

Children's Social Care

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Children's Social Care

INTRODUCTION

The new interim leadership of Children's Social Care has now had over six months driving the new Improvement Plan following the lack of progress through 2017. This is now leading to steady improvement, although not yet delivering consistently adequate or good standards of service in all areas.

The directorate has welcomed external scrutiny, support and challenge from Stockport MBC as Improvement Partner, from the DfE Intervention Advisor, from Ofsted, and from peer consultation with other local authorities who have driven successful improvement plans. This has provided assurance both in terms of setting the right priorities and the strategies that are the focus of our improvement, and in terms of the honesty and accuracy of our self-assessment and quality assurance.

Quality audits show an improving and more consistent standard of casework. Performance indicators show that the basics are improving. Partners are making fewer referrals, risk is being managed, however more confidence is required to ensure referrals, Children In Need and Child Protection numbers also reduce. The Council has sustained its investment to ensure that there has been additional casework and improvement capacity. The whole service has co-developed and articulated "The Heart of Practice" as the Tameside way of doing things, with Signs of Safety at the core of the new practice framework. The directorate is also rolling out the development programmes for practitioners, supervisors and first line managers that will provide support to deliver the quality and standards that are expected.

At this stage the primary challenges lie in workforce issues to ensure the right staff are in place to drive delivery. In particular the long term challenges over Social Worker and first line manager recruitment and retention, and a more recent acute shortage of supply of locum Social Workers across the region.

Tameside is now at a key juncture in the improvement journey where focus can be applied to core compliance and an effective relationship based practice. Careful planning is now being realised through the implementation of a Tameside Model of Practice ("Heart of Practice") centred upon Signs of Safety as the core practice framework, which is being rolled out through a set of stepped development programmes for frontline practitioners, supervisors and senior managers. This is also being underpinned through a set of reinforcing measures including structured observations of practice by supervisors, through reinforcing the model of quality audit as a coaching and learning process carried out with practitioners, and six monthly Practice Weeks where the senior management team spend a week alongside practitioners observing and coaching.

The Quality Assurance Framework initiated in January 2018 is now well established and provides a clear line of sight to the quality of casework and where this is improving alongside where there is further work to do. Quality audits show that whilst the large majority of casework meets standards that are either Requires Improvement or Good, some casework remains Inadequate, although a relentless focus upon driving up standards does mean that this is steadily reducing. Social Workers consistently demonstrate that they know their children well, and have effective relationships both with them and with their carers. Auditing is demonstrating significant improvements in obtaining children's views, in the quality of plans, the engagement of fathers and extended family members, and responding to and reducing risk. There is a continued drive to improve the specific areas of practice that remain weak.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been hard work with the full range of key partners across the borough to improve the quality of partnership working. There was a particular focus around two major partnership conferences in April and June, where proposals for a more effective joint approach to Early Help for families delivered through a neighbourhood model were jointly developed. In addition senior leaders from Children's Social Care, Police and Health have been brought together in a Task & Finish Group to drive improvements in joint work on the child protection process.

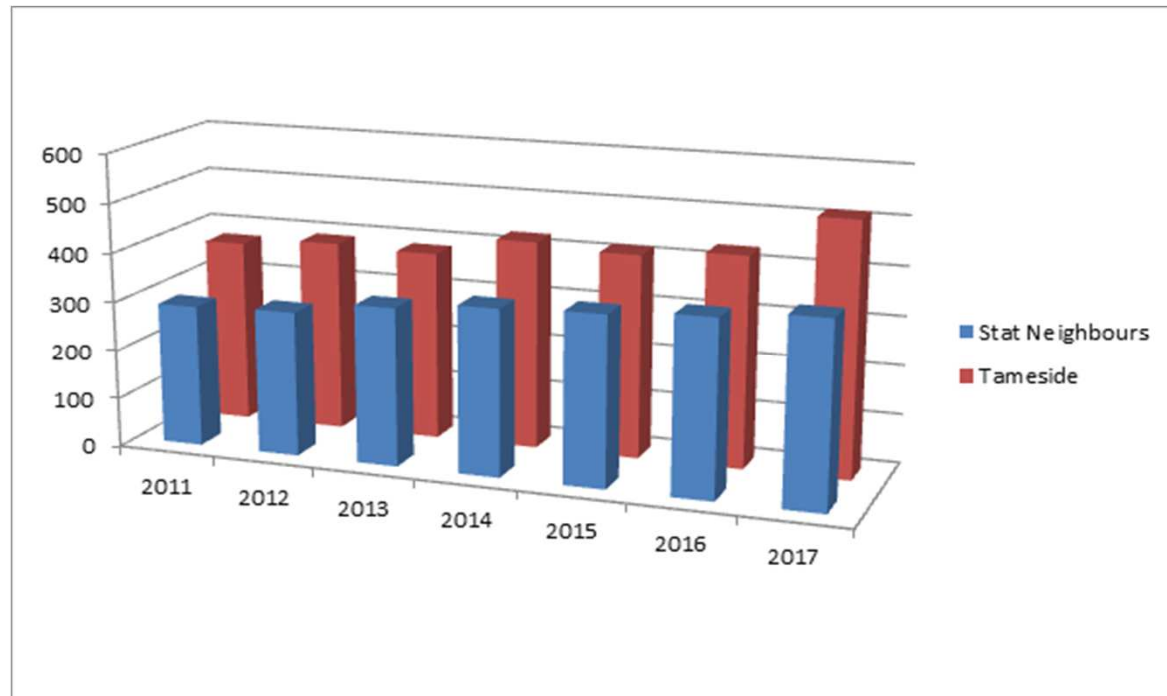
Tameside has preferred to work with one key external partner in driving improvement, and the work with Stockport MBC is continuing to deepen and is focused upon our key priorities of social worker recruitment and retention, first line manager development and learning, and our Edge of Care work.

