

Report for Children's Overview and Scrutiny Board: Update on Our Promise to You Pledge and Implementation

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is provide an update to Children's Overview and Scrutiny Board in respect of the Children's Services implementation of the 'Our Promise to You Pledge'. The last update to the Board was provided in September 2022, and this update reflects the activity aligned to each Pledge strand. The report also makes a recommendation for a review of the Pledge, to be undertaken in co-production with our cared for and care experienced children and young people.

The report will also provide an update on the transfer of the Cared For Community and My Voice from the Youth Trust to inhouse and the number of children who have already engaged as part of this process.

Update on the Cared For Community and My Voice groups

The Cared for Community represented by the Circle (previously known as the Children in Care Committee) and a participation group for care experienced young people called the Voice has now transferred back to the Council and is being delivered in house through the Learning Academy. Since the transition, the Learning Academy have run six Circle sessions and increased attendance from two young people to four attendees; five My Voice sessions have been scheduled, however the two young people previously attending were unable to on each occasion [separate one to one sessions have been offered in lieu]. Having discussed the model being used by the Torbay Youth Trust, it became immediately apparent that the focus on the Circle had drifted from a true participation model, with a focus on youth activities instead.

Further feedback was gathered from a focus group of foster carers, who cared for children who attended the Circle, who reported that the group had not been running consistently, with sessions often cancelled at short notice, and that the focus appeared to be on activity, as opposed to participation.

As such, a schedule of scoping and consultation activity was undertaken, to fully inform the next steps in terms of both groups; this was with the intent of understanding how to increase and enhance engagement from cared for and care experienced children and young people, and ensure that the principles of participation were at the centre of the model being implemented. This included but was not limited to:

- Attendance at Children's Services team and service meetings.
- Attendance at fostering support groups to undertake Listening Circles.
- Attendance at Fostering Forum.
- Engagement in a collaborative participation project through the Virtual School.
- Open Event held during the Easter holidays.
- Engagement with partners such as South Devon College, Avocados Advocacy, Counties2gether, Play Torbay, the Foyer and the Fostering Foundation.
- Scoping of twenty other Local Authority Children in Care Councils, in terms of age range, model of participation and frequency of sessions.
- One to one work with a care experienced young person who is leading on elements of this work in conjunction with Participation Officers.

As a result of this activity and subsequent analysis, the Learning Academy are in the process of re-launching our Children in Care Council through an election of members across the cared for community. The re-launch will be based on a formal youth parliament approach, similarly implemented successfully in other local authorities. As part of this model, we will be looking to recruit 12 members of all ages, cultural backgrounds and with different experiences. Young people will then vote on who they want to formally represent them on the Children in Care Council. They will then come together as a membership to create three priority areas, informed by the experiences and voices of our cared for community, that will improve services for children in care. The Children in Care Council will focus on what matters to them, be driven by them and make a difference for them. Each year we will hold a re-election to recruit new members, with new ideas and experiences to ensure we remain committed to improving services.

We believe this approach will allow us to let every child in our care know about their Children in Care Council and how they can get involved, and will also extend our reach to those children and young people living outside of Torbay through a hybrid approach. We know that best practice tells us that cared for and care experienced children and young people work best when they have a well-defined purpose with clear areas of responsibility. Relaunching through a youth parliament style approach will maximise our ability as corporate parents to work directly with young people in care and also emphasise the lens of participation work.

The Learning Academy have already worked with children and young people to design a booklet for them, outlining the Children In Care Council, and the template manifesto:

