

Friday 18 September 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, 28 September 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

Download this agenda via the free modern.gov app on your [iPad](#) or [Android Device](#). For information relating to this meeting or to request a copy in another format or language please contact:

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 27 July 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. **Exploitation and Missing Children Update** (Pages 11 - 26)
To receive an update on child exploitation and missing children.
6. **Children's Continuous Improvement Board Update** (To Follow)
To receive an annual update on the Children's Continuous Improvement Plan and Children's Reforms.
7. **Torbay Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)** (Pages 27 - 56)
To receive update on Torbay Local Area Special Educational Needs (SEND) Joint Inspection Improvement Notice.

Key lines of enquiry:

- To consider the action plan arising from the SEND Inspection Update carried out in March 2025.
- To consider the impact of the review of home to school transport and how children with SEND are being supported to travel to and from school.

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

(Pages 57 - 60)

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).

This page is intentionally left blank

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

27 July 2026

-: Present :-

Councillor Law (Chair)

Councillors Barbara Lewis, Nicolaou, Tolchard and Twelves

Co-opted Member

Jo Hunter, Church of England Diocese (virtually)

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye and David Thomas)

10. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mike Cook, Jim Funnell and James Stock (Non-voting Co-opted Members) and it was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, the membership of the Sub-Board had been amended to include Councillor Barbara Lewis in place of Councillor Fellows for this meeting only.

11. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Board held on 3 June 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. Fostering South West – End-to-End Regional Fostering Hub

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services – Councillor Bye and the Director of Children's Services – Nancy Meehan provided an overview of the submitted report regarding the Fostering South West – End-to-End Regional Fostering Hub and responded to questions. Key points included:

- Torbay Council will join the Fostering South West End-to-End Regional Fostering Hub in March 2027 as part of the second phase of implementation;
- the regional model aims to increase foster carer recruitment and retention while maintaining strong local relationships and support for carers;
- the proposal forms part of wider national fostering and social care reforms and builds on the existing regional fostering enquiry hub; and
- six local authorities will go live with the new arrangements on 1 September 2026, with progress reviewed monthly to inform future roll-out.

Members asked questions in respect of the following:

- which South West authorities would be included within the regional fostering hub and how would Local Government Reorganisation affect the arrangements;
- whether funding and budgets would transfer to the hub;
- how the regional arrangements would protect the strong fostering practice already established by Torbay Council, where the hub would be based, and whether support would be focussed on existing foster carers or recruitment activity;
- whether participation in the end-to-end hub was optional;
- what level of influence Torbay Council would have over the future model and the sharing of best practice;
- whether there would be a standardised package of support and benefits for foster carers across the region;
- what the key benefits of joining the regional hub would be;
- whether Torbay's strong fostering performance indicated that other authorities were performing less well;
- whether foster carers would remain with Torbay Council or transfer to the hub and how relationships with foster carers would be maintained;
- how the proposed Room Makers initiative would operate;
- the extent to which foster carers, children and young people had been involved in developing the proposals and what support would be provided during implementation;
- the potential impact on existing fostering staff and whether local fostering promotion activities would continue;
- whether there would be an opportunity to withdraw from the arrangements if they did not prove successful during the trial;
- whether there was any flexibility around the conditions and provisos contained within the recommendations to Cabinet; and
- how the financial arrangements would operate and whether funding would transfer to support the new model.

The following responses were received:

- the proposed hub would include all 15 South West local authorities, although the impact of Local Government Reorganisation was not yet known;
- concerns had been raised across a number of authorities regarding the transfer of budgets into the regional hub arrangements;
- support arrangements for social workers would form part of the transfer arrangements;
- the direction of travel nationally was towards regionalisation, with the South West region being asked to identify additional fostering households. Consideration was being given to how a centralised model could continue to meet local needs and priorities;
- Wiltshire Council was leading the development work and had been involved in preparations for the first phase of implementation, which had been in development for approximately four months;
- local authorities currently offered different support packages to foster carers. Work was underway to review and refresh Torbay's offer and contribute towards a more consistent regional approach. Increasing the number of local foster carers could improve outcomes for children and reduce placement costs;

- the regional model would provide greater flexibility, economies of scale, enhanced marketing opportunities, access to specialist expertise and a wider reach for recruitment activity;
- Torbay was currently one of the strongest performing authorities in the region in converting enquiries into approved foster households. The regional model would provide access to a wider audience, although Torbay continued to experience challenges in retaining foster carers;
- it was understood that the hub would operate as an Independent Fostering Agency, with local authorities retaining responsibilities through service level agreements and statutory arrangements. Foster carers would become part of the hub arrangements and be allocated to local authorities as required;
- the Room Makers initiative would provide access to funding to enable foster carers to adapt or extend their homes where additional accommodation was required;
- there was limited information available regarding national consultation with foster carers and families. Feedback from Torbay foster carers had emphasised the importance of maintaining relationship-based practice and ensuring carers continued to feel valued and supported;
- to mitigate concerns regarding local promotion and engagement activities, fostering awareness and communications would be embedded more widely across the Council, supported by the Communications Team and the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities;
- no formal agreements had been entered into and no funding had been committed. The current position represented an agreement in principle and provided an opportunity to review learning from other authorities before final decisions were made;
- the report would not be presented to Cabinet until later in the year, allowing further consideration of the recommendations in light of learning from authorities already participating in the pilot programme; and
- financial arrangements remained a significant consideration, including concerns around pooled budgets and the methodology used to determine financial contributions.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Director of Children's Services, present to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board in January 2027, a feedback report on the process and progress of the first six authorities transferring to the South West – End-to-End Regional Fostering Hub.

13. Early Years Sufficiency Update

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services – Councillor Bye, Director of Children's Services – Nancy Meehan and the Divisional Director Education (Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Services) – Hannah Baker provided an overview of the submitted report regarding Early Years Sufficiency Update and responded to questions. Key points included:

- the Council had successfully met demand arising from the expansion of childcare entitlements, with sufficient early years places available across Torbay;
- average occupancy across settings was 94%, indicating strong take-up of places and no significant over-capacity despite falling birth rates;
- recruitment and retention of the early years workforce remained a challenge, with ongoing work taking place with education providers and partners to support the sector;
- twelve capital projects had created around 110 additional childcare places, with further expansion planned through a second phase of funding for two-year-old provision;
- demand for places for younger children had helped offset the impact of declining birth rates and maintain occupancy levels; and
- parental choice and the operating models of some providers continued to influence occupancy levels, with increasing flexibility being developed to better meet the needs of working families.

Members asked questions in respect of the following:

- what response rate was anticipated from the proposed termly parent and provider surveys;
- whether any trends or feedback had emerged from responses received to date;
- whether the validation data for childcare entitlement codes showed if families were accessing their full entitlement or only part of it;
- what additional information could be gathered through future engagement activities;
- when the additional childcare places would become available and how they would be allocated;
- whether the new places had already been allocated;
- what work was taking place with care experienced young people as part of recruitment initiatives with educational partners;
- how many schools currently offered nursery provision and how many did not;
- what data was available comparing outcomes for children attending different types of early years provision prior to starting primary school (written response to be provided);
- whether feedback and success rates from the work with South Devon College were available (written response to be provided);
- how many providers operated on a term-time only basis (written response to be provided);
- what action was taken where some providers had waiting lists while others had vacant places; and
- how parental choice and changing delivery models within schools were influencing the childcare market.

The following responses were received:

- the move to termly surveys represented a new approach, as surveys had previously been undertaken annually. The aim was to achieve a response rate

- of over 80% to provide robust and timely data, although actual response rates were not yet known;
- feedback received through the surveys would be reviewed over the summer period;
 - some families used their full childcare entitlement while others used only part of their allocation. Data was collected on usage levels, although the reasons for varying levels of take-up were not always known;
 - additional information was gathered through engagement events where possible, although care needed to be taken to ensure surveys remained accessible and not overly complex;
 - delivery timescales for the additional places depended on the scale of capital works required by individual providers. All 110 new places were expected to be available by the start of the next academic year. However, some providers had already allocated their additional places;
 - engagement with care experienced young people had not yet formed part of the recruitment work but this was planned for the future;
 - several schools were exploring nursery provision as a result of falling birth rates and available capacity within school sites;
 - when considering proposals for additional school-based nursery provision, assessments had been undertaken to ensure schools had sufficient capacity and were performing well;
 - Good Level of Development (GLD) data was reported by cohort rather than provider type. Recent data showed a 7% increase in GLD outcomes, and further analysis would be undertaken as additional information became available (written response to be provided); and
 - where providers had unfilled places, officers met with them to review their offer and provide advice on potential changes that could improve occupancy and better meet parental demand.

Resolved:

That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board note the Early Years Sufficiency Update report.

