

**Healthwatch Torbay Insight Report**  
**Experiences of Children and Young**  
**People: Mental Health and Wellbeing**

**November 2023**

**Report purpose:** A response by Healthwatch Torbay to a call for questions from Torbay Council’s Children and Young People’s Overview and Scrutiny Board ahead of a spotlight review on mental health & wellbeing services for children and young people.

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## Introduction

One of the statutory duties of local Healthwatch is to share peoples' experiences of their health and social care services with those who make decisions about how those services are designed, developed and improved.

This report provides a summary of the experiences that Healthwatch Torbay has recorded in relation to mental health and wellbeing services for children and young people in Torbay since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023. Feedback has been received via our [online feedback centre](#) on the Healthwatch Torbay website, through our local Healthwatch contact centre and through the [Healthwatch Assist Network](#) in Torbay.

This report will be shared with Commissioners, and Providers of the Children and Families Service in Devon and Torbay and Torbay Council Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee.

## Background

NHS England recently [published statistics](#) that reveal that in 2023 one in five (20%) children and young people aged 8-16 have a 'probable mental disorder'. Among 17-19-year-olds, this proportion is 23% and among 20-25-year-olds it's around 22%. These statistics coming out of the fourth wave of the NHS's Mental Health of Children and Young survey were published on 21st November 2023.

In [Healthwatch England's latest report](#), they have announced that they "support the call by a [coalition of mental health charities](#) for all pupils to have access to in-school mental health support, to ensure they can get timely help" which we would echo and support locally. We also recognise the valuable contribution of the local voluntary and community sector in taking a collaborative approach to supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Torbay.

Whilst Healthwatch Torbay has not carried out any targeted engagement with children and young people since 2019, we have heard from parents, relatives and representatives from the voluntary and community sector, across the area who have raised concerns to us around access to mental

health support for children and young people and waiting times for diagnosis and treatment.

Below is a selection of commentary provided by individuals who have contacted us directly to share their experiences.

## **Feedback and experiences of children and young people's mental health and wellbeing services**

*"We are emailing as parents at a loss with what to do. Our 12-year-old son is in desperate need of mental health support, but our desperate pleas have been ignored over and over. His behaviour is becoming increasingly worse, he is on the brink of permanent exclusion from school and we literally do not know what more we can do to support him."*

- January 2023.

*"Have contacted CAMHS multiple times by phone about my daughter with suicidal thoughts. Initial assessment was in March 2022, was then put on a waiting list for therapy - still waiting on this. Called several times for support/update on waiting list. In July 2022 my daughter made a serious suicide attempt, she was seen the following day by CAMHS crisis team and several times over the following month. Saw CAMHS Psychiatrist in August, Nov and Dec. Still waiting on therapy. Hugely dissatisfied with CAMHS waiting times, was initially told my daughter wasn't a priority as she hadn't made an attempt on her life, then when she did make an attempt (almost successful) she was supposedly made high priority in August. It is January and we are still waiting on support."*

- January 2023.

*"It became clear after a significant mental health, anxiety and OCD crisis that my teenager needed support. We consulted with the school, who were great, and their Senco and counsellor advised that he showed very many of the traits for Aspergers. We researched this in detail and it rang very true, I took him to the doctors to discuss it and she said it sounded highly likely. Both the GP and the school were happy to support a referral but advised that it would take at least 18 months to be seen in the first instance, and that they couldn't refer him, we had to start the process. I investigated this on the council website, and it was absolutely labyrinthine, and what wasn't clear at all was what help might be available. My son read through the questions and was very put off because he felt they'd 'think he was stupid' and he'd get a label he wasn't happy with, and because of the huge wait and the fact that I couldn't give him any real info about*

*why it might be worth it, we've given up. We're lucky that the school have been really good and are being extremely good at making reasonable adjustments, and he's had some sessions with the school counsellor, but I'm worried about his forthcoming GCSEs and what we'd do if he suffered another crisis and needed emergency help - I guess we'd go back to the GP but it really doesn't feel as if there's proper support infrastructure there at all. The GP we saw was very friendly, sympathetic and supportive, but basically said that the waiting time was a nightmare and the service was at breaking point."*

- January 2023, South Devon

*"Trying to get diagnosed for my grandson to find out if he is autistic / ADHD and waiting list is terrible. in the meantime, we go day to day trying to help him, and his behaviours get worse at school."*

- April 2023.