<p style="text-align: center;">Children in Care Council</p> <p>What is a Children in Care Council (CICC)?</p> <p>The Children in Care Council is a group of children and young people with experience of being in care. They help improve how children are cared for in Torbay. The Children in Care Council helps make sure that Torbay Council supports children and young people in care so they can be the best corporate parents they can be. This means you will meet with important decision makers to make sure that they understand what life in care is like, what works well or needs to change.</p> <p>Being part of the Children in Care Council is a chance for you to learn new things, like how to speak up for yourself and others, and how to work as a team. You can also make new friends who have similar experiences and come together to bring about positive change for children and young people living in care.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Voting and Representation:</p> <p>We are looking for new members to help make a real difference and joining the Children in Care Council is a great way to do it so you can help shape what the services and support for children and young people in care look like for the future.</p> <p>If you want to join the Children in Care Council, please complete a "Manifesto template" below to help explain why you want to join and what skills you could bring to the role. The completed manifesto will then be shared with all children who are cared for (by Torbay Council), we will ask them to vote on who they would like to best represent them.</p> <p>The people who get the most votes will become members of the Children in Care Council. Ideally, we would like to recruit 12 members of different ages, cultural backgrounds and with different experiences. This way, the council will truly represent what you and other young people in care think and want. You will join other members and come together regularly to meet and discuss important topics.</p> <p>We will hold yearly elections, so new members can join bringing new ideas and experiences as other members move on.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What is a manifesto?</p> <p>A manifesto is a special letter that you create which has your thoughts and beliefs written in a clear and powerful way. It's a bit like making a promise or a statement about what you think is right or what you want to change.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Making a Difference</p> <p>Together, we can make positive changes and provide meaningful opportunities for your voice to be heard and acted upon. We want you to be a part of this amazing journey towards a better future!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Manifesto Template</p> <p>Your full name: _____ (we will only share your first name)</p> <p>Your date of birth: _____ (we won't share this information)</p> <p>Age: _____ (we will share your age)</p> <p>Your Contact Details:</p> <p>Mobile Number: _____ Email Address: _____</p> <p>(So, we can contact you, we won't share this with anyone else)</p> <p>Please describe why you want to join the Children in Care Council and what skills you can bring to the role:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Identify Your Top 3 priorities you want to work on if you become a council member:</p> <p>Priority 1: _____</p> <p>Reasoning why: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Priority 2: _____</p> <p>Reasoning why: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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Other important considerations moving forward include:

- Ensuring a hybrid approach to ensure that cared for or care experienced children and young people placed out of area are able to attend.
- Continuing to co-design the participation model to maximise engagement, through surveys, focus groups, Listening Circles and one to one interviews with children and young people.

- Continuing to identify any potential blocks and barriers to attendance and engagement, and factor this into planning.
- Raising awareness of the purpose of this work amongst the Children’s workforce, the partnership and within our fostering community.
- Focusing on quality as opposed to frequency, to ensure that the remit of this work is purposeful and meaningful for children and young people.

Update on Pledge related activity

This section focuses on the key areas within the Pledge, and reflects on the ‘You Said, Our Pledge’ expectations within the Promise.

Being in Care

BEING IN CARE
YOU SAID → **OUR PLEDGE**

- Explain things to us in a way that we can understand
- Help us to feel comfortable and listen to us
- Treat us as you would your own child
- Always involve us where we want it, so we don't need to ask
- Find out about our story first so we don't have to repeat it, unless we want to

- We will come prepared, and we will listen
- Your views will come first, but we will be honest about what we can do
- We will ask you about what your goals are and support you to achieve them
- We will work with your carers to ensure your home is the best it can be
- We will explain your rights using language that is easily understood
- We will use Language that Cares*



*Language That Cares -TACT Fostering & Adoption (tactcare.org.uk)

Torbay is continuing its journey to embed restorative practice approaches to build positive relationships and we continue to offer the ‘Restorative Language’ course across the partnership, and our Restorative Practice online basic awareness course continues to be rolled out on a regular basis which is available to all our both statutory and voluntary partners.

