

Minutes of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board

1 March 2021

-: Present :-

Councillor Bye (Chairman)

Councillors Atiya-Alla, Barnby, Mandy Darling and Mills (Vice-Chair)

Co-opted Members

Tatty Wilson, Church of England Diocesan Representative

Non-voting Co-opted Members

Jo Morrell, Torbay Youth Trust

Charlie Hine, care experienced young person

Nigel Yelland, Devon and Cornwall Police

(Also in attendance: Councillors Brown, Douglas-Dunbar, Law, Barbara Lewis, Chris Lewis, Loxton, Morey and Jacqueline Thomas)

5. Apologies

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting, particularly Jo Morrell, Director of Torbay Youth Trust and Charlie Hine, a care experienced young person who had joined the Board as non-voting co-opted members to give their experience to the Board.

Apologies for absence were received from Brent Davidson from Devon and Cornwall Police who was represented at the meeting by Nigel Yelland, Anne-Marie Bond Interim Chief Executive, Councillor Steve Darling and Rupert Davies who was hoping to join the Board as an academy primary parent governor representative.

6. Children's Improvement Plan Update

The Chairman of the Children's Improvement Board, Nigel Richardson, outlined the submitted report which provided a summary of the latest position in respect of the Children's Improvement Plan. Nigel outlined the history behind the appointment of Children's Commissioner by the Department for Education (DFE), following unsatisfactory inspections in 2010 and 2018, which had resulted in Government intervention with him taking up this role around 18 months ago. He welcomed the establishment of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board to enable dedicated time to be spent on services for children and the involvement of Charlie Hine to help give the voice of the young person.

Nigel highlighted the areas which he believed had contributed towards the improvements, particularly in the last twelve months:

- (i) political leadership – the work of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Steve Darling, and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Law, giving a clear commitment across the Council to improve and view children as the long term future of Torbay;
- (ii) operational leadership – the crucial roles of the Director of Children's Services, Nancy Meehan, and Interim Chief Executive, Anne-Marie Bond, who have renewed the corporate appetite to improve Children's Services, putting the correct leadership team in place, reviewing recruitment and retention practices and ensuring that the right support and processes are in place;
- (iii) partners – ensuring that partners are on board with the improvement journey with the additional of support from the Local Government Association to add capacity; and
- (iv) a clear vision, strategy and plan – this includes 'family friendly Torbay', greater focus on relational and restorative practice and a push for improved outcomes for children and young people – the 'so what' is anyone any better off as a result.

Nigel believed that the Council has worked hard to put the right foundations in place to enable the improvement journey to be sustainable in the long term and acknowledged the particular impact Councillor Steve Darling, Councillor Law, Nancy Meehan and Anne-Marie Bond had made in driving forward the improvements. This would enable the Council to move to the next stage in April moving from a DFE appointed Commissioner to an Improvement Advisor and a relationship with a partner in practice (another local authority who would work alongside Torbay Council to coach and mentor us).

Members noted that there were still a number of risks including the impact of Covid-19, challenges in recruitment and retention to recruit enough good quality front line practitioners and ensuring consistency of good quality social work practice.

Members also heard from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services on their views on the progress made and acknowledged the key role of engaging with the young people to ensure that their voices are heard.

Members of the Board asked questions in relation to the following:

- what the Board can achieve and how it can add value – ideas mentioned were already included in the work programme;
- increase in the numbers of child sexual exploitation and missing people – this was partly due to a better understanding of the data and appropriately

identifying incidences rather than an increase in numbers, a dedicated Child Exploitation Manager and Team has been established to take this forward (it was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Board had a dedicated meeting on this issue on 13 January 2021 prior to the establishment of this board);

- how the implementation of the new Liquid Logic software was going – data migration and testing was being carried out with the system expected to go live on 7 June 2021;
- drop in short term and long term placement stability – it was noted that long term stability was a positive thing to ensure children remain in their placements if they have been in care for over 2 ½ years, some were as a result of moving children out of residential placements and bringing them back into a home environment - Charlie Hine explained the importance to young people of long term placements and the emotional difficulties when they move placements and also the need to ensure greater consistency with social workers so that the young person does not have to keep retelling their story each time they get a new social worker; and
- edge of care services – there was a separate item on this later on the agenda.

The Chairman thanked Nigel Richardson, Nancy Meehan and her team and Councillor Law for all their hard work to help the Council get to this stage in its improvement journey.

It was noted that not all of the data was easy to understand and it was agreed that the Director of Children's Services would re-run a course on understanding children's data for members of the Board and open up to all other members.