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

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

Chair

This page is intentionally left blank

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board

Child Exploitation and Missing Children Update

September 2026

Child Exploitation Team Manager – Children's Services

Update on Service Delivery – Missing and Exploitation Team

- 3x Practitioners + 1x Co-Ordinator - large range of experience and skills – directly engaging with children who have been reported missing or who have complex vulnerabilities including exploitation
- Supporting best practice in identifying and assessing vulnerability to exploitation and missing episodes
- Leading on completion of Philomena Protocols for repeatedly missing children
- Small number of co-allocations to children with complex vulnerabilities and needs

IMPACT:

Relationships built with children and families – focused on acknowledging trauma but working in a solution focused way

Understanding and identifying local peer group networks, locations of concerns, patterns of behaviours

Mapping and reporting adults and locations of concern

Excellent coverage across operational multi agency Panels

2026 So far.....

- Continued building of multi agency relationships and information sharing
- Building relationships with children and families to understand their lives and experiences
- Supporting appropriate use of civil legislation to disrupt perpetrators and locations
- Completion of Contextual Safeguarding Policy and Practice Framework (awaiting sign off)
- Return of initial information from Torbay for Operation Beaconport (National Review of Child Sexual Exploitation)
- Taxi driver awareness – October 2026

**Youth Anti
Social
Behaviour
Forum**

**Everyday good
practice –
thinking and
sharing
information**

**Transition
Panel**

**Youth
Homeless
Panel**

**Risk of
Exclusion
Panel**

MAPPA/MARAC

**Networking
through
Training and
Development**

**Peninsula Peer
Groups**

**Family Help
Panel**



**Torbay
Safeguarding
Children's
Partnership**

**Everyday good
practice**

**Peer Group
Mapping**

**Location
Mapping**

**Adult Network
Mapping**

**Exploitation
Local Profile**

Triage (weekly)

**CEMOG
(monthly)**

**MACE
(monthly)**



However, there is still much (hard) work to do:

- Keeping up with emerging forms of exploitation (including AI and crypto banking)
- Ability to respond and be as 'ruthless' as organised exploitative networks whilst remaining lawful and ethical in our work
- Identification younger for prevention rather than response
- Supporting families and communities to do the same
- Keeping our children 'local' against challenges of placement sufficiency and quality
- Disrupting perpetrators/bringing them to justice alongside prison and probation reforms which counteract this

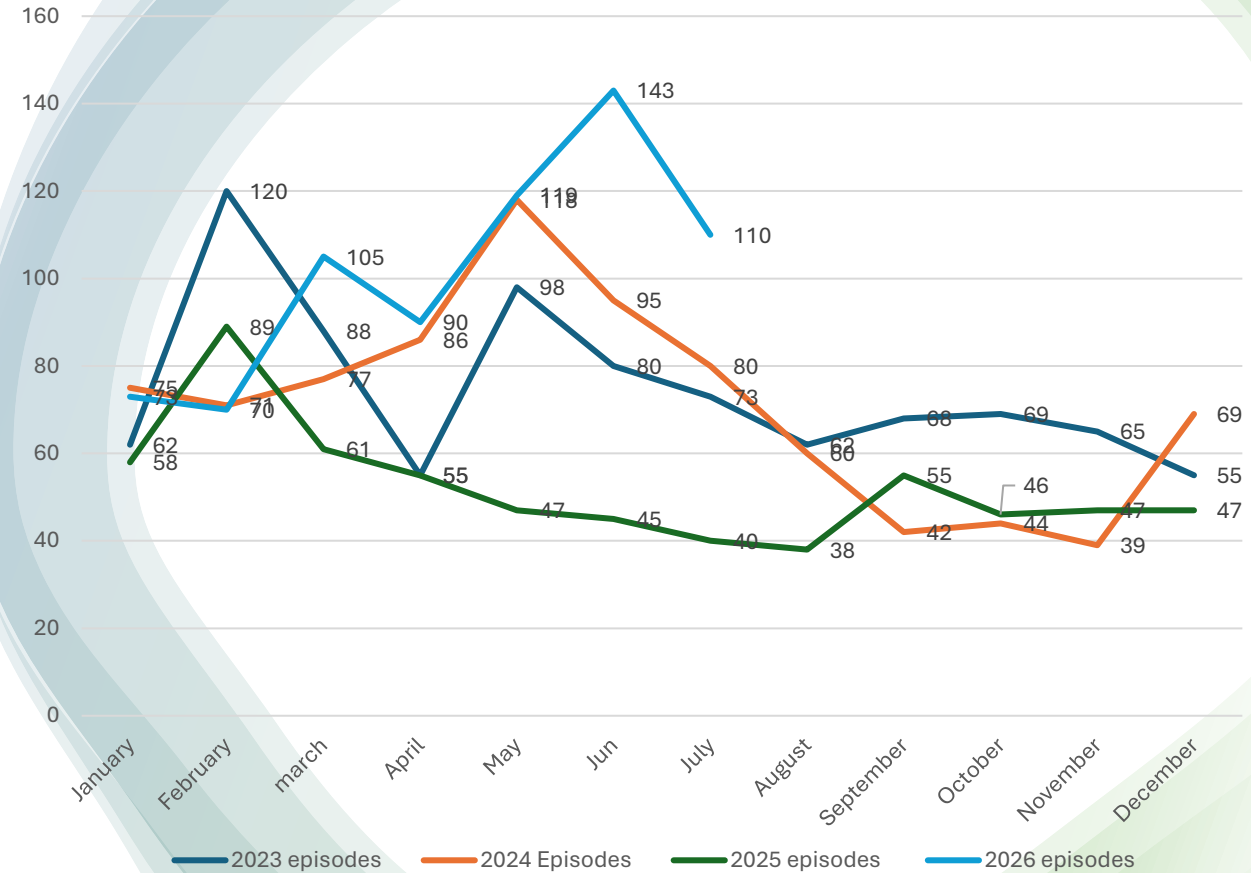
Missing Children

- Significant increase in missing children reported to police
- Across all localities, social groups and social care status

Month	Number of Missing Episodes	Individual Children
April 2025	55	30
April 2026	90	38
May 2025	47	29
May 2026	119	49
June 2025	45	26
June 2026	143	61
July 2025	40	24
July 2026	110	58
August 2025	38	26
August 2026	79	44

Missing episodes– Overview – 3 year comparable

- Why?
- Parental awareness of contextual risk – advice and information being provided
- High media coverage re: deaths of missing children (Nationally)
- Positive/helpful intervention following a missing episode
- Parental concerns re: mental health, self harm and neurodiversity
- Cared For Children – reporting by carers and placements in line with protocol



Children vulnerable to exploitation – September 2026

Missing and Exploitation team are tracking 151 children with exploitation toolkits:

69 males 81 females 1 transgender child

Aged 10 -17

44 children with HIGH vulnerability/BEING EXPLOITED

107 child with MEDIUM vulnerability

Vulnerability across all types of child exploitation and abuse

25 children with active Modern Slavery (National Referral Mechanism) referrals being assessed by the Home Office – for a combination of sexual, criminal and financial exploitation – including being trafficked for the purposes of exploitation/abuse

Example: Exploited child

15 year old Cared For Child – living in a fostering placement

Extensive trauma from being exposed to parental substance misuse and domestic abuse

Associations with peers of concerns and exposure to adult drug suppliers via parental addiction

Had been ‘adultified’ by her family and blamed for disclosing what was happening at home

Young carer for her brother – for whom the Local Authority proposed a plan of permanence in another family

Missing and exploitation concerns due to being in ‘flight’ mode from foster care

Intervention:

- Consistent and persistent approach from the same worker following missing episodes to complete Return Home Conversations
- Weekly appointments (sometimes 2x weekly) to provide emotional support, a listening ear and good advice/information about staying safe
- Support to attend appointments with important professionals regarding health and wellbeing
- Lots of ‘coffee’ and ‘snacks’ as well as drives around the local area to assist ‘talking’
- Supporting the child’s attendance at Court (Court determined that brother would remain local and that their sibling relationship should be promoted).

Example: Exploited Child – cont.....

OUTCOMES/IMPACT:

- Missing episodes have stopped – the child will reach out with problems
- Stability in education (creative arts focused education plan)
- Stability in fostering placement
- Understanding and reflection from the child about parenting capacity and reduction of self blame
- Supported to attend youth groups locally (still a work in progress)
- Ability to make positive decisions about self safety
- Creating poster for the upcoming girls group – was given a brief and created an excellent advertisement for other girls (see next slide)

Into the future:

- Supporting positive aspirations and achievement in education
- Supporting a safe role for her to take part in her brother's care
- Supporting continued recovery and positive relationships with family and peers
- Transition from Missing/Exploitation Team into youth work services (alongside Cared For status)

Example – Repeated Missing Child:

15 year old boy

Parental separation – acrimonious; both parents want him to live with them and blame the other

Neurodiversity – waiting for Autism assessment (currently 2 years waiting)

Quick escalation to repeated missing episodes away from both parents

Experimentation with alcohol and cannabis

Quickly developed associations with other missing and vulnerable children

Escalated into Anti Social Behaviour through ‘urban exploring’ and shoplifting

Intervention:

- Allocation to a consistent member of the team for Return Home Conversations
- Return Home Conversations recorded the child’s view about parental behaviours and his reasons for continually leaving home
- Initial safety planning achieved
- Philomena Protocol completed with mum (missing persons trigger plan)
- Child In Need Single Assessment completed with Child In Need planning agreed

Example –
Repeated
Missing
Child
continued...

