

## **Torbay Children's Services**

### **Improvement Review-Youth Offending Service**

#### **Background, Introduction and Purpose**

This focused, short review of the Youth Offending Service was undertaken as part of a programme of initial enquiries to be undertaken by the council's Chief Executive and Independent Chair of the Improvement Board into areas of service which have had a history of under-performance identified through quality assurance activity, Local Government Peer Review or through Government inspection processes. In the case of the Youth Offending Service, recent peer review and inspection exercises had confirmed significant concerns which had been identified by internal quality assurance processes.

This is the seventh of a series of similarly focused reviews and, in addition, a more wide-ranging review of Leadership, Management and Governance of the Children's Service which incorporated aspects of quality assurance has also been undertaken (July 2021).

The purpose of each review is to understand what improvement focused work has been undertaken, its impact on services for children and their families and to make recommendations for further action if that is required. The style and purpose of the enquiry is essentially to be supportive of those charged with responsibility for improvement and to adopt a critical friend role to elicit a full understanding of what has been achieved so far, and

what (if anything) still needs to be done to meet the requirements of inspection and peer review recommendations and the service's improvement objectives. The reviewers also engage with the process to offer advice and guidance in furtherance of the Children's Service's explicit ambition to ensure that all services are sustainable and of at least a good standard.

The reviews are compliant with an Ofsted recommendation to the Council's Senior Leadership that was set out in their 2018 report that required "The Chief Executive to ensure that leadership, management and governance in Torbay are strong and sharply focused on improving and sustaining outcomes for children, and all recommendations from inspection activity are addressed".

#### **The Inspection and Peer Review Recommendations**

**The Inspectors made the following Recommendations to the YOT Management Board:**

1. make sure that Board members understand the specific needs of children known to the YOT and advocate on their behalf in their own agencies
2. develop the knowledge and understanding of the Board members role and the service's work, so they can provide effective challenge to partner agencies
3. review management capacity to ensure there are necessary resources to oversee the service effectively
4. ensure that the partnership understands the reasons for the large disparity in education provision for children involved with the YOT compared with those in the general population and put plans in place to redress this. The YOT Head of Service should:
5. develop and update policies, procedures and guidance for out-of-court disposals to improve joint decision-making and the quality of management oversight
6. undertake an assessment on all children receiving an out-of-court disposal and make sure that equal attention is given to desistance, safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others
7. ensure that staff have access to the buildings and facilities they need to deliver services to children and families
8. embed processes for capturing feedback from children, parents and victims, and use this information to develop services.

**The LGA Peer Reviewers made the following recommendations:**

- a) Re-establish the YOT Management Board as a smaller, strategic Board with more senior, consistent partner representation with clear terms of reference to reflect that strategic role and better links to other relevant Boards for children's services.
- b) Agree the key priorities for the service and share with partners and clearly communicate to the wider service.
- c) Clarify the remit, role, leadership and management oversight of high-risk cases expected of the Head of Service role.
- d) Consider the establishment of a dedicated YOT Manager post.
- e) Review the current structure of the YOT, including consideration of the YOT manager post (as per recommendation d) above), and to ensure the best use is made of existing resources including case officers and specialist workers.
- f) Clearly communicate the future vision for the service, including plans for the Parkfield building and alternative arrangements for working with children and young people.
- g) Strengthen engagement and ensure that effective two-way communication is in place between the Board, senior management and the YOT team.
- h) Increase the proactive use of performance information and insight to challenge and improve the service, by both the Board and YOT managers, drawing on data

from a wider range of partners including additional children's services performance information relevant to the YOT cohort.

i) Further training for staff should be commissioned to ensure the AssetPlus assessment tool is used to its full potential in undertaking assessments, recording case information and identifying and managing risk and to underpin the quality and consistency of assessments.

j) Further enhance and embed restorative practice approaches and develop a better understanding and use of desistance factors to tackle re-offending and review the Out of Court Disposal process to ensure its continuing effectiveness.

### **Methodology for this Improvement Review**

The method adopted in this review has been a combination of

- pre-reading of policy and procedural papers
- pre-reading of the Inspection and LGA Peer Review reports
- examination of existing data
- separate discussions via ZOOM with the YOT team manager
- discussion with the YOT Board Chair

### **The Findings.**

The quotations from inspection and peer review reports set out above demonstrate that the Youth Offending Service has generated concern for a considerable period of time. This concern had been recognized and had generated the request that was made to the LGA to support Torbay by conducting a Peer Review, the outcome of which largely confirmed the views of the Director and her Senior Leaders, including those from the wider partnership. It is arguable that some concerns had not been recognized or accepted by the YOS workforce which probably affected the prospect for significant and enduring change.

