

Wednesday, 15 July 2026

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-BOARD

A meeting of **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board**
will be held on

Monday, 27 July 2026

commencing at **3.00 pm**

The meeting will be held in the Banking Hall, Castle Circus entrance on the left
corner of the Town Hall, Castle Circus, Torquay, TQ1 3DR

Members of the Board

Councillor Law (Chairwoman)

Councillor Fellows (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Nicolaou

Councillor Tolchard
Councillor Twelves

Co-opted Members of the Board

Jo Hunter, Church of England Diocese

Ndubisi Obasi, Primary Academy Parent Governor

A Healthy, Happy and Prosperous Torbay

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Governance Support, Town Hall, Castle Circus, Torquay, TQ1 3DR

Email: governance.support@torbay.gov.uk - www.torbay.gov.uk

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-BOARD AGENDA

1. **Apologies**
To receive apologies for absence, including notifications of any changes to the membership of the Board.
2. **Minutes** (Pages 5 - 10)
To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board held on 3 June 2026.
3. **Declarations of Interest**
 - a) To receive declarations of non pecuniary interests in respect of items on this agenda

For reference: Having declared their non pecuniary interest members may remain in the meeting and speak and, vote on the matter in question. A completed disclosure of interests form should be returned to the Clerk before the conclusion of the meeting.
 - b) To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of items on this agenda

For reference: Where a Member has a disclosable pecuniary interest he/she must leave the meeting during consideration of the item. However, the Member may remain in the meeting to make representations, answer questions or give evidence if the public have a right to do so, but having done so the Member must then immediately leave the meeting, may not vote and must not improperly seek to influence the outcome of the matter. A completed disclosure of interests form should be returned to the Clerk before the conclusion of the meeting.

(Please Note: If Members and Officers wish to seek advice on any potential interests they may have, they should contact Governance Support or Legal Services prior to the meeting.)
4. **Urgent Items**
To consider any other items that the Chair decides are urgent.
5. **Fostering South West – End to End Regional Fostering Hub** (Pages 11 - 22)
To receive an update on the proposal for Torbay Council to join the Fostering South West End-to-End Regional Fostering Hub.
6. **Early Years Sufficiency Update** (Pages 23 - 26)
To receive an update on Early Years Sufficiency.
7. **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board Action Tracker** (Pages 27 - 28)
To receive an update on the implementation of the actions of the Sub-Board and consider any further actions required (as set out in

the submitted action tracker).

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

3 June 2026

-: Present :-

Councillor Law (Chairwoman)

Councillors Fellows (Vice-Chair), Nicolaou and Tolchard

Co-opted Members

Jo Hunter, Church of England Diocese

Non-voting Co-opted Members

Jim Funnell (Voluntary and Community Sector and Alternative Provider Education)

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye and David Thomas)

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Twelves.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Board held on 16 March 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services - Councillor Bye, Director of Children's Services - Nancy Meehan and the Youth Hub Manager – Jessica Tucker, provided an overview of the submitted report regarding the Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service and responded to questions. Key points included:

- Positive progress following new arrangements, with improved young people's engagement;
- Working towards a target of 130 young people;
- Part of a wider focus on early relationship-building with young people;
- Team expanding from 2 to 3 workers (June), strengthening delivery;
- Partnership with the College supporting access and coordination;

- Ongoing work to maintain engagement and shape next steps, informed by young people's views; and
- Recognising increased summer risk, with Public Health collaboration to promote safety messages.

Members asked questions in respect of the following:

- Was the data on the age and gender profiles of young people receiving treatment locally compared with national data?
- How did the service engage with young people who were not in school?
- Were alternative locations available for young people who might not have felt comfortable engaging within the home?
- Why were there no referrals from Checkpoint, and how could communication have been improved with partners such as paediatrics?
- How common was the use of opioid substitute treatment among young people?
- Did opioid use include both heroin and prescription medication?
- Was a 33% conversion rate into structured treatment in line with expectations?
- How did the service respond to referrals that were not appropriate for structured treatment?
- Would future reports include comparative data over time?
- Why were referrals not consistently received through GPs or paediatrics, particularly where young people had presented at emergency departments?
- Could future updates have included detail on alternative pathways into support?
- How was co-production with young people being used to shape the service?
- How were services adapted to support children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)?
- How did the service consider neurodivergence in relation to substance use?