Page 23

OUTCOMES/IMPACT

- Child In Need planning – child's voice and experiences at the centre
- Small network of well connected professionals providing support and advice to mum
- Child feeling able to choose who he will work with
- Understanding and disruption of adult perpetrators and monitoring local peer network
- Reducing missing episodes

Into the future (via Child In Need Planning):

- YJS pathways (Out of Court) for offending/anti social behaviours – diversion focus
 - Stabilising living arrangement
 - Recovery work for mum to strengthen her confidence
 - Support to achieve in education and promote aspirations
- 

Local practice messages

- ‘Stay the Course’ – this is hard work and we cannot give up on our children and young people – **Persistence and Consistency**
- **Mapping of locations and peer groups is working** – leading to earlier interventions and targeting vulnerable groups for prevention and protection
- Our local forums work for information sharing and shared responsibility for **taking action**
- **Early prevention** – including active assessment and intervention of younger siblings of exploited children
- Use the new **victim support services** and **commissioned services** in the most effective way for children and families
- Learning from national Safeguarding Reviews in relation to serious violence and organised crime/abuse of children and acknowledge that Torbay is not immune to this – **PREPARE for this with good policies and practice**

Into 2027.....

- Review and update of 'Out Of County' procedures and practice – multi agency working group
- Integration of contextual safeguarding into MACPT and Families First Reforms
- Integration of contextual safeguarding into new youth services and police practices
- Focus on girls and young women who are exposed to violence and harm – girl's groups and safe spaces
- Listening to the experiences of children and families and align services accordingly
- TSCP Conference 2027

Thank you for your
time

- Any questions/comments
- Look forward to seeing you again in 6 months



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

[Date of board to be added]

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Progress Report

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board with a six-month progress update on the Local Area Partnership's response to the findings of the March 2025 Area SEND Inspection and the subsequent Notice to Improve. The report summarises the progress made in delivering the Priority Impact Plan, the impact of improvement activity across the partnership, and the assurance arrangements in place to monitor performance, manage risk and drive sustained improvement.

The report also highlights key areas of focus and lines of enquiry arising from ongoing monitoring and challenge by the Department for Education and NHS England, including feedback from the March 2026 Stocktake and subsequent review activity. It is intended to provide Members with assurance regarding the pace and effectiveness of improvement whilst maintaining oversight of the areas requiring continued attention to ensure better outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families in Torbay.

Recommendations

1. To note the progress made by the SEND Local Area Partnership in delivering the Priority Impact Plan in response to the findings of the March 2025 Area SEND Inspection and subsequent Notice to Improve.
2. To be assured that effective governance, performance monitoring and risk management arrangements are in place to support and sustain SEND improvement across the partnership.

3. To note the feedback and areas of focus identified through monitoring activity undertaken by the Department for Education and NHS England, including the March 2026 Stocktake and subsequent deep dive activity, and the partnership's actions in response.

Background

Following the March 2025 Area SEND Inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission, Torbay's Local Area Partnership was judged to have widespread and/or systemic failings in its arrangements for children and young people with SEND. As a result, Torbay was issued with a Notice to Improve, requiring the partnership to address four Areas for Priority Action identified by inspectors. While the inspection recognised some progress since the previous inspection, it concluded that urgent and sustained improvement was needed to ensure children, young people and families receive the support they need and deserve.

In response, the partnership developed a co-produced Priority Impact Plan (PIP), which was approved by the Department for Education and NHS England in October 2025 as an actionable plan to address the inspection findings. The PIP established five priority areas for improvement: governance and co-production; commissioning; multi-agency support for children without an EHCP; waiting times and support for health assessments; and preparation for adulthood. Delivery is overseen through strengthened governance arrangements, including an independently chaired SEND Local Area Improvement Partnership (SLAIP) Board, with progress subject to formal monitoring by the DfE, NHS England, Ofsted and CQC over an 18-month improvement period.

Monitoring Arrangements

Robust monitoring, challenge and assurance arrangements have been in place over the last six months to ensure delivery of the PIP and maintain oversight of progress against the Notice to Improve. The SLAIP Board receives regular progress trackers and thematic spotlight reviews, providing detailed analysis of performance, delivery and impact across each Priority Impact Area and Areas for Improvement. A comprehensive risk management approach is also in place, with risk registers used to identify emerging issues, monitor mitigating actions and enable the Board to formally escalate concerns to accountable senior leaders across the partnership where additional action is required. Building on these arrangements, a Performance and Quality Assurance Sub-Group was established in December 2025 to provide greater scrutiny of performance information and oversight of delivery against the 2025/26 Quality Assurance Framework. The Sub-Group reports directly to SLAIP and escalates any areas of concern requiring strategic intervention.

In addition to local governance and assurance processes, Torbay continues to operate within the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England monitoring, support and challenge framework established following the inspection. Since the previous Overview and Scrutiny report, two formal external monitoring activities have taken place. In March 2026, the DfE and NHS England completed a comprehensive Stocktake review, including detailed examinations of each Priority Impact Area, engagement with SEND Family Voice Torbay and the Independent Chair of SLAIP, followed by a senior leadership review of progress. In July 2026, a further full day deep dive focused on Priority Area 3, Multi-Agency Working (Identification, Assessment and Meeting Need), providing additional independent scrutiny of progress and impact. Together, these internal and external assurance arrangements provide a rigorous framework for monitoring delivery, identifying risks at an early stage and ensuring accountability for sustained improvement across the SEND system.

Summary of Progress Since the Inspection

Since the SEND inspection in March 2025, the Torbay SEND Local Area Partnership has delivered a substantial programme of improvement across the Priority Impact Areas and Areas for Improvement identified within its Priority Impact Plan. Independent reviews undertaken by the Department for Education and NHS England have concluded that the partnership is making good progress, with stronger governance, improved multi-agency working and more effective collaboration across education, health and care. Reviewers have recognised clear evidence that the partnership has responded positively to the inspection findings and has established stronger foundations for sustained improvement.

Progress is evident across all five priority areas. Governance arrangements have been strengthened, strategic commissioning is increasingly driven by a shared understanding of need, multi-agency systems are operating more effectively, waiting times have reduced across several key pathways, and transition arrangements for young people moving into adulthood have improved. Alongside these system improvements, there is growing evidence of positive impact for children, young people and families, including improved access to support, stronger statutory performance and increased opportunities for participation and influence.

The partnership recognises, however, that not all children, young people and families will yet be consistently experiencing the full benefits of these improvements. Both the Stocktake and Deep Dive reviews highlighted the importance of continuing to demonstrate how changes to systems, processes and services are translating into improved lived experiences, increased confidence and better outcomes for families.

As the partnership prepares for the SEND Monitoring Inspection, the focus is increasingly on evidencing the impact of improvement activity, alongside its implementation.

The following sections provide a summary of progress against each Priority Impact Area, together with the key areas requiring further improvement prior to the forthcoming monitoring inspection.

Area 1: Governance: Work faster and better together. Improve Co-production and relationships with parents and carers.

Significant progress has been made in strengthening SEND governance arrangements across the Local Area Partnership, resulting in clearer accountability, stronger multi-agency collaboration and more effective oversight of performance, quality and risk. The July 2026 DfE/NHSE Stocktake concluded that governance arrangements have strengthened considerably since inspection, describing a more mature partnership culture, improved collaboration across education, health and care, and greater alignment around shared priorities. The introduction of an Independent Chair has increased pace, sharpened challenge and accountability, and helped establish stronger partnership ownership of improvement.

Governance is now supported by a comprehensive framework of partnership boards, performance reporting and quality assurance arrangements. The SEND Performance and Quality Assurance Sub-group has established systematic oversight of performance, audit findings, risk and improvement actions, enabling leaders to identify concerns early and drive timely corrective action. Strategic risks, including EHCP timeliness, health waiting times and inclusion, are routinely scrutinised through partnership governance, supported by increasingly sophisticated use of data and quality assurance intelligence. The Stocktake found that implementation of the Priority Impact Plan is broadly on track and recognised evidence of partners taking prompt action where issues are identified.

The partnership has also strengthened co-production and transparency within governance arrangements. Parent carers and young people now have established routes to influence strategic decision making through SEND Family Voice representation, participation activity and SEND Pledge engagement. The Stocktake recognised that there are now more opportunities for children, young people and families to influence service development and acknowledged the progress made in rebuilding relationships with families.