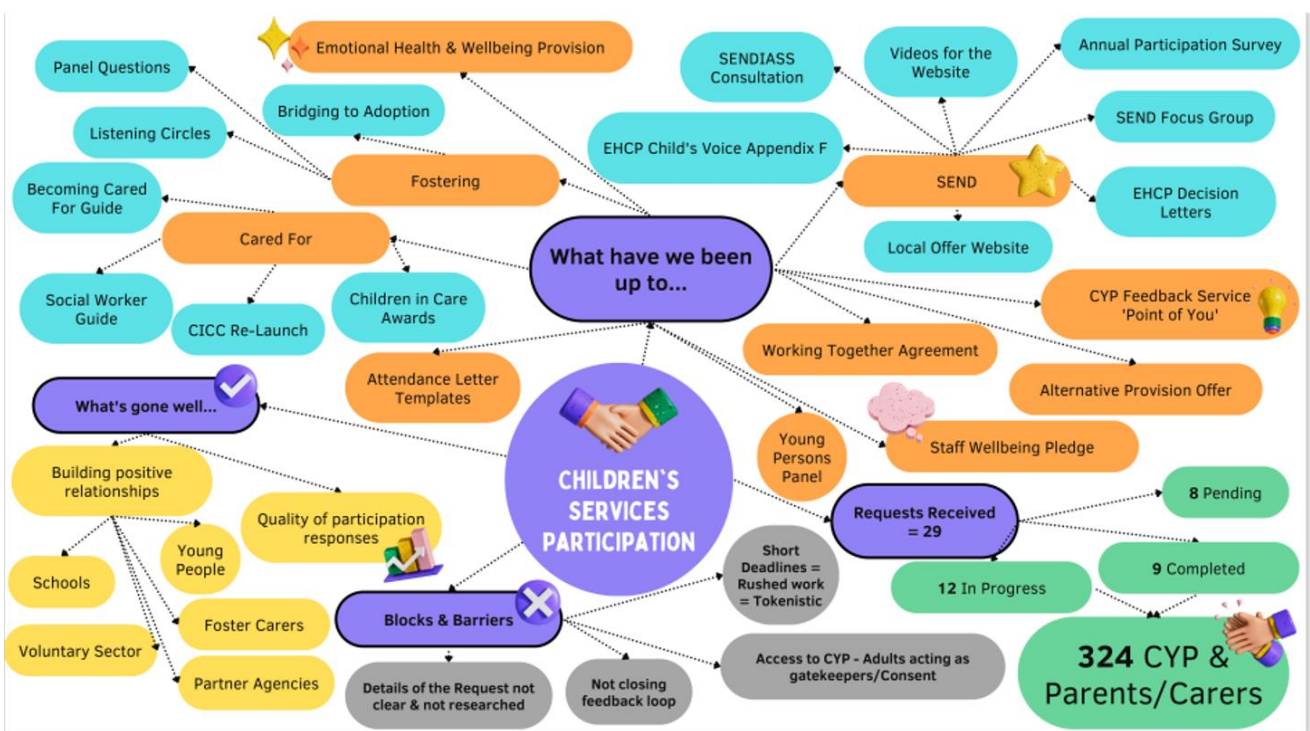
We now have two dedicated Participation Officers whose focus is to amplify the voices of children to undertake meaningful participation with our cared for community including our foster carers. ‘Our Promise to You’ Pledge was created by cared for and care experienced young people and was formally launched on the 1st June 2021, and involved a radio recording using the Boom Bus from Sound Communities, with invited guests from the Corporate Parenting Board. It outlines a commitment to our cared for and care experienced children and young people to listen and work with them to provide and secure the best outcomes for them. This was signed off by the Local Authority having been taken to the Operational Scrutiny Board and to full Council. It is our intention to review the pledge to continue to monitor how well we are upholding the promises we made and the impact this is having on the lives of children and young people in care.

Some of the key areas of participation focus for the next year include:

- Continue to use feedback from children to inform and develop service improvements.
- Continue to explore different ways of supporting children and families to build relationships across the service.
- Consider how we can support more children to chair their own cared for review meetings.

Our Participation Officers work in collaboration across Children’s Services on the above priorities to ensure children and young people are placed at the heart of our practice. By doing so, we continue to actively involve young people in important decision making that impacts their lives, helping to build better transparency and trust.