The following responses were received:

- The data formed part of ongoing analysis, with early indications suggesting identifiable patterns within the local cohort;
- Engagement with young people who were not in education remained a significant challenge. As they could not be accessed through school settings, practitioners undertook outreach work, including home visits;
- The service worked with partners, including the Youth Justice Team and community organisations, to provide neutral and familiar spaces for engagement;
- Discussions with paediatrics services were scheduled, and opportunities to strengthen partnership working with Checkpoint were explored, including at joint events to improve communication and referral pathways;
- This was currently uncommon, with very few cases locally. However, there had been a shift in substance use trends towards synthetic and mixed substances, and work was underway with health partners alongside preventative activity;
- Opioid use included both heroin and prescribed medications;
- This was consistent with national benchmarks. Work was ongoing to improve conversion rates through a personalised, relationship-based approach, although some referrals were not always appropriate;

- All referrals were followed up. While performance measures focused on structured treatment, wider engagement remained important, with the service maintaining contact and keeping pathways open, including through peer mentoring;
- Reporting was provided on a quarterly basis, enabling comparison and ongoing monitoring;
- This was explored further with health partners to better understand referral pathways. Consideration was also given to refining performance measures to distinguish between referral routes;
- Future updates included additional detail on alternative pathways and how these operated;
- Peer mentoring was being developed as a key approach. Young people helped shape the service, including developing harm reduction materials and digital content, although challenges remained in reaching those outside established access points;
- Where Education, Health and Care Plans were in place, these were reviewed and treatment approaches were adapted to meet individual needs; and
- Substance use could act as a coping mechanism for some neurodivergent young people. The service focused on prevention and worked with partners to address underlying factors affecting wellbeing.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board note the Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service report;
2. that the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny sub-board request that the Director of Children's Services formally write to NHS Devon to seek clarification as to why referrals are not being consistently received by drug and alcohol services for children and young people who present at Accident and Emergency departments under the influence of substances;
3. that future six-monthly updates to the Sub-Board include detailed information on any proposed or implemented alternative referral pathways for children and young people being influenced by drugs and/or alcohol, including what these pathways would look like in practice, the roles of partner agencies, and how outcomes will be measured and monitored; and
4. that for future reporting for the Youth Justice Team, that Key performance data, information be detailed into the young people who are accessing as part of drug prevention order compared to those accessing through the Prevent Service.

5. Torbay Youth Justice Plan 2026-27

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services – Councillor Bye, Director of Children's Services – Nancy Meehan and Head of Service, Torbay Youth Justice Services – Jon Ralph provided an overview of the submitted report on Torbay Youth Justice Plan 2026 – 27. Key points included:

- Key objectives include:
 - ensuring children were accessing appropriate education provision;
 - reducing the use of rolling targets;
 - lowering reoffending rates;
 - tackling criminal exploitation of children in Torbay; and
 - increasing support for victims.
- The plan was due to be presented to Cabinet in June and must be submitted to Government by the end of June 2026 as part of a statutory requirement.
- There are already positive outcomes from existing work, although challenges remain, particularly in bringing some facilities or services into full use.
- First-time entrants into the justice system continue to be an area of concern, with offending rates fluctuating.
- The “Child First” approach was being embedded, reflecting a national initiative to treat children as children, avoid criminalisation, and focus on keeping them in education.
- Work was ongoing with education providers and children’s services to support school engagement and prevent exclusion.
- Additional funding had been secured through community sources to support a summer activity programme for young people.

Members asked questions in respect of the following:

- What impact did children not in education, including those who are home educated, have on the service?
- To what extent were children excluded from schools, prior to becoming home educated and what opportunities exist for reintegration into schools?
- How effectively did schools engage with the Youth Justice Service?
- How would the Town Centre Manager role support the management of anti-social behaviour?
- How were services responding to the high levels of child poverty among those children known to the service?
- What evidence was there that demonstrated that current interventions were reducing offending and associated risks? and
- What learning had been taken from other areas in reducing first-time entrants and addressing exploitation.

