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### CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

Day: Wednesday

Date: 2 November 2022

Time: 6.00 pm

Place: Committee Room 1 - Tameside One

Item No.	AGENDA	Page No
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	
	To receive any declarations of interest from members of the Scrutiny Panel.	
3.	MINUTES	1 - 4
	To approve as a correct record, the Minutes of the proceedings of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 21 September 2022.	
4.	CHILDREN'S PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY	5 - 26
	The Panel to meet Tony Decrop, Assistant Director; Susan Harris, Head of Service; and Adrian Rocks, Head of Commissioning, to receive an update on placement strategy and capacity across in-house and external provision, including fostering recruitment.	
5.	RESPONSE TO MID-YEAR BUDGET UPDATE	27 - 28

To receive for information, a letter to Councillor Jacqueline North, First Deputy, Finance, Resources and Transformation, in response to the mid-year budget update.

### 6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

To receive for information, a letter to Councillor Jacqueline North, First Deputy, Finance, Resources and Transformation, in response to the mid-year budget update.

### 7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 11 January 2023.

### 8. URGENT ITEMS

To consider any additional items the Chair is of the opinion shall be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

From: Democratic Services Unit – any further information may be obtained from the reporting officer or from Paul Radcliffe, Policy and Strategy Lead, to whom any apologies for absence should be notified.



### Children's Services Scrutiny Panel 21 September 2022

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 8.00pm

Present: Councillors T Sharif (Chair), Welsh (Deputy), Martin, Reid, Robinson, T Smith

**Apologies:** Councillor Owen

### 8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted by members of the Scrutiny Panel.

### 9. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 27 July 2022 were approved as a correct record.

### 10. RESPONSE TO LGSCO FOCUS REPORT

The Panel welcomed Councillor Leanne Feeley, Executive Member (Education & Achievement); Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Children's Services; and Tim Bowman, Director of Education, to receive a response to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Focus Report – Out of school, out of sight? Ensuring children out of school get a good education, published July 2022.

Members received a response of the Executive to nine questions detailed on page 11 of the ombudsman report that aims to encourage local accountability. Meeting papers also included a report of the service with a summary of learning for Tameside, future guidance and a current appraisal of the Education Service in respect to provision and support for children out of education.

The focus report includes case studies to highlight the breadth of investigation and identifies common issues and learning points across the following areas:

- Taking responsibility for ensuring pupils receive suitable full-time education
- Making decisions based on the evidence available
- Providing suitable full-time education
- Reviewing plans and amending the approach
- · Restricting alternative provision: the meaning of 'otherwise'

Terminology such as 'otherwise', presents a broad category that covers circumstances other than illness or exclusion in which it is not reasonably possible for a child to take advantage of any existing suitable schooling. It remains important for a local authority to consider the individual circumstance of every child and to demonstrate this within the decision making process.

Mr Bowman advised members that Tameside's Education Service has developed robust processes to support children who are not in school on a full-time basis. Members reviewed case studies from the service that highlight some of the person-centred work with young people.

The service report included a self-evaluation of areas the Education Service do well and areas for further development, with reference to future guidance as part of the Schools Bill 2022. Sections detailed within the bill aim to assist the Council in meeting the needs of children not in school, with new school attendance guidance and improving methods to identify and support children not attending school regularly.

Formal adoption of the changes in legislation are planned to take effect from 1 September 2023, with the current issue received as non-statutory guidance for schools and local authorities, in preparation for the policy change and statutory elements for the 2023/24 academic year. Several aspects of provision will help the council improve services and potential outcomes for children not in school. These include:

- Local authorities to maintain registers of Children Not in School.
- Parental information shared with the local authority to support the registers, with the introduction of enforceable outcomes for non-compliance.
- Information sharing with providers of out-of-school education.
- Local authorities to provide support to registered home-educating families where requested.
- Local authorities to share information from their registers

The Executive thanked the Scrutiny Panel for highlighting the ombudsman report and that this has provided a timely opportunity for the service to reflect on shared learning and guidance. In summary, the Education Service has appropriate provision in place for many children who are unable to attend a school setting for a number of reasons. There is still some work to do in ensuring the identification of all children not in school and tailoring support to meet individual need. Next steps are to work up a new model to reflect changes detailed with the schools bill

Councillor Feeley and officers responded to a number of questions from the Panel on:

- The complexity of individual cases and potential impacts of the pandemic that may have resulted in a number of children not returning to school.
- The ability of the Council and systems to identify and monitor children out of school and potential gaps. Opportunities to update local policy and the introduction of a register to monitor children absent from education.
- Mental health challenges and support for young people in Tameside and how best to factor this within a comprehensive support model for children absent from school.
- Opportunities to have clearer oversight, understanding and access to children being home educated.
- Cared for children and work of the Virtual School.