The permanent Director of Children's Services is now in place to take Tameside's sustained improvement forwards, and further permanent recruitment has been successful for the Assistant Executive Director, Head of Service for Child Protection and Head of Service for Looked After Children who will all start in November. Building the permanent leadership team will help to deepen and embed the culture of a high performing service.

Looked After Children Population – Tameside Compared to Statistical Neighbours

Looked after children (LAC) population for the North West is the highest recorded for the last twenty years in 2017

LAC populations have been growing year on year for nearly a decade across the North West and Nationally

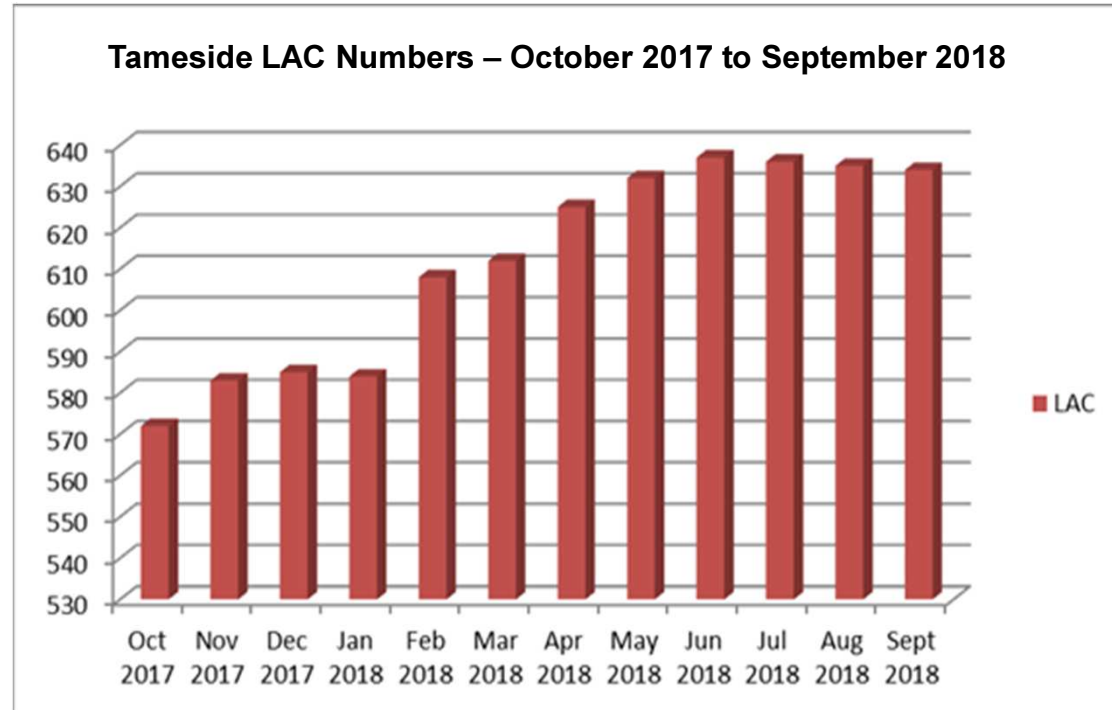


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LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

In common with the rest of the service, there was little indication of progress during 2017 in driving improvement of our services for our Looked After Children (LAC). There was a need to significantly strengthen the leadership and management of the service, and a new Head of Service role and an interim dedicated Service Manager role were created to address this in the early part of 2018.

As their scrutiny of the service came to bear, and our quality auditing programme was given a particular focus upon Looked After Children, it became clearer that there were significant weaknesses in certain areas of our Looked After Children's Service. The relentless drive to meet core standards has been followed by a turbulent period in the staffing of the LAC service.

