

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

**Day:** Wednesday  
**Date:** 10 January 2024  
**Time:** 6.00 pm  
**Place:** Committee Room 1 - Tameside One

Item No.	AGENDA	Page No
1.	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>	
2.	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest from members of the Scrutiny Panel.	
3.	<b>MINUTES</b> To approve as a correct record, the Minutes of the proceedings of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 8 November 2023.	1 - 4
4.	<b>SEND IMPROVEMENT</b> The Panel to meet Councillor Leanne Feeley, Executive Member (Education & Achievement); Allison Parkinson, Director of Children's Services; Jane Sowerby, Assistant Director for Education; and Jackie Ross, Interim Lead for SEND, to receive an update specific to the provision of SEND services and required improvements.	5 - 30
5.	<b>RESPONSE TO LGSCO FOCUS REPORT</b> The Panel to meet Councillor Leanne Feeley, Executive Member (Education & Achievement); Allison Parkinson, Director of Children's Services; and Jane Sowerby, Assistant Director for Education, to receive a response to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Focus Report, Parent Power: learning from complaints about personal budgets, published November 2023.	31 - 52
6.	<b>CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE</b> The Panel to receive the Children's Services Performance and Quality Assurance Scorecard and a response to enquiries made from the meeting on 8 November 2023.	53 - 66
7.	<b>SCRUTINY MID-YEAR BUDGET LETTER</b> The Chair to update members on a response letter sent to the First Deputy (Finance, Resources & Transformation); and the Director of Resources, following a mid-year budget update received on 6 November 2023.	67 - 70

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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.

**8. CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair to provide a verbal update on activity and future priorities for the Panel.

**9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 6 March 2024.

**10. URGENT ITEMS**

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

## Children's Services Scrutiny Panel 8 November 2023

**Commenced:** 6.00pm

**Terminated:** 7.40pm

**Present:** Councillors Roderick (Chair), Tilbrook (Deputy), Fitzpatrick, Howarth, Karim, Martin, McLaren, Owen, Robinson

**Apologies:** Councillor T Smith

### 27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

### 28. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 13 September 2023 and 4 October 2023 were approved as a correct record.

### 29. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Panel welcomed Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader (Children & Families); Allison Parkinson, Director of Children's Services; Melanie Field, Interim Head of Quality Assurance; and James Smith, Performance, Intelligence and Scrutiny Manager, to receive the Performance Management Framework for Children's Social Care and the Children's Services Performance and Quality Assurance Scorecard.

Panel members reviewed the new Performance Management Framework, which sets out the structure and parameters in order to achieve greater direction and oversight. It is important to measure and provide evidence of the quantity, timeliness and the quality of social work practice. This requires a strong performance and quality assurance system to be in place in order to evidence the effective delivery of services.

The framework outlines the practice and management activity to ensure children and young people receive the quality of outcomes they deserve. An effective Performance Management Framework consists of:

- Regular reporting and analysis of accurate performance data
- Clear monitoring and quality assurance arrangements
- Effective evidence-based set of performance management and improvement processes
- Ownership and understanding by at all levels within the organisation
- A clear child-centred focus on impact, aimed at improving services and outcomes
- Oversight and scrutiny by senior management and members

It was reported that senior managers have additional responsibilities to monitor and address performance issues. The performance management activities are in addition to routine and regular performance monitoring processes such as statutory reviews, supervision, complaints and service user feedback.

Detail was also provided on the performance inputs and practice improvement activity. A monthly performance cycle of meetings and actions creates a shared focus and accountability to ensure best outcomes for children.

The cycle operates across 4 weeks and includes:

Week 1 – Brilliant at the Basics (BAB)

Week 2 – Children’s Scorecard

Week 3 – Performance Accountability Board

Week 4 – Quality assurance and performance report

The framework aims to provide a suitable system to support service improvement within Children’s Social Care. This will also be used to inform the self-evaluation and to provide an evidence base for the improvement and delivery plan.

Panel members reviewed the Children’s Services Performance and Quality Assurance Scorecard. The Director of Children’s Services provided some additional clarity to members as to how the scorecard is structured and also the detail specific to the contact and referral process for children and families requiring more formal social care intervention,

The Deputy Executive Leader and officers responded to a number of questions from the panel on:

- Performance reporting and oversight.
- The range of measures included within the scorecard and understanding trajectory over time.
- The scale and complexity of demand.
- The statutory measures that services have to monitor and record.
- Areas of focus for services and priority actions.
- Translating and considering the impacts on children and families regarding the quality of practice and outcomes.
- The role and importance of audits, the reporting of data on this and learning available.
- A number of identified indicators relating to the Front Door, Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Workforce.

**Actions:** The points for action include:

- The Children’s Services Performance and Quality Assurance Scorecard to be tabled at all future meetings.
- The Scrutiny Panel to identify and agree key lines of enquiry relating to specific performance indicators. The request to be made outside of the meeting direct to the Deputy Executive Leader and Director of Children’s Services, with responses to be tabled at the next available meeting.

### **30. CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Panel welcomed Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader (Children & Families); and Allison Parkinson, Director of Children’s Services, to review the updated Children’s Social Care Improvement Plan.

### **31. CHAIR’S UPDATE**

The Chair advised members of upcoming Scrutiny reports to be tabled at the meeting of Overview Panel on 21 November 2023.

All members of the Scrutiny Panel have received an invitation for 28 October 2023, to attend a training session delivered by the LGA on the Effective Scrutiny of Children’s Services.

### **32. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 10 January 2024.

### **33. URGENT ITEMS**

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

**CHAIR**

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# SEND Update

January 2024

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Agenda Item 4



## Agenda

- Current Context of the Local Area Partnership.
- Recent changes to the local SEND system.
- Plans for the next 12 months.
- Planned Improvements and key activities.







# Current Context of the Local Area Partnership

There is now established a refreshed **SEND Partnership Board** with an experienced independent chair (first meeting December 2023).

The focus is on **strengthening partnership across the local area** . Key seniors are already engaged.

The purpose is

- to ensure SEND and Alternative provision arrangements are improved to achieve better outcomes for children and young people and that
- there is robust leadership and governance, scrutiny and accountability through the board.
- This will be the focus of all improvement work.

There has been a **diagnostic review** and some of the recommendations are already being taken forward and will be accountable to the SEND Area Improvement Board.





# Recent Changes in the SEND System

## Housekeeping-statutory duties: EHC Plans

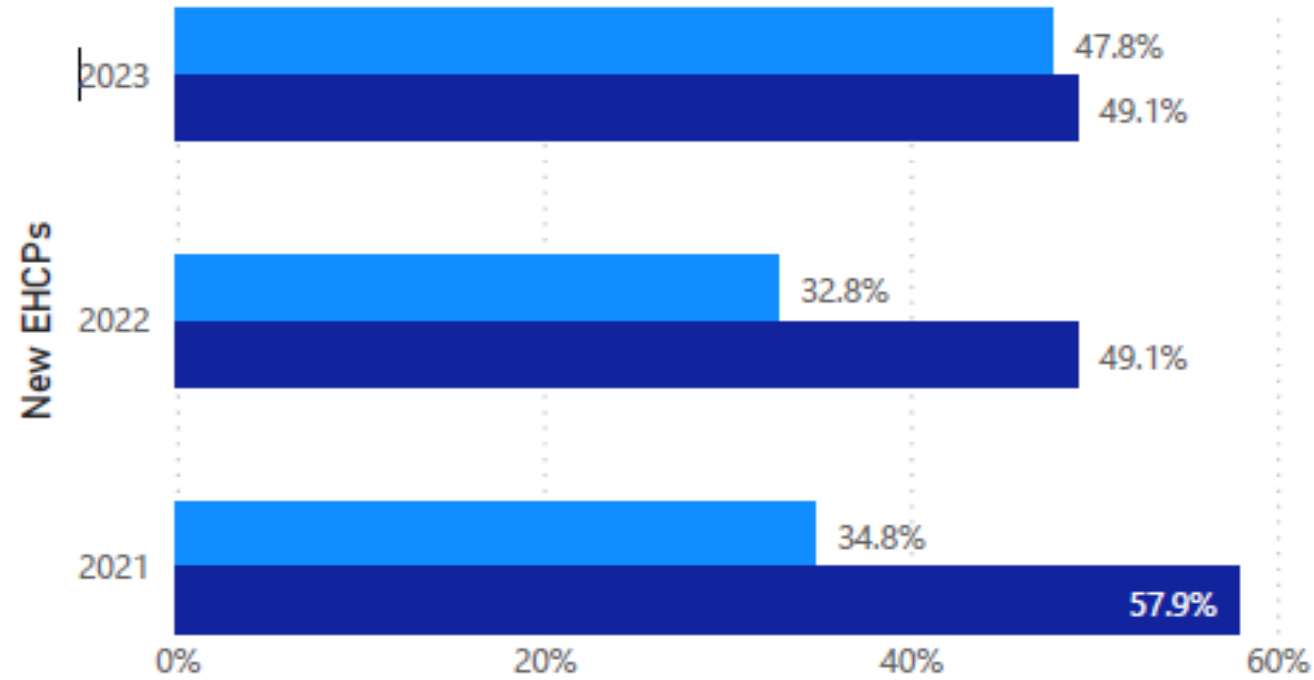
- **Quality assurance** protocol framework presented to the SEND partnership Board
  - Local Area QA group convened to QA plans-agreement on QA process
  - In-service QA implemented on regular basis(has already begun).
- **Timeliness** - System to establish timeliness of advices.
- Recruitment underway to have more leadership oversight within the team.
- Focus now on allocations around schools rather than post codes.





### % EHCPs completed within 20 weeks

● % completed within 20 weeks ● National average (2022 used for 2023)





# Recent Changes in the SEND System (continued.)

## Housekeeping Statutory Duties: Annual Reviews

- Recovery Plan developed October '23 to address the backlog of Annual reviews.
- Work on data completed to ensure a robust account of the current situation – 70% of annual reviews are delayed (backlog).
- Backlog Team now recruited-experienced interims who have done this work before (Team of 6 plus lead-2 will oversee post-16 casework).
- Annual review recommendations now scrutinised and considered by Placement, Provision and Transport panel. Multi-agency and includes schools. Also bespoke post-16 panel





## Recent changes to the Local SEND System (continued.)

- An **independent diagnostic review** has been commissioned and investment has been agreed to prioritise improvements in key areas. This will bring order and rigour to the work to be done, the priorities for implementation, and to area governance.
- **Leadership and accountability** for performance across SEND is being strengthened. Significant investment in SEND leadership and casework.
- To ensure there is a clear focus on the impact of local area arrangements on outcomes for children and young people, an **experienced independent Chair** has been appointed to oversee the refreshed SEND Local Area Partnership Board.





