

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

**19 May 2025**

**-: Present :-**

Councillor Law (Chairwoman)

Voting Co-opted Members

Laura Colman (Primary Parent Governor Representative - virtual)

Jo Hunter (Church of England Diocese - virtual)

Non-voting Co-opted Member

Miranda Pusey (Devon and Cornwall Police - virtual)

Councillors Fellows (Vice-Chair), Tolchard and Twelves

(Also in attendance: Councillor Bye)

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### **1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nicolaou, Mike Cook (Non-voting Co-opted Member) and Hayley Costar (Non-voting Co-opted Member who was represented by Miranda Pusey).

### **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Board held on 10 March 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairwoman.

### **3. Care Experienced, Including Housing for Care Experienced Young People**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye, Divisional Director of Community and Customer Services, Tara Harris and Affordable Housing Manager SHAP (Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme) – Programme, presented the submitted report and responded to questions in respect of housing for care experienced young people.

The Sub-Board asked questions in relation to the following:

- was SHAP supported living or follow on accommodation;
- when a care experienced person leaves their families were they encouraged to stay in touch and continue to be supported;

- the care experienced people who come back and need support, were they referred to Adult Services or would they continue to be supported by Children's Services;
- were young people who stay with host families a short term option;
- paragraph 1.1 referred to Torbay supporting 128 former care experienced young people, of whom 85% (110) were assessed as living in suitable accommodation, which left 18 who were not, 9 were in temporary accommodation and 1 in His Majesty's Prison, where were the remaining 8 (it was agreed that a written response would be provided to this question and where the Council was regarding staying put accommodation for care experienced young people);
- the figures were not correct in the report, it was requested that the figures be updated and the report be republished;
- section 8 referred to limited options to move families who have been found intentionally homeless, was there a plan to support those families; and
- what counted as intentionally homeless for a care experienced young person.

Members received the following responses:

- The SHAP project was being delivered by the YMCA to provide 36 units of accommodation for young people between the ages of 18-25 who were at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping. The YMCA was at the stage of practical completion for 3 of the 4 units of accommodation representing 28 of the 36 units. 18 units were expected to be occupied in July 2025. These units were intended to be the main landing point for young people where there would be overnight warden support. A further 8 units would come online in September 2025 and the remaining 10 in October 2025. The YMCA Staffing Team was in place and training was underway. From a local authority perspective, the allocation policy would now be developed at pace and a Panel established to ensure that this was a transparent process that was operational to ensure that properties were occupied at the earliest opportunity. Members were informed of the work that the YMCA had done in Exeter and suggested the merits of visiting to see what could be learned from their projects.
- There was a lack of suitable accommodation across Torbay, with 220 properties on Devon Home Choice a year across the system, with 1800 on a waiting list. The report had also been prepared in conjunction with the Devon Ofsted and feedback from the Mark Rydell visit. Support for housing for care experienced young people would form part of the Council's Ofsted inspection due later this year and was also the focus of a recent Corporate Parenting Board. Part of the challenge for some supported accommodation was the length of stay due to lack of suitable move on accommodation. High numbers of care experienced young people were staying over 18 months, with some for up to three years. Over the past four years take up had increased from 73% to 90% and accommodation was being utilised better.
- Feedback from Mark Rydell's visit showed that care experienced young people did not want to be in shared accommodation and wanted to be able to move on when they were ready. They felt that the housing offer could be inconsistent at times and could be better. The Council was reviewing the Band B offer and looking to get a set of guarantees to help care experienced young people to transition between Children's Services and Adults Services, with better joining

up of services specially around support for mental wellbeing. The Director of Adults and Community Services and Director of Children's Services were looking at the wider gaps and what the offer was for people post 18.

- Although the number of people in temporary accommodation had increased the number of care experienced young people in that accommodation had decreased. Supported lodgings with host families who support young people to live within their properties was a preferable option, but there had been a reduction in the number of families coming forward, which was the same nationally as well as a national shortage in foster carers. The length of time a young person stayed with a host family varied and depended on their relationships, the intention was for them to stay until they were ready to move on, but the problem was then lack of move on accommodation.
- There was expected to be a bottle neck of care experienced people this year with 35-59 and next year 30-44 people needing support. This excluded referrals through unaccompanied asylum seeking, potentially 25 a year, many of whom were 16 or 17 years old when they come through the scheme. These young people have complex needs particularly around mental health and wellbeing and substance misuse.
- Devon Home Choice had been asked how many care experienced young people had been allocated placements since changing them to a Band B, to help the Council identify how many young people were being placed through the current system to help identify demand.
- The Council has a duty of care for care experienced young people up to 25 years of age. Even after 21 years of age, if the young person says they do not want to see their Personal Advisor, the Personal Advisor will still reach out to them on a quarterly basis. Some do come back for support where they are struggling. They would continue to be supported through the Care Experienced Team, who would then work with other agencies to provide to support to the young person to meet their needs. There was concern that if they did not meet the criteria for support through Adult Services they would not receive the support, this was part of the reason the two Directors were working together as Children's Services retains responsibility but would need support through Adult Services. Work was being carried out with the Human Resources Team to have care experienced as a characteristic for job applications, which would ensure they receive an interview if they meet the essential job criteria.
- There was a pilot to provide early help via the Housing Options Team, to support families who were at risk of becoming homeless, this was carried out with Children's Services to identify issues and source temporary accommodation which was more cost effective than that previously secured by Children's Services as the Housing Team have more expertise in the temporary accommodation market. The Council did not have any intentional homeless people, that was just a legal term.
- Under the new Children's Reforms those children who would have previously been categorised intentionally homeless would have automatically been classed as children in need would no longer happen as they do not have to be held with a social worker, whoever was working with the family from early help services would support them and anyone could be a family lead practitioner. They would only come into Children's Services if they needed to escalate to

child protection. There was a need to skill up the wider workforce to make them aware of the triggers to escalate to child protection.

