

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

16 March 2026

-: Present :-

Councillor Law (Chairwoman)

Councillors Fellows (Vice-Chair), Tolchard and Twelves

Co-opted Members

Jo Hunter, Church of England Diocese
Ndubisi Obasi, Primary Academy Parent Governor

Non-voting Co-opted Member

James Stock, Devon and Cornwall Police

(Also in attendance: Councillors Bye, Chris Lewis and David Thomas)

44. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nicolaou, Nigel Yelland (Non-voting Co-opted Member who was represented by James Stock), and Mike Cook and Jim Funnell (Non-voting Co-opted Members).

45. Minutes

The minutes of the spotlight meeting of the Sub-Board held on 9 February 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

46. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

47. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Performance

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services - Councillor Bye, Director of Children's Services - Nancy Meehan and the Divisional Director Education (Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Services) - Hannah Baker provided an overview of the submitted report regarding progress since the publication of the SEND inspection outcomes in June 2025 and responded to questions. Key points included:

- Ongoing work through the SEND Local Area Improvement Partnership (SLAIP) Board, Chaired independently, with Councillor Law as a Member.

- A March 2026 stocktake was underway ahead of future monitoring visits.
- Feedback against the five priority areas of improvement.
- A new SEND Reform Plan required by the Government by 19 June 2026, following national guidance issued on 24 February 2026.
- Pressures resulting from increased requests for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) following publication of the Government's SEND White Paper and concerns from families.

Members asked questions in respect of the following:

- What specific impact had the SEND White Paper had on the volume of EHCP requests received since February?
- Was the Council seeing increased delays in the assessment pathway, and what mitigation was being put in place to manage the surge?
- How was the Council prioritising cases where delays may significantly disadvantage a child?
- What steps were being taken to counter misinformation circulating among parents about the future of EHCP eligibility?
- How was the SLAIP Board strengthening communication, given concerns that its outputs were not well-known?
- What discussions have taken place with health partners to address 3-year waiting lists for autism assessments?
- Was there a plan for early-intervention options for families awaiting diagnosis?
- How frequently was the Data and Quality Assurance Sub-Board monitoring timeliness, and how was improvement measured?
- What additional capacity was required to produce the new SEND Reform Plan by June?
- How will the Plan interface with Safety Valve requirements ending 31 March 2026?
- How were schools being selected for the Support and Intervention Grant?
- What evaluation will be used to track improvements in teacher confidence following training?

The following responses were received:

- Since publication of the Government's White Paper, the Council has have seen a doubling of EHCP requests, which aligns with a pattern being observed across the South West. Families were anxious about the proposed reforms and believe future entitlement may be restricted. This has placed significant pressure on our assessment Teams. The Council continues to manage this by prioritising children with the most urgent or complex needs and through the Data and Quality Assurance Sub-Board, which now regularly reviews timeliness in detail. Capacity remains challenging, but improvement work was ongoing.
- A large proportion of the anxiety the Council was seeing stems from misinformation, particularly from online forums. The SLAIP Board acknowledged communication was an area that needs strengthening. They have flagged this with their senior partners, and both the Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services have asked for a comprehensive

communication plan. Their intention was to ensure families receive clear, consistent explanations of what the White Paper was and was not proposing.

- Autism assessment delays were significant. It was recognised waiting times could be up to three years, and this was a key focus of Priority 4 of the Improvement Plan. The Council was working closely with NHS partners to expand early support options, including the introduction of named speech and language therapists in schools and building capacity within the Locality Model to support children while awaiting a diagnostic assessment. (A copy of the neurodiversity support map would be shared with Members, and a summary of the Core Group stocktake would come back to the Sub-Board after it has been completed in June 2026).
- The Data and Quality Assurance Sub-Board meets monthly and looks in depth at assessment timeliness, case audit outcomes and compliance. This creates a closed loop across performance, quality assurance and frontline practice. The dashboard submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) was live (a copy of the most recent data and quality assurance dashboard would be circulated to the Sub-Board).
- The latest guidance SEND Reform Plan requirements arrived last Tuesday and gives all local areas until 19 June 2026 to complete a new SEND Reform Plan, despite the consultation not closing until May. This is an extremely demanding timeframe. Torbay faces a particular challenge because we remain midway through our Improvement Plan and expect a reinspection in December 2026, as well as the data required being different from that used under the Safety Valve. Future funding will be dependent on the Government approving the SEND Reform Plan. The Council will need to divert staff capacity across services to ensure compliance.
- The Support and Intervention Grant had been allocated by analysing need, including rates of EHCPs and SEND attendance. No school approached had declined support. Early feedback was positive, especially regarding teacher confidence in making classroom adjustments, and this aligns with future expectations under the forthcoming SEND Reform framework.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board note the contents of the submitted report; and
2. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board is assured that the appropriate monitoring and improvement processes are in place to address the findings and deliver the necessary positive changes for Torbay's children and young people with SEND and their families.

48. Child Exploitation and Missing Children Update

Members considered the submitted report and heard a voice note from the Team Manager Exploitation - Katie Buckley (as she was unable to attend the meeting) which outlined the key developments in respect of exploitation and missing children. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services - Councillor Bye reported a favourable judgement from Ofsted, noting that the complexity of cases continued to rise. Whilst the Council received favourable feedback from Ofsted, exploitation

remained dynamic. Examples were provided of recent interventions supporting vulnerable young people which illustrated how varied and rapidly evolving the situations were.

