

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

Day: Wednesday
Date: 7 June 2023
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 To approve as a correct record, the Minutes of the proceedings of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 8 March 2023.	1 - 4
4.	CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT The Panel to meet Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); and Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Children's Services, to receive a summary of improvement actions and responses during the past 12 months.	5 - 26
5.	REVIEW AND MONITORING OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2021 TO 2023 The Chair to present a summary report of Scrutiny oversight, monitoring and review of Children Services for the period 2021 to 2023.	27 - 44
6.	ROLE OF SCRUTINY The Panel to receive a recap on the role of Scrutiny within the wider framework of the Council.	45 - 56
7.	ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME The Panel to discuss potential work priorities for 2023/24.	
8.	DATE OF NEXT MEETING To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 26 July 2023.	
9.	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.

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Children's Services Scrutiny Panel 8 March 2023

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 7.30pm

Present: Councillors T Sharif (Chair), Welsh, J Homer, Martin, Patel, Robinson, T Smith

Apologies: Councillors Owen, Reid

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

33. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 11 January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

34. SEND UPDATE

The Panel welcomed Councillor Leanne Feeley, Executive Member (Education, Achievement and Equalities); Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Children's Services; and Jane Sowerby, Assistant Director of Education, to receive an update on improvements to SEND services.

Councillor Feeley introduced the presentation and provided members with a recap on past Scrutiny activity related to the Local Area Inspection and a requirement of the authority to produce a written statement of action (WSOA) against 10 priority areas. This can be a complex area of work and significant improvements have already been made to improve services and outcomes. It was reported that:

- The WSoA was signed off by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission on 1 July 2022.
- Progress against the plan is monitored monthly by the SEND Improvement Group and is reported at Education Attainment Improvement Board on a quarterly basis.
- External monitoring by the Department for Education (DfE) takes place on an informal basis monthly and formal meetings held quarterly.
- A full-time designated project manager is now in post to directly support improvement projects.

Members reviewed each of the 10 priorities detailed with the WSoA and received a summary of progress highlights to date. It was reported that a new Ofsted inspection framework was published in September 2022, with the future re-inspection of Tameside SEND services to be completed using the new framework.

A summary of progress and improvement highlights provided members with additional detail of aspects such as a renewed local offer being available for children, families and professionals; parent/carer consultations; EHCP quality assurance framework; SEND scorecard and the importance of co-production and engagement of partners.

Information was provided on priority task and finish groups and supported by performance analysis, with comparable data showing improvement status against each of the 10 priorities from November 2022 to February 2023, with a new approach to progress rating. The breakdown showed:

- 3% actions in red
- 47% actions in amber
- 18% actions in green
- 32% actions in blue

It was reported that changes to the structure and performance of the SEND team has produced positive outcomes in relation to the timeliness of assessment and EHCPs. Stakeholder surveys will allow for greater awareness and understanding to monitoring progress, with a future focus to be placed on annual reviews. Added detail provided on improved methods of co-production and engagement with partners, with a new strategic structure for SEND Partnership Board having been shared and agreed.

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

- Improvements to quality and timeliness of assessments and timescales for review and monitoring for each child.
- Access, waiting times associated with educational psychology and budgetary pressures.
- Improving awareness of the local SEND offer within communities and across the borough.
- Approach and strategy for promoting inclusion.
- Preparations for the new inspection framework.
- Establishing a broader offer for SEND that includes Early Help and family hubs.

Councillor Feeley and officers thanked for attending the meeting.

35. TAMESIDE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

The Panel welcomed Dr Henri Giller Independent Chair of Tameside Safeguarding Children Partnership; and Tony DeCrop, Assistant Director, to receive the partnerships annual report for 2021-22.

36. CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE SCORECARD

The Panel received an update on progress against indicators set within performance scorecards measuring Early Help and Children's Social Care outcomes.

37. SCRUTINY BUDGET LETTER

The Panel received for information, a letter of the Scrutiny Chairs to Councillor Jacqueline North, First Deputy (Finance, Resources & Transformation), in response to annual budget update sessions held on 16 January 2023. The Chair advised members that the joint meeting of Executive Cabinet and Overview Panel received the letter on 8 February 2023.

38. SCRUTINY ACTIVITY 2022/23

The Chair advised that a report presented at the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 8 February 2023 included a summary of the Scrutiny Panel's activity during the year.

39. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair advised members of Scrutiny reports tabled at the joint meeting of Executive Cabinet and Overview Panel on 8 February 2023. Items specific to the panel include:

- Children's Workforce Strategy – Social Worker Recruitment and Retention

- Scrutiny update
- Summary of activity for 2022/23

The Chair thanked members for their participation and contribution throughout the municipal year.

40. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that this is the last formal meeting of the Scrutiny Panel for the 2022/23 municipal year.

41. URGENT ITEMS

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

CHAIR

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Children's Services Improvement – 12 month refresh

Introduction

On 5 July 2022, following a Focussed Visit to the Integrated Front Door of Children's Services by Ofsted, Tameside Council and our Partners were issued with a Notice to Improve Services for Children by the DFE. This Notice to Improve requires the Council and Partners to comply with a series of actions as identified by the Children Act 2004 (Section 11). This report describes the action to be delivered by the Council and Partners in the context of the Improvement Notice and progress made in the 12 months since the inspection.

This report lists the specific requirements set out in the DFE Improvement Notice and the Tameside response to date on the requirement to improve set out by Ofsted and DFE.

Adviser arrangements

The Secretary of State has chosen to appoint an adviser to provide advice to the Department for Education (the Department) and the council. The council will work with the adviser until some such time that the Secretary of State is satisfied this is no longer required.

Frances Craven was appointed as the DFE Improvement Advisor for Tameside in September 2022. The Improvement Advisor has undertaken multiple site and staff visits to Tameside Children's Services on a monthly basis.

Frances has brought challenge and advice to the corporate leaders of Tameside MBC, meeting every two weeks with the Director of Children's services but also meeting with the Leader, Lead Member for Children, Chair of Children's Scrutiny, Chief Executive, Area Commander from GMP, Education Leaders, NHS System Leaders, the Leadership Team across Children's Services and key service personnel.

Tameside Children's Services also brought in a dedicated project manager to support the Improvement Advisor to compile appropriate reports and service reviews and set the agenda at the request of the Improvement Advisor.

Improvement Plan

The council's improvement plan will deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement. The plan should cover the areas identified in the Ofsted report of 6 June 2022 as well as recommendations made by the adviser.

Tameside response:

A draft improvement plan created by the new DCS was presented to full Council in June 2022 and signed off by partners in July 2022. This action plan was updated and refreshed with partners and managers across Children's Services in response to the DFE 6 month review held in January 2023 to address the areas of work that the DFE suggested should be strengthened. A revised plan was agreed and updated and signed off in February 2023 and is monitored via each board meeting and actions agreed in a forward plan for each meeting. A whole series of partner communications and staff newsletter on improvement actions have been positively delivered and reviewed by partners also issued monthly.