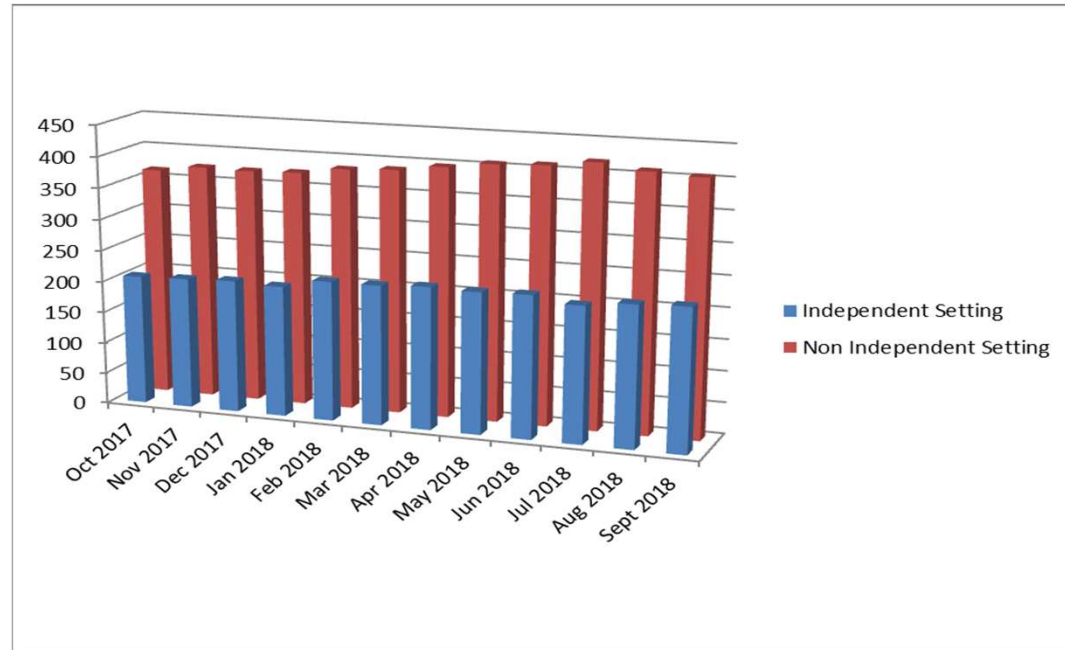


The quality auditing work of LAC casework has been complemented by a significant amount of case auditing carried out by Heads of Service and Service Managers from Stockport, and this has provided assurance as their findings have mirrored those of our own audits. The key areas that require improvement relate to: supervision and management oversight; the quality of care planning and drift/delay; the consistency of up to date assessments of need; and life story work. The areas of strength relate to Social Workers knowing their children well, consistent articulation of the voice of the child, and the improving quality of plans. Management oversight needs to be strengthened not just within the core of our casework, but also through the roles of the Independent Reviewing Officers, and in respect of particular areas of practice including those children reported missing and the oversight of permanency planning.

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LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Corporate Parenting work has been significantly strengthened, helped by new leadership of the Corporate Parenting Board and the impact of the new Participation Worker. The Children In Care Council has been revitalised, and the strength and passion of their voices have been a key driver in taking action to improve our service. Both quick wins and longer term objectives are being prioritised as a result. Elected members and corporate leaders are now taking actions to demonstrate their commitment to corporate parenting in a way that was not previously evident. There has been significant improvement in the performance of the Virtual School and Looked After Children are now receiving the Personal Education Plans that ensure their particular needs are prioritised in school to help them meet their potential. Work has also progressed in partnership with CAMHS to ensure that there Looked After Children in Tameside consistently receive a timely response when they need it.



Tameside LAC, Independent & Non Independent Settings (October 2017 to September 2018)

The context remains a very challenging one following a continuing significant increase in LAC numbers, as a consequence of greater rigour of intervention for children at risk of abuse and neglect, and of dealing with the significant legacy of previous years' poor practice. But at this point, practice has remained too risk averse and we need to strengthen the effectiveness of our interventions to manage risk and effect change in families without the need for children to come into or remain in care. Tameside has developed a specific strategy to address this and ensure that more children can be supported to remain within their families' care, including our investment in the Edge of Care Service and expanded capacity for Family Group Conferencing.

Vigilance has remained in ensuring that children are effectively safeguarded. The consistent effectiveness of practice and systems has been assured through our extensive auditing programme, and the external scrutiny from Stockport as well as Ofsted monitoring visits. Identified performance issues are now actively addressed.