The following responses were received:

- The number of home-educated children was relatively small locally, although this is a national issue;
- Pilot schemes with specialist placements were supporting children at risk of exclusion, with a view to reintegration into mainstream education;
- Dedicated support was in place to work with schools and re-engage young people in education;
- The Town Centre Manager would work with partners to improve safety in key areas, although the impact is not yet known;
- High levels of child poverty were influencing service delivery, with increased focus on basic needs and wellbeing;
- Offending patterns, including theft and shoplifting, had been linked in some cases to lack of access to food or unstable home environments;

- Initiatives such as cooking programmes, youth hubs and partnerships with local organisations were supporting young people with life skills and access to food;
- Work was ongoing with partners to address exploitation, including targeted interventions and case reviews; and
- Learning from other areas and detailed reviews of high-risk cases had informed future approaches to reducing offending and exploitation.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board noted the and recommended Cabinet to approve the Youth Justice Plan for 2026-27.

6. Early Years Sufficiency Update

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board.

7. Child Friendly Programme Update

This item was deferred and a written update to be provided by the Corporate Parenting Lead on the Child Friendly Programme.

8. Draft Work Programme Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board 2026/2027

The Chair presented the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2026/27 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 2026/27 as presented be approved: and
2. that the Work Programme will be kept under review by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board and the Senior Democratic Services and Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

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

The Sub-Board noted the contents of the submitted action tracker.

Chair

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

Date: 27 July 26

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Fostering South West – End to End Regional Fostering Hub

When does the decision need to be implemented? Immediately

Cabinet Member Contact Details: [Cllr Nick Bye, Lead 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 for Torbay Council to join the Fostering South West end-to-end regional fostering hub from March 2027. The proposal forms part of the national Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme, which aims to increase fostering capacity, improve recruitment and retention, and strengthen support for foster carers and children.
- 1.2 The proposed hub model moves beyond the current recruitment-focused regional front door and will include the full fostering journey from enquiry, assessment and approval through to post-approval support. For Torbay, this will mean participating in a regional model while retaining clear local accountability for statutory responsibilities, safeguarding, placement sufficiency and the quality of support provided to children and foster carers.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 The proposals support Torbay's ambition to ensure that children who cannot live with their birth families are able to live in safe, stable, nurturing family homes wherever this is in their best interests. Torbay has the highest rate of children looked after in the South West, the highest spend per capita, and a high proportion of children placed out of area. Strengthening local and regional fostering capacity is therefore an important part of improving outcomes for children and managing sufficiency and cost pressures.
- 2.2 The data shows that Torbay is performing strongly in fostering recruitment when compared with the region. Torbay has the highest rates across all five recruitment pipeline metrics, including expressions of interest, initial visits, applications received and applications

approved. Torbay's total enquiry-to-approval conversion rate is 10.2%, compared with the regional average of 3.1%, and Torbay's average total process time is 228 days compared with the regional average of 254 days. Joining the hub provides an opportunity to build on this local strength, share best practice across the region and benefit from additional investment, data insight, regional training and targeted support.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1 That Cabinet approves Torbay Council joining the Fostering South West end-to-end regional fostering hub from March 2027, subject to the final operating model, financial arrangements, legal agreements, workforce implications and risk mitigations being agreed.
- 3.2 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Nick Bye, the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and the Director of Corporate Services, to agree the detailed implementation arrangements for Torbay's transition into the hub.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1:

Appendix 2:

5. Background Documents

- Supporting Information

6. Introduction

- 6.1 Fostering South West currently provides a regional recruitment and marketing offer and a single front door for fostering enquiries. The proposed end-to-end model would extend this into a more integrated regional offer covering recruitment and marketing, enquiry handling, journey guide support, pre-approval support, assessment coordination, enhanced data and insight, and post-approval support. The Department for Education has confirmed that authorities joining an end-to-end hub during 2026/27 will be eligible for funding streams including Room Makers, Mockingbird and potential Innovation Fund opportunities. The DfE has also indicated that any authority intending to join by March 2027 will receive its full 2026/27 allocation, whereas delivery beyond March 2027 risks loss of funding.

7. Options under consideration

- 7.1 Option 1: Join the Fostering South West end-to-end hub from March 2027. This is the recommended option. It enables Torbay to remain part of the regional programme, secure access to national funding opportunities, influence the developing model, and implement change in a phased way that allows local governance, workforce consultation and engagement with foster carers to be undertaken properly.

- 7.2 Option 2: Join earlier, from September 2026. This would align with the first cohort of early adopter authorities but is not recommended for Torbay because the timescale would not allow sufficient time for Cabinet approval, detailed financial and legal due diligence, workforce consultation, local implementation planning and meaningful engagement with foster carers and staff.
- 7.3 Option 3: Do not join the end-to-end hub at this stage. This is not recommended. It would reduce Torbay's influence over the regional model, risk loss of access to associated funding, and could limit opportunities to address sufficiency pressures through shared recruitment, data, training and support. It would also leave Torbay outside a national direction of travel in fostering reform.

8. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 8.1 The regional costed plan identifies indicative one-off set-up costs of £802,000 and ongoing annual costs of £2.806 million across the seven design areas and cross-cutting programme costs. The largest areas of expected ongoing cost relate to the single front door, assessment coordination, recruitment and marketing, and cross-cutting leadership, management and governance. These figures are regional planning assumptions and will require further work to determine Torbay's share, affordability, funding sources, and any ongoing local budget implications.
- 8.2 There is a financial opportunity if increased fostering capacity reduces reliance on residential care; the Department for Education estimates an average annual saving of £345,000 for every foster place that prevents a child entering residential care. However, no guaranteed savings should be assumed at this stage.
- 8.3 The key financial risks are uncertainty over the final funding split, potential pooled budget contributions, transition costs, future sustainability once time-limited funding ends, and the cost of any workforce transfer or associated employment liabilities.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1 The proposed model will require legal advice on governance, inter-authority agreements, data sharing, information governance, commissioning, employment arrangements and any TUPE implications.
- 9.2 Statutory responsibility for children looked after, fostering approvals, safeguarding, care planning and Agency Decision Maker decisions will remain with Torbay Council unless and until any formal delegation arrangements are lawfully agreed.
- 9.3 Any transfer of staff or functions must be supported by appropriate consultation, HR processes, equality considerations and legal agreements. The delegated authority sought in this report will enable the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with relevant statutory officers and the Cabinet Member, to progress and finalise these arrangements.

10. Engagement and Consultation

- 10.1 The regional design has been developed through engagement with local authorities, foster carers and operational leaders across the South West. Feedback has highlighted the importance of consistent, reliable relationships with supervising social workers, being treated as professional partners, prompt communication, clearer processes, peer support, and access to specialist training and support.
- 10.2 Torbay will need to undertake local engagement with foster carers, staff, trade unions, children and young people, and relevant partners as part of implementation. This will be particularly important because Torbay's existing relational fostering model is a local strength and must not be diluted through transition.

11. Procurement Implications

- 11.1 Procurement implications will depend on the final hub operating model. The regional costed plan includes potential procurement or commissioning activity relating to case management systems, digital and marketing activity, training delivery, independent social worker capacity, panel brokerage and programme support. Any procurement undertaken by or on behalf of Torbay will need to comply with the Council's Contract Procedures, the Procurement Act 2023, and social value requirements. Procurement advice will be required before any commitment is made to external suppliers or regional pooled arrangements.

12. Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

- 12.1 The proposal is not expected to have a significant direct environmental impact. Some activity, such as regional meetings, training, staff engagement and foster carer support, may involve travel across the South West. This will be mitigated by making best use of digital meetings and online training where appropriate, while recognising that some in-person engagement will be necessary to maintain relationships and support high-quality practice.

13. Associated Risks

- 13.1 The principal risks are:
- uncertainty over final costs and funding;
 - workforce disruption and TUPE implications;
 - loss of local relationships and practice strengths;
 - reduced local ownership;
 - delay in agreeing legal, HR and data-sharing arrangements;
 - dependence on regional systems and data quality;
 - and the risk that expected benefits do not materialise quickly.

- 13.2 These risks will be mitigated through a dedicated Torbay project team, phased implementation, formal governance, legal and financial due diligence, engagement with foster carers and staff, clear accountability arrangements, and regular reporting to senior leaders and Members.
- 13.3 There is also a risk in not joining: Torbay may lose access to funding, have less influence over the regional model, and miss opportunities to strengthen sufficiency and improve the fostering journey.