7. Children in Care Council and Pledge

Jenny Hunt, Senior Youth Worker from Torbay Youth Trust outlined the submitted presentation and the approach taken to develop 'Our Promise to You – The Torbay Pledge to cared for and care experienced children/young people 2021-2022' and the names and logos: Cared For Community – understanding who we are together; The Circle – young people in care Council; and My Voice – open mic for care leavers. She highlighted the role of the Council as 'Corporate Parents' and the critical question that should be asked when adopting an approach to supporting children in care 'is this good enough for my child?'.

Charlie Hine spoke on behalf of the care community and advised that the pledge would be a game changer and help the children to feel normal if it is implemented and followed through. She explained that there needed to be more support for transition post 18 and becoming a care leaver as currently many young people were returning home to their parents, which was not always the best place for them but was familiar and easier without the appropriate support. She felt that we needed to treat children in care as individuals and explained the difficulty of doing things because of being labelled a 'child in care' and wanting to feel 'normal'.

Members asked questions in respect of the following:

- a lot of activity has been carried out with young people, how do we hear the voice of the child who is not participating – this was covered below;
- how many children in care have contributed towards the pledge and how do we demonstrate the voice is being heard – a target was set to reach 20% of children between 8 to 24 years of age, this was challenging due to some children not wanting to come along and children in care being very busy, additional funding has been given to enable more activities so that whilst the children are having fun we can seek their views, youth workers have been meeting with young people and should be able to meet in person at the YMCA soon. Working with partners to find different ways of reaching out to young people, newsletter, website was being worked on so all information was in one place and working with foster carers to encourage their children and young people to come along and engage in the events, working more creatively;
- what happens to under 8s – the Youth Trust officially supports young people aged 11 or above but they do support children from 8 years old, additional funding would be required to support younger children, this could include family days, working with creative play and arts, working with the voluntary sector and organisations such as Play Torbay who could do more extended work, looking at what the children were telling us through their play and using their skills to interpret this. Independent Reviewing Officers were required to record the voice of the child and funding has been provided by DFE which has been used to engage Bright Spots to carry out a survey around care experienced young people, this includes asking what they expect of us as a corporate parent, this will be used to help shape the future for our cared for community; and
- what can councillors do to make a difference – adopt the pledge via the Cabinet on 23 March 2021, help promote the pledge and get involved in activities with young people and communications.

Resolved:

That the Cabinet be recommended:

- (i) to adopt the 'Our Promise to You – The Torbay Pledge to cared for and care experienced children/young people 2021-2022'; and
- (ii) to develop an action plan to demonstrate how the Council will implement the Pledge to have the greatest and most positive impact on our cared for and care experienced children and young people and that the action plan be monitored by the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board (unanimous).

8. Ensuring Children receive the right support at the right time

Mark Gray from Peopletoo outlined the submitted presentation on a project for shaping the future of early help in Torbay – working together to bring a partnership model for delivering early help to life. He explained the background to the review which explored how the Council managed the demand for Children's Services and

how effective early help was at getting to the needs of children and families at an early stage to prevent them from escalating resulting in better outcomes for children and young people. He acknowledged the strong voluntary sector in Torbay and outlined the new model for delivering early help and acknowledged that not all organisations were consciously aware they were offering early help support.

The Board ask questions in respect of the following:

- what does the model look like to a child at risk – the child's needs should be identified by an organisation working with them to identify the support they need, this is often the school. They need to consider who else can meet the child's needs and they will then bring in a network of other services who can support the child. This ensures they get the right support at the right time and it is key that the organisation has the relationship and links to access support quickly;
- are partners signed up to the model – through the work being done so far by Peopletoo there was a strong sense of collective vision to work together, initially engaging through locality workshops but this will be developed further;
- how are you signposting and linking in with voluntary sector and churches, Tatiana Wilson advised that her diocese was trying to collate data for all churches linked to Pinpoint and offered to link with Mark to take this forward – Mark supported linking in with Tatiana and the church as some of the faith based organisations were those who did not always recognise they were offering early help;
- who takes responsibility and leadership for the child if the school calls in someone else – the initial organisation identifying the need would take the Lead Professional Role and co-ordinate the other organisations who would provide the support. If it was specific that another organisation would be the main organisation to meet the child's need they could agree to take on the Lead Professional Role; and
- the opportunity to engage with communities, children, young people and families and get the model owned by them to ensure it is explained and understood in the communities.

9. Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board Action Tracker

The Board noted the submitted action tracker. The Clerk advised that:

- Rupert Davies would be joining the Board as an academy primary parent governor and that she was working with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to seek a representative from the Roman Catholic Diocese and a secondary parent governor (Minute 2/1/21); and
- a joint response from the Regional Adoption Agency and Director of Children's Services on activity to increase the take up of prospective adopters in Torbay had been circulated on 26 February 2021 (Minute 4/1/21).

Further to Minute 2/1/21 the Chairman suggested the merits of including a representative from the voluntary sector as a non-voting co-opted member to help provide expert advice.

