



Title: **Children's Services 5 year plan – Update and Way Forward**

Wards Affected: All

To: **Overview and Scrutiny Board** On: **11th December 2014**

Contact: **Children's Executive Lead: Cllr Ken Pritchard**
Director of Children's Services: Richard Williams

E.mail: Ken.pritchard@torbay.gov.uk
Richard.Williams@torbay.gov.uk

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to detail the process by which the Children's Services 5 year plan will be implemented, monitored and evaluated, within the context of driving forward further service improvement.

2. Proposal Decision

- 2.1 That Members endorse the implementation of the 5 year plan and consider the process, by which the 5 year plan is monitored, evaluated and endorse the direction of travel for the improvement of Children's Services.

3. Reason for Decision

- 3.1 Children's Services have had significant budget pressures for a number of years. The 5 year plan addresses the issues that have created these and a change process that ensures the effective use of resources to resolve them, whilst ensuring that children are safeguarded.
- 3.2 It is imperative that ongoing expenditure within Children's Services is monitored and reported in line with the remuneration of the 5 year plan.

4. Background

- 4.1 The history of Children's Services budget pressures runs in parallel with both the local judgements of its services by Ofsted and increasing national focus on child abuse concerns, in particular Baby P and more recently CSE.
- 4.2 Historically for Torbay the impact of a Local Authority moving into intervention created two immediate pressures. Firstly, it created a staffing crisis with social workers leaving for a wide variety of reasons (possibly exaggerated by their characterisation in the national media) and secondly, the service as a whole moved towards a risk adverse approach to protecting children. Both of these factors have had profound implications on Torbay and a consequent impact on budgets.

4.3 To resolve the issue and following deliberation by Overview and Scrutiny in 2013 Children's Services have developed a 5 year plan, in collaboration with Social Finance – on October 30th the Council agreed to adopt this plan.

- I. approve the 5 year financial strategy for Children's Services Safeguarding and Wellbeing;
- II. fund the projected overspend: in 2015/16 (£2.3m) and 2016/17 (£1.1m) from reserves as set out within the submitted report;
- III. note the forecast overspend of £1.4m in 2014/15 which will be managed by in-year savings;
- IV. move the £2 million social care contingency into the Children's Services base budget (Safeguarding & Wellbeing) in 2014/15 and future years;
- V. the improvement actions as recommended by Social Finance as set out within the submitted report;
- VI. the Director of Children's Services and the Children's Services Finance Manager reporting back to the Mayor and the Executive Lead for Children's on a quarterly basis and present updated reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on performance both operational and financial;
- VII. the repayment of reserves as set out within the submitted report;
- VIII. the strict performance management mechanism for the changes as set out in the submitted report;

4.4 The 5 year plan recognises that moving out of intervention and resolving the budget situation without putting children at risk is a long term strategy. It requires Children's Services to both stem the flow of children coming into Child Protection and ultimately the care system and secondly, a new approach to working with those children already in the care system to secure more positive and sustainable long term outcomes. It is clear that this strategy has to be under pinned with quality partnership working at all stages.

5. Report

5.1 Children's Services was removed from intervention by the Government in January 2014, following an adequate judgement by Ofsted in March 2013. Immediately following the removal from intervention Children's Services faced new 'staffing' challenges that initially stalled the ongoing improvement process. This ran in parallel with the development of the 5 year strategy with Social Finance. The culmination of both these situations has now led to Children's Services being in a strong position. However, it is the central premise of the strategy that improvements to the service run in parallel with improvements in the budget situation. The two cannot be divorced.

5.2 Following a peer review of Children's Services in September 2014 priorities were set for the continuing improvement journey.

The ambition is to have these priorities addressed during 2014/5 financial year, when a further review will be undertaken.

- **Translation of the safeguarding hub into a MASH.** This will increase the levels of engagement of partners in decision making and the use of live intelligence across the partnership to aid decision making of children potentially at risk of harm. We will also address and improve the operation of our pathways for child sexual exploitation and domestic violence as part of the implementation of the MASH.
- **Implementation of a single assessment.** To support a culture of proportionate and timely assessments we are putting in place a single assessment.
- **Introduction of a Social work model.** Following consultation with staff we will be implementing the signs of safety approach. This will create a consistent framework for practitioners to follow when engaging with CYP and families.
- **Strengthening the early help pathway.** We will be implementing the plan for the formulation of an early help pathway that will establish community based hubs that will manage the organisation and delivery early help.
- **Raising the bar for Children Looked After.** We will be raising the bar for children in care and the corporate commitment to prioritising CLA.
- **Overhaul of quality assurance.** This includes reprising local practices and gearing up the daily use of quality assurance through into supervision and the check and balances offered by IROs.
- **Improving and streamlining systems.** We are committed to making the systems we use work better for practitioners. This also includes an implementation of a more rigorous performance management culture.

