



**By Email**

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<i>Date</i>	20 July 2017	<i>E-mail</i>	John.coughlan@hants.gov.uk

Dear Steve

On careful reflection I think it appropriate that I set down some comments for you in advance of your Full Council meeting today and the report on Children's Services. This is also in the context of the recent letter from Dr Sarah Wollaston MP and Kevin Foster MP. I am sharing this letter accordingly.

We are at a complex moment in a complex situation but I wish to make three hopefully clear and simple points in my role as Commissioner on behalf of DfE.

Firstly, I cannot re-state often enough that the situation for children's services in Torbay has been gravely serious. We have made good progress, especially under the local leadership of Andy Dempsey, but that progress remains fragile and dependent on the establishment of much more secure corporate governance. It is essential that the gravity of this issue is understood by all concerned and its resolution must be a shared priority or the safety of Torbay's children will surely deteriorate again. I am not yet routinely persuaded that this is understood by all concerned.

Secondly, we have had helpful communication about the potential offer from Devon County Council and I confirm that remains in line with the scope of my original recommendation in favour of Plymouth. That recommendation still stands but I will listen carefully to the outcomes of today's Council and any further deliberations. However, I am particularly concerned that the condition introduced by Devon, on what I would term an "all or nothing" offer to support Torbay's services, places me in a deeply invidious position. While I understand Devon's rationale, this condition has the potential to place an even greater burden on my decision about children's governance, introducing as it does a still broader implication for the future of Torbay's other services. I need therefore to make it unequivocally clear that my own

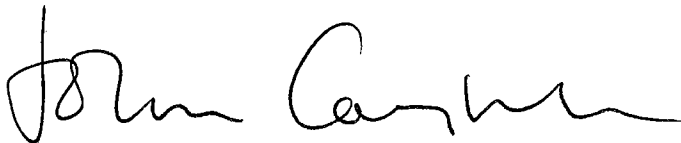
Chief Executive  
**John Coughlan CBE**

first and only consideration will be based firmly on my brief as a children's commissioner with the long-term welfare of Torbay's children as my paramount concern.

Thirdly, in view of the above, we will continue to progress the partnership discussions with Plymouth, not least because of the critical issues of pace I have been trying to impress upon all concerned. But if the Devon alternative is to remain a genuine alternative I will also need to take steps to assess the extent to which Devon has made progress from the point of our first assessment earlier this year. I have made it clear that Devon's offer at that point was credible but, put simply, we thought Plymouth's was better for children, especially with regard to the crucial issue of senior management capacity and readiness.

I hope these points are understood and useful. I look forward to seeing you and colleagues next week.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Coughlan', written in a cursive style.

**John Coughlan**  
**Chief Executive**