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Priority One : Good standards for every child and family

Key Data Measures:

- 84% of C&F Assessments completed within 45 days
- 85% ICPCs held within 15 days
- 97% CP Reviews held within timescales
- 0.9% CP Plans over two years
- 98% of statutory CP visits and 80% of LAC visits carried out within timescales
- 72% of Looked After Children have had a dental check-up within the past 12 months
- 91% of looked After Children have had an up to date health Assessment within the past 12 months.
- 97% of Looked After Children have an up to date PEP.
- 85% LAC plans reviewed within timescales.
- 84% Care Leavers have an updated Pathway Plan.

Key Qualitative Findings:

- The quality of casework is improving – most significantly, the proportion of inadequate casework is steadily reducing. Audit findings have progressed from 80% of casework that is Requires Improvement or better now rising to 88%.
- There is a significant improvement in obtaining children's views, and recording of this activity and use of children's views in their plans are both improving.
- Significant improvement in the quality of plans.
- Significant improvement in the engagement with fathers and extended family members.
- Significant improvements in responding to and reducing risk.
- The primary qualitative concern is over supervision, in particular in the LAC Service, and this should be the main focus of improvement work in the next six months.
- Feedback from partner agencies suggests that there is now more consistency in the application of thresholds

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Priority One : Good standards for every child and family

Conclusions

- Core compliance with basic standards and processes continues to improve, however Social Work recording remains too variable, and management decision making is too often poorly recorded.
- Decision making in the Hub is more robust now that there is more of a focus upon gathering information from partner agencies.
- Our quality audit work is beginning to have an impact in driving improved practice.
- There are some early signs of the positive impact of the introduction of Signs of Safety at the heart of Tameside's practice framework.
- There are examples of good and exceptional practice, but these are currently too infrequent, and there is a need to build the percentage of good casework as well as reducing and eliminating that which is inadequate.

Next Stages :

- Our Quality Assurance Framework will continue to develop and we have begun to be able to report a more mature and triangulated picture of current strengths and weaknesses, by bringing together feedback from children and parents, what the data is telling us, and our quality assurance findings from audits and learning reviews.
- We continue to develop our model of auditing as a learning activity, led and modelled by our Practice Improvement Managers and complemented by testing some new approaches with Stockport.
- Team Managers will be expected to set their team priorities for improvement at the monthly Performance Clinics.
- Improving IRO rigour and impact through: Greater focus on the IRO footprint driving children's plans and being reflected in the child's care record.
- Increased use of formal escalation if plans have not been progressed in a timely way.
- Improved management oversight include sampling and observations

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Priority Two: Improving practice by recruiting and retaining people who will deliver

Key Data Measures:

- Tameside has invested in more Social Workers – numbers of positions have risen from 86 fte in September 2016 to 114 fte in March 2017 to 128 fte in November 2017 to 145 fte in June 2018
- Turnover remains low amongst permanent Social Workers.
- Turnover amongst locum Social Workers remains high and recruitment difficult (which is both a regional and national issue)
- Recruitment of permanent Social Work staff remains extremely difficult, resulting in the number of locum Social Workers in certain areas of service delivery being too high
- Numbers of children experiencing change of Social Worker remains too high at this point.

Key Qualitative Findings:

- Findings from exit interviews have been collated and show a fairly typical profile of those moving on for positive reasons such as promotion or relocation; those leaving because of unhappiness with their direct line manager; and a basket of a range of other issues.
- Findings from induction interviews have provided a mostly positive picture of the initial experience of working in Tameside, and in particular of the support received from their immediate line manager.
- Feedback from our ASYE's is positive about their experience in Tameside, and this reputation has begun to spread across Greater Manchester.

Conclusions:

- It is widely recognised that an Inadequate judgement makes recruitment and retention of Social Workers more difficult, and that is certainly Tameside's experience as the only Inadequate authority within Greater Manchester. These long-standing challenges have more recently been exacerbated by a severe shortage in the supply of Locum Social Workers.
- Some teams have been particularly affected by the combination of turnover and a shortage of recruit, and this has led to short-term and localised rises in caseloads.
- The work in developing our offer to Social Work recruits, and in particular our first joint recruitment campaign with Stockport, is beginning to produce results – with 13 permanent appointments from our May and June rounds..
- We are building upon our effective ASYE programme, for existing staff with a second year of practice programme.
- The Social Work workforce has grown and is steadily stabilising, but too many children and families experience changes of Social Worker

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Priority Two: Improving practice by recruiting and retaining people who will deliver

Next Stages :

