a corporate parent for its

Children Looked After and young people and Care Leavers:

- To provide good quality and supportive care – for children and young people to be cared about as well as cared for.
- To promote continuity in the lives of Children Looked After and young people in order to reduce disruption.
- To encourage all children and young people to participate in decision-making and ensure their voice is heard and for them to contribute to appropriate plans about their lives and these plans are acted upon.
- To ensure the specific needs of Looked After Children and young people with disabilities are met in service provision, communication, participation and policy making.

- To be ambitious for them, encourage and support them in achieving their full potential through good education. To help them be the best that they can be.
- Ensure access to good health care and appropriate health services – physical and psychological.
- To recognise and celebrate their achievements in all aspects of their lives.
- To encourage, enable and support contact with family members where it is in the child/young person's best interests to do so.
- To encourage, promote and support their involvement and participation in the community and to support them in fulfilling their hobbies and interests.
- To celebrate their birthdays and/or festivals as appropriate within their culture
- To provide advice, guidance and practical help when needed and support their progression into independence.
- To provide help to leave care and support into independence or transition into adult services, recognising that most young people do not leave home until they are in their twenties and continue to return frequently.
- To ensure the specific needs of Looked After Children and young people from different cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds are met in service provision, communication and policy making.

In order to achieve these, the Council will ensure that:

- It provides opportunities to engage with all Children Looked After and young people, to hear and respond to their views, and to celebrate their achievements.
- It has in place an effective mechanism to systematically collect and analyse information about the children and young people for whom it is responsible, the factors that influence their lives, and what this means about the life experiences and life chances of those children and young people.
- In order to meet the changing needs of Children Looked After and young people throughout their care experience and beyond, all Council services must be resourced and required to respond effectively to this ongoing analysis.
- Through the creation and maintenance of effective partnership and commissioning

arrangements, ensure that other service providers are influenced and engaged in meeting this agenda.

- Through the creation and maintenance of effective partnership and commissioning arrangements, ensure that other service providers are influenced and engaged in meeting this agenda.
- The specific needs of Children Looked After with disabilities and children from different cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds must be met in service provision, communication and policy making.
- Corporate parents should raise awareness of their Children Looked After at all levels within the Authority and challenge negative and discriminatory perceptions.
- All elected Members will champion the Children Looked After and young people and Care Leavers in their electoral ward and through their links in the community.

Section 4

Improving Outcomes: Our Four Key Areas of Focus

This section describes the challenges we must overcome as corporate parents in each of these four areas and how we plan to address them.

1 - Ensuring that Children Looked After fulfil their educational potential

In order to support this aim we must

- Ensure that Children Looked After are not moved and do not have to change schools during key stage 4 (years 10 and 11).
- Ensure that the correct procedures are followed in order for children to gain a place in a school which best meets their needs and, where possible, is close to their foster or residential placement.
- Improve wider learning and life skills for all children and young people, ensuring access to existing opportunities and being creative in developing others - bearing in mind that nationally 66.6% of Children Looked After (for at least 12 months) have a Statement of Special Education Need and about 76.6% of all Torbay Children Looked After and young people have some form of special educational need.

*Department for Education, BIS, National Statistics for 31 March 2013 and 2014 (SFR 49/2014).

- Ensure that Social Workers and Young People's Workers promote and support the 16-19
- Use the Virtual School Management Board to act as "governing body" to the Head of Virtual School, which will allow the Member representative to link directly to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board.
- Where bullying is reported, Corporate Parents ensure that those responsible for dealing with it do so.
- Ensure all services work together to provide support to ensure Children Looked After are carefully inducted into the school;
- Seek opportunities for children with disabilities who may not be able to achieve well in formal examinations and assessments, to succeed in other ways.
- Make all carers and professionals and Children Looked After and young people aware of post-sixteen opportunities for Further Education and University entrance and provide

information about entitlements and support from Universities and schools (e.g. the Realise project hosted by Cambridge University.) This work is being led through the Raising the Participation Age project as well as Children's Social Care.

- Deliver the commitments in "Narrowing the Gap" - Torbay's strategy to raise the attainment of vulnerable groups has Children Looked After and young people as a priority group.

2 - Promoting and Providing Employment Opportunities

Only 52% of Care Leavers aged 19 are in Education, Employment or Training compared with 88% for Torbay's general 19 year old population (March 2012).