It was against this backdrop that the new Chairperson of the YOT Board and the recently appointed YOT Manager began working to effect the necessary significant changes. This report will track the work that has been undertaken to effect the change and will draw attention to some key issues that will enable the service to be improved further.

The role that YOT plays in providing positive experiences for children and preventing offending or re-offending behaviours is an important element of Torbay's commitment to creating a child friendly council area in which children and young people can be supported to become successful young citizens. The

very structure and statutory foundation of the YOT is unusual in that it is a service that is separate from the statutory children's social care service. However, because of the shared focus of both organizations on working with vulnerable children, a significant proportion of whom are cared for by the local authority or supported through child protection or children in need provision, they are intrinsically linked by their core purposes. This connection underscores the importance of the YOT increasing its connectivity to the wider children's service and the partnership boards that support it. The needs of the children and young people who benefit from the services of the YOT are diverse, complex and sometimes require specialist support found elsewhere in the wider service network for children and it follows that close connectivity and interdependence with other services raises the prospects of those services being developed and delivered.

There is no doubt that the Director of Children's Services, the YOT chair and the YOT Manager have a shared view that it is important to support the notion of increased connectivity with other services and it is acknowledged that this will inevitably mean a closer physical link with other children's focused groups. This change has been contentious with the team, until recently, resisting the loss of their established work base. The arrival of the new manager and the realisation that the delivery of locally based services close to the young people's communities has meant that the changes have gained traction. There is however, a reasonable acceptance that the community settings that are required for the work with young people need to be fit for purpose and suitable for confidential group work as well as often sensitive and personal one-to-one activity.

The YOT workforce is committed to maintaining its professional identity set out in its statutory foundation, but the concept of closer working relationships with the wider children's service is increasingly understood and is gaining acceptance. The Board chair and the manager are confident that this process will continue as misplaced fears that the changes described above will undermine the role of the YOT reduce. The forward momentum continuing will mean that the YOT will naturally develop over time into a key partner playing its part in an integrated approach to the delivery of children's services consistent with the Council-wide aim of creating a '*child (and young person) friendly Torbay*'.

There are clear plans in development to make the ambitions set out above a reality in the foreseeable future but there is recognition that the required changes cannot all happen immediately. The revised YOT plan, that will reflect the LGA and Inspection recommendations, and will be consistent with the legal framework is due to be approved by the Cabinet in mid-June and will be the location for the blueprint of change and proposals reflect the clear leadership of the relatively recently appointed Board Chair and YOT Manager who both recognise the tasks that have to be negotiated and are adopting a systematic approach to addressing them. It is a significant step forward to integrate the range of plans which historically have been developed within the team and it is a development which will support the transformation to a service with a progressive view about where it is headed and the direction of travel.

- Board membership: there is confidence that the current Board is populated with those with a commitment to securing improvement for the YOT. However, it is recognized that it is a new Board that is still developing, and part of that development is to ensure that Board members are confident in their role and have the required levels of challenge capacity.

Since the new Chair has been appointed, the Board has always been fully quorate, but CAMHS is too often absent which, if unaddressed, will have ramifications for how they respond to the inspection recommendation requiring all partners to take into their own agencies those relevant needs of children and young people who are known to the YOT. However, following this review considerable activity was undertaken to adopt a more flexible approach to securing CAMHS provision involving budgets being disentangled and working in partnership with colleagues in Devon to secure the resource of a full-time psychologist.

- Vision: it is the determined intention to ensure that the new Youth Justice Plan will have a clear vision that is developed with the involvement of Team members, which sets out exactly the outcomes and the mechanics to be applied to help the Team achieve its aims and objectives. It is a significant and positive development that the YOT Operations Board is focused upon the eight areas of concern that led to the recommendations of the Inspection team, most of which were also reflected in the Peer Review Report. Progress and challenges are subject

to discussion by the Executive, and it is noted that the Chair and the YOT manager also discuss regularly but in addition to that which takes place in the confines of the Board structure. It is agreed that this is an important way in which delivery can be monitored, the traction of change can be assessed and links to other relevant partnerships such as the Community Safety and Safeguarding Children partnerships can be made.

