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Observations of Practice Policy

Children Services directorate

Learning Academy

Oct 2024

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## 1. Introduction

Torbay Council is committed to creating a prosperous and healthy community where children and young people thrive. Our Children’s Services aim to protect children and provide them with the best start in life by working collaboratively with children, young people, and their families.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff within Torbay Council’s Children’s Services, including those working with children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) and those who are cared for or care experienced.

3. Rationale

As part of our commitment to children and families in Torbay, this document is to be read in conjunction with our Ways of Working Policy. This guidance is to inform our commitment to principle 6. Adaptability and Responsiveness.

**1. Consistency and Quality**

* **Standardisation**: Ensures that all staff follow the same procedures, leading to consistent and high-quality service delivery.
* **Clear Expectations**: Provides clear guidelines on what is expected from staff, reducing ambiguity and improving performance.

**2. Building Trust**

* **Transparency**: Clear ways of working help build trust with children, young people, and families by showing them what to expect.
* **Reliability**: Consistent actions and communication foster trust and reliability in relationships.

**3. Improving Outcomes**

* **Focused Efforts**: Helps staff focus on key areas that improve the well-being and safety of children and families.
* **Evidence-Based Practices**: Encourages the use of proven methods and practices that lead to better outcomes.

**4. Professional Development**

* **Training and Supervision**: Provides a framework for ongoing training and reflective supervision, helping staff develop their skills and improve their practice.
* **Accountability**: Sets standards for accountability, ensuring that staff are responsible for their actions and decisions.

**5. Collaboration and Communication**

* **Teamwork**: Promotes effective teamwork and multi-agency working, which is essential for addressing complex needs.
* **Shared Decision-Making**: Encourages collaboration with children, young people, and families, ensuring their voices are heard and considered.

**6. Adaptability and Responsiveness**

* **Feedback Integration**: Incorporates feedback from service users to continuously improve practices.
* **Flexibility**: Allows for adjustments based on individual needs and circumstances, making the service more responsive and personalized.

**7. Legal and Ethical Compliance**

* **Regulatory Standards**: Ensures compliance with legal and ethical standards, protecting the rights and privacy of service users.
* **Safeguarding**: Provides clear guidelines for safeguarding children and young people, ensuring their safety and well-being.

## 3. Principles

This document details six principles that guide how Children’s services staff should work with children, young people and families:

1. **Building Positive Relationships**
   * **Commitment**: Staff will build trusting and meaningful relationships with children, young people, and families through kindness, understanding, and empathy.
   * **Actions**:
     + Ensure all Children’s Services staff attend Restorative Practice training.
     + Make visits timely and purposeful, conducted in a safe environment.
     + Take time to get to know children and talk with them alone in a place where they feel safe.
     + Be honest about what can and cannot be done for the family.
     + Use a ‘Working Together Agreement’ to explain roles, purposes, and plans.
     + Inform families about worker changes and provide planned introductions.
     + Record and share information clearly and in an age-appropriate way.
     + Respect and consider diversity, making necessary adjustments for specific needs.
2. **Child and Family Assessments**
   * **Commitment**: Conduct detailed, evidence-based assessments to understand the needs and strengths of children and families.
   * **Actions**:
     + Create family diagrams (genograms) to understand family history.
     + Talk to children, families, carers, and professionals to assess needs and strengths.
     + Explain the reason for assessments and outline next steps clearly.
     + Share assessments and reports with children and families, seeking their views.
     + Regularly review and update assessments to reflect significant changes.
3. **Listening to Wishes and Feelings**
   * **Commitment**: Carefully record and consider children’s wishes and feelings in all decisions.
   * **Actions**:
     + Use creative methods to capture the voices of all children, including non-verbal ones.
     + Use children’s own words to describe their thoughts and feelings in reports.
     + Plan together with children and families, considering their input.
     + Clearly explain decisions and reasons, allowing children to ask questions.
     + Celebrate children’s successes and achievements.
     + Provide clear information on how to make complaints, challenge decisions, and give feedback.
4. **Planning and Review**
   * **Commitment**: Create and review plans that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely (SMART).
   * **Actions**:
     + Write plans with clear goals and outcomes, providing copies to children and families.
     + Recognize strengths and ask children what support they think may help.
     + Include children and families in decision-making processes.
     + Hold regular reviews to ensure positive progress and prevent delays.
     + Be open and honest about any changes to planned outcomes or timescales.
5. **Reflection, Supervision, and Management Overview**
   * **Commitment**: Reflect on practices to ensure high-quality and consistent professional care.
   * **Actions**:
     + Provide reflective supervision to develop staff practice and skills.
     + Offer personal supervision to support staff wellbeing.
     + Record and act on good practice and areas needing improvement.
     + Provide regular training and development for staff and managers.
     + Encourage partners to challenge and improve standards of support.
     + Review principles and pledges regularly to ensure quality services.
     + Take responsibility for mistakes and learn from them to improve practice.
6. **Right to Information**
   * **Commitment**: Protect children’s privacy and confidentiality, providing clear information about their rights.
   * **Actions**:
     + Seek consent to share information, except in safeguarding situations.
     + Explain information rights to children and families.
     + Support children in accessing or changing their personal information.
     + Process personal information lawfully and securely.
     + Train staff on responsibilities in handling personal information.