It was noted that the Police had carried out a national public campaign to help people identify exploitation and were working on further work to see where our local Police could help promote this further.

The Board welcomed the detailed operational examples and praised the quality of return-home interviews now offered to all missing children. It was acknowledged that the increasing staffing within the Team had strengthened and built trusted relationships with young people, enabling more effective identification of patterns and risks. Members were invited to shadow the Exploitation Team to see their work, and it was agreed that the Statutory Co-Opted Members would be invited to shadow the Exploitation Team as part of practice week.

Members were requested to email any further questions to the Clerk so that she could seek a written response.

49. Ofsted Report

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services – Councillor Bye and Director of Children's Services – Nancy Meehan outlined the submitted Ofsted Inspection report published on 26 February 2026 and responded to questions. Key updated included:

- Progress on housing and support for care experienced young people, including the opening of a Care Experienced Hub at Occombe.
- Improvements to ensure children were placed in regulated accommodation, and un-regulated accommodation only where it was in the best interest of the young person.
- Challenges around supervision standards and consistency with supervision rates recently risen from 70% to 96%.

The following questions were raised:

- While supervision frequency had improved to 96%, what were the current quality assurance findings?
- How were managers being supported to improve reflective practice?
- What criteria were used to determine when an unregistered placement was unavoidable? What steps were taken to minimise risk to young people placed in such settings?
- What timelines were anticipated for the new residential home, and what barriers remain regarding Ofsted registration?
- What strategies were being used to attract carers for the most complex young people?
- How will transport barriers to Occombe be addressed long-term?
- How many young people have engaged with the new Care Experienced Hub since opening?

A note on options to buy accommodation for care-experienced young people would be circulated to Members.

The following responses were received:

- The Council has relaunched both the supervision template and the supervision policy. While some supervision records were excellent, others have been limited to one or two lines. This inconsistency was highlighted in the recent and previous inspections. Having increased supervision levels, the next stage was to drive quality improvement.
- There were three children in unregistered provision at the time of the inspection; one has since moved, and one new admission was expected. These placements were only used when they safeguard the young person's welfare and allow them to access the training or support they need. Ofsted recognised that we know each case well and make informed decisions but were not able to support unregistered provision.
- Funding for the Residential Home becomes available by 2028, but the Council was seeking to access it earlier. Registration with Ofsted currently takes around 12 months, and the property that was previously identified was deemed unsuitable. The Council was now working with a senior Ofsted Inspector to refine our criteria and expedite the process.
- The Council has recruited foster carers over the last year, but this has been balanced by several retirements. The regional fostering hub was not currently meeting sufficiency for our most complex children, which was why local capacity building remains a core priority.
- The new care experience hub at Occombe was already benefiting young people, with two progressing into training opportunities. Transport was being supported through bus route 60 and familiarisation provided by personal assistants to get the young people used to travelling there. The Council was also working with Strategic Transport to ensure sustainable access.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board thank all those who are involved in delivering services to our young people and who have contributed to Torbay maintaining a 'Good' rating with Ofsted.

50. Best Start in life – Torbay's Local Plan

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services – Councillor Bye, Senior Early Years Advisory Teacher - Emma Kerridge and Public Health Specialist – Children and Families - Joanne Needham outlined the submitted report on the Best Start for Life – Torbay's Local Plan and responded to questions.

The following questions were raised:

- How would the Council improve the ability to track children transitioning from early years settings into school?
- Were there proposals for a centralised early years data system?

- Was the current early years workforce sufficient to meet the targets in the Plan?
- What support was available for training in speech, language and communication?
- How were schools supported to deliver consistent English as an Additional Language (EAL) approach given the variety of academy providers?
- Could schools access specialist advice without long referral waits?
- How was the three-year funding being allocated for Family Hubs, and what sustainability planning was in place beyond 2027?
- What was the role of Parent Connectors in engaging harder-to-reach families?
- How was "school readiness" being defined locally, and how would it be communicated to families?
- How would the new advisory teacher post support nurseries with pre-reception transition work?

Members received the following responses:

- The ability to track children across early years settings remains a concern nationally. There was no statutory requirement for early years providers to notify the local authority, which limits oversight. The new Plan aims to strengthen data collection and cross-agency connections, particularly for the most vulnerable children.
- The Council knows more support was required for early years staff, especially around speech, language and communication needs. Workforce development was a major strand of the Plan.
- Children with EAL were performing below national averages. One factor was that certain assessments require English to complete, even when children were otherwise meeting their developmental milestones. The Council recently funded EAL training for schools, 19 out of 29 had participated. The aim was to provide more consistent system-wide support.
- We have three years of Family Hub funding, which gives us time to plan sustainability beyond 2027. The hubs support early identification and engagement, including Parent Connectors and outreach following the 2.3 year and 1 year health reviews.
- The Council was developing a local child-development progression document and working with families on what school readiness means in practice. The advisory teacher funded through Family Hubs will focus on transition support, summer-holiday interventions, and reducing the drop-off seen when children start school.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Cabinet be recommended to approve the draft Best Start for Life Plan set out at Appendix 1 to the submitted report; and
2. that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board monitors delivery against Best Start for Life Plan every six months.

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

The Sub-Board noted the contents of the submitted action tracker. The Clerk provided the following update:

The audit of attendance at Core Group meetings was circulated to Members on 10 March 2026 arising from minute 21/9/25, as well as the update on training for wider partners and those who have contact with young people for diabetes care arising from minute 37/1/26.

Chair