Cllr Fairfoull, Ms Stathers-Tracey and Mr Decrop thanked for attending the meeting.

### 11. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK (SEF)

The Panel welcomed Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Children's Services; Tony Decrop, Assistant Director; and Paula Sumner, Assistant Director, to receive a verbal update on the Children's Social Care SEF.

Members heard that the self-evaluation document records information and analysis in respect to the ongoing improvement of children's social care. This is a live document updated to reflect and share our position with Ofsted across the breadth of social care including areas such as early help, the front door, help and protection, children in care and care leavers

The document ensures that improvement priorities align to Ofsted's inspection framework and that content reflects outcomes from Ofsted focused visits and the annual conversation. The SEF identifies and records the assessment of service managers on specific areas where progress is identified, achieved and remains a priority.

It is extremely important that all services are able to reflect and undertake an honest and transparent appraisal of improvements delivered, the difference made, challenges that remain and work still needed.

Officers responded to a number of questions from the Panel on:

- Areas for development and priority actions
- The general demand on services, future projections and thresholds for referrals
- Quality assurance, social worker caseloads and addressing workforce pressures
- The effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements and the timeliness of strategy meetings

Officers thanked for attending the meeting.

### 12. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SCORECARD

The Panel received performance data and commentary from the children's social care scorecard.

The Chair requested that the visual presentation of performance data to the Scrutiny Panel is adapted for future meetings. The depth and detail within the scorecard is welcomed, however members would prefer a more tailored and bespoke version to improve the visual scale and to aid with overall interpretation, understanding and context.

### 13. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair updated members on the following matters.

- Completed actions from the panel meeting held on 27 July 2022.
  - 12 September scene setting and children's safeguarding training. The Chair briefly advised members on children's social care demand and workforce pressures highlighted at the session.
  - 14 September visit to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Evidence to greater
    physical presence of required partners to deliver an effective multi-agency single point of
    access point. This has helped to address Ofsted recommendations regarding drift and
    delay, with improved decision-making and timeliness of strategy meetings.
  - Contact made with the Chair of Manchester's Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel regarding scrutiny benchmarking and visit.
- Chair invited members to express an interest in joining the working groups. It was agreed that the Chair and Deputy Chair to join all active working groups.
  - Benchmarking with a visit to Manchester Councillors Reid and Robinson.
  - Workforce strategy (recruitment and retention of social workers) Councillors J Homer, Martin, Owen, Patel, Ryan, T Smith.
- All Scrutiny members were invited to attend a training session on 5 September, delivered by lan Parry from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.
- All Scrutiny members have received an invitation to attend a Mid-Year Budget session on 3
  October. Two sessions are available 3.30pm and 5.45 pm.
- The next meeting of Overview Panel is on 26 September at which recent Scrutiny activity will be reported.

### 14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 2 November 2022.

### 15. URGENT ITEMS

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items for consideration at this meeting.

**CHAIR** 





# **Childrens Placement** Sufficiency



## The "Sufficiency Duty"

- We have a legal duty under the 1989 Children's Act, to ensure we are taking reasonable steps to secure sufficient provision for our children in care.
  - Our Sufficiency Strategy, Excellent Homes and Families sets out the strategic vision we have for our children in care when we accommodate them
- Sufficient doesn't mean 'heads on beds' it must mean good quality local services which make a difference for our children.