It is well evidenced that there are a number of factors that can affect the career options and success after the age of 16: including, limited educational qualifications and training, mental health difficulties, substance and/or alcohol abuse, relationship breakdowns (personal or family), moving home, living in a rural area with limited public transport and support networks.

These factors will all contribute to whether or not a young person will be successful in securing employment. Young people who have a stable care history or who are able to achieve some stability in their personal circumstances on leaving care are more likely to enter and remain in employment, training or study.

A National Care Leavers Survey highlighted the following issues that young people face when trying to secure employment:

- The need for guidance, advice and help identifying the options open to them, and help in finding the right job or course. The right job or course was seen as very important to young people, as they were more likely to remain interested and motivated;
- Childcare - many young mothers stay at home to look after their children, and feel that they can't think about furthering their education or going out to work because childcare is too expensive, and they are unaware of any options available to help them with this;
- Limited job opportunities in the local area leading to a reliance on benefits;
- Limited help with health related problems;

- Lack of money for: transport, clothes, books and other support materials – all of which can affect the choices they can make.

In order to promote the employment opportunities of care leavers the following must be inherent in practice and service delivery:

- placement stability (at home and/or a care placement and in school), positive encouragement and high aspirations, effective school and education service links;
- the assessment of current skills and career planning being addressed early, from 13-14 years, and to be a central part of the leaving care planning and review process;
- signposting to future entitlements to support and financial assistance should they wish to return to further or higher education some time after leaving care and how to access them;
- continuing support and contact to help young people maintain motivation and to respond to those wishing to return to learn or earn;
- inter-agency links to provide access to opportunities and to plan service developments in this area – including: careers, training agencies, further/higher education colleges, employers, Benefits Agency and youth services.

Work experience and apprenticeships:

Torbay Council is a major employer in the area and is well placed to provide both work experience placements and apprenticeships within the various departments and services of the Council. Enabling young people to have relevant work experience or apprenticeships is essential for maintaining their sense of inclusion in the transition from adolescence into adulthood. All work placements require resources to provide dedicated support to young people and employers to ensure success for the young person and the business.

The Council has pledged to provide apprenticeships and as a start 10 will provided to Looked After young people and Care Leavers.

3 - Promoting physical and psychological health and well being

The level of physical and psychological ill-health tends to be higher in Children Looked After and young people than the general population because of their often difficult start in life.

Children Looked After can have more health problems compared with their peers and can result from a range of factors including:

- missed health checks such as dental and optician visits;
- early life experiences leading to a legacy of health problems, physical and psychological;
- limited education and support to both parents and young people so that they understand how health matters are important;
- poor diet, smoking, alcohol or drug misuse within their household;
- mental health or emotional difficulties.
- complex health needs associated with a disability
- understanding why they are, or were, Looked After

It is therefore important that Looked After Children are provided with a holistic health check with annual reviews and that children and young people, parents and carers are educated, trained and supported to lead to healthy lifestyles and help identify and address areas of concern.

In planning for the child/ young person’s future, and their move to independence, an individual health plan that sets out their health needs and how they will be met must be completed.

Life-story work is critical to psychological wellbeing by helping children and young people make sense of why they are/were looked after and that it is/was not their fault.

In addition, it is important that opportunities to pursue social and leisure interests are provided and promoted to children and young people, whatever their abilities, to help improve their emotional, psychological and physical health and wellbeing.

The Designated Nurse for Children Looked After will ensure that all children and young people who are looked after are provided with appropriate health care and advice including, for young people sexual health advice, and that annual health assessments are undertaken.

We need to continue to improve our performance in health assessments and dental checks and meet our target of our 100% performance rate.

The Designated Nurse for Children Looked After will visit or liaise with the relevant health professionals for all disabled children and young people, including those placed out of authority and those in residential school to:

- Ensure appropriate arrangements are in place with the health authority which covers the

area where the placement or school is situated,

- Clarify whose responsibility it is to provide therapeutic health services, such as physiotherapy/occupational therapy assessments e.g. school or the health authority.
- Ensure there is a designated health professional in Torbay to have oversight of the child's health needs and provision, links with the health authority where the school is located and ascertain the annual health assessment arrangements.

The Designated Nurse will contribute to the Statutory reviews of disabled Children Looked After who are placed out of authority and the Statement of Special Educational Needs Review.

The Government's suicide prevention strategy (July 2011) highlights looked after children, young people and care leavers as a high risk group for suicide, and 6-7 times the rate of mental and behavioural problems and 'conduct disorders'. Stricter access criteria/service thresholds for adult social care and mental health services will add to the level of vulnerability. We need to work with partners in mental health agencies to commission, jointly, appropriate psychological services for young people, particularly those aged 17+ who fall between child and adult statutory mental health services.

