

Title:	Children Service's Sustainability		
Report to:	Children's Partnership Executive		
Agenda Item No.	7		
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<p>1. Purpose To advise the Partnership Executive of the improvements made to critical strategic relationships, existing partnership approaches and the internal reshaping to secure the sustainability of improvement in Children Services.</p>			
<p>2. Background</p> <p>2.1 Children Services has made significant steps to address the need for improvements in the governance and strategic leadership of safeguarding in Torbay. The process to address these has focused on re-establishing critical relationships with partners, politicians and the operation of key statutory functions i.e. Lead member, TSCB etc.</p> <p>2.2 Significant progress that is being made to build new partnership arrangements across the children's sector. This has been challenging as partnership arrangements were in deficit following the past functioning of the Children's Trust and were largely broken in the early days of intervention.</p> <p>2.3 Internally Children Services is re-adjusting and building on the good practice of the past year to put in place a long term sustainable safeguarding service.</p> <p>Changes made during 2013 are listed in more detail in the next section along with the plans for the future that will further secure the improvement of Children's Services.</p>			
<p>3. Summary</p> <p>The following decisive steps have been taken to ensure that there is capacity for sustained improvement of safeguarding in Torbay.</p> <p>3.1 Improvements to the governance and strategic leadership of safeguarding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new permanent Executive Director of Financial Operations (Chief Executive) for the Council has been appointed and is in post. This has brought to an end the period of change and uncertainty in the governance arrangement of the council. • A new lead member was appointed shortly after the resignation of the previous member. The new lead member has been fully engaged and supportive in the development of Children Services and the re-launch of the corporate parenting responsibilities of the Council. • The TSCB is now beginning to effectively deliver its scrutiny and challenge 			

functions. A new Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board was appointed in July and has worked with the DCS to ensure the board delivers its statutory functions. For example, it is publishing its learning framework and improvements have already been made to multi-agency auditing and workforce development.

- The Council's Corporate Parenting Panel has been re-launched and is working with a renewed Child in Care Council. Council members will be working with children to agree a set of priorities and to sign off a refreshed pledge. The Panel is also developing links with an array of young person led initiatives including a young inspector's programme and young person led network of children's groups.
- Promoting and protecting the welfare of children has a high profile amongst local politicians. As a result, Children Services is benefiting from the active support and engagement of members in the service improvement process. For example, close working relationships have been forged with a core group of politicians over the department's service remodelling proposals.
- A major process of budget remodelling has been undertaken in recent months to reduce the costs to Children's Services and rebase the budget. This will include the appointment of a new 'management accountant' role to prepare a three year business plan for Children Services. The budget reduction process this year has also allowed the service to develop a number of invest to save projects that are now being finalised.
- The establishment of the Partnership Executive Group has sustained the benefits derived from the Improvement Board and opened new partnership opportunities. The role of the Executive will be reviewed in December to ensure we retain the critical executive role to drive the LSCB but also build on the strategic thinking that has developed from closer relationships.

3.2 Building and improving partnerships

- The ongoing improvement process for Children services and the changing landscape (particularly with Health Services) is providing the opportunity for numerous conversations across all agencies. These cover all aspects of the continuum of need from the Child Poverty Commission publishing its first annual report within a 'preventative' framework to the ongoing evolution of the 'community hub' model both from a professional and a community perspective, to the proposals for a new targeted mental health model that sits alongside the traditional CAMHS service.
- The positive nature of all the conversations emanates from a new culture in Torbay that openly welcomes the partnership approach. We now have to step up to the mark through the conversations and translate the words into action. The three ideas above will possibly form the early proposals alongside the creation of effective fieldwork based networks that bring staff together to address common issues.
- To be able to respond more effectively from the Local Authority a new joint commissioning unit is being formulated drawing on skilled staff from children's, adults and public health. In addition to this arrangements have also been put in place to allow for shared desk space within the Clinical Commissioning Group to ensure effective links are made from an early stage.

3.3 Building on good practice

- Morale and confidence is good amongst front line staff and the organisation is

benefiting from a stable and committed workforce and middle management team. For example, during a recent significant upturn in referrals staff from across the organisation provided additional resources to help the initial intake team. This healthy organisational culture is in stark contrast to the situation 2 years ago.

- Recruitment and retention has been addressed. Children Services has actively reduced its overall vacancy rates from over 40% to 12% in under a year (vacancy rates are under 10% in front line teams). Torbay has also developed its reputation as an employer for choice amongst newly qualified workers leaving the local University. An effective and well organised induction programme is in place for all Social Worker's first year in assessed practice. This programme includes opportunities to receive joint induction with other partners.
- The practice improvements noted by Ofsted have been further embedded.
 - regular support and challenge from practice managers continues to be regularly provided, Practitioners in their First Year of Assessed practice are well supported with protected caseloads, increased supervision and additional training
 - the hub continues to effectively triage increasing levels of work and with additional support, the initial response team has risen to the challenge
 - the child protection numbers have further reduced and decisive action continues to be to ensure children do not remain on plans unnecessarily
 - partners are appropriately identifying children of concern however this has continued to support higher numbers of children in care
 - adoption rates and timeliness is significantly improved with Torbay adopting more children than at any previous time
- Structural changes are well underway to develop a single joined up service that will be by April 2014 see
 - a single assessment process from CAF onwards
 - the creation of clear career pathways for social workers
 - the introduction of principal social work roles in each team
 - the creation of a quality assurance role to lead on the development of peer review and case auditing and the further embedding of learning culture

In addition to this, 2 new Service Manager posts have been created within social care to spread the workload more evenly and to provide strategic support to the Initial Response teams and on an Integrated Youth Support Service.

- Torbay is also taking a lead role in regional work with other authorities across the region to develop peer challenge and to access critical benchmarking information. This includes the completion of the regions first round of self assessments and the invitation to have a peer challenge on CLA in March 2014. Torbay is actively seeking examples of good practice and learning from others.
- The leadership team is establishing a new relationship and expectation with middle managers that will see all senior operational managers take responsibility for an improvement portfolio. This will be coordinated and organised through the project management structures established to good effect under the previous improvement plan.
- A better grip on commissioned services is being put in place with the creation of a joint unit. This will take a lead in the ongoing development of the South West

Peninsular purchasing arrangement and improving the management of providers.

Looking forward

- Whilst the significant progress has been made. The Children's Services management team recognises the ongoing challenges in respect of
 - getting all members of the partnership at all levels to work as one in the safeguarding of children that includes establishing a more seamless link between services across the partnership
 - keeping and maintaining pace in a small authority whilst it continues to make significant changes
 - the time and space needed to fully embed changes made to date and also move on with the latest phase of the improvements
 - the increasing social care demands
 - the ongoing challenges of the budget reduction process

4. Recommendations

To note the progress made by the Children's Services in establishing a stable and sustainable future for the safeguarding of children.