Evidence of impact includes:

- A co-produced Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is informing commissioning decisions across education, health and care.

- Multi-agency quality assurance and performance arrangements are providing stronger oversight of service quality and improvement activity.
- Shared governance has supported improvements in EHCP quality, commissioning, inclusion initiatives and preparation for adulthood pathways.
- Leaders have established a clear understanding of the partnership's highest risks and are using governance processes to monitor and drive improvement.
- The Local Area Partnership's progress was assessed as showing "strong signs of a maturing partnership" with strengthened governance and greater shared ownership across agencies.

Feedback from children, young people and their families:

Parent carers consistently value the person-centred, flexible and relational approach demonstrated by many professionals, particularly where families feel listened to, understood and actively involved in decision-making. Feedback also highlights opportunities to further strengthen communication and consistency across services, including ensuring timely responses, providing clear explanations of decisions, and making pathways for raising concerns or seeking further support more transparent.

Young people involved in the SEND Youth Forum said they are hearing about improvements but do not yet consistently feel them in daily life. Their forum priorities focus on being seen, heard and understood, fair and consistent support, trusted adults who listen, clear explanations and emotional safety.

Area 2: Commissioning: Identify gaps where no support or provision exists and create support and services for these areas

The Local Area Partnership has made substantial progress in strengthening SEND commissioning arrangements, moving from a reactive approach to one that is increasingly evidence led, jointly governed and focused on improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. A major milestone has been the completion and publication of the co-produced SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), which now provides a shared understanding of need across education, health and care and is actively informing commissioning decisions, risk management and sufficiency planning. The July 2026 DfE/NHSE Stocktake recognised the JSNA as a key strength and highlighted positive progress in commissioning across multiple workstreams.

Commissioning governance has been strengthened through the establishment of a multi-agency Commissioning Oversight Group, providing systematic review of needs analysis, service performance, emerging risks and gaps in provision. This has created a more coordinated approach to planning and investment across the partnership, ensuring commissioning decisions are informed by data, lived experience and strategic priorities. The Stocktake found that commissioning

intelligence is now influencing service development across autism, neurodiversity, speech and language, mental health, post-16 provision, adult social care and specialist education

Evidence of impact includes:

- 40 additional specialist autism places have been created at Combe Pafford School for September 2026, increasing local specialist provision and reducing reliance on out of area placements.
- The partnership has expanded mainstream resource base capacity, strengthened EOTAS (Educated other than at school) commissioning arrangements and widened post-16 education and employment pathways for young people with SEND.
- The under-5 Speech, Language and Communication Needs pathway has improved significantly, with average waiting times reducing from 45 weeks to 25 weeks between April 2025 and April 2026 following service redesign and locality-based delivery models.
- Mental health commissioning improvements have increased access to support, with MyWay supporting more than 2,000 children and young people and Lumi Nova engagement increasing from 33 to 150 monthly sign-ups by April 2026.
- Commissioning arrangements have also supported the development of enhanced outreach services, locality inclusion pilots and strengthened transition pathways into adulthood.

Feedback from children, young people and their families:

Families report positive experiences where support is tailored, responsive and delivered close to home, including through Portage, PEEP (Parenting Support), specialist health services, EOTAS packages and schools that have a strong understanding of their children's needs. Feedback also highlights opportunities to further develop the range of local provision, strengthen the clarity of pathways and information available to families, and continue enhancing access to respite and family support, ensuring timely and consistent decision making across services.

CYP feedback highlights the importance of provision that feels safe, tailored and meaningful. In Alternative Provision/EOTAS examples, children described valuing free time, feeling different from previous settings and benefiting where provision supports confidence, emotional regulation, engagement and communication.

Area 3: Multi-agency working: Work together to improve support for those children without an EHCP

The partnership has made strong progress in strengthening multi-agency working across education, health and care. Independent review through both the DfE/NHSE Stocktake and Priority Area 3 Deep Dive found clear evidence of improved

collaboration, more effective pathways and stronger joint accountability for identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND. Reviewers concluded that Torbay is on track in responding to the inspection findings and that most of the planned improvement activity has now been implemented.

A key area of progress has been the development of a more consistent graduated response. Investment in school improvement, specialist outreach and speech and language support has increased the confidence and engagement of schools and early years settings. The locality model has strengthened access to advice and earlier intervention, helping education settings respond more effectively to need before issues escalate. Deep dive reviewers identified this work as a strong example of successful partnership working generating positive impact for children, young people and families in Torbay.

The partnership has also strengthened EHCP processes through improved quality assurance, clearer multi-agency practice and stronger oversight. The deep dive identified improving EHCP quality and timeliness, supported by systematic auditing, pre-issue quality checks and closer collaboration between education, health and social care partners. School leaders reported improvements in the quality of plans, and the partnership achieved full compliance with statutory phase transfer requirements during Spring 2026.

Multi-agency working is also delivering improved support for children at key transition points. Stronger collaboration between children's services, adult social care, health providers, education settings and employers has resulted in earlier transition planning, clearer pathways into adulthood and more effective support for young people preparing for employment, training and independent living.

Evidence of impact includes:

- The DfE/NHSE Deep Dive concluded that stronger multi-agency working is now evident across education, health and care services, with the partnership on track to deliver the improvements required following inspection.
- 29 of 31 targeted primary schools and five early years settings participated in the Speech, Language and Communication Needs locality pilot, supporting earlier intervention and more consistent identification of need.
- Multi-agency quality assurance processes have contributed to measurable improvements in the quality of EHCPs, with positive feedback from schools and evidence of improvement through regular audits.
- EHCP timeliness improved during 2026, with the proportion of plans issued within 20 weeks rising above the 2025 national average of 46%
- 100% compliance with statutory phase transfer deadlines was achieved in Spring 2026.

- The Team Around the Special School (TAS) model has improved the identification of emerging needs and enabled faster multi-agency support.
- The number of 16 to 25-year-olds with EHCPs who were not in education, employment or training reduced by 55% between January and July 2026.
- The proportion of young people with an unknown destination reduced from 2.4% to 1.2%, reflecting stronger tracking and engagement arrangements.
- Supported internship opportunities increased by 500%, with 80% of NHS internship participants progressing into paid employment.

Feedback from children, young people and their families:

Parents report improved confidence where schools and services work together, listen and provide earlier support. Locality pilot feedback includes families feeling better supported, more listened to and more confident that schools understand and can meet their child's needs. However, concerns remain where EHCP implementation is inconsistent or children miss education while responsibilities are resolved.

Young people's priorities include getting the right support at the right time, fair and consistent learning support, trusted adults and preparation for life now and in the future. Locality and inclusion evidence shows positive impact where support improves self-regulation, communication, engagement and access to learning.

Area 4: Waiting Times and Support: Reduce waiting times for health assessments and improve the support available whilst waiting

The partnership has made tangible progress in reducing waiting times across several key health pathways and strengthening support available to children, young people and families while they wait for assessment or intervention. The July 2026 DfE/NHSE Stocktake recognised meaningful progress in this area, particularly within mental health services, support while waiting arrangements and multi-agency management of children with higher levels of need. Reviewers identified stronger oversight, improved pathways and increased access to early support as evidence of a more responsive system.

A particular area of success has been Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT), where sustained recovery activity has delivered significant reductions in waiting times. Alongside improved performance management and pathway redesign, the introduction of linked therapists, locality working and accessible support offers has strengthened both access to services and support available before specialist intervention is required. Mental health services have also demonstrated sustained improvement, supported by enhanced triage arrangements, digital provision and expanded early intervention support.

Alongside reducing waits, the partnership has developed a broader "support while waiting" offer to ensure children and families can access advice, guidance and

practical support earlier. This now includes advice lines, workshops, school-based support, digital resources, drop-in sessions and targeted neurodiversity support. The Stocktake recognised improvements in early-help and pre-diagnostic support through the Neurodiversity Advice Line, parent programmes, integrated Family Hub and health provision, and expanded outreach support.

Stronger governance and performance oversight have also been established.

Named pathway leads, improved dashboards and routine escalation processes now provide greater visibility of waiting times and service performance. This has enabled the partnership to target recovery activity more effectively and maintain a stronger focus on improving access to support across health services.

Evidence of impact includes:

- The DfE/NHSE Stocktake identified meaningful progress in reducing waiting times, particularly within mental health services, alongside improved support for children and families while they wait.
- The number of children aged under 4.5 waiting for Speech and Language Therapy reduced from 300 to 14 between March 2025 and June 2026.
- The number of children waiting more than 18 weeks for Speech and Language Therapy reduced from 250 to 10, representing a 96% reduction, with 91% of children now seen within 18 weeks.
- CAMHS Mental Health Response Service (MERS) waiting times reduced to an average of 6 weeks, with no child waiting longer than 18 weeks since December 2025.
- Community Paediatrics has eliminated waits over 40 weeks, with 59% of children now waiting less than 18 weeks.
- The introduction of a new triage model ensures contact is offered within four weeks of referral for mental health services.
- The Occupational Therapy advice line supported 58 families during its initial reporting period and achieved a satisfaction score of 9.9 out of 10.
- Support while waiting has been expanded through Speech and Language Therapy drop-ins, MyWay digital and face-to-face support, neurodiversity navigation services, parent programmes, school-based support and practical family workshops.
- Multi-agency triage and escalation arrangements have strengthened oversight of children with higher levels of need, ensuring those at greatest risk are prioritised appropriately.