Below is a visual representation of the work that the Participation Officers have undertaken with children and families to date:



In July 2021, in conjunction with CORAM VOICE, Torbay implemented the Your Life in Care Survey. As a direct result of this feedback, and subsequent direct work with children in the form of participation prompts which outlined what we as a Local Authority intended to do about this feedback, A Buddy system is in the process of being implemented across the cared for service, to ensure that children can build multiple relationships within the team and the service, to mitigate against any adverse impact that changes or absences of social workers may have. Torbay also worked jointly with CORAM VOICE to implement the Your Life Beyond Care Survey in April 2021.

The Director and the Divisional Directors of Education and Safeguarding meet with two cared for children on a monthly basis, to discuss with them their views, and their perspective on being a cared for child, and a child with involvement from social care. These meetings are then fed into an ongoing participation feedback loop, with the notes and learning shared across Children’s Services, with specific actions arising from each meeting. Some of the ideas arising from this participation work, such as a rolling Act of Kindness and Celebrating nomination for cared for children, have now been actively embedded into practice.

Our new Ways of Working are now in place, and our centred on the voices and feedback of children and young people. Review due to be undertaken over the summer 2023 to see what progress we have made in terms of relational based practice.

The Children and Young People’s Panel (to include a cross section of children and young people representatives, including cared for children, care experienced young people and those with SEND) has now been launched. The new ‘Point of You’ feedback service is being launched in September 2023, which is a feedback service designed for young people by young people. There is no set agenda, which allows young people to give us feedback on what we do well, could do differently or need to change. This will be used to improve service delivery. A new Restorative Language and Recording Policy is also being launched in September 2023 to provide a framework for staff to shift our recording to a relational and restorative strength-based model, including the use of age appropriate and language that cares within our recording.

It is really important for foster carers to feel part of a local network of support, and also the wider regional and national network of fostering families. Following ongoing feedback from our foster carers, we are working with them to develop more robust local support networks, including an enhanced Corporate Parenting Offer which affords Torbay fostering families access to local activities and events and resources as well as more moments to come together and access peer support, a wider range of support groups, an annual Foster Carer Workshop and monthly thematic surveys to ensure that foster carers have a voice in the improvements being made to the service.

The Fostering Family Charter has been created and implemented. This outlines the role of Torbay as a corporate parenting, the role of the Torbay fostering service and the role of the fostering families, and the expectations of all within those roles. It represents a commitment and a promise between everyone, to work in partnership in the best interests of the children we care for.

We continue to review the training offer for fostering families, to ensure they are well equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to provide the best quality care for our children and young people.

Our Wellbeing



Torbay are aware, that locally as well as nationally, the pandemic has had a significant impact on children's mental and emotional well-being. Social workers continue to work in partnership with CAMHS, referring to this service when there are concerns relating to a child or young person's mental health or emotional wellbeing. This includes consultation following the completion of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, at the point any potential mental health or mental wellbeing need is identified. Torbay continues to support all children to access therapeutic support when they need it, and when threshold for statutory CAMHS intervention is not met.

Torbay has created JIGSAW: Torbay's Life Story Work Strategy, to outline the importance of ongoing and fluid life story work with cared for children, and to provide a guide to social workers in undertaking this critical work as well as referral pathways for more specialised life story intervention.

We are finding more ways to make young people feel good about themselves, and ways in which they can celebrate with us the things they do which make them proud. We have introduced a Celebrating Achievement and Act of Kindness nomination scheme, with personalised letters provided to each nominee.

Torbay have implemented a new role within the fostering service, the Therapeutic Advanced Fostering Social Worker. The purpose of this role is to provide therapeutic support and oversight to cared for children and young people, and their carers. Feedback about the impact of this role has already been significant:

*"Have just had a second parental consultation with *** and to say we were impressed is an understatement.*

In this very cloudy area that is mental health, we have continually struggled to get the best advice for our young persons in care.

*In two sessions *** has helped to explain many of the situations we continually find ourselves in whilst therapeutically parenting our three boys.*

Her knowledge on the subject is in-depth and she goes to great lengths to explain the unfathomable to us.

We come away comforted by her professionalism and the strategic advice she gives has proven to be on point on every occasion.

Our three boys have experienced the very worst starts in life and we do not wish to compound these negatives any further by mismanaging their daily lives and emotions.