- Culture: There has been improvement in relationship of the team with their social care colleagues, much of which is attributable to the positivity exhibited by the Team Manager who is compellingly focused upon securing better outcomes for children and moving past the debilitating tensions associated with the perceived removal of the team's long-term base. Closer physical connection between YOT workforce and their social care colleagues, the Team Manager becoming a full member of Children's Service Management Team and directly accountable to the DCS with appropriate strategic connections to both education and community safety colleagues, is supporting the development of a revised and more focused identity for the team. In turn, this has helped the team to accept the challenges laid down for them in both the LGA and Inspection reports.
- Quality Assurance and Performance Management: It is recognized that progress in these areas has been affected by not having a dedicated data analyst. While the suite of data that is available is substantial, its full effectiveness is not realised as it is not built into a dashboard with qualitative links to other relevant data sets. It is anticipated that the full-time analyst who will join the team will be central to this development and speed the shift from a reliance on quantitative rather than qualitative material.

This focus on improving the content and use of data is an important element in the Team Managers determination to build a more functional approach to Quality Assurance. Early conversations with the Head of the Learning Academy to explore the potential for adapting the QA process have taken place, and it is the intention to build a framework which enables the capture of the needs and, importantly, the voices of

children, a renewed focus on enabling the voice of the victim to be heard which is a priority area for improvement, and the performance of the team in meeting them. This is to be done by ensuring that the revised data suite directly links to the Team's priorities. Once established this structured approach will compliment the supervision programme which is undertaken systematically by the Team Manager supported by his own bespoke QA, activity and will represent a step-change in the Team's approach to this critical area of improvement activity.

This report has already referred to the important shift in the role and function of the team to enable it to be appropriately more closely aligned with other key services for children. At a strategic level there has been an important decision to require all partner boards at specific intervals to report on progress with their (improvement) plan to the Children's Continuous Improvement Board. This will ensure that the YOT will be held to account and where necessary challenged about its achievements and progress. Importantly, it will also benefit from another dimension of QA activity by being involved in discussion and debate, and to receive support from a range of partners (some representing a number of children's focused Boards) with a shared ambition to improve the quality of services available to children. There is also a determination to capture learning and current policy and practice thinking derived from the Team's participation in the Youth Justice Board's bank of intelligence, some of which will be shared at the regular YJB South West Regional Group

The developments set out above are supportable and in the context of some of the challenges the Team has been experiencing, necessary early stages in a process of enabling organizational development and building an infrastructure that will support service development and delivery. Both the LGA and Inspection reports were positive about the quality of court work but critical of the Team's preventative agenda although the existence of good levels of experience in Trauma Informed Practice was seen as an established skill-based asset that would significantly contribute to improvements in practice and operational management. Good early work has begun to address this critical area. The volume and needs of children most at risk of offending are being scoped and the Team will initially prioritise and target those most at risk. This work will have added complications as the Team has lost two dedicated

prevention workers from its workforce complement. However, the Team Manager is confident that he will be able to deploy resources from his current practitioner capacity to carry out the work on this key priority for improvement. The Board Chair and the Team Manager share a united view that over time the preventative work will need its budget base restored to enable informed and focused planning in relation to this key priority.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** In keeping with a considerable tranche of children's focused services, the YOT has not been prioritised in the first phase of the Children's Service Improvement Plan. The reasons for this are complex but there can be no doubt that there was a misplaced confidence that the service was fundamentally sound, and it came as a surprise to some members of the Team when the LGA review and subsequently the Inspection team set out a number of areas of significant concern. These are now being addressed and the main body of this report has already set out its belief that focusing on developing some key elements of infrastructure is essential for a 'healthy' service to be developed further. Specifically, strengthening the Board functionality, defining the vision and priorities of the service within a single plan, underlining the need to capture and use children's and victims' voices, establishing a solid QA framework, moving towards local delivery of services and enabling the development of effective relationships with other Boards and professional groups are individually and collectively important pieces of the YOT improvement jigsaw. Much of this work is still work in progress and although there is clear evidence of change it has not been possible to evaluate the impacts of those changes for children and young people.

As a consequence of the conclusion, the recommendations from this report largely endorse the improvement priorities of the Youth Offending Team:

1. The YOT should continue to build its relationships with other Boards operating across the council area, children's focused services and the Children's Continuous Improvement Board.
2. Continue work to secure a range of local facilities that are fit for purpose to enable services to be delivered effectively to children and young people.
3. Continue to develop the YOT Board so that its members individually and collectively become significantly influential in the development of an effective and efficient Youth Offending Service.

4. Continue to build and implement a functional QA Framework that is informed by the voices of children, young people and victims.
5. Continue work to build and deliver a sustainable and effective prevention service.

Anne-Marie Bond, Chief Executive, Torbay Council

Stephen Hart, Chair, Torbay Children's Continuous Improvement Board.

May 6<sup>th</sup> 2022