Feedback from children, young people and their families:

Families recognise and value the support available while waiting for services, including advice, parent programmes, practical strategies, assessments, signposting and emotional support. Feedback is particularly positive where families feel listened to, supported and provided with clear next steps. The partnership continues to focus on reducing waiting times and strengthening the support available during this period,

to minimise the stress and uncertainty families face while waiting for decisions or provision.

Children and young people report positive outcomes where support improves confidence, emotional wellbeing, independence, school participation and communication. Transition clinic and health feedback shows young people feeling better prepared, less worried about moving into adult services and more able to understand or manage their own needs.

Area 5: Preparation for Adulthood: Improve processes for transition from Children's into Adults' services so that young people are better supported across education, health and care

The partnership has strengthened preparation for adulthood arrangements through improved collaboration between education, health, social care and employment partners, resulting in clearer pathways and earlier transition planning for young people with SEND.

Both the DfE/NHSE Stocktake and the Priority Area 3 Deep Dive recognised encouraging progress in this area, identifying strengthened commissioning, improved oversight and more effective joint working to support young people as they move towards adulthood.

A key area of improvement has been the development of more coordinated transition pathways between children's and adult services. Enhanced governance arrangements, including dedicated transition groups and multi-agency oversight processes, are supporting earlier planning and improved coordination across health and social care services. Transition planning now begins earlier, with clearer expectations around preparation for adulthood and greater involvement of adult services in supporting young people and their families.

The partnership has also increased opportunities for young people to progress into education, employment and training. Investment in supported internships, employment pathways and post-16 provision has expanded the range of opportunities available locally, while stronger tracking and oversight arrangements are ensuring young people at risk of becoming NEET are identified and supported more effectively. The Stocktake highlighted strengthened post-16 opportunities, SEND employment pathways and improved commissioning arrangements as evidence of a more effective preparation for adulthood system.

Alongside these developments, preparation for adulthood is being more consistently reflected within Education, Health and Care Plans. The Deep Dive recognised the introduction of a revised co-produced 0-25 EHCP template, designed to strengthen preparation for adulthood outcomes, transition planning and next steps. The

partnership was able to demonstrate growing evidence that forward planning for key life transitions is becoming more embedded within plans and practice.

Evidence of impact includes:

- A dedicated multi-agency transitions governance structure is now in place across children's and adult health services, improving oversight of transition pathways across physical health, learning disability, mental health and neurodiversity services.
- Transition planning begins earlier, with clear expectations that planning starts by Year 9 and, in some services, from ages 11 to 14.
- Adult social care is more routinely involved in planning for adulthood through attendance at EHCP reviews, transition panels and joint case discussions.
- Occupational Therapy services have embedded transition planning from age 14, working alongside Adult Social Care to identify young people who may require future support.
- Transition pathways are now embedded within provider contracts and have been strengthened through the implementation of NHS England guidance and enhanced quality assurance arrangements.
- Families have access to improved information and guidance, including transition resources, Year 9 information packs and support to help young people develop greater independence and manage their own health needs.
- A revised co-produced 0-25 EHCP template has strengthened the focus on Preparation for Adulthood outcomes, transition planning and next steps
- The DfE/NHSE Stocktake recognised improved pathways, stronger commissioning arrangements and better coordination between services supporting young people as they move into adulthood.

Feedback from young people and their families:

Parents and carers describe the transition to adulthood most positively when support is well coordinated and focused on preparing young people for the future. Families value professionals who work collaboratively across services, provide reassurance about what comes next and take time to understand individual circumstances.

Feedback suggests that multi-agency planning is helping families feel more informed and confident about the move from children's to adult services, while the increasing focus on preparation for adulthood is supporting conversations about independence, education, employment and future aspirations.

Parents also welcome the work underway to develop clearer post-16 pathways and opportunities that help young people prepare for adult life. These developments are helping families gain a better understanding of the support available and what to expect during transition, while ongoing improvement activity aims to further strengthen confidence and ensure that preparation for adulthood is consistently embedded across all pathways.

Young people report that they feel more confident about adulthood when they are actively involved in planning for their future and supported to develop greater independence. Positive experiences are particularly evident where young people have been given clear information, practical guidance and opportunities to build the skills needed to manage aspects of their lives more independently.

Young people also value support that helps them think about their aspirations beyond school, including further education, employment and independent living.

Continued Improvement Priorities

Priority Impact Area 1: Governance, Leadership and Accountability

Governance arrangements are now stronger and more effective; however, both the Stocktake and inspection preparation activity identified the need for the partnership to move beyond evidencing activity and demonstrate the impact of governance on the experiences and outcomes of children, young people and families. The monitoring visit is likely to place significant weight on whether leaders can evidence that strengthened accountability, challenge and oversight are translating into measurable improvements in lived experience.

Key areas for continued improvement:

- Strengthen evidence showing how governance decisions have improved outcomes for children and young people across all five Priority Impact Areas.
- Demonstrate the impact of quality assurance, audit and performance management activity on frontline practice and service delivery.
- Evidence improvements in communication, engagement and trust with families, including how feedback is influencing decision making and service redesign.
- Continue strengthening co-production so that the SEND Pledge and governance arrangements result in demonstrable improvements in family experience.
- Ensure performance reporting consistently evidences impact, not solely delivery of actions.

Priority Impact Area 2: Commissioning

The partnership has established a stronger commissioning framework based on the SEND JSNA, improved governance and better sufficiency planning. The next stage is to demonstrate more clearly the impact of commissioning decisions on outcomes for children and young people and to evidence how commissioning intelligence is used to identify, manage and mitigate risks.

Key areas for continued improvement:

- Demonstrate clear links between commissioning decisions and improvements in outcomes, access and experiences for children and young people with SEND.
- Continue embedding the JSNA as a live planning tool to inform future commissioning priorities and sufficiency decisions.
- Evidence the impact of new specialist provision, resource bases and locality models on inclusion and demand management.
- Strengthen outcome measures across commissioned services so that improvements can be demonstrated through consistent performance and lived experience evidence.
- Ensure commissioning oversight routinely evidences how identified service gaps are translated into commissioning action and monitored for impact.

Priority Impact Area 3: Multi-Agency Working

The Deep Dive confirmed that multi-agency working has strengthened considerably and that the partnership is on track in responding to inspection findings. The primary focus before the monitoring visit is now to evidence the impact of those improvements and ensure consistency across pathways and services.

Key areas for continued improvement:

- Demonstrate further improvements in the health, social care and provision sections of EHCPs, reflecting the specific areas identified within both inspection and Deep Dive activity.
- Continue strengthening the quality and consistency of EHCPs, particularly in relation to outcomes, provision and transition planning.
- Build a stronger evidence base demonstrating the impact of the graduated response and locality-based support models on outcomes for children and young people.
- Evidence the effectiveness of multi-agency pathways supporting children at risk of missing education, including attendance, part-time timetables and alternative provision pathways.
- Demonstrate the impact of work to reduce exclusions and suspensions, particularly for children and young people with SEND.
- Ensure improvements to multi-agency pathways and support arrangements are clearly reflected within the Local Offer and accessible to families.

Priority Impact Area 4: Waiting Times and Support While Waiting

The Stocktake recognised meaningful progress in reducing waiting times and improving support while waiting. The strongest evidence currently exists within Speech and Language Therapy and mental health services. Prior to the monitoring visit, the emphasis must be on sustaining recovery and strengthening evidence of impact across all pathways.

Key areas for continued improvement:

- Continue reducing waiting times in pathways where demand remains high, particularly neurodevelopmental and occupational therapy services.
- Demonstrate the effectiveness and reach of support available while children and families are waiting for assessment or intervention.
- Strengthen evidence showing the impact of support while waiting on family experience, wellbeing and outcomes.
- Improve the consistency of performance and outcome reporting across health pathways, enabling clear demonstration of progress and recovery.
- Continue evidencing the effectiveness of multi-agency triage, escalation and prioritisation arrangements for children with complex needs.
- Develop a clearer narrative linking reductions in waiting times with improvements in children's experiences and access to support.

Priority Impact Area 5: Preparation for Adulthood

The partnership has made encouraging progress in strengthening transition pathways and improving collaboration between education, health and social care services. The priority before the monitoring visit is to demonstrate that these strengthened arrangements are resulting in consistently improved experiences and outcomes for young people moving into adulthood.