Children's Scrutiny Committee have received detailed update reports on delivery of the improvement plan actions on a quarterly basis included additional scrutiny attention exploring any action areas rated Red or Amber with assurance given by the relevant part of the system, notably the workforce recruitment and retention actions, Police and Social Care responses to children who go missing and the quality and timeliness of assessment at the multi-agency front door.

To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:

a. The content of the improvement plan and a record of progress against it must be kept up to date.

Tameside response:

The Improvement Plan Actions have been monitored by the DCS, Children's Leadership Team and Project Manager on a bi-monthly basis and revised and risk assessed for timely delivery every month. The actions in the plan have been updated monthly with risk assessment of delivery reported to the DFE Advisor and improvement board. The updated plan has been received by all partners with updated assurance issued to the Leader of the Council, Lead Member for Children and Chief Executive on a monthly basis.

b. The council must ensure it establishes and maintains an improvement board, which the council will be responsible for; improvement board is to have an independent chair in place who will oversee the implementation of the improvement plan and report to the improvement board on progress against the objectives in the plan, to a timetable agreed with the Department. It can commission updates from partners in order to do this;

Tameside response:

Tameside and partners had retained an Improvement Board since it was rated Inadequate in 2016. The board had developed a high level improvement document that although laudable, did not get close to identifying actions that were addressing the specific Leadership, service capacity, system effectiveness, oversight of performance and practice quality issues that were found to be lacking in the Ofsted Focus Visit in April 2022. The DCS and AD Children's Social Care had already identified that a revised improvement plan was needed to drive forward essential improvements for children and to enable the workforce to practice effectively.

In line with the Improvement Notice, Tameside swiftly established a new Children's Improvement Board working to deliver the new Improvement Action Plan in August 2022. The DFE Appointed Improvement Adviser agreed to chair the new Board in October 2022.

Supported by the dedicated Programme Manager, the revised Board included critical partners who had not previously been engaged in the Children's Improvement Board previously including the new Council Leader, new Chief Executive, new Area Commander, also we brought in Education Leaders, and agreed a forward programme of reports to undertake deep dives in to the journey of the child across partners and all the way through the system from front door through to Child In Need, Child Protection, Pre Proceedings, Cared for Children in Care, Care Leavers and Quality Assurance.

The Improvement Board has met routinely every month to track and review the ambitious improvement plan and has undertaken additional deep dives in to areas of partnership performance in line with data reports, audit findings and feedback from case audits and thematic analysis.

c. Reports to the improvement board should include data, analysis and recommendations supported by evidence of impact of improvements on the quality of services for children in need of help and protection;

d. The council should highlight those objectives which are slow to progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened;

e. The views of frontline staff and of children and young people will be taken into consideration in the development of practice and standards.

Tameside response:

The Improvement Board has received revised data scorecards including analysis of trends on a monthly basis and in addition we have established ten key partner data improvement measures that really demonstrate partner agency improvements in terms of timeliness but also improved quality of responses to children across sectors.

Reports and audits of practice have been delivered to the Board in the context of areas where we appear to be out of step or an outlier when compared with our statutory neighbours and challenge and scrutiny applied to address areas of weaker performance.

Detailed case audit reviews have also been undertaken in respect of areas of concern to understand in greater detail what the system and agency response means to the lived experience of Children and Young People with a view to share accountability and action.

To note this has focussed on the referrals in to the front door from partners, with detailed analysis undertaken in to attendance at Strategy Meetings, Child Protection Conferences and Core Groups. A deep dive in to front door contacts has directly resulted in action across organisations that have resulted in a reduction in contacts that do not meet threshold for assessment but require information and advice. We have revised the threshold guidance and delivered extensive agency training plus remodelled our Early Help service and strategy in direct response to identified need in families that was formerly being met mainly through statutory assessment which was not always necessary or appropriate.

This deep dive analysis has resulted in significant investment from Tameside MBC in doubling case holding capacity and increasing support in to schools to support both direct work with families but also specialist support to undertake high quality assessment and plans in line with the practice model signs of safety.

We have achieved a significant increase in attendance at Strategy meetings by reconfiguring how colocated workers meet on a daily basis when risk emerges on cases in the front door, reducing any delay or drift and ensuring attendance at 98% from agencies compared to 40% at the time of the focussed visit. We have also remodelled the duty rota with Social Workers co-located with all partner agencies in the front door, again significantly reducing delays in case allocation and initial safety planning and risks better managed.

Department for Education reviews

6. *Officials or advisers from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the improvement agenda at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate.*
7. *These reviews may cover, but are not exclusive to: culture; performance; leadership, management and governance; workforce and management oversight; early help; and multi-agency arrangements.*

Tameside response:

In January 2023 the DFE officials undertook a 6 month progress review of Tameside Improvement Board. The review involved a series of meetings with key leaders, interviews with partners and focus groups with managers and front line staff.

The overarching feedback from DFE Officials was that Leaders, Managers and workers could demonstrate evidence of improving services for Children.

The letter and feedback made suggestions to further improve communication, workforce development and progression opportunities, leaders' visibility to all staff, improved engagement with Schools and Education Leaders to improve services further. All recommendations have been directly responded to in the refreshed action plan. The refreshed plan is now being monitored by the Improvement Board on a monthly basis.

The majority of Improvement Actions in the original Improvement Plan that was finalised by Partners in August 2022 have now been delivered. A summary report demonstrating what we said and what we have delivered is attached to this report.

The second 12 month review is due to take place on 20 June 2023 where the DFE will test the impact of our Improvement focussed work has had on our Partners, our front line practitioners and leaders.

8. *From time to time, the adviser may require that a diagnostic review or assessment of performance in a specific service area is undertaken by a local authority or other party agreed with the Department.*
9. *For any review or assessment, the council must provide the person(s) conducting it with:*
 - a. *access to, and time with, staff and leadership;*
 - b. *accurate and up to date data on performance and quality.*
 - c. *facilities to carry out the reviews;*
 - d. *access to case files, minutes of meetings, supervision records or any other relevant information.*
10. *Prior to any reviews, the council should provide its own assessment of improvement. This may reflect, but is not limited to:*
 - a. *progress against the improvement plan objectives'. Staff surveys'. Staff supervision and the quality of feedback.*

Tameside Response

The Council, agreed with DFE funded SLIP support, has undertaken a Peer Review of the effectiveness of Tameside Safeguarding Childrens Partnership by Stockport Council. Review findings and recommendations have been fed back to the Safeguarding Partners but also the Improvement Board in April 2023.

The result of this review and improvement recommendations are being implemented through the introduction of a new proposed Safeguarding Partnership structure to enable improved engagement from partners beyond the current framework. Leaders have agreed to appoint a new Independent Scrutineer role, have agreed to fund and appoint a full time Partnership Board Manager to concentrate on improving the business management and challenge of practice risks and learning in contrast to the previous arrangement of a shared Board Manager arrangement with Adults Safeguarding Board.

