

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

29 September 2025

-: Present :-

Councillor Law (Chairwoman)

Councillors Fellows (Vice-Chair), Nicolaou and Tolchard

Co-opted Members

Jo Hunter (Church of England Diocese)

Non-voting Co-opted Members

Mike Cook (Voluntary and Community Sector and Alternative Provider (Education)
Tanny Stobbart (Play Torbay – Representing Voluntary Children and Young People Sector)

Nigel Yelland (Devon and Cornwall Police)

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye and Chris Lewis)

18. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Twelves.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Board held on 23 July 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

21. Torbay Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services - Councillor Bye and Director of Children's Services – Nancy Meehan outlined the submitted Torbay Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report for 2024/2025 which had also considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board, and responded to questions. The Deputy Director of Safeguarding and Patient Safety, NHS Devon – Michele Thornberry also attended the meeting to respond to questions.

The key issues from the report included:

- The report was a statutory requirement and must be submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) by 30 September 2025;
- The format of the report would be changing to a standardised format from next year to support national AI analysis of safeguarding trends;
- each statutory partner (Police, Health and the Council) had contributed to the report;
- key developments included the implementation of the Families First programme, restructuring of internal teams, and a renewed focus on mental health; and
- Torbay remains an outlier in terms of children in need, which has implications for future service delivery and funding.

Members asked questions in relation to the following:

- Why were hospital admissions for tooth decay in 0–17 year olds in Torbay more than double the South West and England averages? Was this primarily an NHS issue?
- Operation Compass had seen a rise in notifications. Was there support in place for children in early years and primary schools?
- In the child protection plan data, one category was blank. What does this represent? (A written response would be provided to clarify the blank category.)
- 10% of strategy meetings were not quorate. Was this affecting decision-making, and what was being done to improve it?
- What were the timescales for implementing the next steps, and how was capacity being managed?
- Education was not a statutory partner. How were we ensuring their involvement in safeguarding?
- Was attendance at Core Group meetings monitored, and were social workers always present?

The following responses were received:

- There were multi-factorial causes of tooth decay in 0-17 year olds, this included issues with parental awareness around dental hygiene, and access to dental services in the South West was limited. The NHS was prioritising children in care, with nurses supporting this vulnerable group. The issue remains a high priority.
- Operation Compass was a national programme where police notifications were sent to schools. In Torbay, the partnership extended this to early years settings and health visitors to ensure children under five were supported. Weekly meetings were held to review cases and ensure trauma was addressed.
- Strategy meetings should include the three statutory partners. While some meetings were not quorate, quality assurance and dip sampling were used to ensure decisions were sound. The move to Family Protection Teams aims to improve quoracy as all Teams will include statutory representatives.
- Transformation of Families First had started and was due to be completed by the end of the financial year. A plan had been submitted to the DfE, and key performance indicators (KPIs) were expected to be identified by the end

of November 2025. Capacity remains a challenge, especially with external pressures.

- Schools were invited to strategy meetings when relevant. Efforts were underway to secure education representation on sub-groups. A meeting with the DfE National Safeguarding Partner was scheduled for 3 November 2025 exploring this.
- There was no statutory requirement for quoracy in Core Groups. Every child protection case must be led by a qualified social worker. Dip sampling could be undertaken to review attendance.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Director of Children's Services be requested to undertake a dip sampling of attendance at Core Group meetings to confirm that the correct people are attending to ensure that they are meeting the children's needs and provide a written update to the Sub-Board; and
2. that the Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board note and endorse the contents of the Torbay Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report.

22. Exploitation and Children Missing Update

The Team Manager – Exploitation – Katie Buckley outlined the submitted report which provided an update on exploitation and children missing and responded to questions. The key points included:

- A reduction in missing episodes in 2025, with notable improvements except in February. Although this may not tell the whole picture as not all children were being reported missing.
- Hidden missing children remain a concern, this was often linked to parental reluctance to report.
- The Philomena Protocol was being used to improve police responses.
- Multi-agency communication was strong, with escalation processes in place.

Members asked questions in relation to the following:

- What percentage of children go missing multiple times?
- Were children placed in Torbay from other areas going missing because they want to return home?
- What were children doing when they go missing?
- What was the new Police initiative for early intervention?
- Was the Philomena Protocol shared with others?
- How many missing children were also at risk of exploitation? (A written response would be provided.)
- Who conducts return home interviews for children placed in Torbay?
- Do we collect data on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and excluded children who go missing?

- What proactive work was being done in primary schools?