4 - Accommodation and Housing - Preparation for Independence and providing a safe and secure home.

Young people leaving care are a diverse group whose accommodation needs will vary according to their care experience, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, contact with their families, degree of preparedness for leaving and any disability they may have. It follows that their accommodation needs will be equally diverse.

Although amendments to legislation have made some difference, the fact remains that there continues to be a large number of care leavers who do not have appropriate accommodation. A number of factors can be seen to contribute to this including:

- a lack of safe, secure and affordable accommodation for care leavers – there are a number of supported housing projects but they are in the main transitional and so very often

young people have to move on from them quite quickly;

- low incomes and unemployment;
- restrictions in levels of Income Support and Housing Benefit for under 25 year olds, and lack of entitlement to Income Support for most 16 and 17 year olds, have contributed to increased homelessness amongst young people.

Many of the problems young care leavers face are not just about finding accommodation but sustaining it.

Firstly, many care leavers will have limited life skills, such as cooking and cleaning, along with limited experiences and skills in managing finances and are likely to be unable to manage their budget to cover all the associated costs with living independently e.g. bills, food, rent. In some cases, this problem is further compounded by the reality that a large number of care leavers are reliant on state benefits as their limited educational qualifications prevent them from securing suitable employment. Young people also require preparation for the experience of coping with being on their own.

The provision of an appropriate range of accommodation options to meet the diverse range of needs requires agreements with statutory and voluntary housing providers to plan services, ensure access to a range of tenancies and partnerships or joint ventures to establish a range of good quality supported accommodation options. When planning accommodation to meet the varying needs of young people and to promote and assist positive outcomes it is important to:

- involve young people in planning and decision making;
- assess the needs of the young person and help prepare them for independent living;
- offer a choice in the type and location of accommodation;
- ensure there has been effective planning and preparation for the move;
- have a contingency plan in case the planned accommodation falls through;
- set up a package of housing support;
- have a clear financial plan to help manage the accommodation.

For those children and young people who are looked after it is essential that the authority continues to ensure that they are able to live in a safe and secure home. The focus will be on the availability and quality of safe and suitable

accommodation for young people and work with foster carers, residential homes and social housing and private sector providers to achieve this. This will include Supported Lodgings and Staying Put – where young people can remain with their current foster carer up until the age of 21 years; and to have a flexible approach which allows young people to move back to more supported accommodation if they need to.

The average leaving home age for the general population is around 24 years with young people returning home frequently, The Council needs to offer the same support to our young people.

For those children and young people who have returned home, Torbay must work with parents to ensure that they are accessing the support and services they need to help them address any problems they or their children may have so that the children can be appropriately cared for.

For those children and young people in foster care and residential care Torbay must continue to follow its thorough assessment, approval and review procedures to ensure it has appropriately skilled and experienced people and staff to look after our children.

We will consult with young people to remodel the supply of accommodation in various locations across Torbay which will include options for emergency accommodation and “trainer” flats; and build independence and resilience skills well in advance of young people leaving care to promote successful tenancies in the future.

We need to work closely with adult services to ensure that young people with disabilities who will require continuing care are consulted and have their future accommodation planned well in advance.

Who will ensure we deliver in these 4 areas?

The action plan will be steered by the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board and implemented by the multi-agency Corporate Parenting Working Group.

The Corporate Parenting Board will be chaired by the Children and Young People’s Cabinet Lead Member and will include representatives from the key stakeholders, including carers, young people and Elected Members. The Board will receive information on the Council’s performance in respect of Looked After Children, and will provide via the Children in Care Council, a forum for Children Looked After and young people to

express their views for consideration in developing policy and in realising this strategy.

Section 5

The Role of Councillors

“Elected Councillors, you have a crucial role.

Only you can carry it out. You can make sure the interests of the children in care come first.”

(If this were my child” DfES Oct 2003)

All Councillors should be prepared and ready to champion the interests of Looked After infants, children and young people in their community. Councillors are in the unique position in being able to promote opportunities for Children Looked After and Care Leavers through their political power and influence; and through their connections in the community, schools, health services, local businesses, district councils and with employers. If these links can be built upon then ‘life choices’ and outcomes for children and young people can be greatly improved.

This section sets out the arrangements in place and expectations of Councillors.