Also through DFE SLIP agreement, we have brought in external support and challenge from Salford Childrens Services who reviewed our threshold application at the front door, our step up and step down processes, the effectiveness of our in-house Residential Homes offer and the Placement and Brokerage service.

The Improvement Board had assurance feedback from Salford at the April 2023 Board meeting that demonstrated very effective threshold application, robust decision making for children and timely allocation of cases in the front door. All learning points have been adopted by partners as we implement the new integrated model for improving the front door in May 2023. This work is being led by a dedicated steering group of multi-agency partners as a direct result of the analysis from the Improvement Board deep dives and data reviews.

Tameside has also worked with Warrington Children's Services to undertake a Peer review of our Pre-proceedings and PLO process to ensure that the work we do to consider actions we need to undertake prior to undertaking children and families through the court is built upon best practice.

A very detailed review that we arranged mutually with Warrington as a trailblazer in the North West, this again identified that we have good tracking in place, are improving our case records and file preparation and involving children in the process. This review told us what we knew that we need to improve, to embed the PLO toolkit.

11. Taking account of the measures set out in this improvement notice and the adviser's feedback, the council should aim for actions included in the improvement plan to be delivered by the end of June 2023 (within 12 months of the Ofsted Focussed Visit) or sooner, where appropriate

Tameside response:

The Improvement Plan has been revised and risk assessed per action under the seven improvement priorities at every Improvement Board since August 2022. We produced the Plan on a Page to share with all staff at all levels of the organisation to improve awareness of the workforce and young people and families.

The six month DFE review resulted in leaders completing a stocktake of the original priorities and actions with a simple –“We said – We did” summary of all we have delivered.

We have agreed and co-designed with partners a refreshed action plan and have included the production of digital profiles of Improvement Board Members and brought in front line workers to attend Board to validate evidence of our workforce in the improvement actions in the plan and in reports.

The Board has also agreed a forward plan for agenda items that follows the action timelines that we have agreed in the refreshed plan so that we keep to task and maintain effective risk management of improvement delivery pace.

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Tameside Improvement Plan 2022/23

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We said:

We did:

**Child
Friendly
Tameside**



Priority 1

A new Improvement Board accountability framework and plan to measure and challenge improvement.

We said:

We'd agree leadership and chairing arrangements for the new Improvement Board.

We said:

We'd improve governance and corporate leadership.

We said:

We'd review the existing Tameside Safeguarding Partnership arrangements post-pandemic to provide strong challenge and support.

We did:

DFE appointed the Improvement Advisor as independent Chair of the Improvement Board and Tameside Council's deputy leader (Cllr Bill Fairfoull) and chief executive (Sandra Stewart) joined the Improvement Board to provide assurance around accountability and responsibilities.

We did:

We produced a new Improvement Plan and refreshed Terms of Reference for the Board.

We did:

We refreshed the Terms of Reference for Tameside Children's Safeguarding Partnership and undertook a Safeguarding Partnership review with SLIP Partner Stockport Council.

We improved attendance at timely strategy meetings to safeguard children within 24 hours by 100% for all cases within jurisdiction.

We arranged for the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to undertake the initial S47 strategy meetings in the front door, improving timeliness of response across agencies.



Priority 1

A New Improvement Board accountability framework and plan to measure and challenge improvement.

We said:

We'd establish a dedicated scrutiny panel for Children's Services.

We did:

We established a dedicated scrutiny panel for Children's Services with a clear work programme, linked to performance of the Children's Safeguarding Partnership, the Improvement Board, SEF and workforce stability.

We said:

We'd get the Improvement Board to drive the effectiveness of the Self Assessment Framework to evidence we truly understand the strengths and weaknesses of services for children.

We did:

We completed a PEER review that reported strong SEF with clear direction and controls in place to deliver services for children.

We said:

We'd provide evidence of pace and change of Corporate Service support for Children's Services.

We did:

We implemented a staff survey to identify workforce challenges and issues to enable improved workforce retention and development.



Priority 2

A refreshed workforce recruitment and retention plan of action.

We said:

We'd put a new permanent CSC Leadership Team in place to deliver improvements for children.

We said:

We'd have regular conversations and briefings with staff on progress around recruitment.

We said:

We'd introduce a new staff induction.

We said:

We'd introduce a workforce recruitment and retention strategy to demonstrate our competitive edge.

We did:

We have already mainstreamed to work of the Managed Service resulting in lower caseloads and swifter case allocation.

We did:

We established regular staff briefings and site visits providing feedback from frontline workers, practice managers and teams and received positive feedback and assurance around reduced pressure on staff and more manageable workloads.

We did:

In addition to worker of the week recognition we are underway with planning staff awards event.

We did:

We established a revised workforce strategy fully inclusive of staff consultation.



Priority 2

A refreshed workforce recruitment and retention plan of action.

We said:

We'd undertake a workforce survey across Children's Social Care to identify improvements needed in workloads, caseloads and partner agency input.

We said:

We'd review the impact of new supervision procedures and processes for staff.

We said:

We'd improve communications, recognition and pride in work to build and strengthen services for children in Tameside.

We did:

We conducted an independent review of Children's Social Care teams. And a Managed Social Work Service is already starting to show reduced demand in Duty and Assessment Teams.

We did:

We established a new Signs of Safety training team with training taking place and embedded in the supervision process.

We did:

We've arranged a multi-agency staff awards celebration event to promote work with children and young people.



Priority 3

A grip and transparent challenge of the effectiveness of changed systems across partners to keep children safe.

We said:

The police would implement a new system and rota for attendance at strategy meetings to improve compliance and effectiveness.

We said:

We'd finalise a new 0-19 service contract to measure accountability for the recruitment of health visitors and school nurses to improve the quality of assessment and reduce risk for children in respect of health outcomes.

We said:

We'd undertake an integration review of MASH arrangements, procedures and impact measures across Early Help and statutory services.

We did:

A tracker was established for all strategy meetings and attendance by agency. We co-located the police in the MASH team alongside social workers, NHS, Education, CAMHS and Probation.

We did:

We implemented a new 0-19 contract and a suite of key performance indicators, with sufficient capacity and skills to deliver measurable improvements for children's health needs.

We did:

We ensured that the MASH Team is fully integrated and operational with procedures and processes in place and the MASH Steering Group meeting monthly. Deep dive assessments and assurance reports are informing improvement and the journey of the child.



Priority 3

A grip and transparent challenge of the effectiveness of changed systems across partners to keep children safe.

We said:

We'd ensure the Safeguarding Partnership understand the nature of contacts and referrals coming into MASH and the impact of repeat referrals.

We did:

We conducted deep dives into front door and routine monitoring and reporting on contacts. Referrals and repeat children and families are reviewed regularly by the Safeguarding Board and data is understood and challenged to ensure safety and reduce duplication of effort by agencies.

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Priority 4

Deliver improvement in consistency and quality of assessments, plans through a refreshed Quality Assurance Framework.

We said:

We'd ensure the Improvement Board was clearly sighted on current quality and consistency of assessments and plans from the last 12 months.

