



Title: **Response to Children's Services Peer Review**

Wards Affected: **All**

To: **Overview and Scrutiny Board** On: **18 July 2012**

Contact Officer: **Richard Williams**

☎ Telephone: **01803 208401**

✉ E.mail: **richard.williams@torbay.gov.uk**

1. Key points and Summary

1.1 This report sets out the final peer review letter and identifies the actions taken following the Peer Review.

2. Summary

2.1 In the final letter from the peer review it described progress as fragile in respect of the potential impact of imminent changes to the council's senior leadership and the need to recruit and retain social workers. These two core issues are being addressed:-

- An independent chair for the CIB is being recruited that will ensure ongoing external challenge and support to the improvement programme during changes to senior leadership.
- A new recruitment and retention package has been agreed that includes –
 1. The implementation of an enhanced relocation package that competes with the best regionally. The use of hosts to help those needing information about housing, schools, childcare, local GPs etc
 2. Retention payments for staff in key services and a finder's fee for staff who introduce social workers to the authority.
 3. The introduction of a career structure that removes the reliance on market supplements and a system that supports progression (as developed through the CPIP (project 1)).
 4. The employment of a leading national recruitment agency to head hunt suitable managers and to position the authority better through national advertisements and better branding.
 5. The use of national recruitment fares, targeted advertisements and a revamp of the recruitment pages including video testimonials from staff (as highlighted by the peer review).

2.2 The peer review was not an inspection and therefore did not offer any judgements but it looked at 12 cases in detail and did meet over 130 people from across the partnership. The main conclusions of the peer review were: (See appendix 1):

- Positive change has definitely happened – the pace of change now needs to be increased and its impact for children and families clearly articulated

- Staff report the situation is safer than it was – evidence to corroborate this needs to be compiled and reviewed by the TSCB and IB
- Urgent action to recruit and retain social workers is critical
- Your long term strategy for life after the improvement notice needs early and sustained development involving all partners. This is not a problem or solution for social care or children’s services alone
- Communicate between partners that things are moving – again, the use of performance measurement and impact data will support the transparency of the improvements in service delivery and outcomes for children and families
- You have calmed and controlled – now empower!

2.3 Children services have reviewed the findings of the peer review and are working on the following areas of urgent action. These are listed below against the relevant requirements of the improvement notice.

Improvement notice action

- **Continue to improve the quality, timeliness and consistency of assessments, taking appropriate account of risk and recording the views of key agencies of the council and children and young people, where appropriate, to inform decision making and planning in line with statutory guidance.**

The peer review found that

- There was clear evidence of effective multi-disciplinary working and we witnessed professional dialogue between staff from different disciplines in which they showed a good understanding of their differing roles and responsibilities.

Action being taken

- Streamline paperwork/PARIS system to make it a more user friendly and to release time for social workers to spend more time with families. All unnecessary ICS fields on core and initial assessments will be removed during July.
- Piloting partnership access to PARIS from July that will allow professionals to identify if a child is already known and who the allocated worker is.
- Piloting of multi-agency enquiry form (base on Child’s Journey) starting in July
- Developing more shared workforce development opportunities from induction onward

Improvement notice action

- **With partner agencies, ensure that a common and locally agreed shared assessment is used by all agencies to improve the service provided to children and families outside of social care.**

The peer review found that

- Child’s Journey/Threshold Matrix – clear, strong roll out and visible support
- Some good early help projects and approaches

Action being taken

- Agreeing vision and broader strategy for early help and children in need – outline framework produced (16th July). Engagement of managers across CS 27th June.

Improvement notice action

- **Work with relevant partner agencies to ensure that they actively participate in strategy discussions and risk assessment and actively contribute to all child protection and children in need plans.**

The peer review found that

- There was evidence of good practice direction from chairs of Child protection conferences and some good examples of child protection plans which gave a clear outline about what help would be provided to the family in order to facilitate change.

Action being taken

- Continue review of CP plans. CP plans number reduced since April – now 50 lower.

Improvement notice actions

- **Ensure that performance information and evidence from quality assurance audits are carried out, analysed and reported to the Improvement Board and Torbay Safeguarding Children Board (TSCB) in accordance with Ofsted 'local safeguarding children board good practice'. Analysis should be used to inform action taken by the Council and its partners to drive improvements in safeguarding and the Council should report on the impact of such actions to the aforementioned boards.**
- **Agree with the Improvement Board and the LSCB the frequency, scope and number of quality assurance audits. Ensure that the quality assurance audits are carried out and the performance information and evidence from the audits are analysed and reported to the improvement Board and the TSCB in accordance with Ofsted 'local safeguarding Children board good practice'. Analysis should be used to inform action taken by the Council and its partners to drive improvements in safeguarding and significantly reduce the number of cases judged to be inadequate. The Council should also report on the impact of such actions to the improvement board and TSCB.**
- **Ensure that the contribution of key partner agencies to the agreed improvement strategy, and that the leadership and accountability for the work of safeguarding children is clearly identified within existing and new organisational structures.**

The peer review found that

- Child's Journey/Threshold Matrix – clear, strong roll out and visible support
- Remodelling and strengthening of TSCB with clarity of priority areas for change and openness to challenge and development
- Collaboration with other LSCBs on training

Action being taken

- New simplified and shared format for auditing cases being developed based on Ofsted Inspectors check list – piloting by CSLT mid July.
- Vol sector CPIP lead taking on work package lead of TSCB promotion and awareness raising.
- Core business – performance management approach that links all elements of the personal and organisation performance cycle ready for promotion to Children's Services managers 27th June.

Improvement notice action

- **Ensure that the partners on the improvement board work with the Council to agree objectives and targets for improvement in the delivery of children's safeguarding services with timescales and that these are communicated and implemented with staff and partners so that they understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering these objectives, targets and improvements.**

The peer review found that

- We had a credible and coherent plan
- There was a strong, clear vision and actions in the Children's Partnership Improvement Plan.

Action being taken

- Continue routine of briefings
- Core business – performance management approach
- Cultural change commissioned complete first phase 17-18th July

Improvement notice action

- **Continue to monitor social worker workloads (including caseloads) to ensure that responsibilities for tasks are clearly defined, there is adequate reflective supervision and support and that no practitioner carries a workload which is excessive and prevents effective social work practice**
- **Continue the development of effective reflective supervision of social work practice is in place with rigorous management oversight and decision making on individual cases, which will identify strengths and areas for development in practice with a view of further improving the quality of social work practice**
- **Continue to implement the comprehensive programme of induction, training, mentoring and continuous professional development for all social care staff and work to ensure that shared learning opportunities with partners are exploited. The council should report the impact the work has on improving outcomes for children to the improvement board.**

The peer review found that

- Evidence of some decisive action regarding poor performance
- Evidence of managerial direction in case work
- Enthusiasm and people being up for it
- Positive front-line relationships across agencies
- Front-line relationships/co-location
- NQSW/Grow your own/Training and Development
- Creative use of staff, including secondment

Action being taken

- Implementation of council approved R&R package
- Recruitment of Principal Social Worker
- Commissioning E&D approach

Richard Williams
Director of Children's Services