**** has provided us with a valuable and operational framework that allows us to look inward and understand the daily challenges that are our boys' lives.*

We can not change the past but Jessica is reassuring us that we are a part of making their futures fulfilling and rewarding.

*Thank you so much for the services of ***."*

Our Support and Learning

OUR SUPPORT AND LEARNING

YOU SAID → OUR PLEDGE

- Treat us just like any other children and young people, and as individuals
- We have our own history, but it may or may not define us
- Help us to stay at our current school or college if we like it - if we have to move, please provide us with clear reasons why
- Help us to enjoy our learning

- We will respect your privacy and work to ensure that you are not singled out or bullied at school, college, or in any other setting
- We will work closely with your school, college or provider and offer you easy to understand reasons for any changes
- We will always listen and take your views into account
- We will develop a Personal Education Plan of the things you do in school, so you are helped to do well
- We will use our training to be thoughtful about the challenges you have faced



We are working with our Human Resources department to provide a training programme for our young people looking for work, and how to prepare for this in terms of interviewing, CV writing and job searching. Our Human Resources department now ensure that all internal opportunities are provided to the Care Experienced team weekly, in order for bespoke matching to take place about any potential opportunities which may be suitable for our care experienced young people. For example, one of our young people is being supported to apply for a Kickstart café assistant role as a result of this communication. We have a bespoke project in place currently, mapping work experience, work trail and some paid opportunities to care experienced young people and young people who experience SEND.

We have also met with SWISCO and Build Torbay in respect of work experience and employment opportunities for cared for and care experienced young people have taken place and bespoke educational opportunities are now actively considered within Transitions Panel. The Transitions Panel is now established which also now considered overview of education plans for cared for and care experienced young people, and includes SEND within the membership. The Virtual School and SEND are also now included within care planning pathways.

We manually track all of the Personal Education Plans for our young people, to make sure that you are involved in and understanding this plan.

We are recruiting a Business Support apprenticeship role within the Learning Academy. This opportunity will be available to our cared experienced young people to apply.

The infographic is enclosed in a thin black border. At the top left, the words 'OUR TIME' are written in large, bold, teal letters. Below this, 'YOU SAID' is written in large, bold, red letters, with a teal arrow pointing from it towards the right. On the right side, 'OUR PLEDGE' is written in large, bold, yellow letters. Below 'YOU SAID' are four red bullet points. Below 'OUR PLEDGE' are three yellow bullet points. In the bottom left corner, there is a yellow circle with the words 'THE CIRCLE' written inside in red and white.

OUR TIME

YOU SAID

- Support us to find activities that enable us to have fun, be creative and have our say
- Respect our relationships with any family and friends we may have, including if we have any brothers and sisters who may not live with us
- Please enable us to have choices about any family time or social time that we want
- Arrange activities and any family time we may have in advance and to fit it around the things that we like

OUR PLEDGE

- We will work with your carers to ensure you have opportunities that you enjoy and enable you to have your voice if you want to
- We will plan visits in advance and involve you in those plans
- We will help you to stay in contact with any family you may have if you want that and explain the reasons if this is not possible

THE CIRCLE

We have introduced two additional Family Time Co-Ordinators to ensure that children are consulted about their family time plans and involved in these plans and their reviews. We are working with children and their fostering families to create a child-friendly version of the Delegated Authority form, to help children understand the decisions being made about their care, by who and why. These actions arose specifically from feedback gathered through the Bright Spots survey.

Torbay have established a group of Corporate Parenting Champions across the Council. The champions meet every two months for an hour, to cascade ideas, information and requests to teams throughout the Council and feedback at our meetings. One of the aims of this group is to become a creative space for ideas to provide the best possible opportunities for our children.

Visions for this group are:

- To become an authority who thinks first about our corporate parent role and fully embedded in all we do as an authority.
- To provide a corporate parent offer for our children on top of the care plan in place.
- To provide a corporate parenting offer for foster families.
- To raise awareness of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

Torbay's Corporate Parenting Offer created and continues to be enhanced. This has included opportunities for cared for children and their fostering families to access free events and opportunities, including Torquay United Season tickets, the circus, Paignton Zoo, the Train of Lights at Christmas, to name but a few.