## Current Context of the Local Area

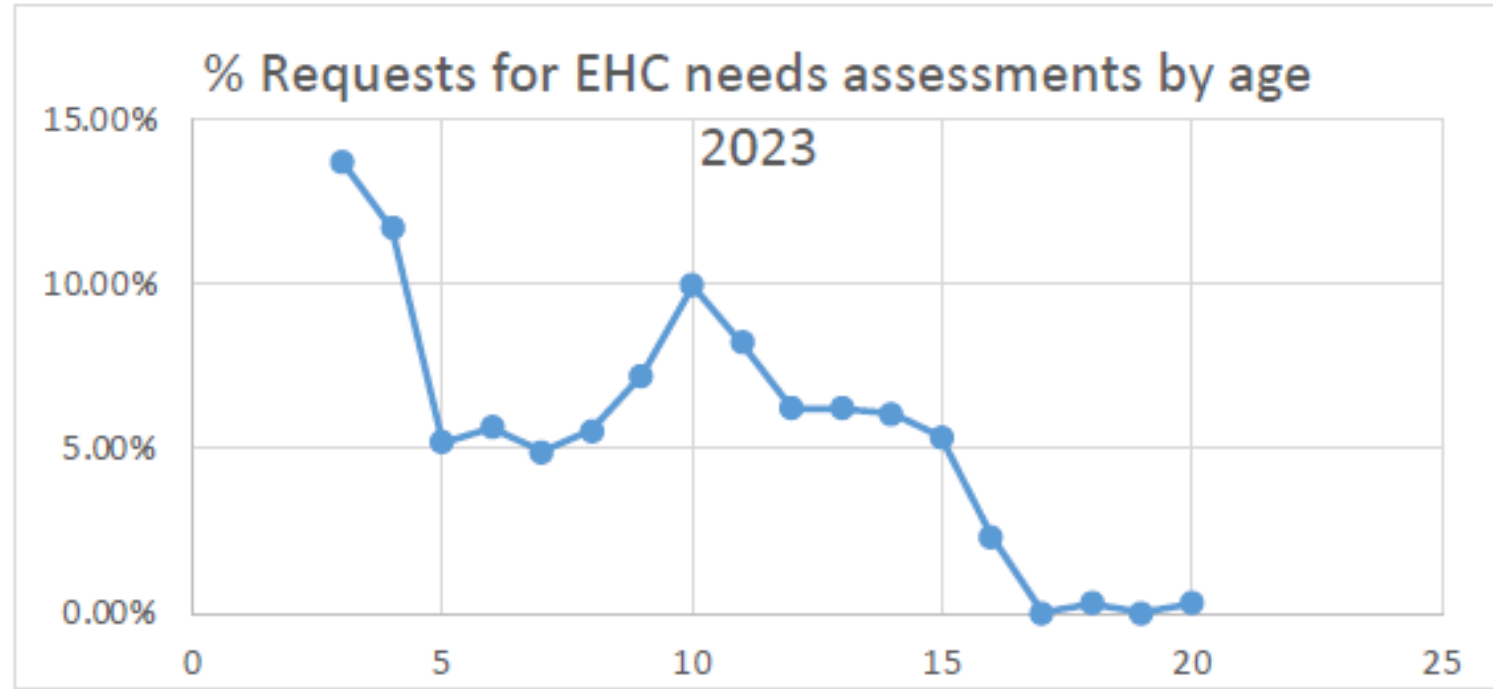
Significant **increase in plans** especially at age 4 and 11. DBV case studies show a number of children with plans could have achieved their outcomes without a plan or in a mainstream school.

- The **lack of MDT and gap in service offering are the main reasons** for this. The graduated approach is not currently embedded across the Local Area. There is a **lack of confidence in SEN Support evidenced by the increase of EHC needs assessment referrals**. We are working with schools and partners to redefine and promote the graduated response: showcasing practice; outreach support.
- There is focus on **family hubs** to be part of a wider strategic approach to meet needs earlier, linking up with schools and education outreach services, as well as with social care.





Tameside data on EHC needs assessment shows:



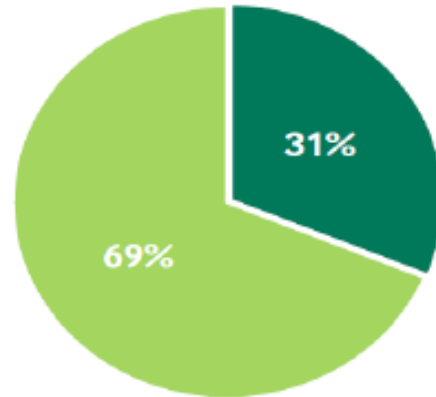


## Lack of MDT response and gap in service offering were the biggest barriers to achieving ideal outcomes

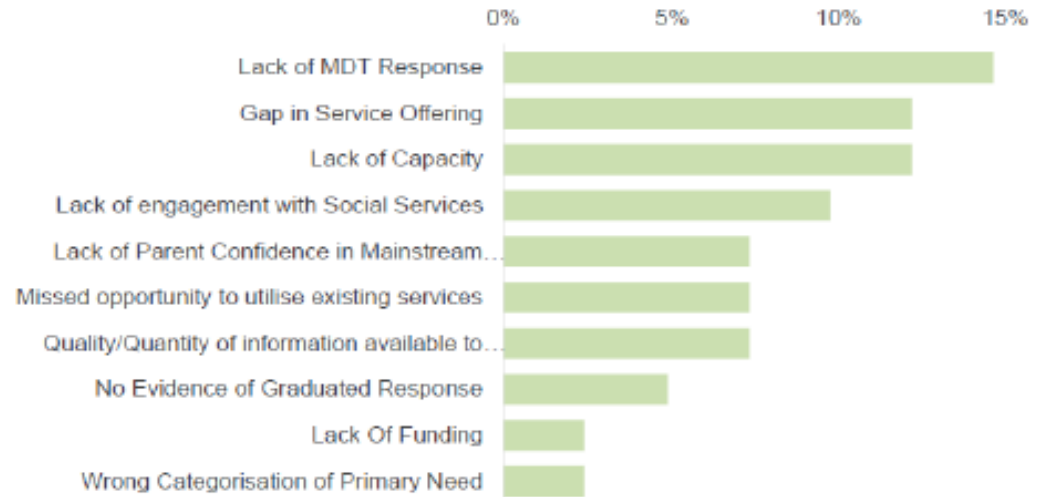


We completed 6 case review workshops in April 2023 with participants from across a range of disciplines, reviewing 32 unique cases to understand whether we delivered an ideal outcome to a CYP with SEND. We reviewed cases of CYP with a range of primary support needs a mainstream, maintained special schools and INMSS.

Did we achieve the ideal outcome for the CYP and enable them to achieve their goals and aspirations?



What themes contributed to achieving a non-ideal outcome?







## Current Context of the Local Area (continued.)

- **Parental participation and satisfaction is improved**, as reported by the Parent/Carer Forum, but there is still some way to go. We are working on reviewing **joint commissioning** arrangements underpinned by a shared approach to outcomes for children and young people. We are also establishing a **more holistic approach to meeting needs**, linking with Family Hubs, early years, schools and education settings.
- The refreshed Local Offer website has been co-produced and is overseen by a multi-agency operational group but not yet live. **Meet the Local Offers days** have been very successful and well attended.



## Current Context (continued.)



- Children's and Adult Social Care have a clear commitment to work in **partnership**. The quality of young people's transitions into adulthood has improved due to the **joint funded Transitions Social Worker** role.
- The appointment to the **DSCO (Designated Social Care Officer)** role has **strengthened the relationships** between Education and Social Care by further developing social care input into EHC plans and promoting better communication and joined up working between SEND, Virtual School and Social Care Teams.
- Strengthening Alternative provision strategy and Quality Assurance of this are key next steps. **Robust Headteacher Advice** is widely shared and understood; the same approach is implemented for directly commissioned AP but work underway to ensure this is more secure.





## Priority Actions

- Housekeeping
- Turning off the tap – ensuring improved SEN Support and Graduated Response
- Closer working across the partnership



# Plans for the next 12 months



**Area of Weakness 1** *The endemic weaknesses in the quality and, due to the pandemic, timeliness of EHC plans, which lead to poor outcomes for children and young people with SEND across education, health and care.*

- The implementation of a robust graduated offer and specialist service realignment.
- Realigning the statutory service.
- Ensuring there is local area governance and leadership over statutory decision-making.
- Establishing a backlog team.
- A Placement, Provision and Transport Panel. (and a bespoke post-16 one) is now established.





## Plans for the next 12 months

**Area of Weakness 2** *The high level of dissatisfaction among parents and carers with the area's provision.*

- Improve the graduated approach.
- Review joint commissioning arrangements underpinned by a shared approach to outcomes for children and young people.
- Embed voices of children and families in our Local Area Quality Assurance Framework and Performance Management Cycle.
- Young people, families / carers and professionals will have access to clear and accessible information including the Transition Pathway and Protocol that accurately reflects the transition journey.





## Plans for the next 12 months

**Area of Weakness 3** *The local offer not being well publicised and not providing parents with the information that they need*

- We have established a multi-agency, co-production ownership board for the Local Offer, which will support in the development of an implementation plan.

**Area of Weakness 4** *The placement of some children and young people in unsuitable education provision*

- We will establish rigor and accountability/transparency and moderation of decision-making in-house (including a more consistent approach to casework which underpins current realignment of the team).





## Plans for the next 12 months

**Area of Weakness 5** *The unreasonable waiting times, which lead to increased needs for children and young people and their families.*

- An annual review backlog team is being recruited - one lead and six additional experienced case officers to oversee annual reviews. This would relieve workload pressure on the permanent team who will be able to focus on business as usual.

**Area of Weakness 6** *The lack of contribution from social care professionals to the EHC process.*

- We are developing a quality assurance framework to sit under governance of the SEND partnership Board which will include review of quality of advice from social care professionals.
- There will be a simple process based on a set script to make informal contact with families and assess level of care needs who have been referred for EHC needs assessment.
- There is training planned for all social care teams.



## Plans for the next 12 months



### Area of Weakness 7 *The limited oversight of the quality of SEND provision for children and young people's education*

- The refreshed SEND Partnership Board will take forward strategic oversight of across the Local Area, not just for the areas of improvement required since the local area inspection, but across universal, targeted and specialist services.

### Area of Weakness 8 *The inconsistent application of a graduated approach across different settings, leading to weaknesses in meeting needs across the area*

- The implementation of a robust graduated response will be a good opportunity to include more children/young people in mainstream schools as well as a robust approach to placement.
- We will map education, health, and care provision across the Local Area, identifying and addressing gaps in relation to meeting needs of children and young people with SEND, through an improved graduated approach, and clearly communicate this.