We did:

We ensured that all Board members, including corporate and political leaders, full understand the quality of practice and the improvement challenge for children and families, and established a new Quality Assurance framework.

We said:

We'd drive forward an intensive Signs of Safety training model and reviews.

We did:

We appointed a Signs of Safety Team and established a training programme.

We said:

The Improvement Board would agree a target to improve the number of audited cases that are assessed as 'Good' and 'Outstanding' by 20% each quarter.

We did:

We embedded the improvement target as a Key Performance Indicator for the Safeguarding Partnership and secured external independent capacity to audit and moderate quality. We are now measuring more 'Good' case audits.

We said:

We'd improve the joint impact between the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership and the Improvement Board.

We did:

We appointed a Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator and reviewed the provision.



Priority 5

Deliver an integrated family offer.

We said:

We'd provide Board oversight of physical location of four areas and locality structures/teams and services within each community.

We said:

We'd establish workforce development sessions to build relationships, enhance skills sharing and facilitate improved processes.

We did:

We appointed a Project Manager, identified appropriate buildings, secured resources and reconfigured buildings as Family Hubs.

We secured Board support for sharing venues and resources to better meet the needs of children and families.

We co-located teams across four areas in communities.

We are collocating teams and moving in to the community.

We did:

We have fully opened our 4 Family Hubs, the first in the North West to do so.



Priority 6

Continue to safely reduce the number of children who need our care and improve outcomes for those we care for and care leavers.

We said:

We'd ensure the Improvement Board clearly understand the impact of our Early Help Offer and its effectiveness and the shift to more agencies supporting children.

We said:

The Improvement Board would receive assurance of effectiveness and impact of Edge of Care service.

We said:

The Board would continue to monitor the options for high quality care placements to ensure children and young adults are safe and supported.

We did:

We ensured that the Early Help service redesign includes demand reduction planning with the number of cared for children reducing by 50 children in the last 12 months.

We provided quarterly updates on the quality and number of agencies who hold Early Help Assessments with 57% of all EHA's held by schools and partners with schools.

We refreshed the Threshold document and arrangements.

A fifth children's home moved from an 'Inadequate' to 'Good' rating by OFSTED.

We did:

We moved the Edge of Care team back into Children's Social Care.

We did:

We introduced and promoted a Foster Care recruitment campaign with stable placements, foster care numbers and a strong and stable Foster Care Team in place.



Priority 6

Continue to safely reduce the number of children who need our care and improve outcomes for those we care for and care leavers.

We said:

The Board would evidence action and responsibility to unblock practical resource issues that can't be resolved by the Corporate Parenting Committee.

We said:

Board members would take shared responsibility and accountability for complex and hard to place children.

We said:

The Board would demonstrate grip and control of the safety and effectiveness of our in-house residential homes.

We said:

The Board would evidence maximising opportunities for care leavers' career choices at an early stage, utilising resources across agencies and reducing the NEET rate for 17-25 year olds by 20%.

We did:

We reviewed the Corporate Parenting Committee Membership and Terms of Reference and implemented the Department for Education (DfE) recommendations with issues escalated regularly for resolution.

We launched dedicated care leavers' job drop-in, enhanced our care leaver offer and grew the size of the service to reduce case-loads.

We did:

We've established an agreement to share costs and accountability with quarterly updates on costs of complex care placements and financial share across NHS and LA budget lines.

We did:

Five care homes are now rated 'Good' with managers in place and are OFSTED registered.

We did:

We've established a revised EET offer and NEET conference, aligned with a greater offer from DWP.



Priority 7

Assure that social work and early help practice is consistently high quality, responds directly to the voice of the child and/or young person and demonstrates positive impact and change to children's lives.

We said:

The Board would be assured of implementation of the Signs of Safety model.

We said:

The Voice of the Child would be clearly evident in all plans with external assurance of excellent practice.

We said:

We'd re-procure the Case Recording System across Children's Services to improve the efficiency of recording, reporting and analysis.

We did:

We recruited and trained the Signs of Safety Team with SoS a golden thread within the service.

We did:

We conducted deep dives of the journey of the child with practice week dip sampling, direct observation and case studies evidencing the Voice of the Child.

We did:

We have corporate support for a project to enable live data reports coming online.



Priority 7

Assure that social work and early help practice is consistently high quality, responds directly to the voice of the child and/or young person and demonstrates positive impact and change to children's lives.

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We said:

We'd revise quality assurance and practice week improvements experienced and visible in case studies and through external validation of practice and moderation.

We did:

We've put in place a Practice Week schedule with senior leadership and agency attendance and that feedbacks directly into the Improvement Board.

We said:

The Improvement Board would receive assurance of improvements in terms of integration between SEND support and EH/CSC plans and assessments through the QA role of the new DCSO.

We did:

We have appointed to a Dedicated Social Care Officer role (Known as DiSCO) to connect Early Help, SEND and Social Care Planning together.

We said:

That feedback from a staff survey would demonstrate improved confidence and knowledge of staff recording SEND needs within assessments and plans.

We did:

We're developing the staff survey and have co-located the SEND Case Work Team in MASH to improve alignment with social work and EH assessments. We've put in place new management capacity for SEND Operational Teams.



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Our Vision

Our vision is that all children, young people and families in Tameside have the best start in life, to grow, thrive and achieve their best outcomes. Tameside organisations and communities work together to co-ordinate services to demonstrate improved overall wellbeing and quality of life for our children.

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Our Priorities

- Establish a new Improvement Board, Accountability Framework and Action Plan to measure and challenge improvement
- Strong refreshed workforce recruitment and retention strategy and plan
- Grip and transparent challenge of the effectiveness of changed systems across partners to keep children safe
- Deliver improvement in the consistency and quality of assessments and plans through a refreshed Quality Assurance Framework
- Deliver an integrated family offer in the 4 locality areas of Tameside
- Continue to Safely reduce the numbers of children who need our care and improve outcomes for those we care for and care leavers
- Assure that Social Work and Early Help Practice is consistently high quality, responds directly to the voice of the child and /or young person and demonstrates positive impact and change to children's lives



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REVIEW AND MONITORING OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2021 TO 2023

