TORBAY COUNCIL

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

28 September 2026

-: Present :-

Councillor Law (Chairwoman)

Councillors Fellows (Vice-Chair), Nicolaou, Tolchard and Twelves

Co-opted Members
Jo Hunter (Church of England Diocesan Representative - virtually)
James Stock (Devon and Cornwall Police)
Mike Cook (Voluntary and Community Sector and Alternative Provider (Education)

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye, Johns, Chris Lewis and Stevens (virtually))

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15. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Board held on 27 July 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

17. Exploitation and Missing Children Update

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye, introduced the report and outlined the increasing challenges associated with children and young people reported missing. The Head of Service Family Help, Ellie Clark provided an overview of the submitted report.

Members heard that increased reporting and referral activity had improved visibility of concerns and enabled earlier intervention. The Sub-Board was advised of ongoing work to identify and prevent exploitation, including strengthening partnership arrangements and bringing return home interviews back in-house.

Members noted concerns regarding under-reporting by parents and the importance of schools identifying and reporting children missing from education. The Board heard examples of partnership work with transport providers, hotels, businesses and community organisations to raise awareness of exploitation and improve safeguarding arrangements.

Members asked the following questions:

- Could exploitation awareness training be expanded from taxi drivers to bus and railway staff?
- Was there a national Government campaign to raise awareness of child exploitation?
- What proportion of missing children were cared for children or care experienced young people and were out-of-area placements included in the statistics? (A written response to be provided on the proportion of missing children who were cared for children and care experienced young people.)
- How does Torbay compare with other local authorities in relation to missing children? (A written response to be provided containing comparative data with other authorities, including a ward-level breakdown where possible.)
- Were there emerging patterns of exploitation linked to artificial intelligence?
- What percentage of missing children were known to have been exploited?
- How long does a child need to be absent before being reported missing?
- How many missing children were found within Torbay compared to outside the area?
- What proportion of missing children have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)?
- What support exists for young people over the age of 17 who may continue to be vulnerable to exploitation?

The following responses were received:

- Awareness campaigns have included taxi drivers due to identified risk factors, while previous work has also been undertaken with British Transport Police, railway staff, hotels and other community settings. Awareness activity was regularly rotated across sectors.
- A national exploitation awareness day takes place annually in March, primarily aimed at parents, although there may be opportunities for additional local campaigns.
- Children placed outside Torbay by the Council remain included within Torbay's data and safeguarding arrangements, including use of the Philomena Protocol where appropriate.
- Officers advised that Torbay was not considered an outlier and experiences were broadly comparable with other authorities in the South West.
- Work was ongoing with Devon and Cornwall Police, Barnardo's and the Children's Society to understand and respond to emerging online and AI-related risks.
- Repeat missing episodes were more likely to be linked to exploitation concerns. Return home conversations and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements were used to identify risks and provide support.
- There was no statutory timescale for reporting a child missing. Circumstances and individual risk factors determine when a report should be made and accepted by the police.
- Most missing children were found within Torbay, although some travel outside the area using transport links such as the rail network.
- A significant proportion of young people who go missing have EHCPs and this information was captured through safeguarding processes.

- Care experienced young people can receive support up to age 25. Transition arrangements involve Children's and Adult Services working together to support vulnerable young people.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Director of Children's Services be requested to consider a local communications campaign to raise awareness of exploitation in Torbay to help people recognise the signs of exploitation and know how and when to report it.

18. Children's Continuous Improvement Board Update

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye, and the Director of Children's Services, Nancy Meehan, outlined the report and advised that a new Children's Continuous Improvement Plan for 2026 to 2029 had been developed. Members heard that the focus had evolved from solely responding to inspection recommendations towards a broader partnership approach aligned with national reform programmes.

The Board was advised that progress continued across key improvement themes, although national reforms had not proceeded at the pace originally anticipated. Work was underway to align local improvement activity with revised national expectations.

Members asked the following questions:

- How can the voice of children and families continue to influence improvement activity?
- Could the voluntary and community sector contribute to reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)?
- How was repeat referral data measured and what themes were emerging? (A written response to be provided on whether repeat referral data was expressed as a percentage.)
- Was progress on strengthening transition arrangements for young people on track?
- What information will be available through locality profiles?
- How will the Council monitor the capacity of partners to deliver the various national reforms?

The following responses were received:

- Partnership work continues to focus on ensuring improvement activity reflects the experiences of children and families.
- Officers welcomed additional involvement from the voluntary and community sector in supporting outcomes for young people.
- There have been no repeat entries into care over the past two years. Long-term neglect remains a key theme and was being considered through inspection and safeguarding improvement activity.
- All identified actions within the plan remain on track at the present time.

- Locality profiles will identify local patterns of need and help inform partnership working between councillors, schools, community organisations and service providers. (Action: To share locality profiles with Members to support understanding of local need and demand.)
- Monitoring arrangements include reporting to the Continuous Improvement Board, Safeguarding Children Partnership and a range of other governance bodies.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board notes the Children's Continuous Improvement Plan 2026-2029, the current national reform programme and Torbay's approach to oversight through existing partnership governance arrangements.

19. Torbay Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bye, Director of Children's Services, Nancy Meehan, and Divisional Director of Education and SEND, Hannah Baker presented the report and highlighted progress made across the SEND improvement programme. Members heard evidence of improved partnership working, increased co-production with families and measurable improvements in several key performance indicators.

The Board was advised that families were increasingly reporting positive experiences and improvements in services. Significant progress had been made in reducing waiting times, improving EHCP timeliness and supporting children and young people into education, employment and training.

Members congratulated partners for all their hard work in making improvements to SEND. They acknowledged there was still work to be done to improve parental confidence. There had been huge changes in waiting lists which was really having a positive impact on the young people.

Members asked the following questions:

- Were children seen within 18 weeks under the Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) Response Service (known as MERS) and how long was the wait for treatment after assessment? (A written response to be provided on the period between a MERS appointment and commencement of treatment.)
- How was the partnership capturing the experiences of parents and families alongside performance data?
- What progress was being made in addressing neurodiversity waiting lists?
- Were numbers of children being home educated reducing?
- What opportunities were available to support young people with SEND into employment?
- Were employers engaging with supported employment initiatives?
- What were the barriers preventing young people from taking up employment opportunities?

- How will speech and language improvements achieved in primary settings be replicated in secondary schools? (A written response to be provided on plans to reduce speech and language pressures for secondary-aged pupils.)
- What aspects of the locality model have schools found most beneficial?

The following responses were received:

- All children referred to the MERS service were offered an appointment within 18 weeks and support was available while waiting.
- Extensive engagement activity was taking place through SEND Family Voice and other participation events to gather views and shape future priorities.
- Investment in specialist places, school-based support, training and intervention programmes was helping address growing neurodiversity demand.
- Numbers of young people with EHCPs being home educated remain broadly static, although there were a range of complex reasons why families choose home education.
- Supported internship pathways have been developed through schools, colleges and voluntary sector organisations to improve employment opportunities.
- Engagement with employers continues through a SEND Employment Forum and partnership arrangements.
- Key barriers include costs, availability of opportunities and the need for additional support around employment transitions.
- Speech and language improvements were being supported through a linked therapist model and further training programmes for schools.
- Schools have valued peer support, collaboration, shared learning and place-based approaches to addressing local need through the locality pilot.

Resolved (unanimously):

That Cabinet be recommended to:

1. 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. be assured that effective governance, performance monitoring and risk management arrangements have been put in place to support and sustain SEND improvement across the partnership; and

3. 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 in July, and the partnership's actions in response.

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

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

Chair