## **Excellent Homes and Families**

- Our sufficiency strategy. Has our visions for our cared for children:
  - They have access to good quality homes, families and services close to their home communities;
  - The children we care for have the opportunity to live with families;
  - Where children do need to live in children's homes this will act as an intervention to support them to successfully live with families and independently in the future;
  - The homes and families where our cared for children live will be caring and will nurture and protect them;
  - The people who care for our children will help address and deal with the trauma they have experienced;
  - Our children are prepared for adult life by the families and homes that care for them;

## How we provide care

### Internal services

• 5 Childrens Homes, Fostering, Transition Support for Care Leavers, House Project

### **External Services**

 Fostering / Residential / Leaving Care purchased through regional arrangements from private companies and charities

- Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has recently undertaken a market study into children's social care placements in the UK.
  - The market is not providing sufficient placements that fully meet children's needs when and where they require them resulting in negative outcomes.
  - Some prices and profits are above levels expected in a wellfunctioning market
- Quarter of all children's homes in England are in the North West
- There are not enough foster carers

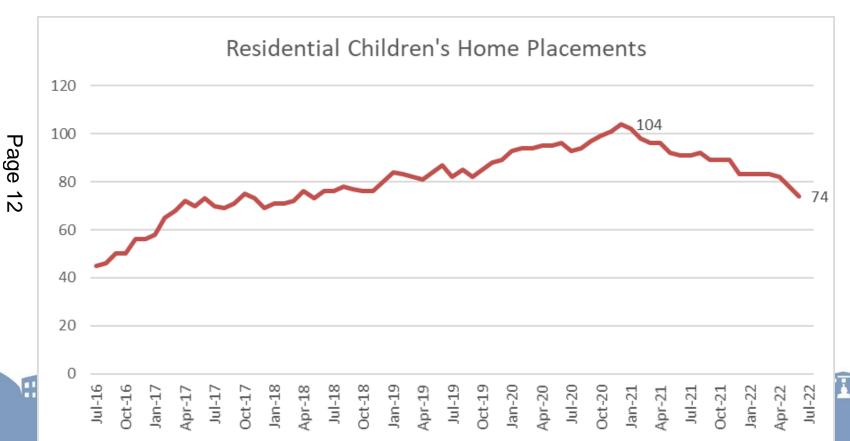
## Placement Commissioning in Tameside

- Children's commissioning a new service area in 2020 Page 10
  - Subject to further fixed term investment post Ofsted in 2021 recognising very high work load
  - Increased strategic and operational capacity has improved decision making and accountability

## Children's Homes 1/3

- Tameside has historically placed to many children in children's home
- Considerable growth since 2016 resulting in numbers more akin to a city such as Leeds or Sunderland
  - Too many children placed too few moved on to family environments or independence
  - New sufficiency strategy to support a change ofculture and practice

## Children's Homes 2/3



## Children's Homes 3/3

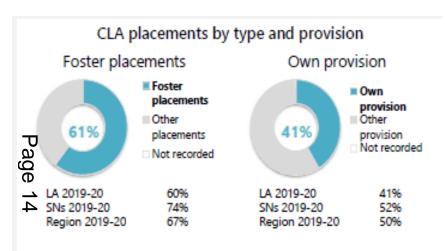
- Key driver monthly review of residential placements to increase grip
- Operational capacity to challenge providers and find more effectively

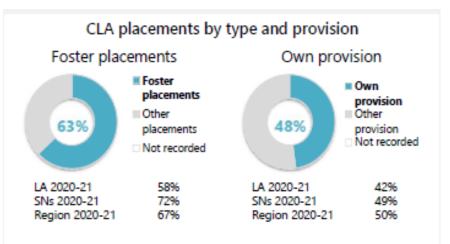
• Page 13•

- North West benchmarking shows Tameside in line with regional average for Ofsted registered children's home costs for first time (data back to 2018)
- Marked improvement in the number of children living in residential more than 20 miles from Tameside. There are now 16 children living far away compared to 29 last summer.



## Fostering





June 2021 June 2022



## Fostering Agency Usage

- Reduced use of private agencies
- Increased proportion of our children living with families
- Number with our own provision now almost in line with statistical neighbours

## **Leaving Care Options**

- A key challenge has been a legacy of young adults funded through Children's Services. This has been mitigated in the current financial year through investment in expansion of the 'Threshold Service' which is supporting more young adults to live with appropriate support.
- Remains a budget line of £2.3 million in children's to fund placements for over 18s.
- Investment in the House Project, the established Transition Support Service and ensuring young people and appropriate access to the local Semi-Independent market means our young people are being helped to prepare properly for adult life, and removing the cliff edge of turning 18 in a children's home.
- £1.4 million DfE Grant for Staying Close to support care leavers who have lived in children's homes after the age of 18

## Financial Impact

- Financial Position Remains Challenging
- P2 (May 2022); Forecast £30,043,506
- P6 (September 2022): Forecast £28,324,853

  Budget: £26.725.780
  - Budget: £26,725,780
  - Out turn in 2021/22 financial year: £31,262,650.