*"Referred to CAMHS last August for my son for anxiety and ADHD. Referral reviewed in October and rejected. Reason given was he needs an autism assessment first. Waiting list is in excess of 2 yrs. Also, we should see what the school can do which we are already doing. Referral finally accepted due to intervention of school nurse. Initial CAMHS appointment received this July. He was assessed as OCD and qualifying for treatment. Appointment won't be available for 12 to 18 months say CAMHS. They raised our hopes and then dashed them. They made my child sit through a difficult session when there was no help available."*

- August 2023.

*"After several attempts through the GP we have finally got granddaughter on a waiting list for CAMHS, however as every day passes her state of mind gets worse. Does anyone really care about young people? Are these systems, health treatment, and support systems completely broken now?"*

- September 2023

*"Our daughter has autism and was showing worrying signs of psychosis. Opportunities were missed to provide our daughter with the correct mental health care. Instead, they were too busy working on the old adage of 'blame the parents.' Our daughter's life has been ruined because of these people. Thanks for nothing CAMHS - oh, and by the way, just because you have passed exams, it doesn't make you wiser! Why don't you LISTEN to the concerns of parents as opposed to being all too intent on blaming them????? Also, in your so called 'training', you would have had seminars on the dangers of making assumptions."*

*Well, our daughters' predicament (and ours) is all because of your assumptions, prejudice and blaming the parents."*

– feedback received October 2023, Torbay.

*"My child is now 14, when she was 7, we were refused even an appointment from CAMHS, at that point we were a family in crisis. In the last year my daughter has struggled with so much, self-harming, unable to attend school, depression anxiety and we have always thought she has ADHD and ASD. Our GP put in a referral for a diagnosis with CAMHS, our appointment came, complete waste of time. Dr never read any notes, or the referral. He made the whole appointment more stressful for all of us. Then never gave us a response, until I chased it up 2 months later. Getting poor excuses from the manager about problems with his laptop. We've been forced to go privately now; I just couldn't keep seeing my daughter continue to decline. It's an absolute disgrace and the consistent barrier to basic support is ridiculous. Good luck out there."*

– feedback received October 2023, Torbay.

## **Feedback from the Healthwatch Assist Network**

The Healthwatch Assist Network is made up of community groups and organisations who engage with Healthwatch to share intelligence around the issues and concerns that they are made aware of from the people that they are in contact with. As well as raising concerns to us, they also share with Healthwatch suggestions that people make that could make services work better for people.

Through the network we have heard that parents of children and young people with autism and other conditions are concerned about waiting times for assessments and whether anything could be done differently to speed up the process. Many families may have more than one child with similar or other conditions and the impact of these on their mental health and wellbeing is significant. Parents are experiencing real stress and worry over delays for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) with some reporting that the process is taking years rather than months for a child being approved for an EHCP.

We have also been informed by network members that waiting times for support through child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are long, even if a person has self-harmed or is feeling suicidal.

## Our observations

We acknowledge that there has been a significant increase in need for children's mental health and wellbeing support locally and nationally and that it is more important than ever for support to be accessible for young people as early as possible and for parents to know where they can go to access the right information and support in a timely way.

Unfortunately, we have only recently heard of the negative experiences whereby people are experiencing delays accessing help and support. We are keen to hear from young people and parents of those who have received support for their mental health and wellbeing at the time when they needed it and how the support that they received met their needs, whether this was through the NHS, or through the voluntary and community sector. We want to be able to share these experiences with the public to highlight what works well so that these services can reach more young people in Torbay.

## National Announcements and Reports

- Healthwatch England's new report: [The public's perspective: The state of health and social care](#) November 2023.
- [A Mentally Healthier Nation](#) Centre for Mental Health report
- [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023](#) – wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey, NHS England, November 2023.
- [Earlier mental health support announced for thousands nationwide](#) – Department of Health, October 2023.
- Advice and information published by Healthwatch England:
- [What mental health support is available for children and young people?](#) – September 2023.
- Young Minds report: [Deconstructing the System](#) – April 2023.

## Previous reports Healthwatch Torbay – experiences of children and young people

[What does it feel like to be a young person living in Torbay?](#) Report published in 2019.

### Questions raised by Healthwatch Torbay

1. The government recently announced funding for drop-in early support hubs nationwide to deliver early mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people. What provision is there in Torbay for young people to access early support for their mental health and wellbeing?
2. What collaborative plans are either in place, or in the pipeline, between local NHS service providers, schools, children’s social care services and other related services to increase support for children and young people in Torbay?
3. How can Healthwatch Torbay help to promote key messages to the public around access to emotional wellbeing services for children and young people in Torbay?
4. How can Healthwatch Torbay help to signpost people and share information about early support for young people in Torbay?
5. What systems are in place, or will be put in place, to monitor the impact of any service improvements to children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing services and how will the voices and experiences of young people and their families be embedded in the process for measuring impact?



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