

Torbay Council – Inspection of child protection

26 February – 6 March 2013

Summary report for children and young people

The purpose of the inspection is to look at how well the council and other organisations help and protect children and young people to be safe from harm and to be well cared for.

Overall, we rated Torbay Council as adequate for how effective child protection services are. All of our grades are explained in the table below:

Outstanding	A service that is significantly better than required at keeping children and young people safe
Good	A service that is better than required at keeping children and young people safe
Adequate	A service that is doing what is required to keep children and young people safe
Inadequate	A service that is not doing what is required to keep children and young people safe

Here is a summary of the things we found at the inspection that were generally **adequate or good** and the things we told the Director:

The council has worked hard to develop the way it receives information about children, young people and their families (known as referrals) and has changed the way it does this. Now, when someone contacts the service which receives these referrals, they can be assured of getting a timely response. If they need to speak to an experienced person to discuss a concern, this is also readily available.

More families are now being helped due to the change in the referrals service. Where previously families might have not been offered support, the new service will now make a decision as to whether a different sort of support can be offered rather than that from a social worker. Schools and other agencies have a clear understanding of this process based on the use of the 'child's journey', an effective document to decide on the best course of action and support for families.

The council is working hard to deal with some poor social work practice and decision making which occurred in the past. This means that there are more children and young people who are on child protection plans or are engaged in court proceedings

to help them be safe. We looked at the work social workers were doing at this present time and could see that this work was much improved compared to that in the past. However, there is much more yet to be done.

The council has needed to make improvements to its services for a number of years but has had difficulty in making positive progress. Since a new director of children's services and a new assistant director were appointed, there have been positive improvements and we were able to see some of these during our inspection. However, there are still a lot of changes required and it will take some time for the council to get to a position where services are of a consistently good quality.

We met with some families and they gave positive feedback to us about some specific services including intensive family support and family group conferencing services. These services have a good track record of helping to support families who are finding life a struggle.

Generally, agencies work together effectively to support children who need protection and who go missing. In particular, the council and other agencies have learnt a lot from an investigation into child sexual exploitation, known as Operation Mansfield. The council has been effective in raising awareness of this and developing the range of agencies involved in identifying children missing from education.

Inspectors observed some good examples of discussions involving children and families in meetings involved in various types of support. The best meetings fully involved and engaged, were attended by a wide range of key workers and resulted in clear plans for improvement. In very effective meetings, these plans were fully understood by families who knew what they had to do before the next meeting.

Here is a summary of the things we found at the inspection that **needed improving** and the things we told the Director:

The director has recently changed arrangements for the protection and support of children with disabilities. These need to be developed further to ensure that children with disabilities are provided with the right sort of help especially where there are child protection concerns.

Inspectors saw some good examples of reports and assessments but this was not seen in all cases. The director needs to make sure that all cases are reviewed regularly to ensure that children and their families are supported effectively. The language used in reports, assessments and plans must be easily understood by children, young people and families.

There were some clear examples where social workers remained working with families for an extended period of time to ensure that a consistent level of support was provided. However, for some, there had been a number of changes in social workers especially in the past due to temporary staff being employed. This is now getting better and there are more staff employed on a permanent basis. However, we found that children often had to change their social worker as soon as a child protection plan was no longer considered necessary. We have asked the director to work out a way which will be better for children, young people and their families so that they can keep up the progress made.

Inspectors saw some good examples of plans for children and their families. However, some were not as good as they could be. The council needs to ensure that all children in need and child protection plans are clearly set out and note what actions are to be completed and by when.

Not enough children and young people were attending child protection conferences so that they can give their own views. The director needs to do some work with social workers and the advocacy service which is available to young people to enable as many young people as possible to attend their case conference. The director also needs to develop a clear approach to gaining the views of children, young people and families at different stages of help being provided so that their views can help improve services.

We found that the views of children, young people and their families were being gained but that this was not on a regular basis. We have asked the director to work out a way for views to be sought regularly. This way, the director and staff in children's services will know what children, young people and their families are saying about the services they are receiving so that they can then look to see whether and how they can improve their services.

The full inspection report was published on 9 April 2013. The council will now prepare a plan to show how they will improve things. It will also say when they are going to talk to children and young people about what they are going to do and which groups they are going to talk to.

If you would like to look at the full inspection report you can find this at

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/torbay>