Key areas for continued improvement:

- Demonstrate the impact of strengthened transition arrangements on the experiences of young people and their families.
- Evidence that preparation for adulthood outcomes, next steps and transition planning is consistently embedded within EHCPs.
- Continue strengthening the integration of children's and adult services, including health, social care and employment pathways.
- Demonstrate the impact of Preparing for Adulthood audits and subsequent improvement activity on practice and outcomes.
- Evidence compliance with national expectations relating to transition planning, including NICE guidance and Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI).
- Strengthen outcome evidence relating to employment, independence, participation and successful transitions into adult life.

Cross-Partnership Priority Before Monitoring Visit

Across all five Priority Impact Areas, the strongest recurring recommendation from both the Stocktake and Deep Dive reviews is the need to move from demonstrating activity and implementation to demonstrating impact and lived experience. The partnership now has stronger systems, governance and pathways in place. The focus between now and the monitoring visit should be on evidencing how these

improvements are making a measurable difference to children, young people and families.

This page is intentionally left blank



Department
for Education



Department for Education
3, Glass Wharf
Avon Street
Bristol BS2 0EL
www.gov.uk/contact-dfe

Date: 25/08/2026

Nancy Meehan, Director of Children's Services (DCS), Torbay Council,

Anne-Marie Bond, Chief Executive, Torbay Council,

Mark Hackett, Interim Chief Executive Officer, NHS Devon (ICB)

**RE: DfE & NHSE FEEDBACK AGAINST DEEP DIVES / PROGRESS REVIEW
AGAINST LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP 5 PRIORITY ACTION AREAS**

The team were delighted to meet with you and colleagues across the Torbay Local Area Partnership on 16 July, to discuss progress made in responding to the Priority Action in the SEND inspection report that:

'The local area partnership, including school leaders, must strengthen its multi-agency working to ensure that children and young people's needs are identified, assessed and met in a more efficient and timely manner through cohesive pathways across health, education and social care. This includes the following:

- the effective use of the graduated response,*
- EHC plans accurately reflecting need, next steps and provision for children and young people,*
- reducing levels of suspension and exclusion from secondary schools.'*

The discussion also included how the partnership has responded to recommendations in the inspection report regarding improving multi-agency work to prepare children and young people for adulthood, and to identify and support children at risk or who are missing out on their education.

We are grateful to all who contributed to such a valuable day, and who demonstrated the commitment, collaboration, and hard work that has gone into making the considerable progress since the SEND inspection.

The team would also like to express thanks to Combe Pafford school for warmly hosting the day, and to the young people at the Yellow Frog Café who provided such delicious refreshments. Our feedback is based on the presentations and materials you shared, and on the productive discussions held during the Deep Dive and the initial feedback session on 22 July.

Executive Summary

We feel the partnership is on track in responding to the recommendations in the inspection report and should be well positioned for the monitoring inspection.

Since inspection in March 2025, stronger multi-agency working has become evident across education, health and care services. We heard of the commitment to working collectively to identify and meet needs. There has been good progress in implementing the Partnership's Priority Impact Plan, which set out the required improvements to respond to the recommendations in the inspection report.

The majority of actions in the Plan have been implemented, and there is now increased focus on demonstrating the difference these improvements are making for children and young people with SEND. We heard examples of the positive impact of some of the improvements have already made. These impacts will become increasingly evident as the LAP continues to strengthen its evidence and narrative of improvement in the lead up to the monitoring inspection.

Key Findings

The Effective Use of the Graduated Response (PA 3)

The partnership has taken a number of positive measures to improve the application of the graduated response in education settings which have included:

- the creation of a new post the Head of Service for Quality First Teaching and School Improvement, to take a lead role in promoting the use of the graduated response in schools;
- the provision of training, practical support and advice to education settings, and advice through the Belonging by Design and outreach programmes;
- bringing in DfE-commissioned support, for instance, from the Council for Disabled Children, the National Development Team for Inclusion, and linking with the DfE's regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) initiative, which offers support to schools;
- the introduction of the speech and language therapy balanced model;
- a survey to understand the barriers to schools adopting the graduated response, in order to inform future planning.

The partnership has been able to demonstrate increased engagement in the graduated response from both early years settings and schools, through their participation in briefing and training sessions. Levels of engagement from schools still vary, but to a lesser extent, and the partnership has plans in place to sustain the progress made. In December, the LAP will host its first SEND conference, at which schools will be able to develop their own OAIP self-evaluation tool, further demonstrating a sector-led approach.

The co-designed locality model pilot, focused on Speech, Language and Communication Needs, and a good approach to its evaluation, provide strong examples of impact generated via increased schools' engagement. 29 of 31 targeted primary schools participated, as well as 5 early years settings. There have been positive impacts for children and young people and their families as result of the use of Linked Speech Therapists, Educational Psychology teams, earlier intervention pathways, and more consistent identification and support.

The capital strategy is designed to develop a range of provision: support bases and specialist places in mainstream schools, alongside an increase in the number of places in special schools for children with autism.

Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) - timeliness and accuracy in reflecting need, next steps, and provision for children and young people (PA 3)

In 2025, the very significant level of requests for EHCPs (above the national average) presented a substantial challenge to Torbay in providing timely EHC Needs Assessments and EHCPs. The local area's performance in issuing EHCPs within 20 weeks was below the national average in 2025, and in the first quarter of 2026. However, we saw that action taken by leaders to address the challenge is having a positive impact, with the proportion of plans issued within 20 weeks in quarter 2 of 2026 rising above the national average for 2025. We note that during 2025, the average number of weeks taken to issue a plan in Torbay was comparable to the average for England, and better than the average for the South West as a region. We were also pleased to see that that no plans took more than 52 weeks to complete, compared with a national average of 11%. There is strong performance in the completion of EHCP phase transfer reviews; in the spring of 2026, for instance, the local area partnership achieved 100% compliance with the statutory deadlines.

The Torbay local area partnership has also strengthened multi-agency EHCP quality assurance processes, including quality checks before an EHCP is issued, and post-issue audits of a sample of plans to identify areas for improvement. These audits demonstrate improvement in quality over time – something echoed by school representatives – and they have helpfully identified areas for further improvement. These areas for improvement include, notably, the health and social care sections and the provision section of EHCPs. It will be important for the partnership to make improvements in these areas during the autumn term 2026, as weaknesses in these sections of EHCPs were highlighted in the SEND inspection report.

In response to the concern in the inspection report that EHCPs were not adequately preparing children and young people for their next steps, the LAP has developed a revised 0-25 EHCP template, co-designed with young people, aimed at strengthening the Preparing for Adulthood content and increased the focus on outcomes, next steps, and transition planning. We saw evidence that forward planning for significant life transitions is

increasingly reflected in plans. The significant reduction in the number of young people with EHCPs who are not in education, employment and training is a positive impact of this work. This progress is, however, more difficult to see from the grading system used for assessing the quality of EHCP improvements in PfA content. It will also be important to demonstrate that Section E of all EHCPs include (as required by the SEND Code of Practice) *'forward plans for key changes in a child or young person's life, such as changing schools, moving from children's to adult care and/or from paediatric services to adult health, or moving on from further education to adulthood'*.¹

Reducing Levels of Suspension and Exclusion from Secondary Schools (PA 3)

Since the SEND inspection, DfE figures published in July 2026 for the 2024/25 academic year have shown that Torbay's permanent exclusion rate for secondary schools was below the averages for both England and the South West. Torbay's suspension rate for secondary school pupils is similar, with the LA below the average for the South West, and with only one of its ten close children's services neighbours² at a lower rate.

Torbay is aware that the exclusion and suspension rates from primary schools is much higher than national averages. It has also identified a concern over the relatively high levels of exclusion of children with EHCPs. The local area partnership has therefore rightly taken the decision to broaden the focus of its work beyond secondary level. It has commissioned a review of the exclusion of pupils with EHCPs, to try to identify what measures are most needed to avoid them.

The support that Lodestar Academy has been providing to mainstream schools operates within a strong evaluation framework, with evidence of the initiative having a positive impact on reducing levels of suspension and exclusion.

We note that the proposed secondary risk of exclusion work was discontinued, as schools wished to focus on the Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) work commissioned by the DfE on using powers under section 29 of the Education Act 2002 to direct a pupil off site for their education with a view to improving their behaviour, and in-year school managed move arrangements, as a way of reducing exclusion. It will be helpful for the local area partnership to be able to provide details of the outcomes from this initiative during its inspection.

Improving Preparation for Adulthood Arrangements (PA 5)

Torbay has responded positively to the recommendation in the inspection report that the partnership should improve their oversight and strengthen joint working across services to

¹ SEND Code of Practice (2015), p. 166.