- Developing the Tameside “Heart of Practice” to retain Social Workers with an emphasis upon caseloads, supervision, CPD and career pathways.
- Developing our collaborative Social work recruitment campaign in partnership with Stockport with a second joint round in September 2018.
- Supporting the development of the Greater Manchester Social Work apprenticeship route for a cohort of our non-qualified workers to become Social Workers.
- Frontline Social Work programme commences September 2018 with one unit of four students in Tameside; and we have nominated four Team Managers for the Firstline Programme.
- Application for the next national round of Step Up to Social Work.
- Tameside leading on the Greater Manchester SW “Recruitment Squad” initiative looking to build workforce stability at a GM regional level.
- Developing the Second Year in Social Work supported practice programme.
- Appointment of some newly qualified Social Workers to the role of Family intervention worker with a view to potential future SW appointment.
- Management/Leadership Programme developed in collaboration with Stockport will commence in September 2018 for 24 first line managers.
- Development of an overall “Tameside offer” to support both recruitment and retention of social work staff.

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Priority Three: Improving Practice through better Leadership and Management

Key Data Measures:

- Data is reported daily, weekly and monthly depending upon the indicator, and there is a whole service data booklet produced each month.
- Use of CHAT as an analytical tool to complement our data scorecard.
- Senior managers meet on a monthly basis to review performance and the improvement scorecard, this meeting is chaired by the AED.
- There has been an increased use of trackers to address key performance issues.
- Tameside's performance team produces deep dive analyses.

Key Qualitative Issues:

- Investment in the development of practitioners and managers is clear. A core initial training programme has been developed taking team managers and social workers through the "Foundations of Good Practice".
- Observations of and by managers and supervisors is being increased as a core part of routine learning and development.
- Feedback is being more systematically gathered and analysed to inform strategic planning and service improvement - from children, young people and families; from staff; and from partners.
- There has been a significant improvement in the response to formal complaints.
- The Improvement Partnership with Stockport is developing and deepening in its scope.
- The Improvement Plan continues to be refined and actions effectively completed. The focus of the priorities in the plan continues to narrow – in the past six months the number of actions has reduced from 53 to 24.

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Priority Three: Improving Practice through better Leadership and Management

Conclusions:

- The Improvement Plan is being effectively deployed and the strategic priorities are the right ones.
- Strategic Partnership Working is much strengthened – both for Corporate Parenting and for the wider approach to children and families through a shared neighbourhood model of working with families.
- “The Heart of Practice” articulates the Tameside model of practice and the ways in which we will support practitioners and supervisors to deliver effective strengths-based, relationship-based practice. The implementation of Signs of Safety lies at the core of this practice framework. Tameside now has a practice framework.
- Performance of first line and middle managers continues to be a focus as we raise expectations and support managers to meet them and with new appointments we continue to strengthen our permanent management team.

Next Stages :

- The Management development programme in partnership with Stockport has been designed and will commence in September, with places for 24 Team Managers and Practice Managers
- Planning the transition from a predominantly interim leadership team to the new permanent leadership team, with a particular focus upon avoiding any slowing of the momentum of improvement.
- Continuing to refine the Improvement Plan to ensure it is focused upon delivering effective service improvement.
- Continuing to develop our Improvement Partnership with Stockport.
- Looking for more ways to ensure that Tameside acts as an effective corporate parent in particular in response to the issues identified by our Looked After Children and care leavers.
- Initiating the Children's Neighbourhood Model from September 2018 with a particular emphasis upon delivering more effective Early Help to families.

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Priority Four: Improving practice through caseloads which enable high practice standards

Key Data Measures:

- Average caseloads have continued to reduce overall: For all teams from 21.6 children in March 2017 to 18.5 in September 17.6 in December and 16.4 in April 2018 to 16.1 in June 2018 and following a subsequent rise are again at 16 as of October 2018. (N.B. The average contains a range and for some Social Workers in some service areas caseloads remain to high).
- In order to reduce caseloads and improve the quality of interventions agreement was given to increase social work capacity as detailed earlier in this report, but difficulties in recruitment to permanent positions and with the appointment of agency staff has led to vacancies and a subsequent impact on caseloads in certain areas of service delivery.
- Reduction in contacts.
- Reduction in referrals and increase in Early Help.
- Reduction in Child in Need.
- Reduction in Child Protection.
- Stabilising of LAC numbers, steady for the past four/five months after previous long term upward trend.

Key Qualitative Issues:

- Social Workers in the large majority of teams report that caseloads are now far more manageable.
- Partners are very positive about the steps we have taken to strengthen early help pathways and work towards a neighbourhood partnership model.
- Schools continue to be very positive about the introduction of the CAF Advisor roles, which will be enhanced by further capacity to deliver the neighbourhood model.
- Management grip has been strengthened to ensure that only those children who are Children In Need remain open to Social Workers, and step down processes are effective.
- Child Protection numbers have come down.