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In May 2022, the Council added a third scrutiny panel with a remit dedicated to Children's Services. A significant amount of agreed activity for the newly formed Children's Services Scrutiny Panel aims to deliver 'critical friend' challenge to the Council's Executive specific to Children's Social Care and Ofsted improvement.
- 1.2 It is an ongoing priority for Scrutiny to seek assurances on methods aimed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. Planned activity includes regular oversight of the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan, statutory services, Early Help, Youth Services, the safeguarding partnership, Education and SEND.
- 1.3 Prior to May 2022, the scrutiny of Children's Services was included within the remit of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel. The panel had instructed a fixed Children's Working Group to consider matters on Children's Services and Education. The working group actively sought assurances on the lived experience of children and young people about the services they receive.
- 1.4 A previous report titled, Review and Monitoring of Children's Services 2018 to 2021, was tabled at the joint meeting of Executive Cabinet and Overview Panel on 10 February 2021, **APPENDIX 1**.
- 1.5 Scrutiny members remain informed of published findings from the Ofsted inspection and approach of the Council's Executive in responding to significant challenges and external pressures. Scrutiny continues to review the operational and strategic priorities and required improvements from the most recent Ofsted inspection and subsequent focused visits, **APPENDIX 2**.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Scrutiny in practice remains mindful of the suitability and appropriateness of timings with regard to the impact and value of planned activity. This includes the selection and order of topics and updates received during the year. The annual work programme creates a structured pathway informed by performance monitoring, past findings and insight to challenges for the year ahead.
- 2.2 This paper aims to provide a comprehensive summary of scrutiny activity related to Children's Services across the two municipal years 2021/22 and 2022/23. The information has been categorised into the following areas:
 - Scrutiny activity and formal meetings of the Scrutiny Panels, including the Children's Working Group
 - In-depth review (feedback and reporting to the Executive)
 - Assurance reviews of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
 - Scrutiny budget consultation
 - Training and development

3. SCRUTINY ACTIVITY 2021 TO 2023

- 3.1 Scrutiny activity continues to adopt a combination of approaches to review service and performance updates, respond to formal consultations, focus reports of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and areas in need of more in-depth review. This includes a responsibility for:

- Engagement and consultation – to provide responses to pre-decision activity
- Research and insight to a particular issue
- Review of decisions and recommendations

3.2 Scrutiny activity continues to be undertaken outside of the formal meetings, with all findings and recommendations presented to the full panel for comment and approval. The flexibility allows for speedier and timelier work to be undertaken, creating an enhanced opportunity to both influence and inform the impact of decisions being made. It is also necessary to monitor and evaluate outcomes from past activity and to review the implementation of recommendations.

Scrutiny Activity

3.3 Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of activity of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel and the Children’s Working Group during the 2021/22 municipal year. Table 3 provides a summary of activity undertaken by Children’s Services Scrutiny Panel for the 2022/23 municipal year. The content provides detail of dates, topics and any reporting that has taken place.

Table 1: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2021/22

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
10 June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual work programme developed. Includes priority topics related to Children’s Services and Education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reported to Overview Panel.
29 July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); and Director of Children’s Services to present findings from the Ofsted focused visit that took place on 12 and 13 May 2021.
13 January 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Executive Member (Lifelong Learning, Equalities and Culture); and Director of Education, to receive an update on the SEND inspection outcomes and actions. • Assurance review of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Focus Report – <i>HELP! Learning to improve council services for domestic abuse victims</i>, published November 2021.

Table 2: Activity 2021/22

Children’s Working Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering marketing and recruitment • Children’s sustainability projects • Children’s Social Care Improvement Plan

Table 3: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2022/23

Children’s Services Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
27 July 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual work programme developed. Includes priority topics related to Children’s Services and Education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reported to Overview Panel

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); and Director of Children's Services to receive an update on key issues and outcomes related to Ofsted and next steps for the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan.
21 September 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Executive Member (Education & Achievement); and 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 in July 2022. Attendance of the Director of Children's Services to provide a verbal update on the Self Evaluation Framework (SEF) and improvement priorities. Children's performance Scorecard.
2 November 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Assistant Director and heads of service to receive an update on placement strategy and capacity across in-house and external provision, including fostering recruitment.
11 January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); Director of Children's Services; and Tameside Divisional Commander, GMP; to update on local partnership arrangements directly linked to statutory guidance for local authorities and their partners to stop children going missing and to protect those who do. Progress update on the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan. Children's performance scorecard. Scrutiny report on Children's Workforce Strategy – Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers.
8 March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Executive Member (Education & Achievement); Director of Children's Services; and Assistant Director of Education, to receive an update on SEND improvements. Tameside Safeguarding Children Partnership – Annual Report 2021/22. Children's performance scorecard.

In-depth Review

3.4 The Children's Services Scrutiny Panel has recently completed the following in-depth review.

- Children's Workforce Strategy – Social Worker Recruitment and Retention.
 - Findings and recommendations reported to the joint meeting of Executive Cabinet and Overview Panel on 8 February 2023.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

3.5 Complaints raised by the public and service users can be an important source of information to help councillors identify issues that are affecting local people. The learning available from complaints can therefore play a key part in supporting the scrutiny of public services.

3.6 Scrutiny continues to review decisions and focus reports of the LGSCO, to inform in-year work priorities. The aim is to ensure learning opportunities be shared with services in a timely

manner and for a formal response and/or position statement to be returned to the appropriate Scrutiny Panel within agreed timescales.

- 3.7 The Scrutiny Panel has completed assurance reviews for the following LGSCO reports.
- Focus report – HELP! Learning to improve council services for domestic abuse victims (published in November 2021).
 - Focus report and response of the Executive Member tabled at the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 9 February 2022.
 - Focus report – Out of school, out of sight? Ensuring children out of school get a good education (published in July 2022).
 - Focus report and response of the Executive Member tabled at Overview Panel on 26 September 2022.

Scrutiny Budget Consultation

- 3.8 The independence of Scrutiny enables members to seek assurances on budget planning, process and monitoring. It is appropriate for budget priorities to inform future Scrutiny activity and work programmes.
- 3.9 The Scrutiny annual budget meeting is part of the Council's formal consultation and budget setting process. The meeting primarily focuses on Scrutiny's input to the budget for the year ahead, with a view to reflect on the information received during the year and to inform future priorities. A mid-year budget update also forms part of Scrutiny monitoring and feedback to the Executive each year.
- 3.10 The most recent Scrutiny mid-year budget update took place on 3 October 2022. The First Deputy (Finance, Resources and Transformation), received a formal response of the Scrutiny Chairs, capturing a range of points for consideration in supporting the Council's ongoing work in this area. The letter was tabled in a report to the meeting of Overview Panel on 21 November 2022.
- 3.11 Scrutiny annual budget meetings held on 16 January 2023, with a response letter of the Scrutiny Chairs sent to the First Deputy (Finance, Resources and Transformation); and Interim Director of Finance – Section 151 Officer. The letter was tabled in a report to the joint meeting of Executive Cabinet and Overview Panel on 8 February 2023.
- 3.12 The sessions have enabled members to seek further assurances on the Council's approach to setting a balanced budget and to mitigate risk or exposure to any external or unforeseen financial pressures. Scrutiny activity of Children's Services has highlighted demand pressures and challenges associated with long-term financial sustainability.

Training and development

- 3.13 There is an ongoing commitment to ensure all scrutiny members receive a suitable level of training and guidance. In addition to online resources, it is important that new and existing members have access to external provision based on scrutiny principles, national guidance and expectations.
- 3.14 Detail below on training, development and benchmarking sessions delivered during the 2022/23 municipal year.
- **20 July 2022** - Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Scrutiny and Overview Panel invited to attend an afternoon training session delivered by the LGA and Councillor Bryony Rudkin (Political Peer).
 - **5 September 2022** - All Scrutiny Panel members invited to attend a training session delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) - Essentials of Effective Scrutiny.

