

## **Children’s Service Transformation: Ensuring Resource Sufficiency**

### **Introduction**

For the purposes of Priorities & Resources there are four key facets of Children’s Services that are being highlighted in terms of their ability to deliver a step change in service delivery. Under the headings Foster Care & Residential Care there is additional quantitative information which was requested by the panel at the first Priorities & Resources meeting.

- 1) Edge of Care
- 2) Fostering
- 3) Residential Placements
- 4) Permanence
- 5) Recruitment & Retention

The full Sufficiency Strategy, which will be presented to Cabinet in March 2020 covers each of these areas and addresses the need to radically change our approach to the use of care solutions. For those children who need to be looked after, we will ensure that the provision is high quality and supports the child’s needs for permanence. The following narrative sets out the direction of travel against each of the inter-dependent work streams set out above.

It is to be noted that while the detail of the numerous elements of the Sufficiency Strategy are work in progress, there is already evidence of traction being gained in key areas. For example, the table below shows that currently Torbay has responsibility for 37 children in residential care. This represents a welcome drop from 44 children at the time the first draft of the Sufficiency Strategy was presented to Informal Cabinet on 10 December 2019. Cost reductions are achieved through the drop in use of high cost placements and children are better served by provision more appropriate to their needs. A further reduction in numbers to 31 children is confidently expected by the end of March 2020. Each of the children concerned is in the process of planning moves over the next 8 weeks.

<b>Placements at January 2020</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Average Weekly Cost</b>	<b>Total Weekly Cost</b>
IFA Fostering Placement	96	965	92,655
IFA Parent & Child Placement	5	1,371	6,856
In House Fostering	129	402	51,845
Residential Parent & Child Placement	2	3,830	7,660
Residential Placement	37	4,725	174,830

## **1. Edge of Care**

### **Strengthen the delivery of edge of care, early help, early intervention and prevention services**

The council is developing significantly its approach to early help, intervention and prevention services. The council plans to provide more intensive 'targeted' support, including multi-disciplinary interventions, to vulnerable individuals and families to prevent escalation. For children judged to be at the edge of care we are proposing to develop a range of intensive support, available on a 7-day week basis to prevent the necessity for long term care. This provision will include the facility for a short period of accommodation with a clear objective to return home following intense work within a twelve-week maximum timeframe. We will extend the edge of care definition to include children and young people returning home from care. It will be expected that all plans for children in this circumstance will include a provision from the edge of care service in recognition that children in the early stages reunification remain vulnerable to further disruption. The wrap around support will seek to prevent the 'revolving door syndrome'.

### **Key priorities**

- Provide proportionate early help and edge of care services that will support families to make changes and sustained improvements in their lives, preventing their situation from worsening further to the point that they require specialist services or intervention, for example their child/ children being taken into care.
- Through the provision of intensive edge of care services we will seek to resist all admissions to care for children aged 12+ years in recognition of compelling research that care solutions do not positively impact upon this cohort unless there are significant and critical child protection issues to address.
- Intense edge of care services will also be used to support re-unification of children to their family homes. This will enable us to positively impact and reduce the numbers of children in the 12-16 age group who have 'return home' plans.

## 2. Fostering

### **Increasing the numbers of in-house foster carers and reviewing our existing bank of carers to develop and match their skills to the needs of our children.**

The Council will revise its communication and marketing strategy for the recruitment of foster carers and adopt an ambitious and targeted approach to increase the number of in-house carers, including those who provide specialist services. This will also include the potential to explore collaborative approaches of different types with neighbouring councils, and the creative use of media.

#### **Key priorities**

- To increase the number 'in house' specialist and intensive foster care placements to meet the needs of sibling groups, including dedicated PACE placements; children over the age of 10 including adolescents with challenging behaviours and / or high levels of safeguarding concerns; and children with disabilities.
- To recruit foster carers who can be developed to meet the needs of Torbay children who need care services for short, medium and long term periods, or who are being prepared to be reunited with own families or being placed in permanent living arrangements away from their immediate birth families.
- To ensure foster carers reflect the ethnic diversity of the looked after population.
- To ensure assessments of connected persons are timely and robust and that children, young people and their carers receive appropriate support.
- To reduce, where possible, the number of agency foster placements purchased by increasing and maximizing the use of our internal capacity.

<b>Placement Type</b>	<b>No. Placements</b>	<b>Average Weekly Cost (£)</b>
<b>IFA Fostering Placement</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>965</b>
Under 1	1	727
1-4	5	738
5-10	24	937
11-15	44	971
16+	22	1,046
<b>IFA Parent &amp; Child Placement</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1,371</b>
Under 1	4	1,423
1-4	1	1,163
<b>In House Fostering</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>402</b>
Under 1	10	400
1-4	14	386
5-10	26	383
11-15	50	418
16+	29	400

### **3. Residential Placements**

It is the strategic intention of Torbay Council to restrict the use of residential care to those children with needs that are best met by such a resource. It is well proven that children in care do better if they experience family type life experiences either in foster care, special guardianship, residential care or through adoption. It is this understanding that drives Torbay's determination to effectively prevent the use of care episodes unless it is to safeguard and protect the child concerned. It also provides the support for our determination to refrain from using residential care for any child under 10 years although in highly unusual and exceptional circumstances, this rule may be broken and the age range extended to 12 years.