## Ongoing pressures/risk

- Currently very low Health contributions to complex placement costs compared to other GM LAs
- Over 18s appearing as a budget line of £2.3 million in Childrens Services. Page 18
  - Unplanned placement breakdowns bring significant price escalation risks
  - Bespoke placements cost significantly more than regulated. If these
  - placements were at an average cost there budget would nearly balance
  - Implementing fostering recruitment strategy
  - Increased UASC numbers
  - National shortage of placements and national pressure on unit cost

## **Current Challenges**

- Mental health of teenagers
- Delayed hospital discharge
- Services to support our children who need the most care
- care
  Restrictions of liberty
  - Care v Support and balancing the need for independence
- Ofsted regulation

## Forward plans of activity

- The relaunch of Stockport Road our internal children's home which will bring three children back into our services in the borough. Currently we have been able to bring once child back home to Tameside from a private provider outside of the borough.
- Staying Close Grant income: £1.3 million to support young people who have lived in children's homes Page 20
  - Replacing Boyd's Walk children's home
  - Continued to focus transformation activity on accommodation and support for young people leaving care
  - Review partner contributions to complex cases
  - Working with PCFT on delivering the GM funded Ealing / Parachute models to access greater crisis support models for a children in crisis who need the greatest levels of support
  - Fostering Recruitment Strategy to grow our internal services
  - Sector Led Improvement Programme support (SLIP) from Salford to review and reposition the existing internal residential offer.

# TAMESIDE COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE

# SUFFICIENCY REPORT

NOVEMBER 2022









### **Sufficiency Report for the Fostering Service.**

The intention of this report is to update members on the progress of the fostering Service since becoming Service Unit Manager in April 2022.

Since this time there has been significant changes within the service in regard to both staffing and the implementation of the Foster Care Offer.

### Staffing:

In March it was agreed that the SGO/DCO team would move over to the Cared for Childrens Service under the Service Unit Manager, Joanne Brown.

The four Family Intervention Workers also moved from the Fostering Service to sit within Early Help.

These were significant losses to the team and the team experienced a short period of instability. This was further compounded by the Service Unit Manager, Glen Perryman and Panel Advisor, Michelle Leacock leaving the service and moving to another Local Authority.

In July we also lost a Practice Manager, Katy Ellaway to the same Local Authority.

In August two Supervising Social Workers left one for a three month secondment to the Fostering IRO team and one took early retirement.

Although the team knew me and my ethos as Team Manager it was important for me as the new Service Manager to reassure them and the foster carers and offer stability.

I did this by involving the service in the changes – the vacant posts were offered to the fostering team initially to progress their careers but also to reassure them that I was confident they had the skills and ability to promote the service.

The new Team Manager, Deborah Smolka-O'Brien was previously a Practice Manager. The two Practice Managers appointed were from the social work teams, one was previously an agency worker on the team. The Panel Advisor/ Practice Manager post was accepted by a social worker on the Connected Persons Team. They are all new managers and are being supported by Deborah and will be commencing the Strive Programme on the next cohort.

There are currently three full time agency workers and one job share. Since my appointment we have converted three agency workers to permanent and hope the remaining agency workers also stay as they are valued members of the team.

The Marketing and Recruitment Officer had 2 Kickstart workers join her team in January 2022 for 6 months. The 2 workers became valued members of the team and worked hard to support the implementation of the Foster Care Offer and the Staying Put policy. Unfortunately they had to leave us in September following their 6 month placement. This has meant that Gabrielle Sulak, the Marketing officer has had to pick up the projects they started as well as continuing her own work.

Since the appointment of the new Panel Advisor the panels now operate a hybrid model with the panel members remaining virtual and the social workers and applicants coming into the office. This model is working well, the applicants are reassured prior to joining the meeting by their social worker, they feel part of the meeting and feel they have more opportunity to give their views.

Applicants, social workers and panel members feel this model is proving beneficial and improving the smooth running of panel.

There remains difficulties in applicants getting GP appointments for medicals in a timely manner and this can mean that their panel date has to be moved ultimately delaying final court hearings in some cases.

The Panel Advisor has met with the Medical Advisor and GP representative and they have devised a clear model to work to including an escalation policy. It is proposed to send this to all GP practices for consultation and an implementation date. This will be reviewed in 3 months to see if this supports a more efficient running of panel.

