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Date: Monday, 26 April 2021

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Dear Member

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - TUESDAY, 4 MAY 2021

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at the Tuesday, 4 May 2021 meeting of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No	Item	Page
6.	Workforce Development and Sufficiency of Placements and Commissioning	(Pages 71 - 82)

Yours sincerely

Governance Support
Clerk

TORBAY COUNCIL

Meeting: Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board

Date: 04/05/2021

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: Effectiveness of the Council's approach to workforce development for Children's Services

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Name of Councillor, Cabinet Member Title and email

Director/Assistant Director Contact Details: Nancy Meehan, Director of Children's Services, nancy.meehan@torbay.gov.uk.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report has been prepared to provide members of the Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Board with an update on the effectiveness of the Council's approach to workforce development for Children's Services.

In summary;

1.2 Since the Learning Academy Launched in September 2020 our vacancy rate has reduced by 10%, turnover rate has reduced by 11% and our (use of) agency staff rate by 23%.

1.3 We have recruited 16 Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS) on to our Assisted and Supported Year ((ASYE) in employment tailored programme. We have appointed 14 to join our cohort in Sept 2021 and a further 3 for January 2022 with interviews on going during the next few months.

1.4 We have established clear career pathways including the development of the Advanced Social Worker role, and structured development opportunities for first line managers. We are also introducing succession planning as part of our determination to develop our own workforce and equip them with the necessary skills for career progression.

2. Reason for strategy and its benefits

2.1 We want Torbay to be a place where we have turned the tide on poverty and tackled inequalities; where our children and older people will have high aspirations. Our intended outcome from the workforce development strategy is that Torbay Children's Services 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.

2.2 The strategy outlined in this report help us to deliver this ambition by creating a Council fit for the future that will:

- be our vehicle for investing in and developing newly qualified social workers so at the completion of their programme they can confidently take their place among the wider workforce
- ensure quality of practice by using learning from practice evaluation to support professional and service development
- create a culture of innovation by drawing upon and translating research and experience into practice change of the highest standard
- enable practice excellence in collaboration with universities
- put relationships at the heart of our practice with children and their families and ensure a relentless focus of our support for our workforce at all levels.

Supporting Information

1. Introduction

1.1 Torbay Children's Services launched the Learning Academy in September 2020 as part of its recruitment and retention strategy with an attractive offer that will reach out and engage potential candidates and a Continued Professional Development (CPD) offer that will invest in all staff, support retention and drive service improvement. Our intended outcome from the strategy 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.

1.2 'Assessed and supported year in employment' social workers (ASYE's) are a key element of the strategy, and trained and developed well they will become a significant part of our workforce. In the medium term they will reduce our reliance upon agency social workers which will in turn help in reducing costs. The Learning Academy launch focussed on the recruitment of newly qualified social workers (NQSW's) onto our new ASYE programme. Our offer which includes competitive salary, protected workload allocations and high quality training attracted 16 NQSW's in Sept 2020 for Year 1 and already for Year 2 Sept 2021 we have appointed 14 high quality candidates with another 3 to join the cohort in January 2022.

1.3 In order to support the protected allocations of our NQSW's we are currently employing 1 experienced agency social worker per 2 NQSW's to absorb the more complex work. In the future we foresee skilled and experienced social work teams will be able to absorb a NQSW.

1.4 As part of the offer the service created the Advanced Social Worker (ASW) role. Not only does this provide a highly skilled, knowledgeable and experienced Social Worker who will manage complex work and support and develop less experienced colleagues it also creates a sustainable career pathway within a smaller unitary authority. We created a bespoke ASW development programme to further support and enhance the role.

1.5 For the success of our recruitment and retention strategy it is essential we increase our numbers of permanent experienced social workers to further reduce our reliance

on agency staff and ensure quality and consistency of service for children, young people and their families. A survey by DfE in 2020 found 83% of local authorities are struggling to recruit experienced Social Workers. To support Torbay's recruitment of experienced social workers a specialist marketing company (TMP) was procured to develop and boost our recruitment campaign nationally support by our competitive relocation offer.