14. 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 Page 16	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 proposal is expected to have a positive impact on children and young people who need foster care by strengthening the availability, quality and consistency of family-based placements. Care will be needed to ensure that the model meets the needs of children of different ages, including teenagers, sibling groups and children with complex needs.	Implementation should include child-focused sufficiency planning and targeted recruitment for the children Torbay needs placements for, including older children, sibling groups and children with additional needs.	Children's Services, from project initiation through March 2027 and ongoing implementation.
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.	Foster carers are directly affected by the proposal. The hub may improve access to training, peer networks, information and post-approval support. There is also a risk that carers experience the regional	Engage foster carers early, retain local relationship-based support, provide clear communication on what will change and what	Children's Services and project team, throughout transition and post go-live.

		model as more distant if local relationships are not protected.	will remain local, and build feedback loops into implementation.	
Care experienced	As of January 2026, there were 277 former care experienced young people aged 18-24 in Torbay.	Improved placement sufficiency and stability may positively impact children in care and care experienced young people by supporting more children to remain in family-based care and closer to their communities where appropriate.	Include care experienced young people and children in care in the design of support, communication and feedback arrangements where appropriate.	Children's Services and Participation, during implementation planning.
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.	The hub should support accessible recruitment, assessment and training pathways for prospective foster carers and existing carers, including reasonable adjustments where needed. Children with disabilities and complex health needs are a key sufficiency consideration.	Ensure accessible communications, reasonable adjustments, and targeted recruitment and support for carers able to care for children with disabilities and complex needs.	Project team, Fostering Service and Equality leads, throughout implementation.
Gender reassignment	In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same	No differential impact		

	as their sex registered at birth.			
Marriage and civil partnership	Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census, 44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership.	No differential impact		
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		
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 Welsh, Caribbean or African 1.5% as being of Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	No differential impact		

	• 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 • 43.2% have no religion • 6.3% did not answer	No differential impact		
Sex	• 51.3% of Torbay's population are female. • 48.7% of Torbay's population are male.	No differential impact		
Sexual orientation	In the 2021 Census, residents described their sexuality as follows; • 89% as Straight or Heterosexual	No differential impact		

	• 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			
Armed Forces Community	• In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. • In Torbay, 5.9% of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces.	No differential impact		
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.	No differential impact		
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.	No differential impact		
Human Rights impacts		No differential impact		

Child Friendly		This proposal supports Torbay’s child-friendly ambitions by aiming to increase the availability of safe, stable, family-based care and by strengthening foster carer support. Children and young people’s voice should shape implementation.	Build children and young people’s feedback into the project plan, including accessible engagement and a clear “you said, we did” feedback loop.	Children’s Services and Participation, from project mobilisation and throughout delivery.
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15. Cumulative Council Impact

- 15.1 The proposal links to wider Children's Services improvement, sufficiency planning, placement stability, corporate parenting and budget management activity. The cumulative impact should be positive if the hub strengthens fostering capacity and reduces reliance on higher-cost provision. However, implementation will need to be managed alongside other service improvement priorities to avoid placing unsustainable pressure on staff, carers and operational leaders.

16. Cumulative Community Impacts

- 16.1 There are no significant negative cumulative community impacts identified at this stage. The proposal has potential positive community impact by supporting more children to live in family-based care and by strengthening recruitment of foster carers locally and regionally. Wider pressures across the South West, including placement sufficiency, residential care costs and workforce capacity, will need to be monitored through the regional governance arrangements.

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

Date: 27 July 2026

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Early Years Sufficiency Update

When does the decision need to be implemented? n/a

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Councillor Nick Bye, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, nick.bye@torbay.gov.uk

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 a review of Early Years Sufficiency

2. Background

- 2.1 The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment.
- 2.2 For this update the following key lines of enquiry have been listed:
- What action is being taken by the Council to influence the market and ensure there are sufficient early years places available to meet the demands across the whole of Torbay?
 - What has happened regarding preparedness for the new requirements that came in for September 2025?
 - Do we have over capacity of placements with the falling birth population?

3. Progress

- 3.1 What action is being taken by the Council to influence the market and ensure there are sufficient early years places available to meet the demands across the whole of Torbay?
- Sufficiency monitoring and engagement with the early years sector allow us to monitor capacity, occupancy and any emerging pressures. Overall occupancy across Torbay is at 94%. As a service we are proposing to move to termly data collection from both early years

providers and parents/careers to support our ongoing analysis of the childcare market and ensure we are responsive to the changing market and needs of families term on term. This will start for the Summer Term 2026.

- Current validation data for the expanded working parent entitlements for 30 hours funding indicate that:
 - Under 2's – 93% validated codes
 - 2 Year Olds – 95% validated
 - 3&4 Year Olds -96% validated

These high figures show that most parents who have applied for a code to access the entitlements have been able to secure a place in an early year setting.

