

Meeting: Cabinet **Date:** 20th October 2026

Wards affected: All wards

Report Title: Torbay Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 2026–2029

When does the decision need to be implemented? Following expiry of the statutory call-in period.

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Councillor Nick Bye, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services

Director Contact Details: Nancy Meehan, Director of Children’s Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval of the Torbay Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 2026–2029.
- 1.2 The Strategy provides a whole-system framework to support more children safely within their families and networks, increase the range and quality of local homes and accommodation, secure permanence without avoidable delay, and improve accommodation pathways for care experienced young people.
- 1.3 Delivery will be taken forward through the accompanying Placement Sufficiency Delivery Action Plan and the Budget Sustainability Plan for Placements, with progress reported to Directors and Cabinet.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 The Strategy responds to Torbay’s statutory sufficiency responsibilities and to evidence of continuing pressure in the placement market. At 31 March 2026, Torbay was caring for 292 children. Around 74% were in family-based care, while 94 children were placed more than 20 miles from home and a small number required high-cost or unregistered arrangements. Demand remains particularly challenging for adolescents, sibling groups, children with disabilities and complex needs, parent and baby placements, emergency care and residential step-down.
- 2.2 Approval will provide a clear strategic framework linking prevention, kinship and connected care, local fostering, residential and specialist provision, permanence, supported accommodation and commissioning oversight. The intended benefits are improved placement stability and locality, better education and health continuity, stronger accommodation pathways into adulthood, reduced reliance on crisis-led external provision, and improved value for money.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

1. That Cabinet approves the Torbay Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 2026–2029.
2. That the Director of Children's Services be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, to make minor amendments to the Strategy that do not materially change its direction or commitments.
3. That delivery is taken forward through the Placement Sufficiency Delivery Action Plan and the Budget Sustainability Plan for Placements, with progress and exceptions reported to Directors and Cabinet through existing governance arrangements.

Appendix 1: Torbay Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 2026–2029

Appendix 2: Placement Sufficiency Delivery Action Plan 2026–2029

2 Background Documents

- Children Act 1989 and statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children
- Torbay Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Torbay Children and Young People's Plan
- Budget Sustainability Plan for Placements

Supporting Information

3 Introduction

- 3.1 The Council has a duty, so far as reasonably practicable, to secure sufficient accommodation within its area for children it looks after. The proposed Strategy is based on local demand, placement, fostering, SEND, care experienced young people and market evidence. It establishes seven linked priorities: supporting families and networks; increasing local foster care; reducing out-of-area, high-cost and unregistered provision; improving provision for children with complex needs; securing permanence; improving accommodation for care experienced young people; and strengthening commissioning, data and governance.

4 Options under consideration

- 4.1 Approve the Strategy. This is the recommended option because it provides a coherent statutory and strategic framework, supported by a delivery plan and governance route.
- 4.2 Defer approval. This would allow further development but would delay implementation, weaken the Council's response to current sufficiency pressures and postpone the benefits of coordinated action.

- 4.3 Do not approve the Strategy. This is not recommended because the Council would lack an up-to-date strategic framework for meeting its sufficiency duty and managing quality, demand and financial pressures.

5 Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 5.1 The Strategy is aligned to the Placements Financial Sustainability Plan, which identifies a requirement to reduce placement expenditure by £4 million over two and a half financial years. Approval of the Strategy does not, in itself, commit the Council to new expenditure. Individual workstreams requiring investment, procurement or capital approval will be subject to detailed business cases and the Council's normal financial decision-making arrangements. Financial benefits will be tracked as cashable savings, non-cashable cost avoidance, one-off savings and investment or transition costs.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Strategy supports the Council's duties under the Children Act 1989, including sections 17, 20, 21, 22 and 22C, and the requirement to secure sufficient local accommodation so far as reasonably practicable. It also supports the corporate parenting principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Legal advice will be sought on individual delivery proposals where required, including procurement, property, planning, registration and contractual matters.

7 Engagement and Consultation

- 7.1 The Strategy has been informed by local service, performance, commissioning, finance, housing, SEND and placement evidence.

8 Procurement Implications

- 8.1 Approval of the Strategy does not itself award any contract. Delivery may require future procurement of residential, specialist, supported accommodation or related services. Each procurement will follow the Procurement Act 2023, the Council's Contract Procedures and relevant social value requirements, with proportionate consideration of market engagement, local supplier opportunities, lotting, quality, safeguarding and value for money.

9 Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

- 9.1 The strategic aim of increasing suitable local provision may reduce travel associated with distant placements and support greater continuity with local schools, health services, families and communities. Any new property, capital or commissioned provision will be assessed separately against the Council's Environment and Carbon Neutral Policy, including energy, transport, waste, biodiversity and climate resilience considerations.

10 Associated Risks

- 10.1 Key risks include delay in developing local residential and specialist provision; insufficient foster carer recruitment and retention; provider market, workforce and affordability pressures; blocked accommodation pathways for care experienced young people; fragmented planning for SEND and complex needs; and financial pressures increasing faster than planned improvements.
- 10.2 These risks will be managed through the delivery action plan, monthly high-cost placement review, commissioning and contract oversight, sufficiency performance reporting and escalation through Directors and Cabinet. Failure to approve the Strategy would reduce strategic grip and delay coordinated action.