## Plans for the next 12 months

### Area of Weakness 9 *The poor transition arrangements across all stages of education*

- Leaders will be focusing on improving school readiness of children, so that there is prompt support to meet needs, the impact of which would be that they have better opportunities to achieve positive outcomes.
- There is current work focusing on family hubs and linking services to these to provide a more holistic offer for early support and ensure improvement in school readiness.





## Plans for the next 12 months

Area of Weakness 10 *The lack of strategic direction in the support for children and young people to prepare them effectively for adulthood.*

The draft Transitions Protocol to be taken forward under Local Area Governance, reviewed as appropriate and implemented. The vision is 'of a SEND and alternative provision system which supports children and young people to successfully move through education and into adulthood, regardless of whether they have an EHCP, through the wide variety of routes available'.

- Established a bespoke post 16 of SEN caseworkers and leader and post-16 panel.
- Establish clear strategic leadership across education, health, and care.
- Post-16 pathways to be part of the graduated approach.
- Post-16 placements to be accountable to a bespoke multiagency post-16 moderating placement panel.

### Other actions:

Develop AP strategy and oversight; finalise the SEND Sufficiency Strategy.





# DBV Planned Improvements and Key Activities

## Summary of DBV opportunities and workstreams (excluding LA mitigations)



Opportunity / Findings:

Supporting the goals and aspirations of the child can be achieved without the need for an EHCP

Supporting the goals and aspirations of the child through Resources/SEN Unit setting rather than MSS

Supporting the goals and aspirations of the child in a Mainstream setting rather than MSS

Supporting the goals and aspirations of the child in MSS setting rather than INMSS

How will the workstreams target this opportunity:

**Effective Inclusion:**

- Creation of an Inclusion and Outreach Team linked to / managed by existing Special Schools and Resource Provisions
- Identification of best practices and communication across the system

The grant will support the creation of the Inclusion and Outreach Team which aims to stabilise mainstream placements and ease the pressure on maintained special schools hence reduce the need for INMSS

**Effective Inclusion:**

- Training of SEND teams and partners as appropriate and developing workforce development opportunities (including parents and carers) to enhance parental confidence across the SEND system and therefore trust the right support is being provided in the right provision at the right time.

The grant will support the delivery of new training programmes and the creation of joint workforce development opportunities

**Effective transition at early years and Primary to Secondary:**

- Improve the assessment at early years ages to ensure the best chance of transition to a mainstream setting rather than maintained special and other transition activities / funding to improve the effectiveness of transition and parental / school confidence in transition to mainstream settings, therefore reducing demand on maintained special schools and use of INMSS.

The grant will support the creation of an Early Years assessment centre and 6 into 7 transition activities and funding.

# Tameside & Glossop Integrated Care Foundation Trust



- £1.2m investment for therapies.
- SALT, OT and Physio – are all seen within 18 weeks for initial assessment ( 2yrs plus at time of inspection)
- New Children’s communication standard launched in Tameside – aimed at improving communications skills in young people <https://www.tamesideandglossopicft.nhs.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/new-childrens-communication-standard-launches-tameside>
- OT are currently working to develop a similar set of sensory standards.
- EHCP tracking team has been implemented which has forged close links with the SEN Team and has improved the EHCP process and timeliness of advice responses. (Paed advice response at inspection 17% within 6 weeks, Sept 23 92% returned within 6 weeks).
- ISCAN Microsite sharing information about the service: [Home :: Tameside Children and Young People](#)
- CYP Voice Project – mapping out the current offer in place, focusing on bringing all of the co-production work together across Tameside.





- Active Tameside – Voice of the Young People, support offered to 499 young people, and 221 families (September 22 – September 23). The development of services across Tameside have allowed a wider range of activities and sessions to be developed for young people with SEND to access. (Refer to Q1, Evidence 2 in SEF for Storyboard).
- Active Tameside have developed a new directory of services to share the support they offer. The SEND Participation Officer has also partnered with CAMHS to ensure parents and children are aware of the local offer and the activities and engagement opportunities within Tameside.
- Active Tameside – Delivered a ten-pin bowling festival to share the Tameside’s Everybody Can service and raise awareness of what children and families with SEND can access in their local community. (Refer to Q1, Evidence 7 in SEF).

MECAP Family Engagement Project – Parents/carers with children ages 0-5, offering peer support groups and information sessions on EHCPs and DLA Awareness sessions. 45 parents and caregivers registered with the project. Engaged with 300 parents and caregivers through local events, outreach into the community and at peer support groups/information sessions. (Refer to Q1, Evidence 4 and 5 in SEF).

- OKE – Family activity events and workshops, families aware of other support available whilst on long waiting lists, 7 days a week contact. Currently 2000 families registered. Increase in parents confidence, self esteem, awareness, understanding and knowledge. Peer support and friendships form between parents and siblings. Massive reduction in duty calls to CAMHS once OKE started up. (Refer to Q2, evidence 6 in SEF).
- Bella’s Journey – Case Study, a young person in Tameside being supported by the Family Nurse Partnership supported by Starling Training. Starling introduction to Neurodiversity Training. (Refer to Q2, Evidence 7 and 8 in SEF).



# Health Challenges and Solutions




- **Recruitment and retention of staff remains an on-going challenge – providers have been imaginative & proactive in recruitment campaigns but this remains a national issue.**
- **Long waits for ND appointments/diagnoses. This is a GM wide issue – demand far exceeds capacity. This has been escalated to GM.**
  - Services are committed to a ‘Supported while waiting model’ using the graduated response to ensure CYP’s needs **Data collection has been inconsistent and unreliable.**
  - Health SEND data dashboard has been developed and is monitored monthly at the.
- **Parental Dissatisfaction with long waits for services**
  - Parent/carer survey completed. Due to be redone March 2024
  - Oke – health navigator service implemented - Since July 2022 when the Health Navigator Service began to August 23: 664 New families are now receiving support. 10,399 contacts have been made to the Health Navigator Service.
  - MHST – 30% schools access this now, intention to extend across the borough
  - There is a range of VCSE support for families waiting for diagnoses
  - Barnardos, Kooth, Mencap 0-5, OKE 0-18, TOG MIND, 8+, Anthony Seddon 7+, Active 5+, TASCA 3+, FACT 3+, T21 0+, HOPE 0+



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**Parent power: Learning from complaints about personal budgets (November 2023)**

LGSCO questions for councillors	Executive / Service response
<p>Does the council have a personal budget and direct payment policy?</p>	<p>Yes-follow this link:</p> <p><a href="#">Personal-Budgets-Policy-for-EHCP.pdf (tameside.gov.uk)</a></p> <p align="center">                       Personal-Budgets-Policy-for-EHCP.pdf                 </p> <p><b>Children with Disability (CWD) Social Work / CWD Intervention Workers (draft being updated)</b></p> <p align="center">   </p> <p align="center">                     TMBC Direct Payments Policy - for children.docx                 </p> <p><b>In Health</b> children who receive continuing health care can apply for a personal budget.</p> <p>All other requests for funding usually go to the funding panel and are treated as individual funding requests.</p>
<p>What is the process for parents, carers and young people to ask for a review of the council's direct payment decision?</p>	<p>Mediation and tribunal.</p> <p><b>CWD Social Worker / CWD Intervention Workers</b>                      Parent / young person can request a re-assessment of need with regards DP support.</p> <p>CWD panel mediation with parent / young person and worker at any point.</p>

What are the council's timescales for making direct payments decisions and reviewing them?

The annual review process. There is the facility to review more frequently if there are particular concerns.

**CWD Social Worker / CWD Intervention Workers**

From point of assessment being completed workers have 10 working days to submit request to CWD panel.

Once agreement in place DP will be reviewed 4-6 weekly alongside financial review annually

**Health** will review annually usually. However, there is the facility to review more frequently if there are particular concerns and this will be agreed at the panel meeting.

What information is available from the council to parents, carers and young people about personal budgets and direct payments?

-follow this link:

[Personal-Budgets-Policy-for-EHCP.pdf \(tameside.gov.uk\)](https://www.tameside.gov.uk/personal-budgets-policy-for-ehcp.pdf)



Personal-Budgets-Policy-for-EHCP.pdf

**CWD social Work / CWD Intervention Workers (Easy read guide in process of update below)**

On the CWD website and is in the short breaks statement / protocol (online)



DP easy read guide-Parent.docx

[ISCAN \(tameside.gov.uk\)](https://www.tameside.gov.uk/iscan)

<p>Does the council have an agreement specifying terms and conditions for invoicing and paying for personal budgets?</p>	<p>Paid termly - letter is sent.</p> <p><b>CWD Social Worker / CWD Intervention Workers</b>  Direct payments awarded via CSC is paid fortnightly through Tameside payment systems. Payments are paid directly into a parent's bank account or the pay rolled brokerage service (pay partners) If funds need to be drawn back finance team manage and report through the payments systems in the monthly finance meetings.</p>
<p>How does the council monitor direct payments?</p>	<p>EHCP annual review process.</p> <p>We have less than 10 education personal budgets but there are a small number of personal transport budgets too.</p> <p><b>CWD Social Work / CWD Intervention Workers</b></p> <p>The DP is monitored via financial monitoring system monthly.  DP support is monitored 4 weekly Social Workers / 6 weekly Intervention workers.  Long Term Monitoring Review system-minimum 3 monthly</p> <p><b>Health:</b> There are very few requests to health for personal budgets</p>

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*Parent power:  
learning from complaints about  
personal budgets*



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# Ombudsman's foreword



We have reported many times about the severe problems our investigations highlight in the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) support system.

The sad truth is that in almost every detailed investigation about SEND services, we will find the local authority at fault in some way. We uphold more than nine out of 10 cases. [The situation has the markings of a system in crisis.](#)

Given these existing challenges, it is ever more important councils focus clearly on ensuring they meet their statutory duties, allowing people to receive the SEND services they have a right to.

This report looks at the rights of SEND families to have choice in how their support is provided. The case studies we highlight suggest that local authorities in England are not giving every family the choice and control over their SEND support to which they are entitled. We are sharing the learning from our findings to help councils improve and to increase parental awareness of their rights.

Local authorities must consult with and pay due regard to the wishes of children and families with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. The personal budget process is an important part of how this happens.

Families have a right to request a personal budget – the calculated cost of delivering the provision in their plan. This allows them to have a say in how their services are provided and to arrange their own support, if they wish. Councils then fund the support in various ways, but often through a 'direct payment' to the young person or family.