Leading the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board

The Corporate Parenting Partnership Board will meet every six months and the multi-disciplinary Corporate Parenting Working Group will meet quarterly. The Board is seeking cross Party representation and will work to a revised terms of reference, strategy and action plan. It will also work closely with the Children in Care council. The Corporate Parenting Working Group will develop and implement the action plan and will report to the Board.

Safeguarding Assurance Sessions

A rota of sessions will be established for all Members to follow the child’s journey. Each session will give a small group of Members the opportunity to gain an overview of the performance and quality of each aspect of Children Services. The session will focus on helping Members better understand how the service operates and the outcomes achieved for Children.

Upholding Torbay’s Promise/Pledge to Looked After Children:

Torbay Council has a Pledge -or “Promise”- which upholds our corporate Parenting responsibilities. We want Members to be asking whether, as corporate parents, we are keeping our promises and if not, what should we all be doing to make sure that we do?

Children and young person’s Pledge/Promise see Appendix 4

Challenging and Championing Outcomes for Looked After Children and young people:

The outcomes for Children Looked After and young people tend, generally, to be poorer compared with their non-looked after peer group including educationally, in terms of their physical and psychological well-being and with work prospects. The reasons for children coming into care will have placed them at a disadvantage – we want their experiences and opportunities in the care of Torbay Council to compensate for this disadvantage not compound it.

We want Members to be asking questions about the outcomes for their Children Looked After and what Members can do, in all aspects of their work, to champion and help improve things for children and young people.

The Lead Member for Children and Families will ensure that the local authority is meeting its statutory responsibilities, in particular the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of Looked After Children and care leavers.

Leading on Apprenticeships for Children Looked After and Care Leavers

We want Members to lead on apprenticeships and hold the Cabinet Lead Member to account.

We would like to see Members agree to ensuring that at least 10 apprenticeships will be dedicated to Torbay’s own Looked

After young people and care leavers – a job in the council will help improve the outcomes, opportunities and future prospects for our young people.

Undertaking Induction and Training

There will be an induction and training for Members wanting to become more involved in their corporate parenting role.

Some questions for Councillors to ask themselves:

- Do I understand why infants, children and young people need to be looked after and the legal and policy framework that governs this?
- Do I know about the profile, needs and achievements of all children looked after by my Council?
- Are we providing the best care possible to our Children Looked After and care leavers?
- Would it be good enough for my baby, my child, my son/daughter moving into independence?
- Do I know how well my council is doing in comparison with other comparable councils and government indicators?
- Is there an action plan to address any shortcomings in services and to constantly improve outcomes for Looked After Children?
- Am I taking responsibility for promoting the welfare and opportunities for Children Looked After and care leavers in all my work in the council – and in my other capacities?

Section 6

Expectations of Council Officers and Partner Agencies

In order to deliver the 'corporate parenting' strategy we need to make explicit the individual functions, including roles and responsibilities of the relevant council departments and partner agencies to ensure that the development and delivery of their services take into account, and wherever possible meet, the needs of Children Looked After and care leavers.

Council officers should ensure that elected members are provided with appropriate information in relation to their corporate parenting responsibilities, including service developments and key messages that contribute towards achieving positive outcomes for Looked After Children and care leavers.

The following highlights the key roles that Torbay Council departments can play in fulfilling their responsibility as corporate parents.

Children and Family Services – Enhanced and Preventative and Social Care

The design and direction of the Children Service's is committed to reducing the number of Children Looked After and young people through its Torbay's Children's Commissioning Plan and Sufficiency Strategy whilst maintaining best practice. Locality and Social Care services have been re-structured to provide support to families which aims to enable children to live at home or within their family network. Children's Social Care recognises the importance of families, and engaging parents and extended family in the care and planning process. We will ensure that if a child or young person has to become looked after that our first consideration is a family placement.

A joined-up approach with partner agencies is essential to ensure that children and young people have as positive as possible experience of being Looked After.

High quality multi-agency assessment, planning and the monitoring of outcomes, including placement stability, for Children Looked After and young people is essential.

The 16+ Personal Adviser service will provide on-going support and advice to those young people leaving the care system to live independently. This

will include: multi-agency pathway plans, assessments and reviews, support with the practicalities of transition, training and employment, accommodation, finance and emotional support.

Virtual School for Looked After Children

Virtual School focuses on promoting and supporting the educational needs for Looked after Children. The Virtual School ensures that all School aged Looked After Children can maintain a school place with support designed to meet their individual needs.