The following responses were provided:

- In May 2025, there were 46 missing episodes involving 29 children. Internal reviews were triggered when a child goes missing more than three times in three months.
- Some children attempt to travel long distances, including to airports to return to their home when placed out of area. Reciprocal conversations with placing authorities were held to ensure appropriate support was in place.
- When children go missing their activities vary from walking to clear their head, seeking substances, climbing buildings, or avoiding home due to mental health or exploitation etc.
- A child-centred Policing Team had been established to co-ordinate with safeguarding services and provide one-to-one support for vulnerable children.
- The Philomena Protocol was shared with others and Members were encouraged to raise the profile of this – more information could be found at <https://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/notices/pp/philomena-protocol/>. It was best practice to complete it with carers and share it with the Police to aid in locating missing children.
- The placing authority was responsible for return to home interviews, but oversight was maintained to ensure interviews were conducted and information shared.
- Data was collected on SEND and excluded children who go missing. 55% of the most vulnerable children have Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Work was ongoing with schools and youth centres.
- Torbay Safeguarding Children Partnership (TSCP) training was available to all professionals including Primary Schools. Capacity had increased, and targeted work was being done with Years 5 and 6.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board note the contents of the submitted report on exploitation and children missing and endorse the proposed next steps; and
2. that the future report includes a case study to show the difference that has been made to children and their families and provides an update on the move of the Exploitation Team within the communities.

23. Exclusions and Absence

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services – Councillor Bye and the Divisional Director – Education – Hannah Baker outlined the submitted report which provided an update on exclusions and absence and responded to questions. The key points highlighted included:

- Improvements in attendance and exclusions across Torbay schools.

- EAOTAS (Education Otherwise Than At School) programme had been streamlined from 72 bespoke programmes to 36 high-quality offers.
- Over 500 children were currently in EAOTAS, with more than half returning to mainstream or specialist settings.
- Concerns raised about off-rolling practices and the rise in elected home education (EHE), particularly in secondary schools.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) locality pilot underway with speech therapists and educational psychologists supporting schools.

Members asked questions in relation to the following:

- How were college places for children EOTAS funded?
- Was there any evidence that Year 11 children were being off rolled to protect exam results?
- Of the 501 children in EHE, 183 were secondary age. How many of the 160 attending college were Torbay children? (A written response would be provided.)
- Were children being excluded or suspended due to uniform issues, and what support was in place for them?
- Was there sufficient capacity within the EHE Team to ensure children were safe?
- Play Torbay was working with universities on forest school models. Could this be an alternative for EHE children? (Note: Hannah Baker agreed to meet with Play Torbay to explore this further and maximise outcomes for children.)
- Were families of children in EOTAS being informed that they were prioritised for specialist placements?

The following responses were received:

- The college places for children EOTAS were not overseen by the local authority. South Devon College offers a re-engagement programme for Key Stage 4 students, funded through general grant allocations. The students were not on the college roll and do not attend full-time courses. The programme was designed to encourage post-16 enrolment.
- Anecdotal evidence suggested that some parents feel they had no choice in elected home education for their children. One example involved a child being sent home due to wearing the wrong blazer. The Council was working with schools to understand the narrative and ensure that EHE was genuinely a parental choice.
- There were instances where children were sent home due to non-conforming uniforms. Support varies, and future reports will detail what provisions were in place during suspensions or exclusions.
- There was no legal framework that allows services to enforce visits or monitor education quality for EHE. This remains a challenge.
- Families of children in EOTAS were being consulted on specialist provision. Annual reviews were used to assess readiness for reintegration. The Council now has greater sufficiency in specialist provision and is committed to re-engaging children in formal education.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board note the contents of the submitted report on exclusions and absence; and
2. that the next exclusions and absence report includes:
 - breakdown by gender and age of primary school children in EHE;
 - identification of children who have not started school in EHE;
 - number of pupils on free school meals who are excluded or suspended;
 - number of suspensions due to uniform issues;
 - support available during exclusions/suspensions and whether children are actually at home;
 - detailed information on Year 11 pupils and actions to reduce school changes; and
 - whether EHE children are known to the Exploitation Team.

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

The Sub-Board noted the contents of the submitted action tracker. It was confirmed that all actions were now completed.

Tanny Stobbart provided a verbal update on the Play in the Park events and agreed to circulate a written report once it had been signed off by the Trustees.

Councillor Fellows provided a verbal update on the YMCA Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) project in Exeter that Councillors Bye, Fellows and Tolchard visited on 15 July 2025. It was noted that each YMCA operates separately under a franchise type arrangement and was responsible for raising their own funds. Councillor Fellows reported the success of the projects in Exeter and how they had been integrated sensitively within the community and was assured that the project in Paignton would also have a positive impact and provide much needed accommodation to homeless young people in Torbay.

Chair