Our cases reveal inconsistencies in how councils comply with their personal budget duties. Common themes include more typical administrative failings, such as delays in making payments or considering requests.

More concerning are issues with councils being unaware of their duties, like not recognising general parental requests for funding as a request for a personal budget. Or a lack of coherent processes on making decisions.

But even more worrying is an occasional dearth of information about personal budgets on council websites. Many of the SEND families who complain to us are knowledgeable about their rights, from years of battling to get the support to which they are entitled. Yet it is simply unacceptable for any council to pass the buck onto families to unearth their rights.

The impact when something goes wrong is often additional stress and delay in getting support arranged. Ultimately it can lead to support being missed. In many of the cases, families have had to dip into their own pockets to continue funding support when the council has not delivered its duties – compounding financial strain upon an emotional one.

Councils not properly complying with personal budget responsibilities could also be missing a trick. With known shortages of specialist support services in parts of the country, swift

and accurate application of the personal budget process, in some cases, could harness the knowledge of families willing to arrange SEND provision themselves, putting it in place faster and more efficiently than it would have

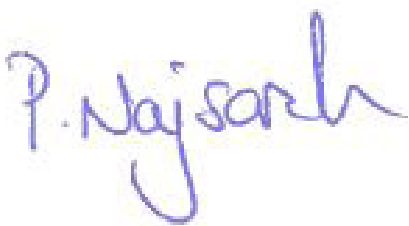
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***In many of the cases, families have had to dip into their own pockets to continue funding support when the council has not delivered its duties – compounding financial strain upon an emotional one.***

”

otherwise been.

Councils should reflect on the practical learning from the cases in this report. This will help ensure they are giving SEND families the right autonomy over how their EHC plan support is provided. And to help councillors scrutinise what happens in their authority, we provide some questions which they can pose.



**Paul Najsarek**  
**Local Government and Social**  
**Care Ombudsman**  
**November 2023**



# Background and legal context

## Law

The Children and Families Act 2014 section 49 introduced personal budgets for children and young people for whom councils maintain or prepare Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans.

There are separate regulations for direct payments for special educational provision, health care and social care provision. These are:

- > The Special Educational Needs (Personal Budget) Regulations 2014
- > The National Health Service (Direct Payments) Regulations 2013
- > The Community Care, services for Carers and Children's Services (Direct Payments) Regulations 2009 and The Care and Support (Direct Payments) Regulations 2014

Statutory Guidance "**Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years**" January 2015 in paragraphs 9.95 to 9.124 distinguishes between councils' duties and best practice when dealing with personal budget requests.

## Definition and mechanisms for delivery

A personal budget is an amount of money identified by the council to deliver provision set out in an EHC plan so the parent can get involved in arranging the provision. The child's parent or the young person has a right to ask for a personal budget when the council decides it will prepare an EHC plan or during a statutory review of an EHC plan.

There are four ways councils can deliver a personal budget:

- > Direct payments – individuals receive the cash to contract, purchase and manage services
- > An arrangement – the council, school or college holds funds and arranges the support specified in the plan (notional budgets)
- > Third party arrangements – funds (direct payments) are paid and managed by an individual or organisation on behalf of the child's parents or young person
- > A combination of the above

Councils cannot fund a school place or post-16 institution by direct payments.

Details of the personal budget should be included in Section J of the EHC plan.

## Personal budget process

Councils must display information on personal budgets on their websites. This should be part of their Local Offer and include information about organisations which can advise and help parents and young people to make decisions. Councils must also have a policy on personal budgets with the details of the eligibility criteria and with a decision-making process, including the parents' right to ask for a review of the council's decision refusing a request for a direct payment.

Councils must take into account the individual circumstances of each request for a personal budget. They should prepare a personal budget unless doing so would have a negative impact on other EHC plan holders, or would not be an efficient use of the council's resources.

Councils should have a robust process for funding special educational provision through direct payments. This process must include:

- > Written notice of the conditions for direct payments
- > Agreement of an early years setting, school or college if any provision is to be delivered in the educational placement
- > Setting out in writing the council's reasons for a refusal of direct payments and telling parents/young people of their right to ask for a review
- > Monitoring arrangements

More details of the councils' duties relating to personal budgets and direct payments are provided in the [Appendix](#).

## Our role and experience

We look at the way councils consider parental/young persons' requests for personal budgets. We check councils understand that when asking for personal budgets, parents/young people do not have to use this technical term. Sometimes they can simply ask for funding for a provision included in the EHC plan.

Councils should include information on personal budgets in their Local Offer, on their website and hold a personal budget policy. Our investigation will check how councils comply with these duties.

Certain parts of the personal budget process are compulsory, and we will criticise councils for failing to follow the correct process.

Where we find a council at fault, and this has caused injustice, we will make recommendations. Our recommendations aim to put the complainant in the position they would have been in if the council's failings had not happened. They might include:

- > Apologising
- > Making a decision it should have made before
- > Reconsidering a decision that it did not make properly in the first place
- > Making a symbolic payment to recognise the impact of fault where this is not possible

Most importantly, we can make recommendations for the council to improve its services. We do this when our investigation identifies a practice or policy fault. 'Service improvement' recommendations aim to avoid similar problems reoccurring for the benefit of everyone in the area.

Our 'service improvement' recommendations often include amending information on the council's website, introducing or amending a personal budget policy, reviewing the personal budget process including advice provided to the parents or carers, and training staff. Service improvements are published for every council on our [Council Performance map](#).

# Common issues and learning points

## Not recognising parental requests for ‘funding’ as requests for direct payments



### Hannah's story

Case reference: [22 003 230](#)

Hannah is autistic and since the beginning of her primary education struggled with attending school full-time. After a few exclusions, Hannah's mother had a meeting with her school and council. All agreed she could not cope with more than two hours per week of learning at school.

Hannah's parents suggested using Applied Behaviour Therapy (ABA) which would make it possible for Hannah to access education. The council amended Hannah's EHC plan, including in it the details of how ABA would be delivered for a year. Hannah's mother found tutors trained in ABA and they started teaching Hannah at home.

In the following months Hannah's mother contacted the council on many occasions asking it to pay for Hannah's tutors. The council did not agree. At the Annual Review six months later Hannah's mother told the council some of the tutors left and others reduced their working hours. This affected Hannah's education.

Nine months after Hannah's tutoring started, her mother formally asked for direct payments to pay the tutors and the council agreed. The council's failure to recognise that Hannah's mother's requests for funding were requests for direct payments meant it failed to apply its direct payments policy. This caused delays and complications to the process.

### How we put things right

By the time we completed our investigation, the council had reimbursed Hannah's mother the cost of the tuition. It agreed to apologise to Hannah's mother and provide its special educational needs case officers and managers with training on personal budgets in EHC plans.

### Learning point

When parents ask councils to fund special educational provision in their child's EHC plan, councils should consider whether this is a request for a direct payment. This is necessary to ensure councils comply with their statutory duties.

# Common issues and learning points

## Failing to consider parental requests



### Taigan's story

Case reference: [22 007 593](#)

Taigan is autistic and has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. After he moved to a junior school Taigan struggled with a full-time attendance. For many months he was on a part-time timetable at school and at risk of permanent exclusion because of behavioural issues.

A year after the council issued an EHC plan, Taigan stopped attending school. The council intended to arrange specialist tutoring for him but after a few months of no education Taigan's mother asked the council for a personal budget to fund some tutoring for him.

Despite asking three times for a personal budget, the council did not consider Taigan's mother's request. It told us that she did not provide any specific details with her request.

Our investigation found the council at fault for not considering the request for a personal budget. It is unreasonable to expect parents to provide all the information required without any guidance from the council. If the council had considered and refused the request, it should then have told Taigan's mother that she could ask for a review of the decision.

The council's faults deprived Taigan's mother of the opportunity to arrange specialist tutoring for her son earlier – particularly because the council could not find a suitable tutoring agency.

### How we put things right

The council agreed to consider Taigan's mother's request for a personal budget and to make a symbolic payment to recognise her distress for the prolonged period it failed to respond to her. The council also agreed to ensure all SEND case officers and their managers review the council's personal budget policy and direct payments guidance.

### Learning point

Councils should have a clear procedure in place for considering all parental requests for a personal budget or direct payments and ensure it is adhered to.

# Common issues and learning points

## Not giving clear reasons for a decision and failing to give advice on the right to review



### Adam's story

Case reference: [22 000 324](#)

Following an annual review of Adam's EHC plan, the council agreed a personal budget to provide him with support. After two months his mother started receiving money for Adam's numeracy and literacy tutoring.

Six months later the council decided to stop paying Adam's personal budget. The council sent its decision to Adam's mother with an amended draft EHC plan, without giving reasons for this change and with no advice on her right to ask for a review. It stopped the payments for tutoring before discussing it with Adam's mother.

Adam's mother tried to challenge the council's decision but did not know why the council changed its position, or how to ask for a review. Adam continued to struggle to engage properly in his schoolwork. To avoid him missing out on education, Adam's mother took over funding his numeracy and literacy tutoring. She made new personal budget requests in the months to come, but all of them were refused by the council. This situation caused Adam's mother severe distress and stretched her finances.

### How we put things right

The council agreed to apologise, provide a full back payment of Adam's personal budget and to continue to pay Adam's personal budget each month until it made a decision using the correct procedure. The council also agreed to establish a clear policy on personal budgets/direct payments, train its staff and review its systems and practices relating to personal budget reviews. The council agreed to produce a template document informing parents of the outcome of personal budget decisions which includes information on how to ask for a review.

### Learning point

When making and communicating decisions on personal budgets/direct payments, councils should follow good administrative practice by providing reasons for their decisions and information on the right to ask for a review.

# Common issues and learning points

## Delays in considering parental requests



### Paul's story

Case reference: [22 001 375](#)

Paul has complex special educational needs and he has an EHC plan. Paul struggled to attend mainstream school and the council agreed to home-based schooling for him. This was funded by direct payments.

The council reviewed Paul's EHC plan and issued an amended draft plan without any details of Paul's personal budget. A few months after issuing this, Paul's mother contacted the council to get a decision on his personal budget. She was concerned they did not know how Paul's education would be paid for before the start of the new school year.

With no final EHC plan and no decision on his personal budget, for the first three weeks of September Paul's mother had to fund his provision from her own savings. At the same time, she had no certainty the council would reimburse her. It reimbursed her in the fourth week of September, arranged a direct payment and apologised for the delays.

### How we put things right

The council agreed to apologise to Paul and his mother for its failings. It made a symbolic payment to recognise the distress and uncertainty it had caused. The council also agreed to carry out training for staff involved with personal budgets, as well as to introduce a personal budget section in the templates for annual reviews.

