

**Title:** Update Report – Children’s Services

**Wards Affected:** ALL

**To: Health and  
Wellbeing Board**

**On: 19<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

**Contact: Richard Williams**

**Telephone: 208401**

**Email: [Richard.williams@torbay.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.williams@torbay.gov.uk)**

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**1.** I have utilised a copy of a report to the Torbay Safeguarding Children’s Board to provide the Health and Wellbeing Board with an update for Children’s Services.

**Purpose**

- 1.1** To outline to Members the continuing improvement journey for the Local Authority Children’s Service
- 1.2** To provide Members with an outline of the financial challenges for the Local Authority Children’s Services

**2. Summary**

- 2.1** Children’s Services is continuing on its improvement journey and is positive about being formally removed from Intervention in December 2013.
- 2.2** The financial challenges facing the Local Authority over the next two years will call for ever clearer partnership response to both reduce demand and respond appropriately to our collective statutory duties.

**3. Report**

- 3.1** Following the Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding in February/March 2013 the Local Authority began discussions with the DfE to formally remove our intervention status. This has not happened immediately for a number of reasons, but essentially there was a need to establish a level of confidence that the changes that had been initiated and recognised by Ofsted could be sustained.
- 3.2** To achieve this Professor Ray Jones would continue to visit over the next three months and provide reports to the DfE on our progress. The conditions of the Intervention Notice will then be considered at a formal review meeting in early December and I am confident that at this stage the Intervention Notice should be removed.

### **3.3** My level of confidence in this emanates from a number of developments that have taken place since the Inspection

1. A new Lead Member for Children’s Services (Cllr Ken Pritchard) has settled into the role and provides an ongoing support and challenge role both to Officers, Members and Partners. A new Executive Head of Finance and Operations (Chief Executive, Steve Parrock) has been appointed to Torbay Council that will stabilise the organisation and provide leadership (alongside the Mayor) for the future. Finally, the appointment of the new Chair of the Safeguarding Board will bring a wealth of experience to bear on our continuing improvement journey.
2. A new Improvement Executive has been set up and meets for the first time early September. The Terms of Reference for the Executive are:

#### **AIM**

- ✿ To lead the delivery of the Children’s Partnership Improvement process, securing excellent outcomes for children via the highest quality professional practice, leadership, management and partnership working

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- ✿ To monitor and direct the implementation of all the recommendations identified by Ofsted, peer reviews and address the actions arising from serious incidents
- ✿ To evaluate, support and challenge the progress being made across the partnership in improving safeguarding services and support for children
- ✿ To manage and oversee the mitigation of risks and issues arising from the improvement process and where necessary remove the barriers to improvement
- ✿ To provide added reassurance to the Department of Education that the appropriate pace and scope of improvement across children’s safeguarding is being achieved.
- ✿ To receive, circulate and ensure the improvement plan addresses the outcomes from external reviews.

#### **GOVERNANCE**

The Children’s Improvement Executive will be chaired by the Director of Children’s Services, who will report directly to the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board and the Executive Director of Operations and Finance at Torbay Council.

The Membership of the Executive is:-

**Chair:** Richard Williams, Director Children's Services

**Members**

Cllr Ken Pritchard	Executive Lead for Children, Schools and Families, Torbay Council
Mike Lock	Headteacher Combe Pafford School
Paul Northcott	Detective Superintendent, Devon and Cornwall Police
Ms Jane Viner	Director of Nursing Professional Practice and People's Experience, SDHT
To be nominated	Torbay Community Development Trust
Gill Gant	Director of Quality Governance South Devon and Torbay Clinical Commissioning
Dr Bob Brown	Director of Nursing and Professional Practice, TSDHT
David Taylor	Chair, TSCB

The Executive will exist in its current role until the Improvement Notice is removed and will allow time for the LSCB to be reviewed and a possible revised structure to be implemented. The real challenge for the Executive will be to monitor ongoing improvements but also to pro-actively provide the executive leadership to a real multi-agency response to Safeguarding in Torbay.

3. The Children's Partnership Improvement Plan was recognised by Ofsted as an effective vehicle for change in Torbay. We have revisited the Plan and revised the projects to reflect the current situation. As previously many of the projects have 'multi-agency' working running through the middle of them and learning from the past we need to make sure that where appropriate this is reflected in the project groups that support the work.

The key aspect of the CPIP was the discipline that was developed through the project management process and this resource has been retained to support ongoing improvements.

The Improvement Executive will on behalf of the LSCB oversee the closure of the previous plan and the ongoing implementation of the new plan.

4. A review has taken place for Children's Services to ensure that it takes on board the learning from the previous two years, is fit for purpose and is

sustainable. Operational management of the full safeguarding process is therefore being streamlined under one Executive Head and a new commissioning team is being created jointly with adults, health and housing to ensure we maximise opportunities in the future. These changes along with other integrated approaches are currently being worked through for full implementation from April 2014.

5. In my eighteen months as Director of Children's Services in Torbay I have seen a significant cultural change both internally within Children's Services and externally with partners. Internally the service would often, in the past, dance around a problem, dealing with the symptoms and missing the underlying cause. Staff almost appeared afraid of raising issues and would therefore keep their heads down and carry on working a system that often worked against them. This has fundamentally changed and although there is always room for improvement we are now effective in resolving some of the long term issues that have underpinned poor performance in the past.

The relationship with partners has slowly improved during the improvement process and I now perceive willingness and indeed an enthusiasm to work together and share responsibility. This has been gathering momentum with a number of new developments and we are at a critical point where it needs to move from strategic/management discussions to influence day to day operational processes for frontline practitioners and middle managers.

- 3.4 The developments I have outlined provide me with a level of confidence in the continuing improvement process. However, I do retain a clear understanding of some of the challenges and realities that we will face. I have highlighted four of these to illustrate this:-

- **Budget:** The financial pressures on Local Authorities are increasing with the demands being drawn down from central Government. The targets for the Local Authority will potentially exceed £22m over the next two years and this will inevitably impact on Children's Services. As this process has now been ongoing for the past two years the majority of discretionary services have already gone and the inevitable impact will fall on early intervention/targeted support.
- **Organisation:** I am not sure that within my thinking and years in Children's Services I have ever experienced a time without change. However at this time all organisations seem to be turning themselves inside out. A characteristic of organisational change and of staff involved in the process is to look inwards and seek security through the comfort of the known. An organisation that is changing and in parallel implementing budget reductions, is only likely to exasperate this situation.
- **Demand:** The changes that are being driven at a national level and ironically the increased levels of confidence in the safeguarding services are driving up the number of contacts and referrals to the Safeguarding Service. The result

of this, in recent months, has been a steady increase in pressure within the system and parallel pressures on individual Social Workers.

- **Perception:** The increasing interest from the Media on issues relating to safeguarding and in particular the 'blame culture' associated with this places additional pressure on all levels of staff. The constant need to look for the negative overrides the consistent high quality of work undertaken by the majority of staff.

Each of these issues brings with it an additional challenge that rolled in together only serve to increase the pressures on individual organisations. As noted in the paper the natural reaction in these circumstances is to turn inwards, but the solution is often within our ability to work more effectively together and share both responsibility and accountability for safeguarding children.

#### **4. Recommendations**

##### **4.1** It is recommended that Partners:-

Note the report

Welcome the continuing improvement journey

Pro-actively commit to the ongoing partnership approach in Torbay to secure removal from intervention

Pro-actively seek opportunities to further enhance the approach to reducing demand, statutory intervention and the ongoing improvement process