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Priority Four: Improving practice through caseloads which enable high practice standards

Conclusions:

- Overall caseload trends are downward although its continuation is dependent on our ability to recruit and retain Social Workers.
- We have worked effectively with partner agencies to achieve a significant reduction in referrals.
- We have built more effective pathways to early help so that more families are receiving an early help response.
- We are managing CIN and CP casework more robustly and so the levels of demand are reducing towards the levels of statistical neighbours
- The Strengthening Families Strategy has been developed to ensure that Tameside are only looking after the children and young people it needs to look after and this is beginning to take effect.
- Legal Gateway Panel process has been effectively revised to a new Legal and Resource Panel process.

Next Stages :

- Expanding the capacity for Early Help support through Public Health investment in youth support and Homestart.
- Increasing the access to the Early Help pathway through each of the four neighbourhoods from September 2018.
- Continuing the drive for increased management grip upon CIN and CP work to reach the levels of statistical neighbours.
- Following through upon the Successful Families Strategy to reduce the numbers of children needing to remain in care.
- Scoping the introduction of a No Wrong Door service model for our residential and edge of care provision.

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Priority Five: Improving Safeguarding Practice

Key Data Measures:

- Child Protection numbers peaked in February 2018, but have now significantly reduced .
- The % of children subject to a Protection Plan for a second time is relatively low.
- The % of children subject to a Plan for more than two years is low.
- The % of ICPC held within 15 days is in line with statistical neighbours.

Key Qualitative Findings:

- Auditing has found variability in the recording of decision making.
- Multi-agency working requires strengthening.
- The quality of Protection Plans is variable.
- Our integrated service for children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation has continued to develop and recently provided assurance to the LSCB over their work.
- A peer review of the Hub and Duty teams by colleagues from Stockport and Salford in September 2018 concluded that whilst there remained areas which required further development and improvement, no work either observed or sampled was found to be inadequate .

Conclusions:

- Initial responses in the hub are predominately sound and the quality of decision making is much improved.
- Core safeguarding practice is improving with evidence of improved adherence to policy and procedure.
- There is a clear and effective system for Step up and Step down of cases.
- At this point, there is still too much variability in the quality of plans.
- There are developments in place to ensure that missing and CSE data can be taken from our recording systems to ensure tracking is more robust.
- The Youth Offending Service continues to deliver an effective service and ensure that more early intervention is offered and the numbers of young people requiring a statutory response is continuing to reduce.

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Priority Five: Improving Safeguarding Practice

Next Stages :

- Focus upon Core Standards will be persistent and relentless to sustain the current improvements.
- This focus will be supported through:
 - Consistent auditing with Social Workers and Supervisors, including dip sampling by Service Managers.
- Deployment of Practice Improvement Manager roles to work within teams, alongside SWs and Managers to quality assure, coach and check on the follow up to case audits.
- Specific focus on Strategy Discussions and S47 enquiries:
 - Team Managers or Practice Managers to chair all Strategy Meetings.
 - Dip sampling by Service Managers
 - Business Support to minute Strategy Meetings and circulate
 - Use of a new template to reinforce practice standards
- Specific focus on Protection Plans: All Outline Child Protection Plans are now sent for review to the Conference and Review Manager with lead for Child Protection.
- Restructure of the IRO service to develop specialist Child Protection Chair roles.
- Implementation of the Signs of Safety conference model.
- Missing and CSE Panel held fortnightly with representatives from Early Help, Children's Social Care, Education, Health and Police to ensure robust planning for children at high risk, these panels will be merged and further developed to ensure there are separate strategic and operational groups.
- Planning with Police and other partners to introduce a full Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub for Tameside.

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Priority Six: Improving practice to children looked after and care leavers

Key Data Measures:

- LAC numbers have now stabilised at around 636 for the past four/five months following a sustained period of increase, but remain well above statistical neighbours.
- 50% of care leavers are NEET– in line with statistical neighbours.
- 84% of care leavers now have Pathway Plans (April 2018) – an improvement on the level of 35% at inspection in 2016.
- Tameside's adoption performance remains strong.
- 97% of LAC have a Personal Education Plan – an improvement on the level of 72% at inspection in 2016.
- 50% of LAC have an Initial Health Assessment that is within timescales – an improvement on the level of 25% at inspection in 2016 - although still an area identified for improvement.
- 72% of LAC have an up to date Dental Check – performance here is dipping although this has been identified as primarily due to recording issues.
- 3+ moves – performance is stable.
- 87% of LAC Reviews are being held on time.
- CAMHS performance data shows that all LAC are seen within the four week timescale after assessment.