### Learning point

It is essential to consider personal budget and direct payments requests in a timely way, to ensure consistent support for children and to avoid financial strain on their parents or carers.

# Common issues and learning points

## Not giving clear reasons for a decision and failing to give advice on the right to review



### Hamish's story

Case reference: [21 005 214](#)

At the annual review of Hamish's EHC plan, the council agreed to make direct payments to his mother to fund his private tutoring. The council started direct payments a month before the summer holidays.

Two months into the new term, the council told his mother it was ending his personal budget immediately as it was no longer needed. The mother questioned the council's decision and asked it to continue the payments until the matter was resolved. Four months later the mother met with the council to discuss the issue, but it did not treat her complaint as a formal request for a review of a personal budget decision.

At the very end of the school year the council reconsidered its decision not to pay.

During our investigation we found the council's Local Offer information on personal budgets/direct payments was incomplete. It also did not have a clear personal budget and direct payments policy. It must have these. This left Hamish's mother unclear about what should have happened and what rights she had.

### How we put things right

The council agreed to apologise for its failings and backdate direct payments. It also agreed to continue funding Hamish's tuition until it made a personal budget decision using the right procedure. The council carried out several service improvements including establishing a clear policy for personal budgets and direct payments as well as amending its Local Offer.

### Learning point

Councils should ensure they have sufficient information on personal budgets/direct payments on their websites as well as legally compliant policies on personal budgets and direct payments.

# Common issues and learning points

## Delays in making payments



### Mia's story

Case reference: [22 009 007](#)

Mia's EHC plan said she needed weekly music sessions to help with her education. Her mother found music tutors and asked the council for direct payments so she could arrange the tuition. After receiving details of the tutor, the council agreed a personal budget for Mia and to fund the sessions through direct payments.

For the first few months the council paid the fees for Mia's music sessions based on the invoices her mother sent. Then it stopped making payments and asked for evidence of the payments she made to the music tutors, their contact details and progress reports from each tutor. Mia's mother sent the council videos from the music sessions, but the council said it could not use this evidence.

The communication between the council and Mia's mother about what evidence she needed to provide, resulted in almost 10 months of delays with the payment for the tutors. In the meantime, the mother continued paying for music sessions which caused her financial difficulties.

### How we put things right

The council agreed to pay Mia's mother for the music sessions she received. The council also said it would produce a personal budget agreement for her mother, outlining the terms of reimbursement for music sessions.

### Learning point

When agreeing personal budgets/direct payments, councils should draw up agreements specifying terms and conditions for invoicing and payments to avoid misunderstandings and delays.



# Promoting good practice

While remedying individual injustice is an essential part of what we do, we also help councils, care providers and other public bodies tackle systemic failures and improve the way they deal with complaints.

In many cases we ask organisations whether other people are currently, or could be, affected by the same issues raised in a complaint.

Drawing on our casework, we have identified some positive steps councils can take to improve services:

- > Ensure the council has information on its website about personal budgets and direct payments and this information is compliant with the law and guidance
- > Review and, if necessary, amend, the council's personal budget and direct payment policies
- > Review the council's procedures to ensure it provides parents, carers and young people with information to help them through the process
- > Introduce templates for personal budget/direct payment agreements and personal budget/direct payment refusals
- > Ensure direct payment agreements specify terms and conditions for invoicing and making payments, so parents know what information they will be expected to provide to receive the payments
- > Ensure parents, carers and young people know about their right to ask for a review of the council's decision to refuse a direct payment
- > Have a clear and transparent procedure for reviewing decisions about direct payments
- > Train front-line staff to recognise direct payments requests and to provide advice to parents and carers

# Local scrutiny: Questions for councillors

We want to share learning from our complaints with locally elected councillors, who have the democratic right to scrutinise the way councils carry out their functions and hold them to account.

We have suggested some key questions elected members could ask officers when scrutinising services in their authority:

- > Does the council have a personal budget and direct payment policy?
- > What is the process for parents, carers and young people to ask for a review of the council's direct payment decision?
- > What are the council's timescales for making direct payments decisions and reviewing them?
- > What information is available from the council to parents, carers and young people about personal budgets and direct payments?
- > Does the council have an agreement specifying terms and conditions for invoicing and paying for personal budgets?
- > How does the council monitor direct payments?

# Appendix

## Councils' duties

### General personal budget duties

Councils must:

- > Provide information on personal budgets as part of the Local Offer
- > Hold a policy on personal budgets which should include:
  - Description of services across education, health and social care that lend themselves to the use of personal budgets
  - The ways of making the funding available
  - Eligibility criteria
  - Decision-making process
- > Provide information about organisations that can advise and assist parents and young people to make informed decisions about personal budgets
- > Consider each request for personal budget on its individual merits
- > Prepare personal budget when requested, unless the sum is part of a larger amount and disaggregation of the funds would:
  - Have negative impact on services for other EHC plan holders, or
  - Not be an efficient use of council's resources
  - Allocate enough funding budget to secure the agreed provision in the EHC plan

### Direct payments for special educational provision

Councils must:

- > Provide written notice of the conditions for receipt of direct payment
- > Secure agreement of the early years setting, school or college if any of the provision is to be delivered on that institution's premises
- > Satisfy itself the direct payments:
  - Will be used in an appropriate way
  - The recipient will act in the best interest of the child or young person
  - Will not have an adverse impact on other services provided or arranged by the council for children and young people with EHC plans
  - Are an efficient use of the council's resources
- > When refusing direct payments:
  - Set out its reasons in writing
  - Inform the child's parent or the young person of their right to ask for a formal review
  - Consider parental or young person's representations and respond to them in writing giving the reasons for the council's decision
- > Monitor the use of direct payments
- > When reducing the amount or stopping direct payments:
  - provide reasonable notice to the recipient
  - Set out its reasons
  - Reconsider its decision if requested
  - Consider the representations made by the recipient

## Direct payments for social care provision

Councils must:

- > offer direct payments for services provided to children with disabilities or their families under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 - for children and young people under 18
- > consider request for a direct payment - for young people over 18 with eligible care and support needs or where the council decides to meet needs
- > Satisfy itself the direct payments will be used in an appropriate way and act in the best interest of the child or young person

There are specific processes councils must follow depending on the age of a person asking for direct payments to meet their social care needs. They are specified in the Regulations quoted above.

## Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

PO Box 4771  
Coventry  
CV4 0EH

Phone: 0300 061 0614  
Web: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)  
X: [@LGOmbudsman](https://twitter.com/LGOmbudsman)

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December 2023

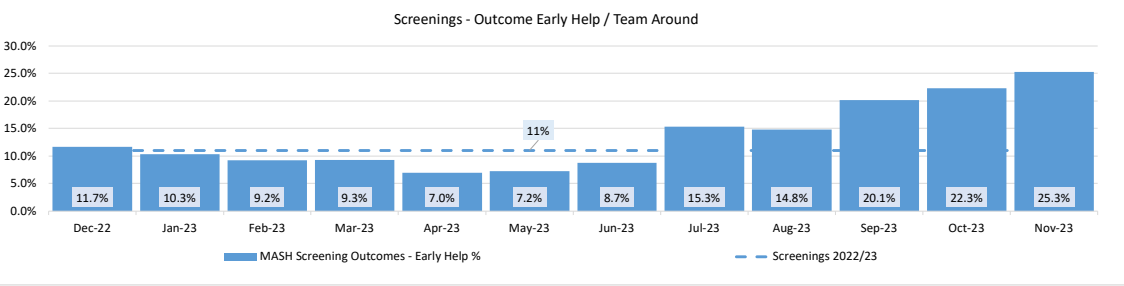
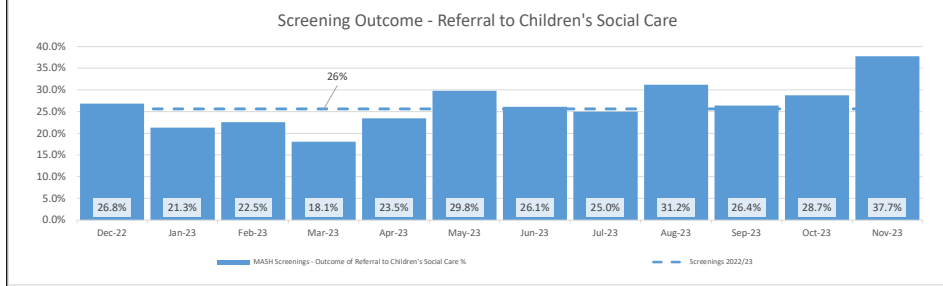
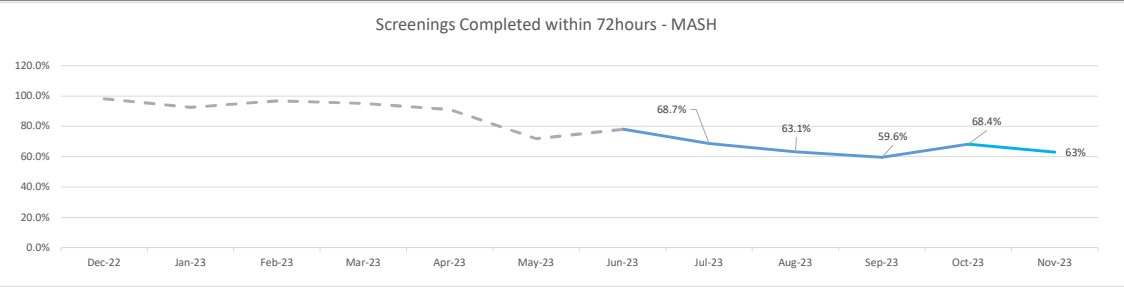
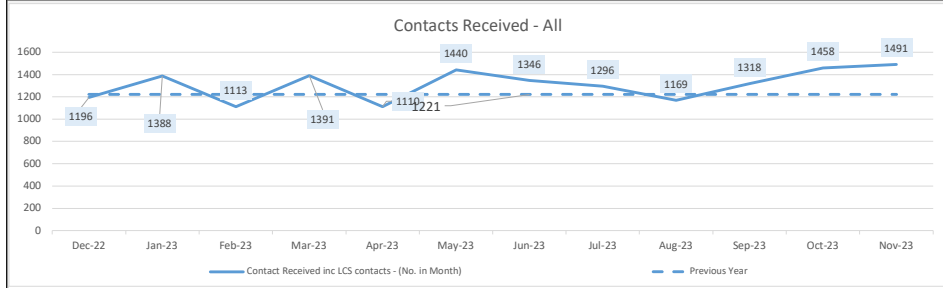
# CHILDRENS SERVICES PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SCORECARD