Wherever it is possible to do so we shall try to enable families to remain unified or to support them to live together successfully after a period of care during which time intensive work takes place to build the platform for the child to make a successful return to his/her family. This work is best achieved if the in care resource is geographically approximate to the child's home and community and it mirrors as closely as possible domestic life. This means that residential provision should be small, comfortable domestic style properties ideally located within easy travelling distance of Torbay's borders. Currently, Torbay has no residential resources of its own which means that it has to commission places through the independent sector if it chooses to offer residential provision. It is currently in the process of exploring options for creating a diverse range of provision that will be informed by the particular needs of the Torbay looked after children cohort.

#### **Sufficiency challenges and strategic priorities**

- To strengthen the edge of care service to prevent avoidable care episodes
- To prevent the use of residential care for all children under 12 years of age
- To strengthen alternative care resources to free residential provision for use with those children whose needs are best met in these settings
- To develop a diverse range of local residential resources which mirror as closely as possible domestic dwellings
- To use residential care for the shortest time possible to prevent institutionalisation.

Residential placements range from £3,300 to £7,213 per week. The cost of care is dependent upon the level of the child's need and resultant staff and resources required to meet this.

The cost mix of residential placements currently is;

<b>Weekly cost</b>	<b>No. Placements</b>
Under £4k	11
£4 – 5k	15
£5 – 6k	4
£6 – 7k	5
£7k +	2

<b>Age</b>	<b>No. Placements</b>	<b>Average Weekly Cost (£)</b>
5-10	4	3,879
11-15	22	4,558
16+	11	5,368

<b>Residential Parent &amp; Child Placement</b>	<b>No. Placements</b>	<b>Average Cost</b>
Age: Under 1	2	3,830

#### **4. Permanence**

It is well researched that children do best when they live in secure and permanent arrangements either in their own families, in suitable provision provided by the state or in the care of wider family members or friends (connected persons). It is the commitment of Torbay Children's Service that all looked after children will have a permanence plan within six months of becoming looked after and this plan will be implemented in full and with rigour.

##### **Key Priorities:**

1. To review and revise the existing permanence strategy to include those children in care who should achieve permanence within their own families.
2. To strengthen arrangements to undertake joint viability assessments with child care teams.
3. To continue the good progress in securing placement orders for children for whom the plan is adoption.
4. To consider how best to strengthen the roles and impact of IROs in timely permanency consideration and planning.
5. To maximise Torbay's contribution to the Regional Adoption Agency, with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of children who are harder to place e.g. sibling groups, older children and children with disabilities.
6. To continue to ensure that the council's legal processes support and are used well to secure the permanence arrangement that best suits the needs of the child in a timescale which maximises the prospects for a good or better outcome.
7. In conjunction with colleagues from the adoption and looked after children workstreams, develop a strategy for implementing a Family Group Conferencing Service that will be automatically made available to all children on the edge of, or who enter the care system. This should include consideration of the commissioning arrangements for such a service.

## **5. Recruitment & Retention**

As part of the 2020/21 budget there is a £2m investment in staffing which will support Social Works improvement journey. The investment is focussed on increasing the staff resource delivering support for the young people and families the service work with.

This increased capacity will only be effective through effective recruitment and retention of Social Work staff with the key skills needed to meet the local need. The ability to recruit and retain social workers is a challenge faced by Local Authorities across the United Kingdom.

In order to improve our ability to recruit and retain Social Work staff the Council is developing a revised employment offer. At the heart of Torbay's recruitment ambition will be a vibrant and attractive offer that will reach out and engage potential candidates. This will involve amendments to the website, re-packaged recruitment literature and an enthusiastic and energetic response to employment enquiries and applications.

Two key facets of the recruitment offer are the enhanced employment package for Social Workers and the development of the Learning Academy.

The enhanced package will offer increased financial incentives for joining Torbay Council, with further incentives designed to retain key skills within the workforce.

The Learning Academy will provide a 3 year academy programme which will enable newly qualified social workers to progress beyond the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) stage. This Academy can support up to 20 ASYE's in the first year.

This work further complements the University Student placements offered and the Step-Up to Social Work scheme. The concept of a Grow Your Own scheme for colleagues wishing to train as Social Workers and Trainee Social Worker posts are also being explored.

The intended outcome from the approach as a whole is that Torbay will have permanent, fully resourced, qualified and highly skilled employees who will invest in achieving the best possible outcomes for children, young people and families in Torbay.