Resolved:

That a representative from the Imagine This Partnership Board be invited to become a non-voting co-opted member of the Board to help provide expert advice (unanimous).

10. Exclusion of Press and Public

Prior to consideration of the item in Minute 11 the press and public were formally excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the item involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

It was noted that this was due to the report on the Youth Offending Team inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation being embargoed until 3 March 2021 and therefore not being allowed to be made public. The clerk advised that the recording would continue to enable this to be uploaded to the website on 4 March 2021. The papers would also be made public at the same time.

11. Review of the Youth Offending Team

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Law, and Director of Children's Services, Nancy Meehan, highlighted the key points arising from the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection and Local Government Association Peer Review of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) as set out in the submitted documents. The HMIP report covered three areas:

Domain one: organisational delivery:

Governance and leadership: inadequate – governance arrangements were not robust enough and seniority of board members not at the right level. Challenges had been identified by the Local Government Association (LGA) prior to the inspection but were not able to be addressed due to Covid-19 and the building where the Team was located being closed and the challenges of staff working from home. The YOT Board has been replaced by a Senior Partnership Board who have met to put together a vision for the next 18 months, with an operational Board sitting below to drive forward the changes to the partnership.

Domain two: court disposals:

Outstanding: this needs to be reviewed as it is not right that a child's outcome was better through a court disposal rather than out of court options.

Domain three: out-of-court disposals:

Inadequate: this was due to not being able to evidence the difference it would make to young people or how it would impact on the victims of crime and a lack of

a quality assurance framework. It was proposed to take a more restorative approach rather than making use of formal cautions and court processes and to work more closely with the victims to support them in achieving satisfactory outcomes.

It was noted that overall the Youth Offending Team Service was judged as 'requires improvement' although it was acknowledged that the Youth Offending Team was a great and committed Team.

Members asked questions in relation to the following:

- concern that a large number of children and young people involved with the YOT were our children in care or who were not in education, employment or training (NEETs) – there were 24 children and young people who were being supported by the team and they all should be in education, employment and training;
- previously the YOT was highly regarded – the service had not been inspected for a while and when examined in detail there were a number of issues identified;
- different terminology e.g. out-of-court disposal – a glossary of terms to be provided in future reports to help understand the different actions available;
- how the YOT was working with the voluntary and community sector and Torbay Youth Trust to help provide wrap around support and using community provision more effectively – partnership working was a challenge identified by the review, this would be picked up by the Senior Partnership Board who were responsible for the funding;
- how would the lack of feedback be addressed – a quality assurance framework was being put in place to work with the young people, their families and victims which will help shape future provision;
- a third of the children were being educated in alternative provision, Pupil Referral Units can be linked to exclusion what action was being taken to address this – a panel has been established identifying the number of children who were being excluded or put into alternative provision, working with the Local Education Board to see how we can maintain these children in school without adversely impacting on the wider school. Rachael Williams, Assistant Director for Education sits on the YOT Senior Partnership Board and was looking at patterns and trends for elected home education to see if it was done out of choice;
- would the Kickstart programme help some of the young people and if the Youth Cautions would come back – the YOT were exploring options on how best to engage with the young person as options such as Youth Cautions form part of a criminal record but do not enforce engagement with the YOT, a preferred option would be a Youth Conditional Order, a caution given through a Panel and has a condition attached that the young person must work with the YOT;
- has the second YOT manager been found – the manager was in post but was working elsewhere at the time of the inspection with another manager picking up the role;
- number of first time entrants to the YOT being higher than the national average and lack of awareness of activities of the Board and

communication of Youth Justice Plan and Business Continuity Plan – the new Senior Partnership Board was communicating to the Operational Board who in turn cascade this to front line staff. The previous Youth Justice Plan had been written by team managers at the time without the wider YOT management board inputting. There has been a slight reduction in new entrants but the data was not up to date due to how it was collated and it would be investigated to see if this was as a result of lockdown;

- the lack of qualified detached youth workers on the street, the guidelines state it should be 2 full time workers per secondary school and Torbay has 2 full time workers for the whole area – it was suggested that some of the underspend in the overall Children's Services budget may be used to help support the YOT; and
- overall members were disappointed with the report.

Resolved:

That the Cabinet be recommended:

- (i) to review the underspend in the Children's Services revenue budget for 2020/2021 and consider investing some of this money in supporting youth services to address some of the issues identified in the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) Inspection and Local Government Association Peer Review reports and action plan;
- (ii) to ensure the Youth Offending Team continues to work with community and voluntary sector partners, such as Imagine This and the Torbay Youth Trust to ensure positive outcomes for young people who are going through the Youth Offending Service;
- (iii) to support the appointment of a dedicated Youth Offending Team Manager; and

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- (iv) that the Director of Children's Services be requested to provide an update to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board in four months time on the implementation of the Youth Offending Team action plans (unanimous).

Chairman