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Agenda Item 6

Summary Performance Charts



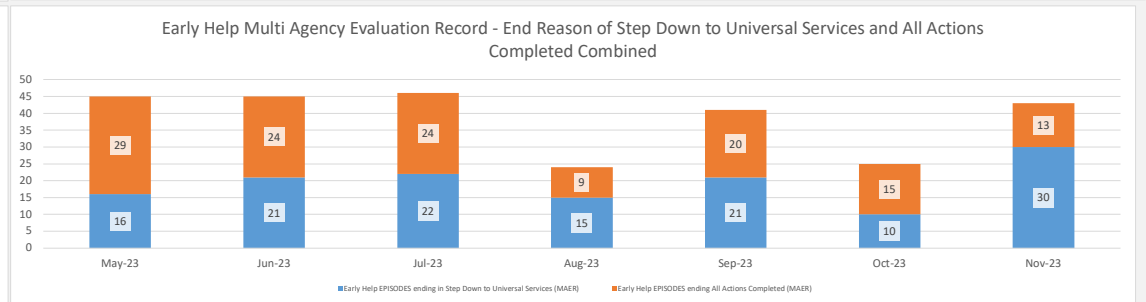
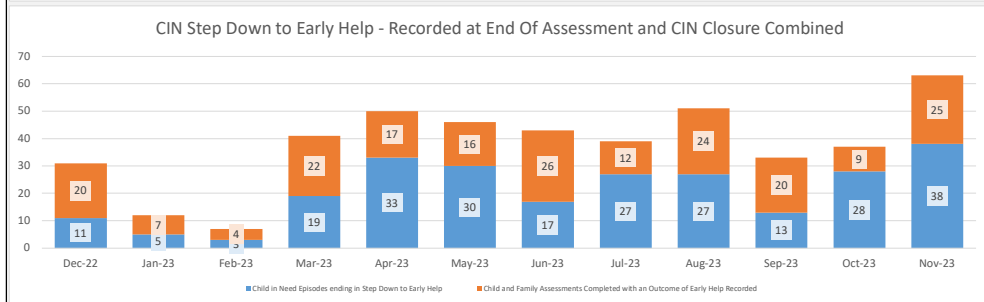
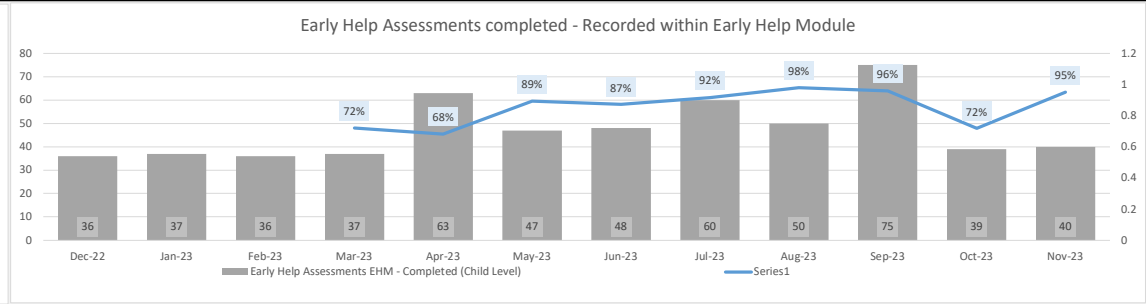
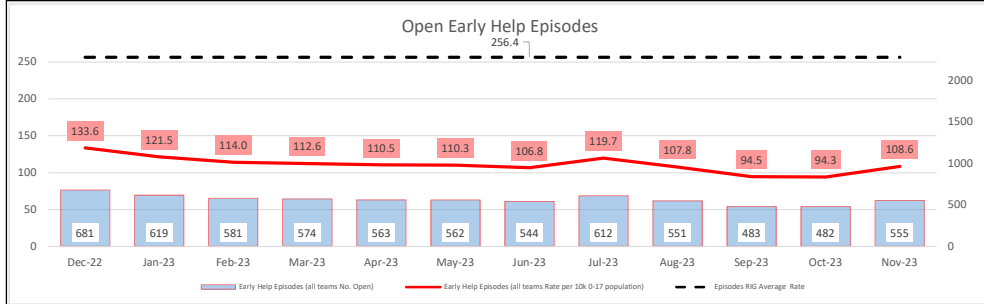
Highlight Indicators

Ref	Indicator	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Previous Year	Target	Greater Manchester Average	North West Average	Statistical Neighbourhood Average	England Average	Last 12 Months	Performance	Direction of Travel
FD1	Contact Received inc LCS contacts - (No. in Month)	1346	1296	1169	1318	1458	1491	1350								↑
FD2	Contact - (12 Month Rolling Rate)	3069	3056	3058	3043	3056	3043	2732								↔
FD2a	MASH Contact (No)	1344	1289	1150	1307	1451	1488	1343								↑
FD2b	MASH Contact Ending Prior to Screening (No)	358	388	295	114	209	115								A	↓
FD2c	MASH Contact Ending Prior to Screening (%)	27%	30%	26%	9%	14%	8%								A	↓
FD2d	Requests for Information Received	38	58	58	84	87	38									↓
FD2e	MASH Screenings Completed	982	899	854	1188	1209	1133								R	
FD2f	MASH Screenings Completed within 72hrs	78.1%	68.7%	63.1%	59.6%	68.4%	63%								R	
FD7	Contact Referred to children's social care (% of ALL contact in month EHM and LCS with an outcome of Children's Social Care by month end)	15.8%	16.3%	21.6%	22.4%	22.5%	28.1%	20%							G	
FD8b	Requests for Information Completed	38	58	58	84	87	24									
FD8c	MASH Screening Outcomes - Referral to Children's Social Care %	26.1%	25.0%	31.2%	26.4%	28.7%	37.7%	26%							A	
FD8d	MASH Screening Outcomes - Early Help %	8.7%	15.3%	14.8%	20.1%	22.3%	25.3%	11%							G	
FD8e	MASH Screening Outcomes - Referral to Other Agency %	20.5%	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	1.2%	1.7%	13%							R	
FD8f	MASH Screening Outcomes - Information and Advice %	56.1%	58.8%	53.2%	52.0%	47.2%	35.4%	53%							G	
FD16	Domestic Abuse Notifications Received	260	200	285	269	283	301									

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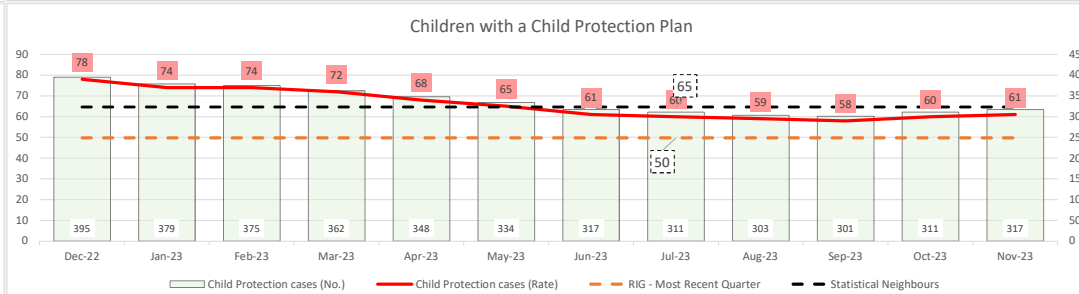
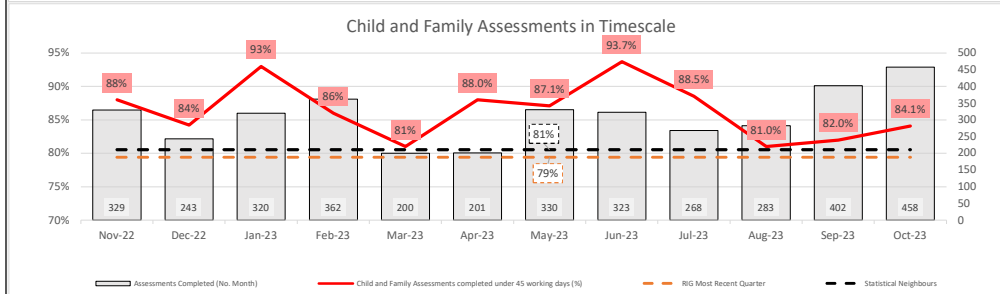
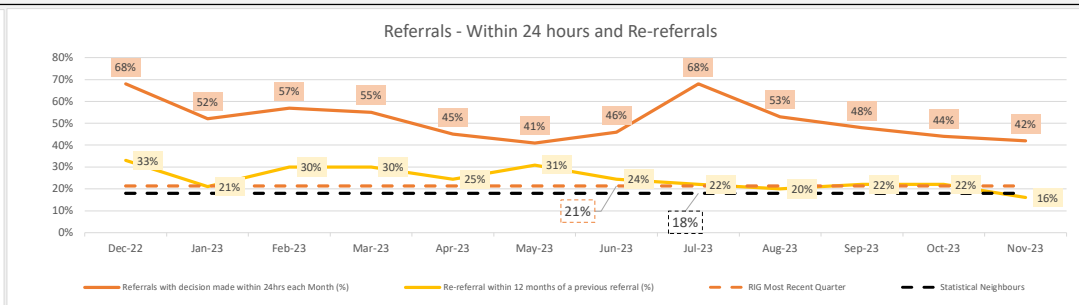
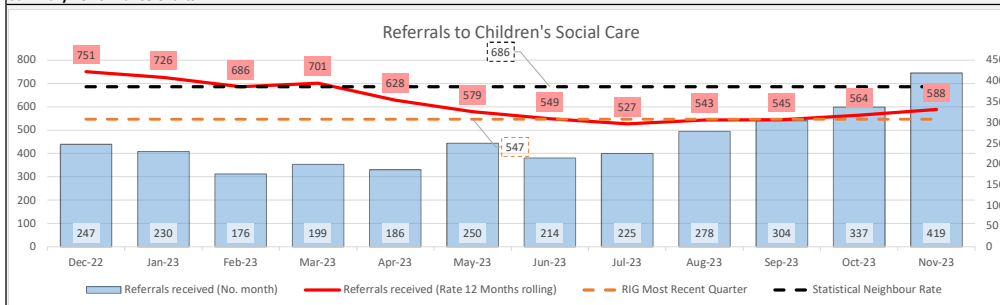