- 1.6 In order to sustain retention and reduce our turnover rate the Learning Academy needs to consider how to promote 'Pull Factors' (factors that encourage workers to stay in Torbay) which include:
- the ability to make a difference
 - high quality supervision (management oversight and opportunities for development)
 - peer support
 - opportunities for career progression
 - organizational support for emotional wellbeing
 - feeling valued
- 1.7 The Learning Academy has supported the development of defined career pathways through its 'grow your own' strategy including creating opportunities for apprenticeships, step up to social work, placements, and Advanced Social Workers and leadership roles. We have strengthened links between quality assurance and learning to drive service improvement and progress on the service's Ofsted journey. A strong investment has also been made in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) which enables staff to make a difference through high quality social work while being valued as a colleague. The service is actively improving the quality and accessibility of supervision and management oversight and this will continue as we strive for robust and consistent supervision practice.
- 1.8 The Head of the Learning Academy is working with corporate HR to develop Torbay Councils workforce strategy and undertaking joint procurement of leadership and management training. This ensures that Children's Services is aligned to One Torbay and promotes cross pollination of learning across the services.
- 1.9 Means to actively track cost savings emanating from the recruitment and retention initiatives on a monthly basis are in advanced development. The details will be distributed to support leaders in monitoring the effectiveness of the strategies.

2. Options under consideration

2.1 N/A

3. Financial Opportunities and Implications

3.1 Means to actively track cost savings emanating from the recruitment and retention initiatives on a monthly basis are in advanced development. The details will be distributed to support leaders in monitoring the effectiveness of the strategies

4. Legal Implications

4.1 N/A

5. Engagement and Consultation

5.1 N/A

6. Purchasing or Hiring of Goods and/or Services

6.1 N/A

7. Tackling Climate Change

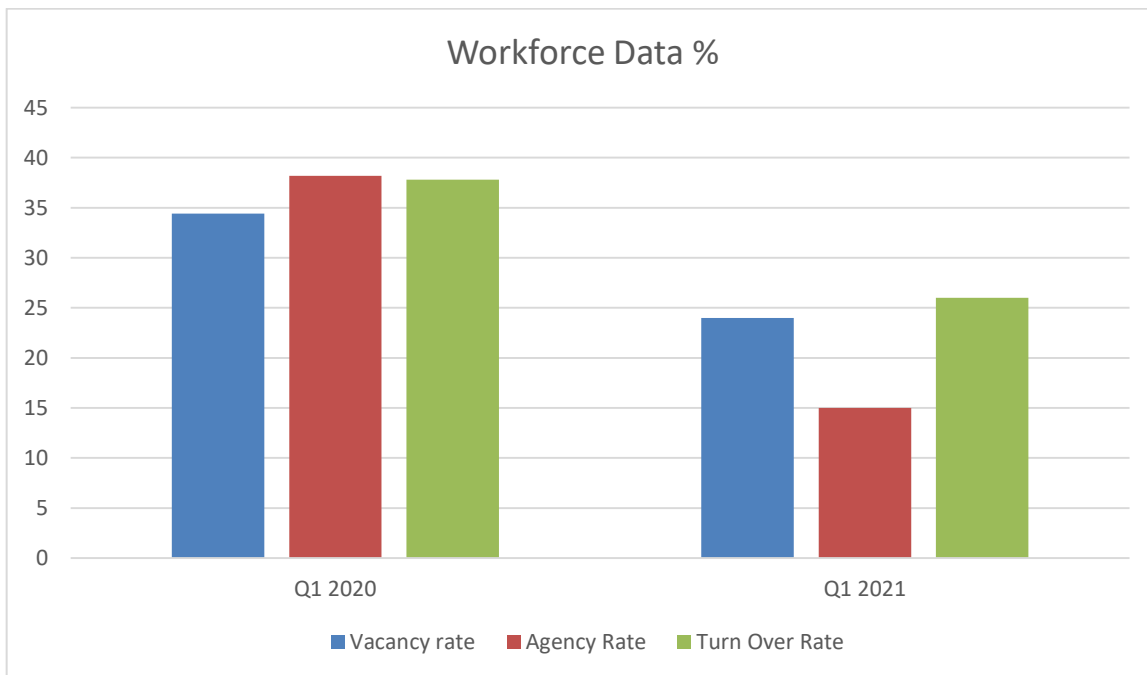
7.1 N/A

8. Equality Impacts

8.1 Not applicable as this report has been prepared to provide an update on existing services.

Appendix 1

Workforce Data



Meeting: Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board

Date: 4th May 2021

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: The effectiveness of the arrangements for fostering and residential care, including the options for meeting the needs of children and young people with complex needs who require specialist provision within Torbay

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Cordelia Law

Director/Assistant Director Contact Details: Nancy Meehan, Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to provide members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board with an update on the effectiveness of the arrangements for fostering and residential care, including the options for meeting the needs of children and young people with complex needs who require specialist provision within Torbay
- 1.2 In line with the Sufficiency Strategy 2021-24, Torbay Children's Services wish to:
 - continue to increase the numbers and capability of in-house foster carers and reviewing the existing bank of carers to develop and match their skills to the needs of our children.
 - reduce the use of out of local area provision which may disadvantage children and young people.
 - provide a robust commissioning framework which is effectively responding to the sufficiency challenges and driving up standards.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to outline the effectiveness of the current arrangements for fostering and residential care, and include the options for meeting the needs of children and young people with complex needs who require specialist provision within Torbay that are set out in section 2 below.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 The benefits of the above approach are set out below. Torbay Children's Service;
 - wants cared for children, including children with disabilities, to receive appropriate additional packages of support within placement, which may include

education, therapy and drug and alcohol intervention. These will be delivered by partner agencies in some situations.