The panel chair remains accessible for consultations and contributes to the Quality Assurance meetings. Some positive feedback has been received especially in regard to the fostering social workers knowing their carers and contributing with confidence in panel.

The Panel Advisor has set up regular consultation 'clinics' to support fostering social workers to be prepared for panel and discuss any concerns they may have. There has been little take up of this so this will now be widened to include Childrens Social Workers, ISCAN and Leaving Care.

A Managers Development Day took place in August to devise a clear business plan using the Signs of Safety Model. We looked at each area of the service; Connected Team, Mainstream Team, Business Link and Marketing and Recruitment. Clear timescales for change and measure were also identified.

The Practice Managers also wrote Mission Statements so there was clarity for anyone coming into the service of the team's ethos and a reminder for the teams/ workers when appropriate.

A whole Service Development Day took place early September introducing the business plan but setting work streams to ensure the whole service 'bought into' the plan and were clear of the manager's aims.

This day went really well and positive feedback was received from the social workers stating that they felt involved in the service and that their views were listened to and taken into account.

#### Foster carers.

Between July 2022 to the end of September 2022 there were a total of 58 enquiries as per the table below. This averages just under 20 per month. The same period last year there were 118 enquiries due to the response from the USAC campaign. Due to a number of reasons many of these could not be taken forward.

However, the current data shows that conversion through to assessment has improved with eight ongoing assessments at the end of September 2022 compared to 4 ongoing in 2021. The biggest challenge the fostering team are faced with is converting the enquiries into assessments. Some of the reasons for applicants dropping out either before or during assessment include:

- Applicant felt they could no longer apply to foster due to personal circumstances.
- Applicant became uncontactable despite several contact attempts.
- Applicant was undergoing significant life changes and not the right time e.g. new baby, house move, job move.
- Applicants advised/felt they should to wait due to age of their own child(ren).
- Applicant concerned about finances.

Table 1	July 2022	August 2022	September 2022
Number of initial enquiries received within each month Number of Initial Visits	14	27	17
	2	4	0
Total number of applications received in month	1	1	1
Number of fostering households actively engaged in a Fostering Assessment on the last day of each reporting month	8	7	8
Total number of households approved by Agency Decision Maker within each month	0	1	0
Total households that have left the fostering service within each month	0	0	2

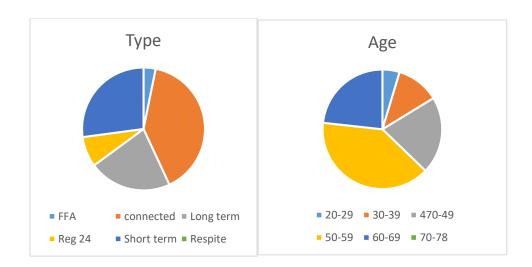
The Marketing and Recruitment Officer continues to work on the 3 year marketing strategy 2021. This sets out to increase the number of children living with internal foster families by 34% which equates to a net growth of approximately 70-80 foster carers over the next three years. The key areas are outlined in Tameside's Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2025.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Sufficiency Strategy has identified "Grow Foster Care" as one of its two Commissioning Themes. As part of this a growth strategy has been developed for GM LAs including collaborative recruitment activity which builds on previous projects

Skills to Foster continues to run bi monthly, we use the virtual platform as this appears to be the preference for applicants and finding venues for the evening groups has not been easy since the relaxation of covid. A recent skills to foster group of 3 households resulted in 3 applications which is positive.

There have been two resignations in the past 3 months due to carers retiring. These carers had been fostering for many years and decided now is the right time for them to cease fostering.

As you can see from the pie chart below there are a large cohort of carers in the 50-59 age category. It is hoped that future campaigns will attract a younger cohort to meet the demanding needs of our most complex children.



There is an increase in Connected Carers who are friends and family carers and are able to provide a safe and caring home for our cared for children. 59% more children are living with connected carers in 2020/2021 compared to 2015/2016. Supporting more connected carers will increase children's opportunities to live within their families in line with Tameside's vision.

The enablers of the strategy for increased internal growth include;

- Working with our GM partners on the GM Fostering Growth Strategy
- Improved Foster Care Offer
- Ambitious Marketing & Recruitment Strategy
- Working with partners in housing, education, health, police and others to support our fostering services.