Summary Performance Charts












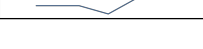
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EH2	Early Help Episodes (all teams No. Open)	544	612	551	483	482	555	570							A	↓
	Early Help Episodes (all teams Rate per 10k 0-17 population)	106.8	119.7	107.8	94.5	94.3	108.6	111.9							A	↓
EH7	Early Help Assessments recorded within EHM - Open at month end Number	51	80	88	75	74	101	59								↓
EH9	Early Help Assessments EHM - Completed (Child Level)	48	60	50	75	39	40	34							G	↑
EH9a	Early Help Assessments Completed in Timescale 45 days % each month	87%	92%	98%	96%	72%	95%								G	↓
EH10	Early Help Episodes ending in Step Up to Children's Social Care (Multi Agency Evaluation Record)	26	25	14	44	25	38	4							R	
EH10a	Early Help EPISODES ending in Step up to Childrens Social Care (Episode End Reson)	1	1	0	0	0	0									
EH10b	Early Help EPISODES ending in Step Down to Level 2 (MAER)	11	5	2	5	13	5								A	
EH10c	Early Help EPISODES ending in Step Down to Universal Services (MAER)	21	22	15	21	10	30								A	
EH10d	Early Help EPISODES ending All Actions Completed (MAER)	24	24	9	20	15	13								A	
EH11	Child in Need Episodes ending in Step Down to Early Help	17	27	27	13	28	38	9							A	
EH11a	Child and Family Assessments Completed with an Outcome of Early Help Recorded	26	12	24	20	9	25								A	

Summary Performance Charts

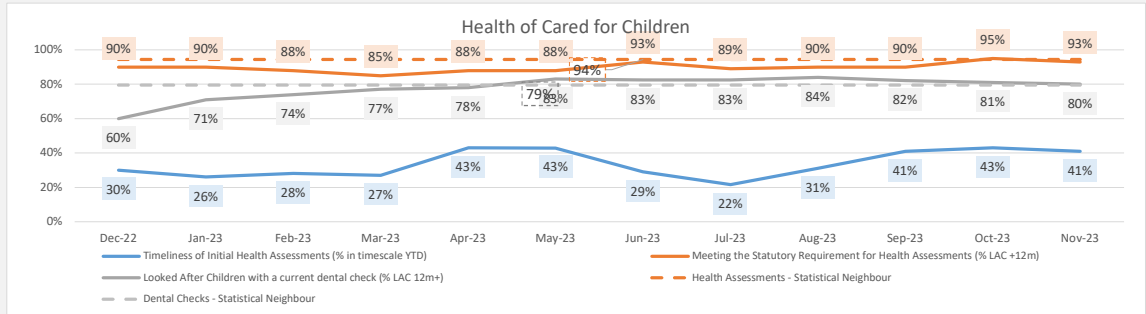
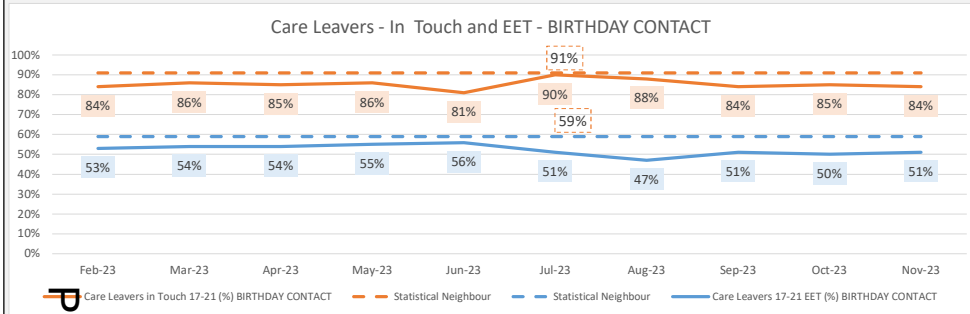
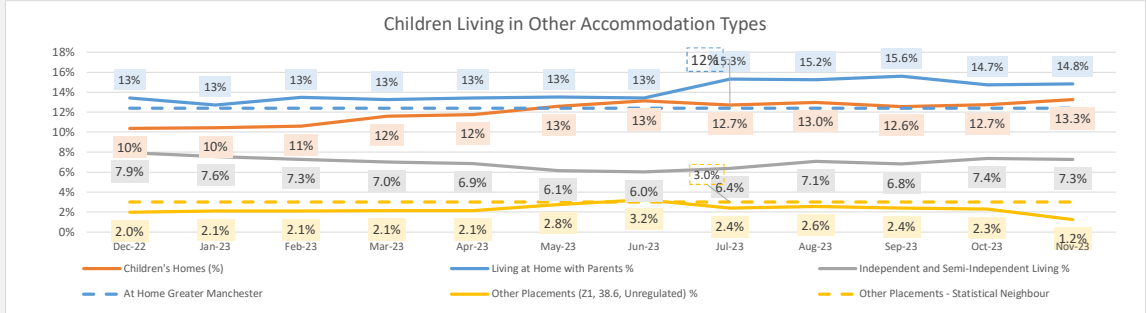
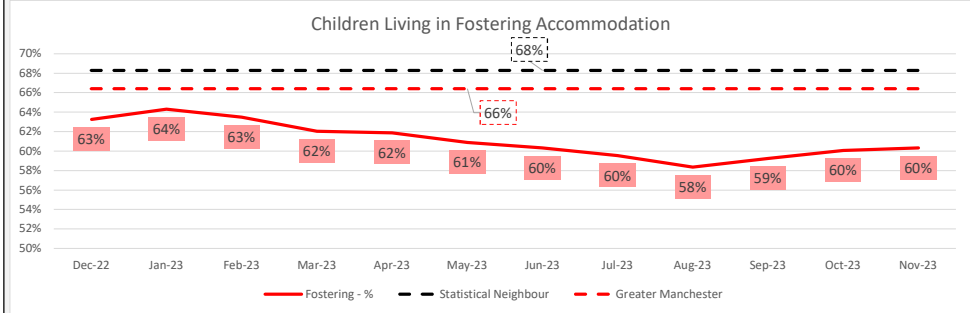


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Ref	Indicator	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Previous Year	Target	Greater Manchester Average (2021/22)	North West Average (2022/23)	Statistical Neighbour Average (2022/23)	England Average (2022/23)	Last 12 Months	Performance	Direction of Travel
CIN1	Referrals received (No. month)	214	225	278	304	337	419	280							A	↑
CIN2	Referrals received (Rate 12 Months rolling)	549	527	543	545	564	588	701	612	674	530	686	545		G	↑
CIN3	Referrals with decision made within 24hrs each Month (%)	46%	68%	53%	48%	44%	42%	46%							A	↓
CIN4	Re-referral within 12 months of a previous referral (%)	24%	22%	20%	22%	22%	16%	28%	20-24%	23%	21%	21%	21%		G	↔
CIN5	Referrals where a child was found to be not in Need after Assessment.	15%	14%	11%	12%	26%	27%	30%	29%	24%	27%	33%	30%		A	↑
CIN6	Assessments Completed (No. Month)	330	323	268	283	402	458	383							G	
CIN7	Assessments Completed (12 Month Rolling Rate)	769	740	697	681	692	720	900		730	597	814	557		A	
CIN8	Child and Family Assessments completed under 45 working days (%)	93.7%	88.5%	81.0%	82.0%	84.1%	79.3%	76%	85%	81%	79%	81%	82%		G	↑
CIN9	Strategy Meetings (No. Completed Month)	160	157	143	153	151	181	151								
CIN10	Strategy meetings (12 Month Rolling Rate)	335	328	332	334	335	336	353								
CIN10a	Strategy Meeting Attendance by Key Agency - Police (%)	100%	100%	99%	99%	100%	100%								G	
CIN10b	Strategy Meeting Attendance by Key Agency - Health (%)	88%	88%	89%	83%	90%	89%								A	
CIN10c	Strategy Meeting Attendance by Key Agency - Education (%)	85%	86%	44%	81%	81%	90%								A	
CIN11	Strategy Meeting Outcome - S47 (% Month)	70%	66%	59%	67%	59%	80%	74%							A	
CIN12	Strategy Meeting Outcomes-No Further Action (% Month)	25%	30%	33%	26%	36%	25%	21%							A	
CIN13	Section 47s Completed (no. Month)	136	105	80	86	111	122	113								
CIN14	Section 47s Completed (12 Month Rolling Rate)	246	244	235	235	232	230	268		207	176	247	165			
CIN15	Section 47s Completed - % Conference Outcomes ICPC (YTD)	29%	32%	34%	39%	36%	38%	39%		32%	33%	34%	33%		A	
CIN16	Child in Need Plan (No.)	413	392	425	408	420	419	513		576	486	585	460			
CIN16a	Child in Need Plan (Rate.)	77	83	80	82	82	82			113	95	114	90			
CIN17	Child In Need Reviews that were due completed in timescale (% YTD)	69%	71%	68%	69%	71%	72%	74%	80%						R	

CIN18	Child Protection cases (No.)	317	311	303	301	311	317	348		289	251	330	221		G	
CIN19	Child Protection cases (Rate)	61	60	59	58	60	61	68		57	49	65	43		G	↔
CIN20	Child Protection - Statutory visits in timescale (visit within last 28 days at Month end)	85%	90%	91%	94%	95%	96%		95%						G	↑
CIN21	Number of Times a Child was Reported Missing (No Month)	179	170	165	185	185	161	145							R	↔
CIN22	Number of Incidents where a Missing from Home Interview was Offered (by month end)	134	133	105	137	94	95								R	
CIN23	Missing incidents completed return home interview with 72hrs (No)	85	75	57	92	57	46								R	
CIN24	Number of Children with one or more missing incident each month	89	91	94	90	94	95	79							A	↓
CIN25	Complex Safeguarding - Referrals into the Complex Safeguarding Team (Quarterly)				27			17								
CIN26	Complex Safeguarding - Referrals into the Complex Safeguarding Team Closed NFA % (Quarterly)				33.33%			46%								
CIN27	Complex Safeguarding Team - Cases Open to Complex Safeguarding Team (Quarterly)				37			37								