The Virtual Head, designated teachers working alongside the Social worker, Carer and school are well placed to have a positive influence on the education and career pathway of a Looked After child or young person by helping to raise aspirations and by providing effective and targeted support and guidance for individual pupils. Carers are also in the process of receiving additional training in THRIVE and KEEP style approaches that will enhance their ability to constructively support and promote achievement. Carers ability to use a THRIVE approach will also help as this is the same emotional support model used in a large majority of Torbay's primary schools.

Personal Education Plans will ensure that all needs are planned for during important times such as transition between placements, transition to a new school, during exam periods and on the transition from school based education to employment or training.

We are committed to working with the relevant partner agencies and services so that school moves are limited and that placement moves, if necessary, do not occur during the lead up to or during exam times.

Housing

The lack and quality of supported tenancies and supported accommodation is a major concern within Torbay and it is imperative that we work in-partnership with housing providers to increase the number of properties available for care leavers. In addition, it is important that housing providers work with Children's Social Care and other partners to ensure there are robust and varied packages of support to enable young people to maintain their accommodation provision.

Human Resources, Training and Work Opportunities

We want all Children Looked After and young people to achieve their aspirations and goals along their career pathway and need to ensure that young people are aware of all the training and employment opportunities available to them.

Torbay Council as a major employer is well placed to provide work experience placements and or apprenticeships, within the various departments of the Council.

Enabling young people to access relevant work experience and apprenticeships is essential for maintaining their sense of inclusion during the transition from adolescent to adulthood. In addition, these young people are well placed to raise awareness to staff, managers and elected members about the experiences of being looked after and leaving care and the issues that are important to them - their involvement in the delivery of training and awareness raising will be encouraged and promoted. Training and skills development for those involved in such activities will be provided and where possible appropriate accreditation given.

Health

Improving the physical and psychological health of Children Looked After and young people is a high priority.

The Specialist Nurse for Children Looked After and young people play an important role in ensuring that Personal Health Plans are developed with the child or young person and that these are fully implemented. Developing effective communication channels between agencies is fundamental, to ensure that there are robust monitoring and referral processes.

Addressing and meeting the health needs of Children Looked After and young people will include their mental health needs as well as emotional and physical health needs.

Work with partner agencies to ensure access to a wide range of services alongside a good education and training programme for Children Looked After and young people and their carers is essential in achieving positive health outcomes.

Section 7

Consultation and Communication with Children Looked After and Care Leavers

Communication and consultation with children and young people is an underlying principle of corporate parenting and at present is facilitated by Children and Young People Services in a variety of ways:

- Children In Care Council has met Senior Managers from across the council to inform and influence decision-making.
- Involvement of young people in audits and reviews of services. Young people have already had a track record of being engaged in the evaluation of tenders and helping to shape the tender specification for targeted services.
- An independent advocacy service is provided to enable children and young people to represent their views and achieve change.
- Young people are involved in and contribute to the recruitment of staff who will be involved in working with Children Looked After and young people; and contribute to annual staff appraisals.
- Children Services working in conjunction with Health Watch has trained a number of children and young people as young inspectors who have already reviewed some services.

Children and young people's achievements are celebrated at the annual awards ceremony which is attended by kinship/family members and corporate parents. It is well supported and the feedback from children and young people is very positive.

This strategy endorses an on-going commitment to increased communication, consultation and involvement with Children Looked After and young people. The opinions and views of our Children Looked After need to be taken into account and acted upon by all providers of services and their representation needs to be increased on important issues.

Improving use of the Complaints procedure by children and young people with an opt-out for having an advocate.

Children and young people will receive information on Corporate Parenting appropriate to their understanding including a children's version of this strategy.

Young people will be invited to the Board for specific items.

Disabled children, who, due to their unique and complex needs are often looked after in residential Out of Authority placements, far from their homes and family networks, are particularly vulnerable. The communication difficulties experienced by some of these children and young people increases this vulnerability. To consult with severely disabled Children Looked After and young people the Council will involve specialist services to ensure that people with skills in communicating with children and working directly with this vulnerable group.

Children and young people from black and ethnic minority groups also experience increased vulnerability when they become looked after. The Council will ensure that the views and specific needs of this group of children will be heard.

See appendix 3 for Good Practice Principles.