As above, the New Point of You feedback service is being launched in September 2023. This is a feedback service designed for young people by young people. There is not set agenda: children and young people can give us feedback on what we do well, could do differently or need to change. This will be used to improve service delivery.

Our Future

OUR FUTURE

YOU SAID



OUR PLEDGE

- Please be positive about our lives and our goals
 - Support us to grow and become independent as we get older
 - Give us guidance when we want it, when we don't just let us know you are there for us
 - Support us to become confident and equip us to deal with challenges, but allow us the freedom of our own direction too
 - Let us fail sometimes, as everyone does, but celebrate our talents and skills
- We will support you to know that challenges and uncertainty are part of life and growth
 - We will celebrate your achievements with you in the ways that you would like
 - We will encourage and support you to take up opportunities in education, employment and training until the age of at least 21, in ways that suit you
 - We will work with you to develop the life skills we all need to achieve our goals and have the best opportunities for the future



We have introduced a Transitions Panel, which tracks planning for all cared for and children with disabilities from fourteen to eighteen and identifies placement or post-eighteen challenges much earlier in the young person's care experience. We have also created and approved the Preparation for Independence Strategy which is now operational; as part of the Becoming an Adult Steering Group, a Becoming an Adult Strategy is also in the process of being co-produced. Torbay have also introduced the role of the Placement Auditor, who is working intensively with providers in respect of intervention provided to young people to prepare them for transition and independence, including tenancy management. We have also undertaken a piece of co-production with care experienced young people, Young Carers and a wide range of professionals, to then update and review the transfer protocol between Children's and adults services and a one page guide to transition for young people. We are in the process of co-producing a similar guide to transition for parents and carers.

We know that care experienced young people have specific needs when it comes to accommodation and housing and access to safe, stable and sustainable accommodation is one of our corporate priorities, and is a distinct Strand Lead within our Corporate Parenting Boards. We are working across the Council and the wider partnership on ways in which we can support care experienced

young people to access this, and this was also highlighted to Torbay's Housing Crisis Review who made the following recommendations:

- to consider paying private landlords more than the standard one month deposit (normally the equivalent to one month's rent) to encourage them to rent properties to care experienced young people to give them more confidence they will not be left out of pocket once the young person has moved on (this is something Torbay is already doing and social workers and Personal Advisors can apply through the Access to Resources Panel to secure six months' rent and deposit for care experienced young people, to overcome the identified guarantor barrier);
- to request that provision of new accommodation for care experienced young people should be a priority for TorVista Homes and other registered housing providers;
- to explore options to enable more care experienced young people to remain longer term with their foster carers (and we have revised our Staying Put policy, in conjunction with fostering families and care experienced young people as a way of doing this);
- to explore options for Banding in Devon Home Choice to see if care experienced young people can be given a higher priority and what processes are in place;
- to request that officers look at good practice from other local authorities when refreshing the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to see how we can encourage the development of more larger family homes, single units, units for care experienced young people or units to assist adults with a disability to live independently.

Since this time, a decision has been made to ensure that all care experience young people at risk of homelessness are automatically afforded band B and this recommendation is being progressed by Children's and housing. In addition, We have revised and approved the joint protocol in respect of youth homelessness and we have established a Youth Homelessness Prevention Tracker, tracking final destination of each young person. In addition to this, the Children's workforce includes DfE funded homelessness prevention Personal Advisors, who work alongside those care experienced young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and their substantive Personal Advisor, to provide support, advice and guidance.

Our next steps include to explore ways that are cared experienced community can be celebrated in conjunction with the newly launched Children in Care Council.

Recommendation

Considering the activity outlined within this report, and the changes to the Cared for Community, Children's Services are seeking endorsing to review the Pledge, alongside cared for and care experienced children and young people this would be with the intent of seeking their views about whether the priorities remain the same, or need to be revised and amended.

This would then be presented to Children's Overview and Scrutiny Board as a 2023-26 Pledge (renamed in line with children and young people's views).