- Last year the costs to Children's Services for spot purchasing temporary accommodation was £272,000, there had been a reduction in the number of families but the costs were increasing. There was a lot of different legislation coming into force which would impact on services. Previous market engagement events were not that successful. A needs analysis was being carried out so that the Council knows what it needs over the next five years, which would be used to drive the market to be flexible to meet our needs.
- The Council did not define care experienced young people as intentionally homeless, when they may have difficulties with temporary accommodation.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Democratic Services Team Leader be requested to arrange a site visit to the YMCA project in Exeter; and
2. that the Democratic Services Team Leader be requested to invite the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board Members to the Planning Committee meetings when any new planning applications come through from the YMCA for the SHAP project.

#### **4. Early Years Sufficiency**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye and the Divisional Director of Learning and Partnership Hubs, Rachel Setter presented the submitted report on Early Years Sufficiency Duty and responded to questions.

Members asked questions in relation to:

- was the early years provision in the areas where it was needed;
- how many schools provided nurseries;
- the questionnaire only had 50% response rate, what was being done to improve this, was this showing just the current situation or estimates for September, do we have sufficient places for September;
- how were staffing levels with a number of people leaving the sector and the impact on National Insurance contributions;
- do we know which providers charge for consumables e.g. nappies (a written response would be provided);
- 23% of providers had 10 unfilled spaces, 25% had more do we know what age group they were and what extent would the vacancies be taken up by the increase in hours, for the older age children do we encourage them towards school based nursery settings and encourage younger towards private nurseries;
- how many responses were received from the carers survey on who was able to access their full early years entitlements and what about the 15% who were not able to respond;
- how was affordability defined;
- how would the falling birthrate impact capacity in the longer term; and

- how many 0 to 4 years olds were there and what percentage of children were not represented and how do we capture that data.

The following responses were provided:

- Early years provision was sufficient across the whole of Torbay, with most being required close to where people work. One nursery was looking at a business plan to see if they could maintain their base funding. There were approximately 19 nurseries within schools. Discussions were being held with some schools due to dropping birth rates and less children coming into Reception to see how they could use their nursery provision moving forward. Future sufficiency was being reviewed alongside consideration under the Children's Reforms, which were focussing on having more community based teams.
- The recent capacity survey was advertised with schools, 0-19 providers and via the Council's communications and social media. It was felt that the low response from parents was due to people being satisfied and being able to access spaces. There was a separate survey for providers and parents. The Council had carried out its own mapping exercise and forecasts of birthrates and where people live and access provision and was satisfied that there was sufficient capacity where required. A written response would be provided on the breakdown of the responses to the surveys.
- The Council was working with South Devon College to access apprenticeship programmes, although it could be challenging taking people out of settings to undertake training. There was not a current problem with staff but this was being closely monitored due to challenges around wider education and cost of living, increase in National Insurance contributions and seeing some of the system struggling to maintain and think about key posts. Ongoing discussions were being held with providers to see if they had any issues with staff.
- The codes for early years entitlement were applied for before a parent could access a provider, sometimes a code was requested but not used. The Council does not have the information about individual codes. The majority of parents were validating their codes which was higher than the national average.
- Affordability was subjective based on how the parent felt.
- Parental preference was mainly to access early years close to where they work with schools being closer to their home due to friendships and after school activities. There was a risk of creating another transition if the Council encouraged parents into either school based or private nurseries. School based nurseries could also be term time only which did not suit some parent's needs.
- The surplus capacity for those going into reception at Primary School overall was 27% in Torquay, 25% in Paignton and 38% in Brixham. The Council was working with both early years and schools to see what was coming through. There was only one bulge year for secondary schools. In Paignton and Torquay secondary numbers were more consistent with numbers still falling in Brixham but not at the rate they were previously. These figures were monitored each term.
- There were 5666 children aged 0 to 4 years old out of 26115 children. Family Hubs were working with families and encouraging them to access provision

and support their development. There has been an increase in development of young children which takes the Council above national levels.

Members noted the update and thanked Officers for their work.

**5. Children's Services Self-Assessment**

This item was deferred to 2 June 2025 meeting.

**6. Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board Work Programme 2025/2026**

The Chairwoman presented the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board Work Programme for the municipal year 2025/26 and Members noted that it had been devised with input from Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet Members, partners and Senior Officers. The Work Programme was designed to help shape how the meetings of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board would operate, and the Work Programme would be flexible to accommodate additional topics that may require scrutinising throughout the year.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the initial Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board Work Programme for 2025/2026 as presented be approved; and
2. that the Work Programme will be kept under regular review by the Chairwoman and Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board and the Democratic Services Team Leader.

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

The Sub-Board noted the contents of the submitted action tracker. Arising from Minute 48, Councillor Twelves updated Members that she had contacted the Participation Leads again and they would put her in touch with other care experienced young people if the identified individual did not come back to them.

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Chairwoman