- wants assessment, matching and placement planning to be child focused and evidence-based, and including clear expectations in terms of placement provision and contingency, exit or transition planning.
- wants placement provision to be of consistently high quality and robustly monitored through the commissioning framework, contract management and quality assurance processes
- will, by actively managing and supporting the stability of the child's living arrangements, aim to reduce the likelihood of avoidable placement and education disruption which will positively impact on outcomes for children and young people.
- wants placements for our cared for children and children who require respite placements to be safe and consistently able to meet the needs of our children and young people.
- wants fewer children and young people to be living a significant distance from Torbay and their local area.
- wants fewer children to be placed in residential settings but for those who are, we require rigorous evaluation to ensure that it continues to meet their needs and for those who can move there should be robust and timely exit and transition planning.

2.1 The proposals in this report help us to deliver this ambition by exploring all available options to enhance local placement provision and ensure that children who require care, whether on a short, medium or long term basis, benefit from provision which is carefully matched to their individual needs. This will directly improve the delivery of services for some of the most vulnerable children in our community, who require consistent, safe and nurturing care. By having a specific focus on their needs, it will also ensure that children with disabilities benefit from access to a wide range of respite placements.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- (i) That members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board note the contents of the report and the progress made.

Appendices

None

Background Documents

[Placements with Parents \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

[Fostering Panel \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

Supporting Information

1. Introduction

- 1.1 There are, as of the 12th April 2021, 317 cared for children supported by Torbay Children's Services. These children are of varying ages, with varying plans of permanence, and who require placement provision which in line with their assessed and specific needs. This can include short term foster placements, medium to long term foster placements, residential placements or high quality sixteen plus semi-independent accommodation.
- 1.2 Following the re-inspection in 2018, there was an increase in how many children were placed in residential settings; at the 31st May 2019, 41 children were placed in a residential placement. This was in part due to the lack of management grip and oversight at that time, as well as a lack of local fostering families, provisions and settings.
- 1.3 As a result of the increase in children being placed in such settings, the Independent Placements Overview Panel was introduced in August 2019, in order to have a robust oversight of the independent placements for all children and mitigate against drift and delay in onward planning and transition planning.
- 1.4 At the present time, authorisation is required from the Director of Children's Services to initiate a residential placement search; similarly, should a residential placement be identified as the most appropriate match for a child, this can only be agreed at Director level. This reflects the understanding that residential should be the last option for a child and that a family setting should be sourced wherever possible. On the rare occasion when a residential setting is felt to be in the short term best interests of a child or young person, social workers and Team Managers are encouraged to consider exit or move on planning at the very point the placement is made and is expected be formalised within the placement planning meeting.
- 1.5 As of the 19th April 2021, 19 children are placed in a residential setting.
- 1.6 Of the 316 cared for children, 51% live within Torbay; 21% live in a neighbouring authority; 28% live outside of Torbay and the neighbouring authority.
- 1.7 The Placements Team continue to build positive relationships with independent fostering agencies and placement providers and this relationship-based approach has been instrumental in working with providers to identify suitable and viable placement options for children and young people. An example of this effective joint work is in respect of one young person currently cared for within a residential setting; the Placements Team have worked closely with an independent fostering agency in respect of a step down placement more local to Torbay, in which intensive intervention can take place to prepare this young person for returning to a family setting. Alongside this, joint work between the Placements Team and the agency will be concurrent, to search for and secure an appropriate family fostering placement for him.
- 1.8 In addition, the Peninsula contract ensures ongoing work with Plymouth, Devon and Somerset, with thirteen placement providers on this contract who are able to offer

local fostering and residential provisions to the cared for child of Torbay. This contract is now in its fourth year, with a tender evaluation planned this year to prepare for a new contract being implemented in April 2021. Regular contract monitoring meetings take place on a quarterly basis, which an ongoing understanding of the sufficiency of placements, the progress of recruitment and the mechanism through which quality assurance is undertaken.