- Ongoing provider engagement through visits, networks, finance system support and workforce development, contributes to provider sustainability helping settings remain open and viable therefore meeting the requirements form high quality accessible early years provision for children and families.
- Recruitment and retention continue to provide some barriers for providers when offering additional places for children. To address this, we have been working with South Devon College and local Secondary Schools to attend recruitment fayres, promote working in early years and engage young people, sharing career opportunities and pathways for progression.
- Working alongside a national organisation, Coram Pacey, we are developing our offer for Childminders. This will include localised campaigns on the 'Magic of Childminding' developing our website and support materials for new and prospective childminders and facilitating a local 'Buddy' system to encourage retention. In the last 6 months we have had 7 new childminders begun working in Torbay.

3.2 What has happened regarding preparedness for the new requirements that came in for September 2025?

- In the lead up to the full expansion of 30 hours funded childcare for working parents, providers received termly updates on funding and statutory changes, alongside direct practice and finance support, ensuring they were operationally ready for expanded entitlements. This support continues as the offer is embedded.
- Through both the School Based Nursery Grant and the Early Years Capital Expansion, 12 projects have been supported locally. Once all are completed this will generate approximately 110 additional places.
- Ongoing engagement with the School Based Nursery Programme has resulted in an additional bid for Phase 2 being approved by the Department for Education. This new expansion will increase sufficiency of places for 2-year-old children in an area of high disadvantage.

3.3 Do we have over capacity of placements with the falling birth population?

- Current data and information does not suggest an oversupply of places due to the falling birth rate with the average occupancy rate at 94%. The increase in hours from the

expanded entitlements has resulted in families being able to access an increased offer which has resulted in high occupancy rates.

- However local data and intelligence does suggest that some providers are reporting lower occupancy levels, whilst others are operating a wait list. There are two key factors which potentially impact this, parental choice and delivery models of provision. Whilst it is difficult to influence parental choice, we are actively working with some providers on their delivery models (particularly those who operate within traditional school hours, term time only) to support the increase in capacity and/or look at different options to ensure financial sustainability.

4. Recommendation(s)

- 4.1. That members note the content of the report

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

Date of meeting	Minute No.	Action	Comments
17.11.25	31	3. that the Director of Children's Services be requested to explore options to incentivise foster carers, particularly those who take on older children to ensure that they can remain in placements longer;	3. Teresa emailed Nancy Meehan 26.11.25 – chased 6.1.26 – Director to provide an update
9.2.26	43	2. that the Senior Democratic and Overview and Scrutiny Officer circulate the National Readiness School Survey to all Board Members; 3. that the Director of Children Services arrange a visit to Mayfield School at Parkfield for Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board; 4. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board request the Cabinet to source alternative funding to replace the NTDI grant (ends in March 2026) for the SEND employment forum; and 5. that the Cabinet be requested to consider options for amending the start time of concessionary bus fares for disabled people to enable them to engage in work.	2. complete circulated on 31.3.26. 3. Director to provide an update. Members of the main Overview and Scrutiny Board to also be invited to the visit (requested at Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6 May 2026.. 4 and 5 – Report submitted to Cabinet on 17 March 2026 – see Cabinet Response to Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations - Spotlight on Education.pdf

Date of meeting	Minute No.	Action	Comments
03/06/26	4	2. that the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny sub-board request that the Director of Children's Services formally write to NHS Devon to seek clarification as to why referrals are not being consistently received by drug and alcohol services for children and young people who present at Accident and Emergency departments under the influence of substances 3. that future six-monthly updates to the Sub-Board include detailed information on any proposed or implemented alternative referral pathways for children and young people being influenced by drugs and/or alcohol, including what these pathways would look like in practice, the roles of partner agencies, and how outcomes will be measured and monitored 4. that for future reporting for the Youth Justice Team, that Key performance data, information be detailed into the young people who are accessing as part of drug prevention order compared to those accessing through the Prevent Service	2. Emailed 07/07/26 – update received 08/07/26 • further actions have been agreed with the Safeguarding Lead in the Paediatric Liaison Team at Torbay to support more referrals which include some further training for her team and providing some discreet info packs that can be given to young people. There is also the need to do some more work with the MASH team to raise awareness. • contact has been made with the paediatric team in A & E - we are going to arrange for the YDAS team to spend some time there to share information, promote the service and get a feel for needs. 3. Complete 4. Complete