Section 8

Delivering: The Corporate Parenting Working Group

The Working Group supports the work of the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board as well as turning strategy and policy into service delivery. The group is overseen by Children's Social Care and comprises of key officers, including policy and strategy makers and operational and front-line staff, from across the whole [Council](#). [Membership is set out in the terms of reference](#)

The objectives of the group are:

- to develop and promote a range of resources and opportunities available from our wealth of community networks to promote and develop our Children Looked After and care leavers;
- to develop and monitor a comprehensive work programme to develop practice and take forward service development to promote the outcomes and opportunities for our Children Looked After and care leavers;
- to develop a Corporate Parenting training programme for elected members to understand and develop their roles and responsibilities as corporate parents;
- to collate emerging issues and feedback to relevant management teams to support service development.

The work of the Corporate Parenting Working Group is set out in the action plan.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Legal and policy framework

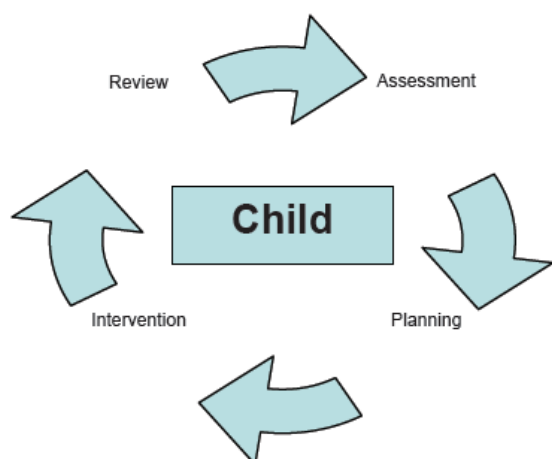
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) – provides the framework for all services and activity.
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 – extends responsibilities to care leavers up to 21 and to 25 if in higher education or training. It requires LAs to produce a ‘pathway’ plan and provide support to care leavers into independence.
- The Care Standards Act 2000 – set out national minimum standards for care in residential homes, fostering and adoptive placements and requirement to be inspected by Ofsted (after CSCI)
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 – reformed existing adoption law to ensure welfare of child central to all decision making. The Act also extended responsibility of adoption services (including LA adoption services) to provide support for adoptive parents and birth parents.
- National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services 2004 a 10 year programme aimed at achieving long term improvements in children’s health.
- The Children Act 2004 – enactment of Every Child Matters placing a duty on all local authorities to produce a plan which addresses disadvantage, raises achievement and safeguards children and young people in their area.
- Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Well-being of Children Looked After 2009 (DoH)
- Statutory Guidance on Corporate Parenting responsibilities of Directors of Children’s Services and Lead Members 2009 (DCSF)
- Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010 (DCSF)
- Statutory Guidance and Regulations on Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (2010)
- Legal Aid and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012

Appendix 2

Effective Care Planning

‘Children Looked After deserve the best experiences in life, from excellent parenting which promotes good health and educational attainment to a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills in order to have an enjoyable childhood and successful adult life. Stable placements, good health and support during transition are all essential elements, but children will only achieve their potential through the ambition and high expectation of all those involved in their lives.’

Effective care planning:



Clear processes of: assessment, care planning, intervention and review so as to improve the experience of care and its outcomes maintaining the centrality of the child at all times

- Increased levels of scrutiny and oversight of the care plan by the IRO
- Carefully manage tricky issues e.g. contact

Permanence options must be identified as soon as possible after child becomes looked after.

- Need to reduce delays in decisions and long term placement.
- High quality care plans will help judges make timely, informed decisions

- Additional support to prevent placement breakdown, positive experiences
- Enhanced participation of children, young people and their families in these processes e.g. children in care councils, personal advisers, review meetings, advocacy

A plan developed under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations (2010) must be capable of satisfying these 3 requirements:

- Would this be good enough for my own child?
- If it doesn't go as expected, is there a backup plan?
- Is this plan really tailored to all seven elements of this Child's individual identified needs, particularly if these are complex and require multiple agencies?

What goes in the plan?

Clarity and transparency in the care plan are essential in order that it can be understood by the child (subject to his/her age and understanding), the child's parents and wider family, the child's carer and a range of professionals and practitioners who are supporting the child and family.

What children said about Care Plans:

- 67% of the children in 2013 told us they knew what a Care Plan is, and knew that they had one;
- 12% of children in 2013 told us they didn't know what a care plan is;
- In 2013, young people in care aged over 14 were much more likely than children under 14 to know about their care plans. Seventy two percent of over 14s knew what a care plan is, and knew that they had one, compared with only 60% of those under 14.