- **12 September 2022** - All members of the Children's Scrutiny Panel invited to attend an online training session on Children's Safeguarding, delivered by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team within Tameside Children's Services, to include scene setting delivered by the Assistant Director.
- **14 September 2022** – All members of the Children's Scrutiny Panel invited to a visit of Children's Social Care Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) / Early Help access point.
- **29 November 2022** - Benchmarking exercise - Tameside Scrutiny Chair and Deputy Executive Leader (Children's and Families) met with the Scrutiny Chair and Executive Member for Children's Services at Manchester City Council.

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Report To:	JOINT MEETING EXECUTIVE CABINET/OVERVIEW PANEL
Date:	10 February 2021
Reporting Officer:	Sandra Stewart, Director – Governance and Pensions Sarah Threlfall, Assistant Director – Policy, Performance and Communications
Subject:	SCRUTINY – REVIEW AND MONITORING OF CHILDREN’S SERVICES 2018 TO 2021
Report Summary:	To receive for information, a summary of activity undertaken by the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, specific to the oversight and monitoring of Children’s Services for the period 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 municipal years.
Recommendations:	That Overview Panel is asked to note the content of the report and summary of scrutiny activity.
Links to Corporate Plan:	Scrutiny work programmes are linked to the Council’s corporate priorities. Scrutiny activity seeks to support effective decision making and priorities across Tameside.
Policy Implications:	Scrutiny work programmes comprise activity that seeks to check the effective implementation of the Strategic Commission’s policies and if appropriate make recommendations to the Executive with regards to development, performance monitoring, outcomes and value for money.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)	<p>There are no direct financial implications arising from the scrutiny activity set out in this report. The scrutiny function is expected to be funded from existing revenue budgets.</p> <p>The financial context of Children’s services is relevant to this scrutiny activity and is summarised here for context. The Council has allocated significant additional investment to the Children’s Services directorate budget provision over recent years to support service improvements, including seven key sustainability initiatives from 2020/21. Despite the pandemic and significantly increased numbers of open cases in the statutory children’s system since June 2020, cared for children (CfC) numbers has remained static, however the full impact of lockdown is not yet known. Similarly to other local authorities there is the potential for unknown growth in numbers to come forward in the early part of 2021, which may place further financial pressures on the service.</p> <p>The Council’s medium term financial plan assumes that budgetary savings will be achieved from the investment in service improvements with total savings of £7.3m between 2022/23 and 2024/25. A further saving of £0.5m has been identified as part of the 2021/22 budget process to contribute to the corporate savings. In 2020/21 the service is currently forecasting an overspend £4.1m by 31 March 2021. There is a risk that the service will not bring spending back on line or be able to deliver the savings to the timeline or scale assumed.</p>

**Legal Implications:
(Authorised by the Borough
Solicitor)**

Overview and scrutiny committees were established in English and Welsh local authorities by the Local Government Act 2000. They were intended as a counterweight to the new executive structures created by that Act (elected mayors or leaders and cabinets). Their role was to develop and review policy and make recommendations to the council. Today, the legislative provisions for overview and scrutiny committees for England can be found in the Localism Act 2011. Those for Wales are in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, and those for Northern Ireland are in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

There are no legislative provisions for overview and scrutiny in Scotland, though many Scottish local authorities do operate scrutiny committees alongside executive structures. Local authorities also manage processes of 'external scrutiny', where their committees look at issues which lie outside the council's responsibilities. In England, specific powers exist to scrutinise health bodies, crime and disorder partnerships, and Police and Crime Commissioners. Combined authorities are also required to establish overview and scrutiny committees.

Risk Management:

Regular updates to Overview Panel provide assurance that scrutiny is progressing with an effective work programme, supporting good decision making and service improvement.

Access to Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Paul Radcliffe, Policy and Strategy Lead by:



Telephone: 0161 342 2199



e-mail: paul.radcliffe@tameside.gov.uk

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council's Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel has responsibility for considering a large remit within Tameside. The oversight of Children's Services, Social Care and Education forms a significant part of the work planned during a municipal year. It is an ongoing priority for Scrutiny to seek assurances on methods aimed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.
- 1.2 Following the Ofsted inspection of Tameside Children's Services in September 2016, the Council has taken a number of direct and positive steps to ensure that effective monitoring takes place regarding improvement activity and service development. A review of monitoring and governance arrangements undertaken in 2017 highlighted the importance of structure. Findings from the review helped to establish greater clarity of roles, responsibilities, oversight and removing duplication where possible.
- 1.3 Scrutiny has a responsibility to establish and maintain an appropriate level of oversight and monitoring. The annual work programme for 2017/18 documented a plan of activity that detailed a need to increase the frequency of contact with Children's Services.
- 1.4 It was important to bring scrutiny members up to speed with published findings from the Ofsted inspection and approach of the Council's Executive in responding to significant challenges and external pressures. Scrutiny continues to review and develop communication and engagement methods with the Executive, to promote and enable a supportive platform for two-way dialogue and information sharing.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Scrutiny in practice remains mindful of the suitability and appropriateness of timings with regard to the impact and value of planned activity. This includes the selection and order of topics and updates received during the year. The annual work programme creates a structured pathway informed by performance monitoring, past findings and insight to challenges for the year ahead.
- 2.2 This paper aims to provide a comprehensive summary of all scrutiny activity related to Children's Services across the three municipal years 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 to date. The information has been categorised into key areas and includes:
 - Formal meetings of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel
 - Working groups
 - Feedback and reporting to the Executive
 - Assurance reviews of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
 - Budget consultation
- 2.3 The report seeks to provide a clear and obvious picture to chronology of activity and reporting.

3. SCRUTINY ACTIVITY 2018 TO 2021

- 3.1 Scrutiny activity continues to adopt a combination of approaches to review service and performance updates, respond to formal consultations, focus reports of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and areas in need of more in-depth review. This includes a responsibility for:
 - Engagement and consultation – to provide responses to pre-decision activity
 - Research and insight to a particular issue
 - Review of decisions and recommendations

3.2 Scrutiny activity continues to be undertaken outside of the formal meetings, with all findings and recommendations presented to the full panel for comment and approval. The flexibility allows for speedier and timelier work to be undertaken, creating an enhanced opportunity to both influence and inform the impact of decisions being made. It is also necessary to monitor and evaluate outcomes from past activity and to review the implementation of recommendations.

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel

3.3 Tables 1 to 3 provide a summary of activity of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, relating both directly and indirectly to Children’s Services at the formal meetings calendared during the three municipal years in question. The narrative provides detail of dates, topics and any reporting that has taken place.