Key Qualitative Issues:

- Quality auditing shows improvement in LAC casework; from 80% of casework that is Requires Improvement or better now rising to 87%.
- The key areas that require improvement relate to: supervision and management oversight; the quality of care planning and drift/delay; the consistency of up to date assessments of need; and life story work. The areas of strength relate to Social Workers knowing their children well, consistent articulation of the voice of the child, and the improving quality of plans.
- We have a clearer understanding of our LAC and Care Leaving Population, and management oversight of each cohort of LAC is being strengthened although this work is not yet complete.
- Working with LAC, we are doing well in ascertaining their voice, wishes and feelings, where no inadequate practice evidenced in the audits.

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Priority Six: Improving practice to children looked after and care leavers

Conclusions:

- The LAC Team and our drive to improve standards has been held back in the short term by a shortage of Social Work capacity, and by turnover of the managers of the service. Such turbulence has been a consequence of the requirement for a stronger culture of effective practice and supervision. Whilst this has produced short-term challenges, in the longer term it enables us to improve management, supervision and social worker performance in order to achieve the changes of culture and practice required.
- We have made rapid strides in strengthening our Corporate Parenting to deliver a revised Strategy. And we have made rapid strides in parallel in securing children and young people's participation and sharing of their views about the service and what needs to improve.
- Healthy young Minds Tameside and Glossop revised its care pathway in April 2018. The pathway is informed by a number of psychological theories to ensure that the service supports children and young people and their networks at the various stages of their emotional development and needs.
- It is recognised that historically Tameside has underinvested in foster carers. A number of measures have been implemented to ensure that foster carers feel valued and appropriately supported. This includes increasing the management and social work capacity, re-establishing support groups, re-evaluating training and planning an annual recognition event. A full service review is currently underway.
- There had previously been insufficient evidence that IROs drive care plans for children effectively enough, but there is now increasing evidence of IROs acting as effective champions for children and their care plans.
- More children should be cared for within their family networks and more children should move into permanent care through use of Special Guardianship Orders.
- There are too many children on care orders at home.
- Too few care leavers are engaged in education, employment or training – although comparable to statistical neighbours.
- We need to develop our strategic placement commissioning so that we ensure we have the right placements to meet our children's needs

Children's Social Care

Priority Six: Improving practice to children looked after and care leavers

Next Stages :

Focus upon core standards will be persistent and relentless. The focus upon improving supervision will include:

- A new supervision template
- Managers using a tracker to ensure supervision is taking place
- Investment in supervisors' development through the Foundations Training and then Management Development Programmes.
- Introduction of observations of supervision.

Work with Social Workers will focus upon supporting them to deliver to clear expectations over the areas of practice requiring improvement. This support will be delivered through:

- Supervision that is reliable and of higher quality.
- A coaching and learning model of case auditing.
- Weekly team meetings with a focus upon improvement priorities.
- The formal training and development opportunities being rolled out.

The focus upon management oversight will include the revised IRO service with roles dedicated to LAC and driving care plan; a revised approach to the management of missing LAC; and further work to improve the tracking of discrete cohorts of LAC including in respect of permanency planning.

We will maintain the increased capacity to work with children in care, care leavers and their carers; ensuring that Social Workers capture their views and drive the work of the Corporate Parenting Board in meeting their needs.

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Priority Six: Improving practice to children looked after and care leavers

Next Stages (continued) :

The focus upon Pathway Plans is moving from compliance to quality.

- We are reviewing our in-house residential and fostering provision in order to improve their effectiveness and ability to meet our children's needs.
- We are scoping opportunities for more integrated service approaches for our LAC, both through better service integration and through placement integration, including residential and fostering provision and wrap around multi-agency support.
- We will be monitoring the effectiveness of the Regional Adoption Agency for Tameside's children
- We have recently increased capacity within the placement commissioning team to strengthen procurement & commissioning processes alongside developing more robust monitoring systems in order to ensure efficient uses of resources & driving improvement in quality and placements.
- The residential provider forum has been re-launched and has been received positively. The forum is a useful vehicle in developing positive relationships and the potential for collaboration; it strengthens opportunities for Tameside children to be looked after within their own locality.
- Internal children's home capacity is planned to increase.

Children's Social Care

FINANCIAL CONTEXT

The Council has allocated significant additional investment to the directorate budget provision over recent years to support the necessary service improvements.

A recurrent £ 4 million was approved in 2016/17, with a further recurrent sum of £ 6 million approved in 2017/18.

In addition a non-recurrent sum of £ 6 million over four financial years was approved in 2017/18 followed by a further non-recurrent investment of £ 18 million in 2018/19 over three financial years.

However despite this additional investment, the net expenditure at outturn exceeded the budget allocation for the respective year; £ 2.8 million in 2016/17 and £ 8.6 million in 2017/18.

2018/19

The projected net expenditure at outturn in the current financial year is again expected to significantly exceed the budget allocation.

The forecast at period 6 is a variation of £ 6.5 million. This is an increase of £ 3.6 million to the sum reported at period 5.

