

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE CABINET</b>
<b>Date:</b>	23 January 2018
<b>Executive Member/Reporting Officer:</b>	Councillor Oliver Ryan – Executive Member (Children’s Services) Richard Hancock – Director of Children’s Services
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>CHILDREN’S SERVICES OFSTED UPDATE</b>
<b>Report Summary:</b>	<p>Our children’s services are subject to three monthly Monitoring Visits by the regulator Ofsted.</p> <p>These are focused visits looking at specific areas of practice which have previously included our early help and Looked After services. This report is to update Board on the outcome of the latest visit which took place on 27 and 28 November 2018 and focused on our Hub and duty services i.e. the front door / initial assessment and intervention regarding statutory child protection and child in need cases, including step down to early help - generally referred to as “those children in need of help and protection”.</p>
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<p>That Executive Cabinet note the content of this report, specifically -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the improvements to date in the delivery of services for those children in need of help and protection</li> <li>2. those areas where further improvement is still required the impact of staffing instability on the quality of practice and the speed of improvement</li> </ol>
<b>Financial Implications:</b> <b>(Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)</b>	<p>There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however, it must be noted that the Council continues to face significant financial pressures within Children’s Social Care, with the number of children in care continuing to increase. The 2017/18 outturn exceeded the net budget by £8.6m and Council has increased the 2018/19 budget by £11.6m of non recurrent reserves. However, despite this additional investment the net expenditure is expected to exceed the current year budget by £7m.</p> <p>The action plan and required improvements in quality will ensure that the right decisions are made at the right time and facilitate a reduction in expenditure to within the available resources, although Members should acknowledge that it is likely to take a significant period of time.</p>
<b>Legal Implications:</b> <b>(Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)</b>	<p>It is important that there is effective governance and oversight of service delivery in particular given the additional resources being provided to the service to ensure value for money being achieved.</p> <p>All Councillors and senior officers are corporate parents and the role brings with it significant responsibility.</p> <p>The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says that when a child or young person comes into the care of the local authority, or is under 25 and was looked-after by the authority for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the authority becomes their</p>

corporate parent. This means that they should:

- ✓ act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- ✓ encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account, while promoting high aspirations and trying to secure the best outcomes for them
- ✓ make sure they have access to services
- ✓ make sure that they are safe, with stable home lives, relationships and education or work
- ✓ prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

As corporate parents, it's our responsibility to make sure that the council is meeting these duties towards children in care and care leavers. Children can be in care in a range of different settings, with the authority acting as corporate parent to all of them. This includes foster care, children's homes, secure children's homes and kinship care. The LGIU have issued some useful guidance at <https://www.local.gov.uk/corporate-parenting-resource-pack>

That said any service delivery needs to also meet statutory requirements to be value for money. We need to be sure that we can differentiate between increased costs as a consequence of demand and that the Council achieving effective and efficient services – one way of achieving this is through benchmarking. Hand in hand with this approach we need to ensure that the whole system has effective early intervention services to prevent and manage the increasing demand for services before the interventions required are the costly care interventions required under Children Act 1989.

<b>Links to Community Strategy:</b>	Whilst the Hub operates as a central point of referral, duty teams are attached to localities
<b>Policy Implications:</b>	None
<b>Risk Management:</b>	A failure to have appropriate challenge and oversight of the improvement process creates a risk to the effectiveness and quality of safeguarding services provided to children in Tameside in need of help and protection.
<b>Access to Information :</b>	The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer Richard Hancock: Telephone: 0161 342 3354 e-mail: Richard.hancock@tameside.gov.uk

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 As Board members will be aware our children's services are subject to three monthly monitoring Visits by the regulator Ofsted.
- 1.2 These are focused visits looking at specific areas of practice which have previously included our early help and Looked After services. This report is to update Board on the outcome of the latest visit which took place on 27 and 28 November 2018 and focused on our Hub and duty services i.e. the front door / initial assessment and intervention regarding statutory child protection and child in need cases, including step down to early help.