A small number of Enablers have been employed to aid the initial delivery and modelling of the practice changes highlighted above. The Enablers have been engaged utilising the 'invest to save' monies set aside within this financial year as these priorities will further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of what we do and therefore inevitably improve the budget situation.

5.3 The additional operation changes that will be delivered as part of the 5 year plan are:-

- **Improving the capacity of in-house Foster Care for older children.** A combination of KEEP and THRIVE will be rolled out across the foster care service to improve the quality and capacity of carers in responding to the emotional well being of children. This will be targeted at foster carers looking after young people whose behaviour is particularly challenging.
- **Sustaining the improvement of the adoption pathway.** 2013/14 has seen the best Torbay performance for numbers being adopted. 11 children have been adopted so far in 2014/5 with a further 35+ children with a plan for adoption.
- **Developing in house parent and child capacity.** So far 1 with a further 4, in house parent and child placements will be created by the end of 2014/5. This will enable the authority to deliver more community based assessments of parental capacity and thereby shifting the reliance away from residential and distant resources.
- **Strengthening the operation of panels.** The need to re-assert the role and significance of panels as the vehicle for scrutiny, challenge and prompting creative solutions has been revisited following a recent peer audit process. This is currently focusing on reviewing all children subject to section 20 placements. The aim is to safely and securely de-LAC 1 child per month right through to April 2015. To-date this target has been exceeded. This forms one aspect of the a think different' culture about residential care we are adopting to help reduce the reliance on residential placements.

- 5.4 To monitor and evaluate these development Children's Services will put in place the following mechanisms:
- The ongoing work of the Members Monitoring Group and the Members Corporate Parenting Group. The former to focus on the budget and the second the broader range of Children's Services with a particular focus on Looked After Children.
 - The development of a new Children's Dashboard (Appendix 1). This will be the focus of discussions of the Members' Monitoring Group and future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny.
 - The creation of a Members Safeguarding Assurance scheme to ensure that all Members are informed of developments and have a more pro-active input into future direction (Appendix 2).
 - The ongoing Members briefing sessions to continue to highlight particular issues of concern or interest to Members

6. Progress

- 6.1 Appendix 1 of the report details the key performance indicators that underpin the 5 year plan. The progress of both the Fostering Service and the Adoption Service should be highlighted with both reaching their targets on or before the prescribed dates. In addition to this the staffing situation has improved from a figure of 46% vacancy rate to below 10% in recent months (with only 3 front line social worker vacancies)
- 6.2 However the funding of the key projects within the 5 year plan will not be available until April 2015 where further progress will be made (KEEP project/Parent and Child Project). This will ensure that they are funded on an ongoing revenue basis as opposed to one off expenditure. The reduction of numbers of children classified as Section 20 is also progressing well and is on target. (one per month). It should be emphasised again that no new arrangements will be made to any child that will have a detrimental impact on individual outcomes.
- 6.3 Progress on the indicators for the 5 year plan is therefore largely positive. However at this stage this has not worked through to impact on the full budget. The restriction on this is because the final budget plan was not agreed until late Summer (passed at Council in October) and six months of the financial year has passed. It is, therefore, a matter of catch up and the Children's Services Management Team in partnership with Finance colleagues are exploring all possible options to reduce the expenditure.

7. Issues

- 7.1 The implementation of the 5 year plan was based on the premise that £500K funding was available in year one on an 'invest to save' bases. Half of this was set aside for the development of the plan with Social Finance and the remaining half has been set aside to fund the Enablers.
- 7.2 As has already stated Children's Services has been successful in its recruitment campaign for new Social Workers. However, there has always been a challenge in the recruitment of managers and we have now instigated a 'talent' programme to bring forward quality staff to become quality managers. There are currently 22 staff on this programme. We are also about to recruit for a permanent Executive Head for Safeguarding.
- 7.3 During the period of the 5 year plan challenges will come from a variety of sources. In particular national trends/events will have an impact; Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is

very prominent in services at present and will inevitably provide some challenges going forward. Member will be kept informed of developments and services are currently being refocused to manage the additional pressures from within existing resources.

- 7.4 The ongoing budget reduction process has and will continue to provide challenges. Many of the projects that have been withdrawn were put in place some years ago when central government grants were a plenty. Where the projects have a direct impact on families and children it will require the LA to put in place alternative arrangements. However these should also be an onus on the host organisations to assess their priorities and to make their own adjustments, learning from the past and looking to the future.

8. Looking Forward

- 8.1 The initial milestone for Children's Services will be to ensure that the key performance indicators set in the 5 year plan are met. This will generate the confidence in the service that the targets can be met on an ongoing basis. As has been highlighted in the report we are on target but this is still subject to some volatility and will be closely monitored.
- 8.2 Children's Services is still subject to an Ofsted Inspection and this is due in the next few months. It is a four week inspection and will be a testing time for the whole service. It is never easy to predict the outcome of an inspection as there are many variables and it is a very different framework from our previous inspection in 2013. However it is asserted that the service will be able to demonstrate clear improvements.

Richard Williams
Director of Children's Services