The increase in the projected variation since the previous reporting period is primarily related to placements expenditure due to the following factors :

- Period 5 was based on a “cohort” projection methodology to estimate the projected expenditure of the placements cohort at the period end. Cohort projections account for potential end dates. Projections have now been revised to reflect a more cautious “ traditional” projection which is based on each individual child’s cost for the year. This method tracks movements of placement activity, i.e. if the child changes placements the cost is recalculated for the year. The main difference is the projection doesn’t include end dates unless a placement has ended. It therefore assumes that the number of external placements and unit costs remain stable throughout the remainder of the year.
- There have been a greater number of new independent sector placements made than have ended.
- There has been an increase in the overall independent sector placement unit price.
- The age profile of the looked after population is showing an increase towards the early mid teens, the age group which is most likely to require the most expensive residential type accommodation.
- There is a higher LAC population per 10,000 in Tameside than statistical neighbourhoods and Greater Manchester. There is also a greater reliance on residential placements in Tameside when compared to statistical neighbourhoods.
- There is shortage of available non independent and independent fostering agency (IFA) placements

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FINANCIAL CONTEXT

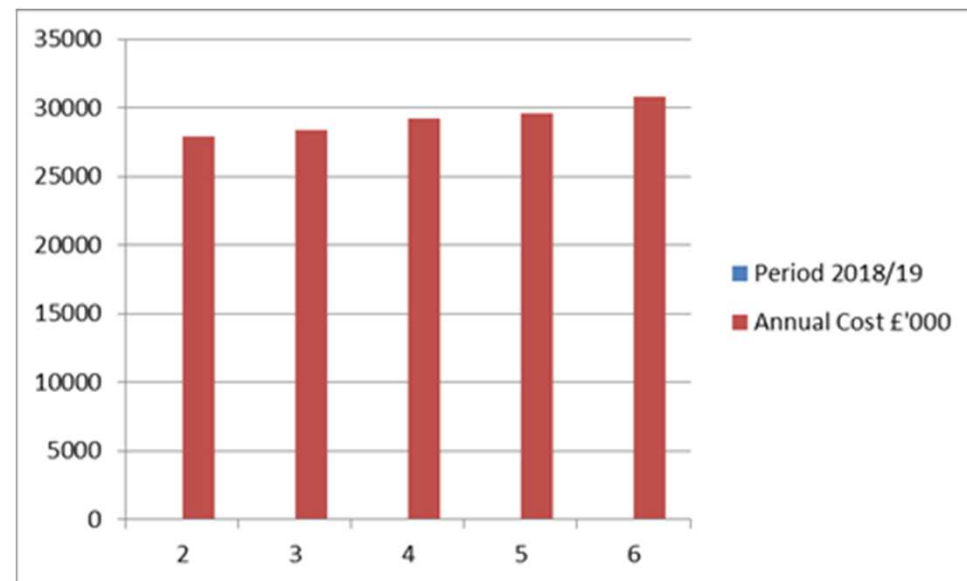
Table 1

	Period 3 £	Period 6 £	Increase %
Average weekly cost of independent sector residential	3,682	3,970	8
Average weekly cost of external foster care	764	772	1

Table 1 provides the comparison details for periods 3 and 6 of the average weekly cost for an independent sector residential placement compared to an independent sector fostering placement and the increase in average rate during these 3 months.

Chart 1

Chart 1 provides contextual details of the annual cost of all placements at each period end in the current financial year. Whilst LAC numbers have broadly stabilised in the current financial year, the annualised cost continues to increase each period.



Children's Social Care

FINANCIAL CONTEXT

Key Priorities During The Remainder of 2018/19

- Revision to the Council's Medium Term Financial Planning assumptions 2019/20 to 2023/24
- The implementation and further development of the Looked After Children reduction strategy.

This will include :

- The further development of the Gateway and Placement panel to improve decision making, consistency of practice and reduce the number of children coming into care
- A review of all Looked After Children accommodated under Section 20.
- The further development and embedding of the Edge of Care service working alongside the Looked After services including a focus on those children who with additional support may be able to either step down from residential to fostering placements or potentially return to the care of family or friends.
- Ensure that all Looked After Care plans are current and that the Independent Reviewing Officers challenge is robust and effective
- Weekly monitoring of care packages and plan of children in external residential and high cost foster care placements.
- Ensure that there is active planning in place, to ensure where appropriate there is a plan for exit and strategy implemented to ensure that children do not remain in these placements longer than necessary.
- Track/monitor and review the care plans of children who have been placed in residential care for a period of six months or more.
- Both locally and working alongside Greater Manchester colleagues seek to more effectively develop placement sufficiency across fostering, residential and supported accommodation