## Agenda Item 5

**Chair of Overview Panel** 

**Chairs of Scrutiny Panels** 

Councillor Jacqueline North First Deputy Finance, Resources & Transformation

Caroline Barlow
Assistant Director of Finance

Tameside One Market Place Ashton-under-Lyne OL6 6BH

email: paul.radcliffe@tameside.gov.uk

Ask for Paul Radcliffe
Direct Line 0161 342 2199
Date 19 October 2022

Dear Councillor North,

### Scrutiny mid-year budget update 2022/23

We write in response to the mid-year budget update presented on 3 October 2022. The sessions enable members to seek assurance on the Council's approach to managing and mitigating budget pressures, known risks and future uncertainty. The demand on statutory services and the sustainability of budgets beyond the short-term remains a concern for members, along with growing social and economic pressures associated with the rise in living costs and a need to support individuals and families in Tameside.

The Council has demonstrated an unwavering commitment and drive to meet all financial challenges to date. We now find ourselves in a position where further savings are required at a time when the demand on statutory services is at its greatest. It is also important to reflect on the strength and resilience of our workforce and communities during such challenging times that now extend to the aftermath and recovery of a global pandemic.

Members shared concerns on the challenges and uncertainty associated with a repeated one-year funding settlement. This can inhibit the Council's ability to set a more robust medium term financial plan and it is accepted that a greater level of confidence can be achieved should longer funding arrangements be granted by the government to local authorities beyond the next financial year.

Scrutiny forms part of the Council's governance and decision-making process, underpinned by principles that aim to provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge, to amplify the voice and concerns of residents, and to drive improvement in public services. This letter provides an account of discussions captured from the meetings and subsequent feedback received. It is hoped that the collective points can assist with planning for 2023 and beyond.

In response to a previous request of scrutiny members, the update included a section on how the budget aligns with priorities set within the Corporate Plan. Members would have liked to hear more on the savings identification process, but please be assured that the content as a whole was detailed and well received.

Revenue monitoring information highlighted a significant in-year overspend across directorates. This is of concern and likely to have a cumulative impact on the budget, with areas showing a sizeable variance against the opening budget and savings position. This appears to place the authority in a precarious position with limited options to balance the budget for 2022/23. The Place directorate was most noticeable on the non-delivery of savings and income shortfall. It is felt that the strategic direction for growth and investment has an important role to play going forward.

A question that remains for Scrutiny is clarity on the existing financial planning model and processes by which directorates identify achievable savings. Further points include learning from previous years with regard to overly ambitious savings targets and members are keen to ensure future decisions are robustly costed and achievable, without jeopardising service quality or requiring late or unplanned financial adjustments.

With limited options available to the Council to increase income and revenue beyond a rise in Council Tax, the required budget savings are somewhat intensified. Members queried the assumption of a 97% collection rate for Council Tax, with reference to past learning from the pandemic and a pressing need to review the impact of significant rises to household budgets. This also included the assumptions for business rate income and collection given the current economic climate and the historic challenges to achieve growth in an area that has predominantly struggled in previous years.

The Council continues to face high levels of demand across statutory services with concerns on the ability to sustain budget increases in future years. This also includes the practicality and rationale of savings targets applied to such areas. Improving outcomes for children and vulnerable residents remains a pressure, which includes outcomes from past Ofsted inspections of Children's Social Care and SEND. It would be naïve of the Council not to acknowledge that growing economic and financial turmoil within society, most notably on household budgets, employment and housing, may result in added demand on statutory services.

A number of questions touched upon budget monitoring arrangements and existing methods to report and flag known risks and shortfalls in savings as they arise. It was reported that approximately half of savings targets have a projected shortfall, with limited information provided on what can being done to claw this back. Further points include:

- The realistic pace that savings can be made and understanding the opportunity cost of such decisions.
- The savings most at risk of not being met.
- The previous use and reliance of one-off monies, grants and reserves that are no longer accessible.
- Future viability and appraisal of non-statutory and discretionary services beyond 2023/24.
- Asset management strategy, streamlining process for energy savings and costs associated with staff returning to office work.
- Future opportunities to intensify corporate and elected member oversight to monitor agreed savings.

We are pleased to say that the Council's leadership and Executive remain fully engaged with all aspects of Scrutiny activity.

Yours sincerely,

**Councillor Jack Naylor – Chair of Overview Panel** 

Councillor Yvonne Cartey – Chair of Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Naila Sharif - Chair of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Tafheen Sharif - Chair of Children's Services Scrutiny Panel