Children in Care Monitor – Dr Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director (2013/4)

In order to achieve this, the care plan should:

- describe the identified developmental needs of the child and the services required to meet those needs, including services to be provided to family members;
- describe why a particular placement has been chosen;
- include specific, achievable, child-focused outcomes intended to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child and identify how progress will be measured;
- include realistic strategies and specific actions to bring about the changes necessary to achieve the planned outcome;
- clearly identify and set out roles and responsibilities of family members, the child's carers and practitioners, including for example GP, nurse and designated teacher, and the frequency of contact of those practitioners with the child, his/her carer and/or family member;

- describe the contingency arrangements if the proposed permanence plan for the child is not achievable in order to reduce delay.

References:

- the "Young person's DCSF_Guide_Full_web[2].pdf for more helpful information about care planning and involving young people in their care plans.
- Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations, Vol 2, 2010
- Implementation of Guidance DFE 2010 (powerpoint)

Appendix 3

Good Practice Principles

The provision of services to Children Looked After is regulated by the Government, and this is reflected in the policy framework adopted by the Children and Young People's Services and supported by the Council:

- To design and direct services in a way which will enable families to continue to care for, or resume care of, their children;
- To ensure that services provided to families are based on the principle that all children have a right to a positive, safe and healthy childhood that takes into account their race, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, disability or special needs;
- To ensure that, in circumstances where care or accommodation cannot be avoided the aim will be to achieve a speedy rehabilitation with the birth family in a way that safeguards the child and promotes the child's well being;
- Every child who enters care or accommodation will be the subject of a core assessment which will inform structured and purposeful care planning;
- To ensure that if a child has to enter care or accommodation that the first consideration will be given to a family placement.
- That every child in care or accommodation has a detailed Care or Pathway Plan which identifies the child's needs, the objectives of care and sets out specific timescales for action and review; (see appendix 1 Care Planning Principles.)
- To undertake care planning in an open and honest way seeking to engage parents and the extended family in the planning process, and informing family members of the factors which can influence the direction of planning;
- To ensure that all children have an allocated social worker and that an up to date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each looked after child and young person which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of the child's life events;
- To ensure that the child and anyone involved in his or her care is provided with accurate, relevant and up to date information on the reasons for care, the direction of care planning and the day to day details of placement planning;
- To ensure that, at a minimum, every child is visited within Statutory Requirements;
- To maintain robust mechanisms for ascertaining, recording and responding to the wishes and feelings of Children Looked After and young people, including access to the Independent Visitors and Advocates;
- Through the provision of detailed, inclusive care and placement planning to ensure that a care placement is assessed and obtained for the child which meets their emotional, developmental, educational and cultural needs;
- To ensure that when being looked after sibling groups are placed together wherever possible, unless their individual needs determine this to be inappropriate;
- To ensure that Children Looked After are supported to maintain links with their parents, wider family, social network and community;
- To ensure that Children Looked After from black and other ethnic minority backgrounds are provided with the means to maintain continuity with the heritage of their birth family in their day to day life;
- To ensure that all Children Looked After have comprehensive health care, consistent education provision and the use of specialist advice and therapeutic interventions when required;
- To ensure that whenever plans for permanence are being considered, they will be made on the basis of the needs of each looked after child and within defined timescales;


- To ensure that all children are subject to a case review within the statutory timescales and that the child and parents are partners in the review process;
- Where secure accommodation is used, that this is a 'last resort' and for the minimum time necessary;
- To ensure that those leaving care have been helped to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living and that, for those eligible, a package of continuing support is available set out in a Pathway Plan which is regularly reviewed until the age of 21 (or 25 if in Higher Education).
- To ensure a smooth transition to adult services for those severely disabled care leavers who are likely to need social care support, specialist health care and accommodation throughout their adult lives.
- To ensure that all care provided adheres to the Healthy Care Standard laid down by the Department for Education and Schools (DfES).

These principles inform the vision statement and commitment to all children and young people and should be understood to extend to the provision of services to the families and carers of Children Looked After in order to promote permanent and stable placements, which are the essential basis of positive outcomes for children and young people.

Appendix 4

Pledge for Children Looked After

Children in care pledge for torbay



We would like to thank the Children in Care Council for their time telling us what is important to them, what their experiences have been, and what they would like to happen for themselves and other young people in care and leaving care. This group meets weekly and can be contacted through CIC@torbay.gov.uk

Torbay Council promise to help, support, stand by and alongside children looked after to get the very best outcomes for each and every child.