11 Equality Impact Assessment

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act and groups with increased vulnerability	Data and insight	Equality considerations (including any adverse impacts)	Mitigation activities	Responsible department and timeframe for implementing mitigation activities
Age	18% of Torbay residents are aged under 18 years old. 55% of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old. 27% of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older.	The Strategy is expected to have a positive impact on children in care and care experienced young people by improving the availability, stability and suitability of homes and support across childhood and transition to adulthood.	Use age-appropriate planning, placement matching, participation and transition arrangements; monitor outcomes by age and placement type.	Children's Services and partners; throughout 2026–2029.
Carers	- At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay. 5,185 of these carers provided 50 hours or more of care.	No Differential Impact	N/A	N/A
Care experienced	As of January 2026, there were 277 former care experienced young	Positive impact is anticipated through stronger Staying Put, supported accommodation, move-	Monitor suitability, homelessness risk, move-on and tenancy	Children's Services, Housing and

	people aged 18-24 in Torbay.	on, tenancy sustainment and participation arrangements. Risks include insufficient affordable or specialist accommodation and delayed transitions.	sustainment; escalate gaps through the sufficiency programme.	Commissioning; throughout 2026–2029.
Disability	In the 2021 Census, 23.9% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot by a physical or mental health condition or illness.	Children with SEND, disabilities and complex needs may be disproportionately affected by gaps in local specialist provision, disrupted education and delayed transition planning. The Strategy gives this group a specific priority and is intended to improve joint planning and local sufficiency.	Joint planning across social care, SEND, education, health, housing and adult services; accessible participation; reasonable adjustments; monitoring of placement and education stability.	Children's Services, SEND, Education, Health, Housing and Adult Services; throughout 2026–2029.
Gender reassignment	In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth.	No Differential Impact	N/A	N/A
Marriage and civil partnership	Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census,	No Differential Impact	N/A	N/A

	44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership.			
Pregnancy and maternity	- Between 2013 and 2024, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 56.0 per 1,000) than the Southwest (53.4) and broadly in line with England (56.3). - For the period 2022 to 2024, rates in Torbay (44.6) have been significantly below England (50.0).	No Differential Impact	N/A	N/A
Race	In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as the following: 1.6% as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh 0.3% as Black, Black British, Black	No Differential Impact	N/A	N/A

	Welsh, Caribbean or African • 1.5% as being of Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups • 96.1% as White • 0.4% described their ethnicity another way. • Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.			
Religion and belief	The 2021 Census showed that the residents in Torbay identify their religion and/or belief as the following; • 48.5% are Christian • 0.4% are Buddhist • 0.2% are Hindu • 0.6% are Muslim • Less than 0.1% are Sikh • 0.1% are Jewish • 0.7% have another religion	No Differential Impact	N/A	N/A

	• 43.2% have no religion • 6.3% did not answer			
Sex	• 51.3% of Torbay's population are female. • 48.7% of Torbay's population are male.	No Differential Impact	N/A	N/A
Sexual orientation	In the 2021 Census, residents described their sexuality as follows; • 89% as Straight or Heterosexual • 1.7% as Gay or Lesbian • 1.1% as Bisexual • 0.1% as Pansexual • 0.1% described their sexuality another way • 7.4% of people didn't answer the question	No Differential Impact	N/A	N/A
Armed Forces Community	• In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces.	No Differential Impact	N/A	N/A

	In Torbay, 5.9% of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces.			
Additional considerations				
Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation)	Torbay is ranked as the 39th most deprived upper tier local authority in England in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2025.	The Strategy is expected to support children and families affected by deprivation through earlier help, prevention of homelessness, stronger family networks and improved access to stable local homes. Housing affordability and family poverty remain material risks.	Align delivery with Family Help, Housing and financial inclusion work; monitor Section 17 accommodation, homelessness and placement distance.	Children's Services and Housing; throughout 2026–2029.
Public Health impacts (Including impacts on the general health of the population of Torbay)	For the five-year period 2020 to 2024, data shows there is a 6-year life expectancy gap between males who live in Torbay's least and most deprived areas and, a 3-year gap for females.	Stable placements, continuity of education and health services, therapeutic support and safer transitions are expected to improve physical and emotional wellbeing. Delayed access to local specialist support could reduce these benefits.		
Human Rights impacts		The Strategy supports children's rights to family life, safety, participation, identity and access to education and health. Individual	Maintain lawful care planning, advocacy, review and complaints routes; involve children and young	Children's Services and Legal;

		placement decisions must remain lawful, proportionate and based on assessed need and best interests.	people in decisions and explain reasons clearly.	throughout implementation.
Child Friendly	Children and young people have emphasised having a say in decisions, being heard, having somewhere decent to live, remaining connected to important people and places, and receiving support that recognises the impact of care experience.	The Strategy has a positive Child Friendly impact by embedding participation in placement planning, commissioning, quality assurance and governance and by prioritising safe, stable and local support where possible.	Use established participation forums and direct work; include feedback loops in procurement, service design and performance reporting.	Children's Services and Participation Service; throughout 2026–2029.

12 Cumulative Council Impact

- 12.1 Delivery has cross-council implications for Children's Services, Housing, Finance, Commissioning, Assets, SEND, Education, Adult Services and Legal. Coordinated planning should improve outcomes and reduce duplication, but competing capital, workforce and revenue pressures may affect pace. These dependencies will be managed through the Sufficiency Programme Board and existing budget governance.

13 Cumulative Community Impacts

- 13.1 The Strategy depends on continued partnership with health, education, housing providers, commissioned services, foster carers and the voluntary and community sector. Wider housing-market pressures, provider capacity, workforce shortages and national reform may affect delivery. Ongoing market engagement, joint planning and annual review will be used to respond to these changes.