Table 1: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2018/19

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
14 June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual work programme developed. Includes priority topics related to Children’s Services and Education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reported to Overview Panel on 30 July 2018 Panel receive the most recent Ofsted monitoring letter with summary of findings from the visit that took place on 18 and 19 April 2018.
8 November 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Executive Member for Children and Families; and Director of Children’s Services regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted monitoring Improvement priorities Governance and safeguarding arrangements
10 January 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel receive the response letter of Scrutiny Chair to the Executive, providing collective feedback of points raised at the meeting on 8 November 2018.

Table 2: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2019/20

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
13 June 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual work programme developed. Includes priority topics related to Children’s Services and Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reported to Overview Panel on 29 July 2019
25 July 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Executive Member for Children and Families; and Director of Children’s Services regarding improvement priorities. Panel receive overview of the recruitment and retention of foster carers in Tameside, to inform future activity of the Panel.
7 November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel receive update on the Peer Review of Domestic Abuse, elements of which are pertinent to outcomes for children and young people. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrutiny feedback and learning from Peer Review reported to Overview Panel on 18 November 2019

9 January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel receive a service response to a focus report of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman on complaints related to Education, Health and Care Plans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assurance review of LGSCO focus report on SEND reported to the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 12 February 2020.
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Table 3: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2020/21 (May 2020 to February 2021)

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
11 June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual work programme developed. Includes priority topics related to Children’s Services and Education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reported to Overview Panel on 27 July 2020 • Panel members to provide feedback and learning received from communities on Covid-19. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feedback and learning reported to Overview Panel on 27 July 2020 and shared with all directorates across the Strategic Commission
5 November 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Executive Member for Children and Families; and Director of Children’s Services regarding Social Care Improvements
14 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Executive Members for Neighbourhood Services; and Health Social Care and Population Health, to provide an update on Domestic Abuse in Tameside.

In-depth Review

3.4 The integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel has completed the following in-depth review on a topic specific to Children’s Services.

- Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers
 - Reported to the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 12 February 2020
 - Follow up activity undertaken by the Children’s Working Group on 12 November 2020

3.5 To note, the remit of the Scrutiny Panel also includes Adult Services, Health and Population Health, to which review activity has taken place during the period in question.

Children’s Working Group

3.6 In direct response to outcomes from the Ofsted inspection of Children’s Services in September 2016, the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel established a fixed working group. A primary focus of the group was to consider ‘voice of the child’ aspects detailed within Ofsted findings.

3.7 Established in the 2017/18 municipal year, the working group remains in place and has developed further to consider matters relevant to Children’s Services and Education. The working group meets in private four times a year. Membership for 2020/21 includes seven councillors from the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel and co-opted members.

3.8 Findings and actions from working group meetings are presented to the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, for information and sign off. Activity of the working group is routinely reported to Overview Panel as part of the Scrutiny Update paper.

3.9 Table 4 provides a summary of activity and reporting undertaken by the Children’s Working Group for the period 2018/19 to 2020/21. In general, the working group will provide direct feedback within the timeframe of each meeting. When deemed appropriate the group may also respond directly to the Executive with findings and possible recommendations.

Table 4: Activity 2018/19 to 2020/21

Children's Working Group	
2018/19	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and Attendance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Response paper to the Executive Member for Lifelong Learning with findings and recommendation for reading and attendance. • Corporate Parenting and Care Leaver Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Response letter of Scrutiny Chair to the Executive Member for Children and Families. Reported to Overview Panel. 	
2019/20	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing • Looked After Children Sustainability Projects • Tameside Early Help Offer 	
2020/21	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts of Covid-19 on Education in Tameside • Follow up activity on the review and recommendation related to the Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers 	

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

- 3.10 Complaints raised by the public and service users can be an important source of information to help councillors identify issues that are affecting local people. Complaints can therefore play a key part in supporting the scrutiny of public services
- 3.11 From 2019/20 onwards Scrutiny has reviewed decisions made by the LGSCO on a monthly basis, to inform in-year work priorities. The attention of scrutiny concentrates primarily on the shared learning detailed within the focus reports and key questions for good practice. This will also contribute to the evidence gathered throughout the municipal year when developing annual work programmes.
- 3.12 The Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel has undertaken assurance reviews regarding the following LGSCO reports specific to Children's services and Education.
- Focus report - Not going to plan? Education, Health and Care Plans two years on, (published in October 2019)
 - Reported to the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 12 February 2020
 - Focus report – Careless: Helping to improve council services to children in care
 - Reported to the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 10 February 2021

Scrutiny Budget Meetings

- 3.13 The Scrutiny annual budget meeting is part of the formal consultation and budget setting process. The meeting primarily focuses on scrutiny's input to the budget for the year ahead, with a view to reflect on the information received during the year and to inform future priorities.
- 3.14 The meeting provides an opportunity for scrutiny members to consider the information and impacts. Feedback from the meeting is shared directly with the Executive Member with responsibility for finance, in the form of a letter from the Scrutiny Chairs. The letter provides an account of discussions captured at the meeting and is tabled at the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel held in February.

- 3.15 From 2019/20 onwards a mid-year budget update meeting has been added to the calendar and takes place in September, in advance of the annual meeting in January each year. All scrutiny members receive an invitation to the meeting.
- 3.16 The sessions have enabled members to seek further assurances on the Strategic Commission's approach to setting a balanced budget and to mitigate risk or exposure to any external or unforeseen financial pressures. Scrutiny activity of Children's Services has highlighted demand pressures and long-term financial sustainability.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 As set out on the front of the report

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Ofsted Inspection of Tameside Children's Service – May 2019

Operational	Strategic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in Care – consistency of practice. • Views of children to better inform assessments and actions. • Child protection conferences / IROs - oversight and challenge. • Removing any delays in delivering timely permanence for children in care. • Information recorded and passed between the Early Help Hub and MASH – decisions being made and possible gaps/risks. • Quality and appropriate referrals from partner agencies. • Strategy discussions – speedier distribution of note and actions with all partners involved. To build consensus and ownership of the agreed actions and expectations for delivery. • Timeliness of applications to court in order to secure welfare. Lack of detail and clarity in the letters to parents and what is expected of them. • A need to align EHCP plans with that of CIN and CPP. • The impact of supervisions in supporting the progressions of plans for children. • Strengthened life-story work undertaken in long-term foster care. • Addressing mental health needs of young people at risk of exploitation or going missing. Specifically for Social Workers involved in Healthy Young Minds. Not as strongly address as it is by the duty and safeguarding teams. • Around half of initial health assessments take too long. • Care plans and review meetings to identify and reference support for young people to access hobbies and interests. • Support and training for foster carers. • Leaving care and the potential for earlier allocation of personal assistants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in Care – ambition / impact. • Caseloads – knock-on effect. • Out of hours – workforce planning / contingency. • Delays – children waiting too long for initial child protection conference. Speed of assessments to match the needs of children. • Direct practice and techniques – voice of children / recording of basic personal data. • Clearer and more specific actions to address risk when reviewing CIN and child protection plans. A need for desired outcomes and timescales. • Structure of pre-proceedings work. • Arrangements in place to support children with a disability. • Permanence planning. • To achieve more sustainable relationships by reducing the 'rate of change' in social worker contact with children. • The ability of support to harness individual aspirations and educational needs. The link to achieving improved attainment outcomes. Personal Education Plans and the need to improve future connection and linkages between Children's Services and Education. Availability and access to alternative provision. • Contact centre – fit for purpose? • Managerial oversight and assurance, with regards to a small cohort of children placed in unregistered settings. • Interpretation and understanding of performance information presented to the Corporate Parenting Board. What this means for children.