## 4. Restorative Practice

Torbay Children’s Services adopts a restorative practice approach to build and maintain positive relationships and resolve conflicts. This approach focuses on respectful communication, collaboration, and shared decision-making.

## 5. Commitment to Diversity

We respect and consider diversity in all our interactions, making necessary adjustments to meet the specific needs arising from ethnicity, culture, heritage, age, disability, gender, faith, and sexuality.

## 6. Safeguarding

Torbay Council is dedicated to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people. We ensure that:

* All staff are trained to recognise and respond to signs of abuse and neglect.
* Safeguarding procedures are followed rigorously, including timely reporting and response to concerns.
* Multi-agency collaboration is maintained to protect children and young people from harm.
* Children and young people are educated about their rights and how to stay safe.
* Regular audits and reviews of safeguarding practices are conducted to ensure effectiveness and compliance with legal standards.

## 7. Visiting Timescales

Visits to children and families will be conducted according to the urgency of their situation and legal requirements. Specific timescales are outlined for different scenarios, ensuring timely and effective support.

* **Early Help**: Visits every 20 working days.
* **MASH**: Decision within two working days; visit within one working day for serious concerns.
* **Single Assessment**: Completed within 45 working days.
* **Child in Need**: Visits every 20 working days.
* **Child Protection Plan**: Visits every 10 working days.
* **Cared for Child**: Initial visit within one week, then weekly for the first four weeks, and every six weeks thereafter.
* **Children with Disabilities**: Visits every 20 working days.

## Quality Assurance

Torbay Council’s Children’s Services is dedicated to maintaining high standards of service delivery through continuous quality assurance processes.

* **Commitment**: Ensure that all services provided meet the highest standards of quality and effectiveness.
* **Actions**:
  + **Regular Audits**: Conduct regular audits of child’s records, assessments, and plans to ensure compliance with policies and procedures.
  + **Feedback Mechanisms**: Implement robust feedback mechanisms to gather input from children, young people, families, and staff.
  + **Performance Monitoring**: Monitor performance indicators and outcomes to identify areas for improvement.
  + **Training and Development**: Provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for staff to enhance their skills and knowledge.
  + **Supervision and Support**: Ensure regular supervision and support for staff to maintain high standards of practice.
  + **Continuous Improvement**: Use audit and feedback data to inform continuous improvement initiatives and policy updates.

## 9. Feedback and Continuous Improvement

We value feedback from children, young people, families, and carers to continuously improve our services. If our practices do not align with this policy, we are committed to making necessary improvements.

Any concerns or complaints will be addressed promptly and transparently.

## 10. Contact Information

For further support or to provide feedback, please contact our Learning and Development department at [learning&developmenthub@torbay.gov.uk](mailto:learning&developmenthub@torbay.gov.uk).

## Version control

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| Date | Revision No | Originator of change | Change description |
| 01.10.24 | 1 | Sandra Sylvester | Created policy. |

## References

[Our Ways of Working - Torbay Council](https://www.torbay.gov.uk/children-and-families/our-ways-of-working/#:~:text=Our%20Ways%20of%20Working.%20Our%20ambition%20is%20to%20create%20a)

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