² The ten children's services authorities in England with the most similar profile of needs to that of Torbay are Tameside, Sunderland, Plymouth, Rotherham, Redcar and Cleveland, Isle of Wight, Barnsley, Gateshead, Rochdale, and Telford and Wrekin.

support preparation for adulthood arrangements in several key areas.

Transitions from child to adult health services

A number of measures have been taken to improve the way that child and adult services are joined up across all health services for children and young people with SEND, so that the journey into adult health services is easier and more accessible. These include:

- improved governance and oversight through the Children and Family Health Devon transitions steering group, covering physical health, learning disability, mental health and neurodiversity pathways;
- use of recent NHSE guidance to improve practice in a number of services and the inclusion of transition pathways in provider contracts;
- ensuring that transition planning is taking place earlier, with a clear expectation that planning begins by Year 9 and, in some services, from age 11-14. Occupational Therapy services have embedded transition planning from age 14 through collaboration with Adult Social Care teams, and there is a process in place to identify young people who may need transition support and were not previously known to social care. This work is subject to increased quality assurance processes, which includes auditing to inform future practice and training;
- improvements in information and advice to help:
 - families navigate the transition pathways;
 - young people develop skills in independence and managing their health needs.

The partnership was able to illustrate impact by comparing the typical experience of a young person at the time of the inspection versus now, and via feedback from families and young people.

Transitions from child to adult social care

Measures have been taken to improve transitions to adult social care, including:

- adult social care staff attending EHCP reviews where a young person is likely to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2024;
- transition panels to oversee transition planning in the areas such as current placements and support packages, joint work between child and adult services, issues relating to Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and the Mental Capacity Act; joint working between a young person's social worker and their personal advisor, and preparation for independence;
- training of staff in Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and the Mental Capacity Act.
- Improvement to information, such as Year 9 information packs and information on direct payment.

As a result of these changes, the partnership was able to report transition planning starting earlier and better co-ordination between services.

Post 16 education training and employment

In the areas of post-16 education, training and employment, increased partnership working across services, education providers and employers is evident.

The partnership now provides enhanced oversight, reviews and support for young people with EHCPs who are not in education employment or training (NEET). As a result, the number of 16-25 year olds who are NEET decreased by 55% between January 2026 and July 2026. Furthermore, the proportion of young people whose destination is 'Not Known' reduced from 2.4% to 1.2%, without a corresponding increase in NEET figures, indicating more proactive tracking and engagement. We note that recent data published by the DfE³ shows that the proportion of 16 and 17 years olds with SEND who are NEET is below the average for Torbay's close children's services neighbours.

We also heard of strong progress that has been made in employment pathways. Supported internships have increased by 500% through NDTi-funded work, with 80% of NHS internship participants moving into paid employment. Innovative programmes such as the UKSPF-funded Sound Futures, King's Trust 'Eat That Frog', the SEND Employment Forum and work experience partnerships have broadened participation opportunities for those with SEND and who are at risk of being NEET. For example, Sound Futures (hosted by Sound Communities) supported 75 young people aged 16-24 who were NEET, and reported high levels of engagement and a number of positive outcomes for young people. Partnership working with South Devon College has created additional curriculum opportunities through the development of the pathways into adult programme.

Children at risk of missing out on their education

In the time available, we were unable to discuss in detail the multi-agency support for children and young people at risk of missing out on their education through poor attendance, part-time timetables, missing education altogether, exclusion and suspension, inappropriate elective home education, or poor commissioning arrangements for alternative provision. However, we noted:

- the significant improvements in the commissioning and quality assurance of providers of education other than at school, and alternative providers not registered with the DfE as schools, aimed at ensuring compliance with standards and ensuring that provision meets needs;
- the recent reductions in numbers of pupils on part-time timetables;

³ [Participation in education, training and employment: 2025 - GOV.UK](#) (July 2026)

- the recent reduction in number of children at SEND support who are electively home educated;
- improvements in attendance of pupils at SEND support in most education settings, but a small number of schools with high absence rates;
- the focus on reducing exclusion and suspension rates in primary schools, which are higher than in similar areas in England;
- evidence of positive impacts in attendance and suspension and exclusion rates in schools that have received targeted support.

Next Steps & Recommendations

In summary, the partnership has made good progress towards meeting its targets across Priority Area 3 and the areas for improvement relating to preparing for adulthood and children missing out on their education. There is early evidence of impact that can be built upon during the autumn term. In particular, we suggest that the work on impact focuses on:

- (i) evidencing the improvements in the social care, health and provision sections of new and reviewed EHCPs, and ensuring that they include the arrangements for supporting transitions;
- (ii) the initiatives taken in secondary schools to reduce exclusion and suspensions, and initiatives to reduce the exclusion of pupils with EHCPs;
- (iii) ensuring there is a strong evidence base to demonstrate the improvements made in multi-agency and partnership work and pathways to identify and support children at risk of missing out on their education.

We would also encourage the local area partnership to ensure that the improvements in multi-agency pathways (particularly in the areas of preparing for adulthood, and children at risk of missing out on their education) are included in the local offer. This will help families to become aware of the enhanced support now available to them, and how to access it.

Please do continue working with your SEND and NHS England Advisers, Brian Gale and Mark Tucker, and Mohamed Jimale as your DfE Case Lead, who will all continue to provide you with support and challenge.

If you have any questions or require any further support, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



Salam Katbi
Head of Vulnerable Children's Unit, South West Region's Group

This page is intentionally left blank



Department
for Education



Nancy Meehan, Director of Children's Services (DCS), Torbay Council,
Anne-Marie Bond, Chief Executive, Torbay Council,
Mark Hackett, Interim Chief Executive Officer, NHS Devon (ICB)

08 July 2026

**RE: DfE & NHSE FEEDBACK AGAINST DEEP DIVES / PROGRESS REVIEW
AGAINST LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP 5 PRIORITY ACTION AREAS**

Dear Nancy, Anne-Marie and Mark,

We would like to begin by thanking all colleagues across Torbay Council, NHS Devon ICB, Children and Family Health Devon (CFHD), schools, and parent representatives for their active participation in the deep-dive sessions held over March 2026. We are grateful for the openness, the commitment and the evidence of significant work progressing across the partnership.

The purpose of this review was to understand progress against the Priority Impact Plan (PIP), test Torbay's readiness for the forthcoming monitoring inspection, and evaluate the effectiveness of partnership activity across the five priority areas: governance, commissioning, multi-agency working, reducing waiting times, and preparing for adulthood.

We reviewed materials you shared, including the updated Joint Strategic Needs analysis, PIP documentation, governance papers, data dashboards, and local evaluations, as well as the discussions across each deep-dive meeting and the feedback presentation summarising findings from all five sessions.

Summary Findings

Across all priority areas, there is clear evidence that Torbay has taken positive steps to address the areas of weakness identified at inspection. We observed strong signs of a maturing partnership, with improved collaboration, strengthened governance and greater alignment across education, health and care. This was evidenced through examples shared during the review, including the early impact of the exclusion pilot (which remains an area for improvement) and the work to strengthen the Local Education Board, both of which are contributing to more distributed leadership and shared ownership across the partnership.

While the emphasis has been on ensuring the timely implementation of the Priority Impact Plan, the intention is now to also focus on evidencing the difference the

improvements are making to children and young people with SEND and their families.

The partnership has correctly identified the 3 challenges that require particular attention during 2026 as the time taken to issue new EHCPs, exclusion from secondary schools and waiting times for health services.

A recent focus of the SEND Local Improvement Partnership Board has been on improving communication at all levels and embed co-productions with the aim of improving relations with parents as recommended in the inspection report.

The following sections set out our detailed findings across the five Priority Areas.

Priority Area 1 — Governance, Leadership & Collaboration

There is clear evidence that governance arrangements in Torbay have been strengthened since the SEND inspection. Partners described a more mature and constructive partnership culture, supported by the introduction of an independent chair whose leadership has helped increase pace, sharpen accountability, and build confidence across services. Implementation of the actions in the Priority Impact Plan are broadly on track with examples of partners taking prompt action to address issues.

The multi-agency quality assurance and data arrangements have also developed significantly, with the QA and Data Subgroup now working more cohesively to review audit findings, resolve quality issues and track progress across services in a more systematic manner.

The partnership has also taken steps to rebuild trust and improve relationships with parents and carers. There are more opportunities for young people and parents to express their views and influence the development of services. The partnership recognises further work is required in to embed co-production and improve communications so that its SEND pledge to families becomes a reality

We heard a small number of examples where gaps or delays in communication with parent carers reduced the impact of otherwise positive work taking place across the partnership. For instance, some parent carers reported that they only became aware of the neurodiversity hotline after the navigator pilot had closed. This illustrates how important, timely and proactive communication is in supporting understanding and confidence in service developments. Given the historical context of distrust and frustration for some families, continued emphasis on clearly explaining what is changing, why, and how parent carers are being engaged throughout implementation will help ensure that positive developments are fully realised.