- 1.9 In terms of in-house provision, there continues to be a focus and drive in terms of fostering recruitment and assessment, in conjunction with a clear communications plan and targeted recruitment of fostering families who may be able to offer placements to children whereby there is a gap in the current local provision. This includes ongoing recruitment to the Resilience Fostering Pathway, which is focused on the recruitment of foster carers with specific skills, capacity and knowledge in respect of the care of older children, or children with complex needs.
- 1.10 As of the 19th April 2021, the Recruit, Train and Assessment data collation is as follows for the period of the financial year 20/21:
- 95 initial enquiries have been received in the period.
 - Fifteen Form C applicants had gone through panel by the 24th March 2021 with an additional Form C being heard at Panel on the 19th April 2021 and one further Form C assessment with ADM for sign off = total 17.
 - Form F applicants have been approved at Fostering Panel and another ten are currently in assessment. This is a total of thirty which, if all currently in assessment progress to approval, would give a 32% conversion rate. As it stands, with twenty approvals, this is conversion rate from initial enquiry of 21%.
 - Fourteen resignations have been received to date within the period = net gain of five new fostering households.
 - Twenty-five SGOs had been completed to date = totalling twenty-seven assessment.
 - Eighteen Special Guardianship Orders have been granted in Court; in addition, one applicant positively assessed then withdrew at the Final Hearing.
 - There are seven Special Guardianship Order assessments currently being completed. This totals fifty-three Special Guardianship Order assessments completed within the period.
- 1.11 A Fostering Recruitment and Retention officer is now in post and will be providing all current data in relation to recruitment, including the number of enquiries and numbers of enquiries converting to initial visits and/or full assessments. This will include information pertaining to why any application does not get progressed.
- 1.11 Work is currently being undertaken jointly with commissioning in respect of a joint project between Torbay Children's Services and Home for Good. Home for Good is a national Christian fostering and adoption focused charity working to inspire Christians to foster or adopt and equipping the church communities to support those who are caring for vulnerable children. Home for Good works with local authorities to develop and strengthen connections with local churches around foster carer recruitment and retention so they can best meet their obligations as corporate parents to the children in their care. Home for Good have developed a variety of resources to support prospective carers to explore whether fostering or adoption is for them, including online events and a national enquiry line to provide information for those exploring and support for those already caring.

1.12 There is also now an increased focus on the use of edge of care provision, in situations whereby reunification is a potentially safe and viable plan for children and young people. We have enhanced the monitoring and assessment of potential reunification options and are increasingly seeing to implement bespoke packages of support for children returning home to the care of their parents.

1.13 A new position within the Fostering Assessment Team has now also been implemented [Recruitment Co-Ordinator].

2. Options under consideration

2.1 Option one: continue with the current plan of fostering recruitment. This would include the work of the Recruitment Co-Ordinator, the Fostering Assessment team and the Communications team and would focus on recruitment to the resilience pathway and targeted recruitment for in-house carers on all bases, with a specific focus on those respite carers who can meet the complex needs of children and children with disabilities. This would be in line with other recruitment activity.

2.3 Option Two: Consider a High Dependency Carers pathway or Family to Family Pathway to increase numbers of respite carers able to meet the needs of children with complex needs, or children with disabilities.

3. Financial Opportunities and Implications

3.1 The work being undertaken to enhance the local provision of in-house foster placements will ultimately reduce dependency on the use of independent agencies and continue to decrease dependency on residential placements. Cared for children in Torbay will have access to high quality, long term, local placements which are assessed as meeting their needs.

4. Legal Implications

4.1 Torbay will continue to meet the statutory timescales in terms of their responsibilities to cared for children as per The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children Act 1989.

4.2 In-house fostering placements will not only meet the Fostering Minimum standards, but will provide high quality care to cared for children and young people. Foster carers will be in receipt of a wide range of training opportunities to improve their practice, and develop their understanding of their role in achieving better outcomes for cared for children.

5. Engagement and Consultation

5.1 We continue to engage in a wide range of participation strategies to inform the ongoing review and improvement of the fostering service. This includes: a dip sample of stability meetings, themes in terms of difficulties or issues arising which impact on placement stability and recommendations for practice; creation and implementation of thematic quarterly surveys to gain the views of our fostering families; joint work with CORAM BAAF in respect of the Bright Spots Your Life In and After Care surveys for all cared for children and care experienced adults aged 18-21; the use of Peninsula strategy to increase engagement with independent fostering agencies.

6. Purchasing or Hiring of Goods and/or Services

6.1 Not applicable at this time as this report has been prepared to provide an update on existing services

7. Tackling Climate Change

7.1 Enhancing local provision would decrease the need for significant journeys to be made to visit children out of county.

Equality Impacts; Not applicable at this time as this report has been prepared to provide an update on existing services - Should any proposed changes to these services be identified in the future the relevant EIA will be undertaken at that time if required.