Ofsted Focused Visit – May 2021 (Covid – remote visit)

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

- Workload of social workers and personal assistants.
- Access to sufficient and suitable placements.
- Support for care leavers.
- The oversight of social work practice by all managers – to ensure there is a focus on the experiences and outcomes for children and young people.
- Senior leaders work with health partners to improve attendance at multi-agency meetings and timeliness of health assessments for children in care.

Findings

- Scrutiny by senior leaders is too focused on measuring process through performance data and overall audit grades rather than the evaluation of the experiences of children.
- The need to be more child-focused in senior leaders' approach to performance management and quality assurance.
- Although the results of audit work is collated and reported to senior leaders, these actions are often too focused on process and do not routinely have an impact for children.
- Supervision takes place regularly and provides support for social workers, but does not provide effective challenge or sufficient reflection on the quality of practice.
- When the outcome of screening is that further information-gathering is needed to inform next steps, some children experience delay before they are provided with support from early help.
- For many strategy meetings, health colleagues are not represented, leading to gaps in some of the information available to inform decisions about the level of risk. This means that social workers and managers cannot be confident that the decisions made are appropriate.
- Changes in social worker directly impacting some children, with drift and delay in the progress of their plans.
- When children go missing, the impact of return home interviews is limited by the overly rigid use of closed questions and they do not inform future planning in a meaningful way.
- When children need to come into care, a lack of placement choice leads to some children being placed in unsuitable placements. A lack of sufficiency within the local authority's own resources, as the result of an underdeveloped fostering service, has left them over-reliant on residential provision. In addition, a small number of children with complex needs are placed in unregistered settings.
- The number of care leavers in education, training or employment remains too low and is below that of other local authorities.
- The quality of support for care leavers is significantly impacted upon by the high caseloads of the personal advisers in the leaving care team. Their basic and immediate needs are responded to, but high caseloads mean that for many, the support is overly focused on short-term problem-solving and does not demonstrate ambition to enable them to reach their full potential.

Ofsted Focused Visit – April 2022 ‘Front Door’

Areas for priority action

- Political and corporate leaders’ understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement and for this to be underpinned by a well-informed self-assessment and improvement plan that will drive and monitor practice improvement effectively.
- Timely interventions to assess and reduce risk to children, including multi-agency strategy meetings and the allocation of a social worker to see children.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

- The quality and timeliness of child and family assessments to inform next steps planning.
- The effectiveness of management oversight, including the frequency and quality of supervision and the challenge of poor social work practice that causes drift and delay.
- The strategic and operational relationship with Greater Manchester police, to ensure timely engagement in child protection assessment and planning.

Findings

- Improvements include the move of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) to new premises, which has enabled the co-location of early help and MASH, the development of neighbourhood teams and the reintroduction of duty and assessment teams. Early help assessments that are completed by partner agencies have increased and schools are supported to work more closely with social workers.
- Despite recent changes, political, corporate and operational leaders do not know their services and the impact for children well enough.
- Before this visit, leaders were not fully aware of the extent and impact of repeated contacts about children, the systemic delay in convening multi-agency strategy meetings and in allocating a social worker to assess risks and needs in a timely way.
- When children are at risk of significant harm, there is a systemic delay in the process for convening strategy meetings.
- Too many children experience unnecessary delay in having their needs assessed and met. In most of the cases that inspectors reviewed, children were not allocated a social worker from the duty and assessment team in a timely way.
- The application of threshold is not always consistently applied at the front door.
- Decision-making about what happens next is not consistent and some children’s cases are closed too quickly, without a comprehensive child and family assessment to fully understand their lived experiences and the potential risk they face.
- Assessments are not always timely. They lack a robust analysis, do not consider all information about families or do not always include relevant adults, including fathers and wider family members.
- Supervision for social workers in the duty and assessment teams is not always held regularly and it is not effective enough to improve children’s circumstances. Records of supervision do not include reflection, review previous actions or have new actions for the social worker.

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Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

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7 June 2023

Agenda Item 6

1. Training

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Training

- Centre for Governance & Scrutiny – skills briefings and practice guides.
- Local Government Association – workbooks, e-learning portal and events.
- Bespoke

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2. Role of Scrutiny

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Role of Scrutiny (1)

- Local Government Act 2000.
 - ‘Executive’ – leader and cabinet.
 - ‘Overview & Scrutiny’ – look at decisions & policies / issue reports & recommendations.
- Improve decisions and thus services.
 - no formal power to change.
 - influence policies and decisions.
 - gather evidence & make recommendations

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Role of Scrutiny (2)

- Legal power to require:
 - information made available
 - recommendations responded to within a set time frame.
- ‘Critical friend’ – soft influencing power.
 - focus on forward thinking improvement and positive recommendations.
 - avoid apportioning blame and focusing on negatives.

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Role of Scrutiny (3)

- Council – direct (and commissioned).
- Partners – formal
 - Health (Health & Social Care Act 2001)
 - Community Safety (Police & Justice Act 2006)
- Partners – informal
 - Housing
 - Transport
 - Education

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Role of Scrutiny (4)

- Pre decision (inform and influence).
 - Challenge assumptions
 - Bring insight
 - Suggest new ideas and thinking
- Post decision (challenge and evaluate).
 - Inform evaluation and assess impact
 - Call In (pause a decision)

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Role of Scrutiny (5)

- Full in-depth reviews.
- Light touch and/or research reviews.
- Follow up (from previous reviews).
- Check & challenge / assurance.
- Engagement / consultation.
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

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Role of Scrutiny (6)

NOTE: Scrutiny is not / does not ...

- Planning or Licensing.
- Party political.
- Ward specific issues.
- Management of services.
- Operational monitoring of performance, finance, risk and/or projects.
- Inspectorate.

3. Panel Remit

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Panel Remit

The Children's Services Scrutiny Panel has responsibility to consider all matters related to Children's Social Care and Education. The Panel will be the main mechanism by which Scrutiny members will scrutinise and monitor the planning and performance of the Council's services to children and young people and the Corporate Parenting role. This includes regular oversight of improvement related to Social Care, Early Help, Youth Services, the safeguarding partnership, Education and SEND. To promote 'critical friend' challenge to the Council's Executive specific to Ofsted improvement and to deliver statutory functions when educational matters are considered.

Part of the Panel's work will be to seek the lived experience of children and young people about the services they receive. The Panel will look to ensure there are sufficient and adequate mechanisms in place to encourage participation, with the aim to inform service delivery, wider improvement set by Ofsted framework and practice standards.