This Pledge has been developed by children in care and support staff working through what is really important and what will make a difference. Together, we have thought about the things that are needed to stop children in care from feeling different or disadvantaged. This has been turned into a list with headings.

Torbay Council has responded to the list with promises that they will keep.

The council will review this document every year with the Children in Care Council to ensure it remains up to date and relevant.

The next review will be June 2015.

This document can be made available in other languages and formats. For more information telephone 01803 208100.



Social workers & Staff/ corporate parents

young people say

We want you to have training to work with us
 We want you to be understanding and kind
 We would like to get to know you better and trust you
 Let us choose who works with us (people and organisations)
 Don't put us down
 Don't let us down
 Listen to us and involve us in decisions about our lives
 Give support when we get into trouble or do things wrong.



Torbay Council promises

To provide a qualified social worker for every person in care. Your social worker will get to know you, listen to you and include your views in your planning. He or she will treat you with respect and understanding.
 They will support you with the right service for your needs and age.
 They will be honest with you about decisions that they take.

being in care

young people say

We want to see the Care Plan before the review but we want help understanding it!
 Please use language we understand and explain what things are.
 We want to know who the people are in our reviews and who is involved with us before we turn up.
 We don't want social workers or carers to tell us we will have to move if we misbehave.
 We want to stay where we are happy and we like stability.
 We want to know that we won't have to move from our carers unless there is good reason and we want to be able to say if we don't feel good with our carers and want to move.
 If we don't like decisions you make, we need easier access to advocates and we need to know exactly how to contact them.

Torbay Council promises

You can have time before the review to make sure you have your say.
 Your social worker will listen to your views about where and when to have reviews and who comes to them.
 You will have a place to live with carers who will meet your needs.
 You will be given an information pack and your social worker will go through it with you giving you names and numbers to contact if you have concerns or you are worried or just need to talk.
 They will try their best to help you stay in your foster home or care placement where you are happy.
 They will support you with the right service for your need and age.
 They will make sure there is an advocate for you if you want this.

families, friendships, School and Social life



We would like contact with our families arranged in advance and to fit around other things we would like to do.

We want to be allowed to stay with friends or go away with friends because they are important to us.

We want you to respect our relationships with our families. We want to be able to take part in activities if we want.

We want you to trust us to do stuff on our own and not over-protect us. We don't want to move schools if we like it and our friends are there.

Torbay Council promises

They will make sure they plan your meetings in advance and tell you.

They will help you have planned contact with your family unless there are good reasons why you can't, like your safety. They will explain this.

They will help you take part in things and they will provide a youth worker to support you if you need this.

They will talk to you about your own safety planning so that you can take care of yourself as much as possible.

They will work closely with your school and will not move you without good reason.

Support and Safety



We want to be safe and we need you to work with us to agree what safe looks like for us and why.

Foster carers, teachers, youth workers, schools and family make us feel safe as it stops us being alone.

We want to be protected from bullies and people that want to fight us.

We want to know there is someone we can talk to about our feelings/stuff we need to get off our chests.

We want to feel supported and loved.

We would like to feel more like part of a foster care's family.

We need access to services to help if we are doing things that aren't healthy for us.

You need to make sure we understand how to look after ourselves as we are growing up so we can live on our own eventually.

We want help and support about the way we feel and see ourselves.

Torbay Council promises

They will talk to you about your own safety planning so that you can take care of yourself as much as possible.

You will have a plan that guides your time in school – this is called a PEP (Personal Education Plan).

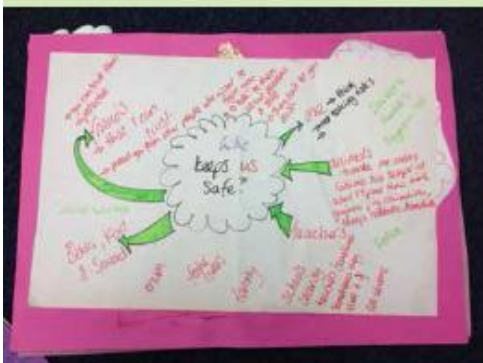
They will help you to easily access the full range of health opportunities and you will have a Personal Health Plan.

They will listen to you and take any bullying seriously, helping you and giving you support.

They will work with you and your foster carer or care placement to make it the best.

Get in touch with us

Use this space to write down the details of your Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).



Social Worker:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Independent Reviewing Officer:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Mobile: _____

Email: _____