We are pleased that you have recruited a SEND programme manager who can support with this as well as progressing key aspects of the Priority Improvement Plan and reporting on its impact.

Priority Area 2 — Commissioning

There has been positive progress across your commissioning workstreams. The recent co-produced Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) provides an up-to-date understanding of needs across the partnership. JSNA themes are informing further education commissioning, adult social care planning, early years work and specialist outreach programmes. The creation of a commissioners' group should focus on ensuring that Torbay can evidence how the JSNA is being used to accurately identify and effectively manage risks when service gaps are identified across the partnership.

Substantial progress has also been made in sufficiency work, including new autism provision at Combe Pafford, School, a widening of post 16 opportunities and support, enhanced resource bases in mainstream schools, strengthened commissioning of Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision and a clearer approach to transitions for children with moderate learning difficulty.

There are signs that providing support around localities of schools are producing benefits. The evaluation of the locality pilots along with the use of the Improvement Support Funding recently provided by the DfE should be helpful in informing the development of the partnership's Experts and Hands offer.

Inspectors reported that a small number of children with SEND had been placed in unregistered children's homes, with some remaining in these placements for extended periods, in the "what the partnership needs to do better" section of your SEND inspection report. As part of the area partnership's preparation for the SEND monitoring inspection, it will be important to evidence how it has responded to this observation. Given the limited time spent on this issue during the stocktake, we were not able to explore it in sufficient detail to draw significant conclusions regarding current practice or impact. We would welcome the opportunity to consider this area in more detail as part of the next full stocktake review.

The learning disability pathway has been reviewed and information for families updated but were unable to see how this work had benefited children and young people. For example, whether there had been improvements in identification and support or more young people registered for and receiving their health checks from the age of 14 years onwards.

Priority Area 3 — Multi-Agency Working (Identification, Assessment & Meeting Need)

The deep-dive discussions evidenced that multi-agency working has improved markedly across Torbay.

Partners reported a noticeable uplift in the quality of EHCPs, supported by clearer processes, the Designated Social Care Officer and the application of the EHCP standard operational procedures in the health services. School representatives we spoke too reported an improvement in the quality of plans. Torbay's well embedded quality auditing process is reporting an improvement in the overall quality of EHCPs.

Improving the timeliness of EHCPs is proving to be a considerable challenge mainly due to the difficulties in recruiting and retaining educational psychologists alongside the increase in requests for EHCPs adding to the workload of on staff working in the statutory assessment service. The service managers have been diligent in reviewing systems and processes for improving efficiency and additional capacity has been provided to reduce the number of children who have been waiting over 20 weeks for their EHCP as well as increasing the proportion of new EHCPs issued within 20 weeks. However, the rise in requests for EHC needs assessment remains a significant challenge to the partnership.

The appointment of a head of service for quality first teaching is welcomed. Her work in evaluating the graduated response to identify its strengths and barriers to its adoption in schools will be helpful in informing plans for ensuring its implementation throughout Torbay. There is evidence of increased engagement of schools such as involvement in the Whole School SENDQA. The training offer and support to schools has improved since the inspection and has received favourable feedback.

The introduction of the balanced model for providing speech and language services complements the development of the graduated response in schools.

The introduction of the Team Around the Special School (TAS) approach has improved identification of emerging needs and provided rapid multi-agency problem-solving.

A number of initiatives have been introduced to support pupils at risk of exclusion and provide support and training for schools identifying those with the highest exclusion rates. There has been a reduction in overall exclusions however work to date has not reduced the exclusion of pupils with SEND.

Priority Area 4 — Reducing Waiting Times & Strengthening Support While Waiting

The partnership has made meaningful progress in reducing waiting times in several areas, particularly mental health. CAMHS (MERS) waiting times have reduced to 18 weeks, supported by a new triage model that will offer contact within four weeks of referral. Early-help and pre-diagnostic support has also improved through the ND advice line, parent support programmes, expanded school-based outreach, and integrated Family Hubs and Health provision. Multi-agency risk management has strengthened, with high-risk children consistently prioritised through triage and escalation panels. The palliative care pathway is well-established and well-regarded, and there were pointed discussions around conferring with local other areas to ensure there is a clear narrative around sleep support pathways.

Waiting times for Autism assessment and speech and language therapy (SALT) waiting times — particularly for over-5s — remain a concern and will require continued prioritisation. There was also some feedback from parent carers & families that they continue to be uncertain about where to access information or how to

navigate the system, emphasising the need for clearer, more cohesive communication.

The work to clarify map the neurodiversity offer across Torbay should be helpful to practitioners and families.

Priority Area 5 — Preparing for Adulthood

There is encouraging evidence of improved pathways and commissioning arrangements that support young people moving into adulthood. Targeted investment over the past three years has strengthened supported internships, SEND employment pathways, the post 16 education opportunities, adult social care and mental health services to meet the needs of young people when they reach 18 years. The multi-agency SEND employment forum is increasingly effective in bringing system partners together to shape pathways, share intelligence and address gaps.

The partnership has taken steps to improve the pathways from children to adult services. This includes identification of children and young people who may require support, starting transitions planning earlier and improved liaison between services. However, we are unsure of the extent to which the partnership's arrangements meet the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) quality standards on transition from children's social care and health services to adult services and comply with the Department for Education's guidance on the use of Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) to support young people's participation in education, employment and training. the).

The six multi-agency audits of the PfA experiences of six young people undertaken in November 2025 has been helpful in identifying what has been working well and what improvements are needed. The partnership should be in a position by the end of the year to demonstrate the impact this audit has had in improving support of young people as they transition to adulthood.

Next Steps & Recommendations

In summary the partnership has made good progress in implementing its Priority Impact Plan across all 5 priorities with some early evidence of it having a positive impact.

For the next stocktake we think it would be helpful to focus on:

- a) the impact of the improvements achieved on the experiences of children and young people and their families across all 5 of the priority impact area.
- b) The extent to which it is possible to demonstrate communication and relationships with families is improving.

How the partnership has responded to the 3 risk areas it has identified.

Please do continue working with your SEND and NHS England Advisers, Brian Gale and Mark Tucker and Mohamed Jimale as your DfE Case Lead, who will all continue to provide you with support and challenge.

If you have any questions or require any further support, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Mohamed Jimale

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

Date of meeting	Minute No.	Action	Comments
27.7.26	13	1. that a written response be provided – to confirm what data was available comparing outcomes for children attending different types of early years provision prior to starting primary school; 2. that a written response be provided - whether feedback and success rates from the work with South Devon College were available;	1. For both 1 & 4 (both are related to GLD data and outcomes) Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Data for each child is submitted annually at the end of Reception Year. Once data has been validated by the DfE and it is nationally published (October/November 2026) an Early Years Data resource pack is produced. This includes a breakdown of the data by cohorts, including Free School Meals, Gender, Summer Born and SEND. Data is also looked at by Ward Level (based on a child's home postcode) and towns. Further analysis looks at provider types so a breakdown will show outcomes based on the type of provider a child was attending in the year before starting Reception. A copy of the report can be shared once data has been nationally verified. 2. Currently information is not collected on the impact of these engagements, other than informal anecdotal conversations on the day with young people. Further work to be undertaken to understand how best to track these engagements to see if people spoken to at these events progress to choose childcare qualification and / or a career in childcare.

Date of meeting	Minute No.	Action	Comments
		3. that a written response be provided - how many providers operated on a term-time only basis; and 4. that a written response to be provided - Good Level of Development (GLD) data was reported by cohort rather than provider type. Recent data showed a 7% increase in GLD outcomes, and further analysis would be undertaken as additional information became available	3. Provider Type PVI: 28 in total - 15 Term Time Only School Based Nursery: 19 in total - 18 are Term Time only Childminder - 58 in total - 8 are Term Time Only 4. See response for 1 above
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	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. – visit being organised for October/November 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
		concessionary bus fares for disabled people to enable them to engage in work.	
17.11.25	31	1. 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;	The Director of Children's Services recognises the importance of recruiting and retaining foster carers, particularly those able to care for older children, sibling groups and children with more complex needs. Significant improvement work is already underway to review and strengthen Torbay's fostering offer as part of the wider sufficiency programme, with a focus on increasing in-house fostering capacity, improving placement stability and reducing reliance on external provision. This includes reviewing both financial and non-financial incentives, strengthening training, support and development opportunities for foster carers, improving access to specialist support, and enhancing the overall package available to carers to ensure they feel valued, supported and able to continue fostering for longer. The work is also considering how best to attract and retain carers willing to support older children and young people, recognising the important role stable, family-based care plays in improving outcomes and helping young people remain within their local communities and support networks. Progress will continue to be monitored through the fostering sufficiency programme, with any opportunities to further strengthen the support

Date of meeting	Minute No.	Action	Comments
			available to foster carers being considered as part of this ongoing work. As such, this recommendation aligns closely with work already underway and will be progressed through the existing fostering recruitment, retention and sufficiency improvement programme.