## 2. OUTCOME OF MONITORING VISIT

- 2.1 In summary the report (which is attached in full as appendix 1) states -

*"The local authority continues to make some progress in the improvement of its services for children in need of help and protection. In most cases, identification of the children who are in need of urgent help and protection is recognised and responded to quickly through a multi-agency response. Contacts are progressed appropriately as referrals to children's social care or are re-directed to early help or universal services. Threshold decision-making about children's levels of need has improved and is now more consistent than it was during the monitoring visit on the 10 and 11 January 2018. As a result, the services received by most children are relevant to their needs. Weaknesses remain in the quality and consistency of assessments and analysis of children's needs, planning, chronologies and supervision".*

- 2.2 The inspection feedback, both verbally at the conclusion of the visit and in the formal written report reflected our own understanding of our current position in regard to these specific areas of practice as reflected in our auditing activity, peer review from September 2018 and self-assessment.

- 2.3 Ofsted recognise this in their report -

*"Inspectors found that case audits accurately reflect the quality of social work practice for individual cases. This demonstrates that audit activity continues to be effective and provides accurate evaluation of the quality of practice in the hub and duty teams".*

*"Senior leaders understand the challenges that they and their staff face and are realistic about their strengths and areas for development. This is based on a thorough and accurate self-evaluation of social work practice with children and their families. Social workers have gained more confidence in senior leaders' decisions because they can see for themselves the signs of progress and improvement".*

- 2.4 It is extremely positive that in this key area of "children in need of help and protection" our thresholds and decision making are seen to be sound and that referrals are then progressed appropriately. It is also encouraging that positive progress can be seen since Ofsted last inspected this area in January of 2018.
- 2.5 There are, as is clear from the report, a number of positives in our performance where significant progress has been made, but also a number of areas requiring further improvement, which had largely already been identified through our own quality assurance processes and regarding which improvement activity is already in place.
- 2.6 The biggest single risk to the effectiveness, consistency and speed of our improvement though, as recognised by our own self-assessment and clearly reflected, both in the Ofsted judgement and the feedback of our DfE colleagues, is our ongoing difficulties in the recruitment and stability of our Social Work workforce

*“Staff recruitment and retention of frontline workers and service unit managers continues to be a significant challenge for the local authority. Senior leaders recognise that workforce instability brings with it a number of vulnerabilities, including inconsistency in the quality of practice. The local authority is actively engaged in a number of relevant initiatives to support social work recruitment and staff development, but at this early stage there has been limited impact”. Ofsted November 2018*

*“The single biggest risk to the Tameside improvement journey (and various action plans) remains the inability of the LA to recruit and retain a stable cohort of good social workers. Despite a range of both traditional and innovative approaches to recruitment at practitioner and team leader levels, the authority is managing to do little more than hold its position on SW numbers” - DfE Improvement Advisors report December 2018*

- 2.7 To date and despite a range of initiatives we have been unable to make any significant inroads into the recruitment of a stable workforce, but it is both positive and helpful going forward that we now have a predominately permanent children’s leadership team and an improved position with regard to first line management, which we anticipate will be further bolstered by current recruitment activity. This area remains a priority and a focus of work both within children’s services and alongside corporate colleagues.
- 2.8 It has been confirmed that November’s monitoring visit will be the last and that our next inspection, anticipated at any point from February 2019 will be a full re-inspection under the new Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) framework.
- 2.9 This will encompass the whole range of our services in one inspection program, as opposed to the service specific focus of the monitoring visit regime, and will conclude in a formal judgement of the Local Authorities performance against the standard Ofsted categories of - inadequate, requires improvement, good, outstanding.
- 2.10 Work is now underway in partnership with a range of corporate colleagues and across children’s social care specifically to prepare for this inspection, but most importantly to further improve the quality and the consistency of this quality, across all the service we provide to our most vulnerable children.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 As set out on the front of the report.