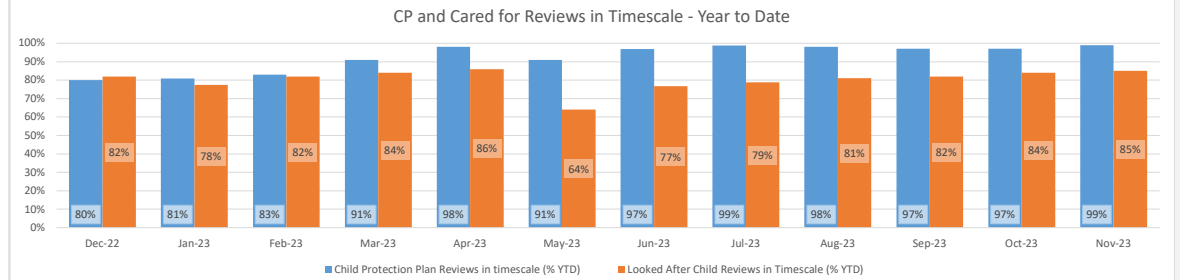
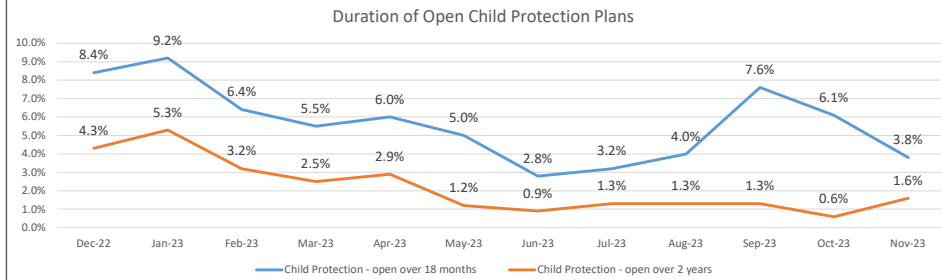
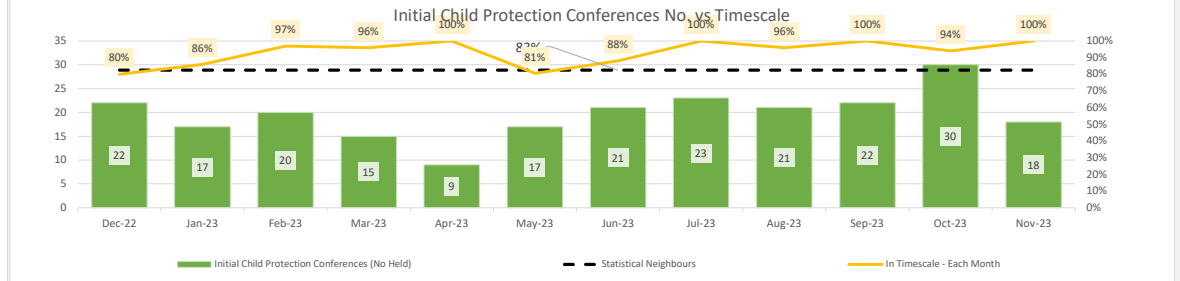
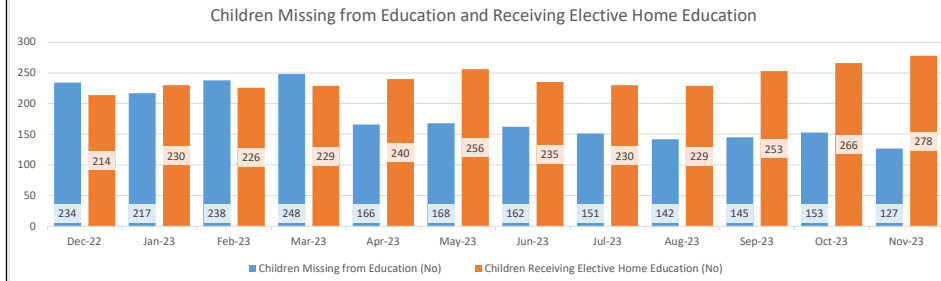
Summary Performance Charts



Ref	Indicator	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Previous Year	Target	Greater Manchester Average (2021/22)	North West Average (2022/23)	Statistical Neighbour Average (2022/23)	England Average (2022/23)	Last 12 Months	Performance	Direction of Travel
CF1	Cared for Children (No.)	648	660	663	660	651	648	656	552							↓
CF2	Cared for Children (Rate)	125	128	128	128	126	125	131	110							↓
CF3	Cared for Children - Statutory Visits in Timescale (%)	77.0%	78.3%	81.0%	92.0%	87.0%	92.0%	83%	90%						A	↓
CF4	Cared for Children with 3 or more placements in a 12 month period. (%)	10.3%	10.4%	10.4%	10.3%	10.3%	10.0%	5.0%	<7%	9%	9%	9%	10%		A	↔
CF5	Cared for Children for 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years (% Quarterly)	70.5%	70.5%	70.5%	70.5%	70.5%	70.5%	68%	73%	67%	69%	68%	69%		G	↔
CF6	Cared for Children subject to 3 or more changes of Social Worker in the last 12 months (%)	30%	34%	31%	34%	36%	35%	29%	10%						R	↑
<b>Where We Live</b>																
CF7	Within Tameside (%)	58.3%	58.5%	58.5%	58.5%	59.0%	58.2%	59%	>65%	59%	61%	59%	56%		A	↑
CF8	Fostering - No.	391	393	387	391	391	391	407							R	
CF9	Fostering - %	60%	60%	58%	59%	60%	60%	62%	71%	66%	66%	68%	68%		R	↑
CF10	Placed for Adoption (No)	19	18	20	16	12	14	20							A	
CF11	Placed for Adoption (%)	2.9%	2.7%	3.0%	2.4%	1.8%	2.2%	3.0%		3%	2%	3%	2%		A	
CF12	Living at Home with Parents No.	87	101	101	103	96	96	87							R	
CF13	Living at Home with Parents %	13%	15.3%	15.2%	15.6%	14.7%	14.8%	13%	8%	12%	11%	8%	7%		R	↓
CF14	Children's Homes (No)	85	84	86	83	83	86	76							R	
CF15	Children's Homes (%)	13%	12.7%	13.0%	12.6%	12.7%	13.3%	12%							R	↔
CF16	Independent and Semi-Independent Living No	39	42	47	45	48	47	46							G	
CF17	Independent and Semi-Independent Living %	6.0%	6.4%	7.1%	6.8%	7.4%	7.3%	7.0%							G	
CF18	Secure Units No	1	1	1	1	0	0	3							G	
CF19	Other Placements (Z1, 38.6, Unregulated) No.	21	16	17	16	15	8	14							A	
CF20	Other Placements (Z1, 38.6, Unregulated) %	3.2%	2.4%	2.6%	2.4%	2.3%	1.2%	2.1%		2%	1%	3%	1%		A	

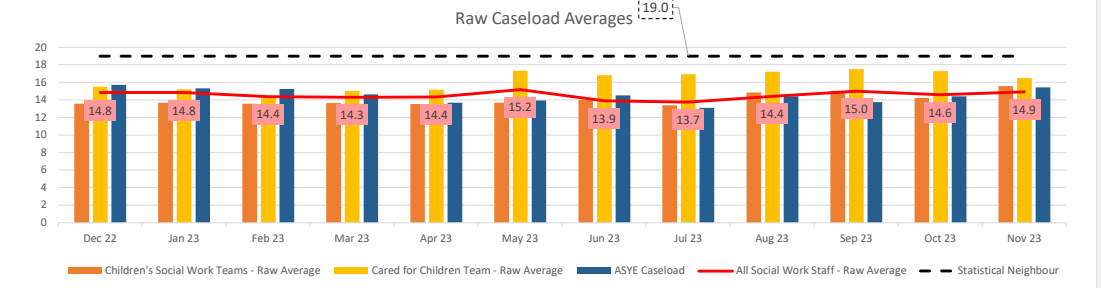
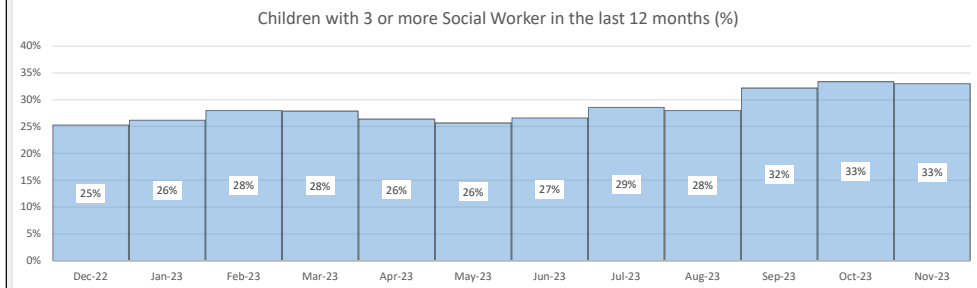
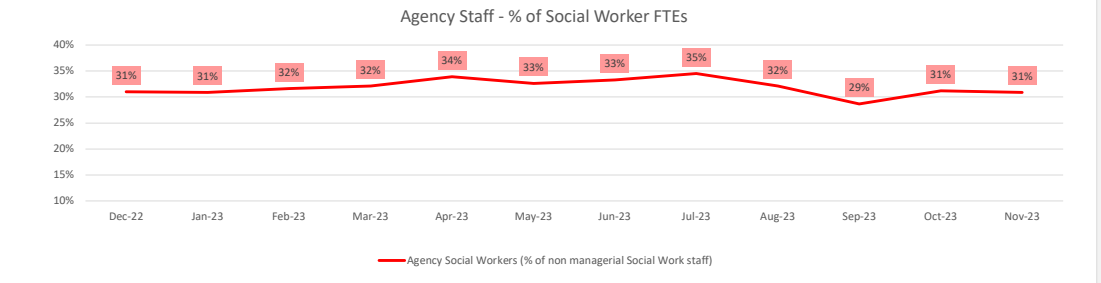
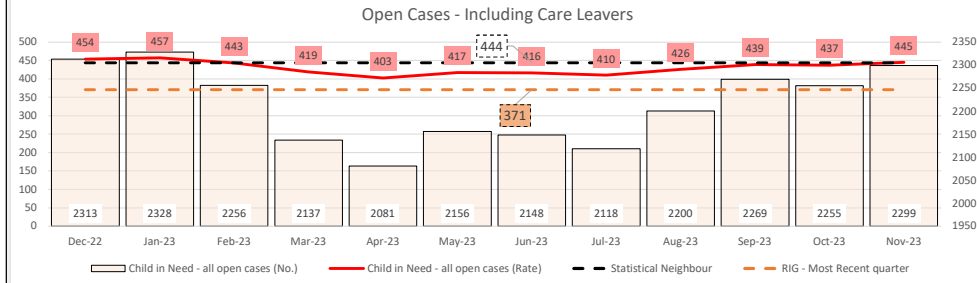
Outcomes																
CF21	Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments (% in timescale YTD)	29%	22%	31%	41%	43%	41%	27%							R	↑
CF22	Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments (% in timescale MONTH)	12%	0%	50%	74%	56%	18%	27%							A	↑
CF23	Meeting the Statutory Requirement for Health Assessments (% LAC +12m)	93%	89%	90%	90%	95%	93%	85%	96%	94%	92%	94%	89%		G	↑
CF25	Looked After Children with a current dental check (% LAC 12m+)	83%	83%	84%	82%	81%	80%	77%	80%	75%	77%	79%	76%		G	↓
CF27	Looked After Children with an Education Health and Care Plan (%)	22%	21%	21%	21%	n/a	17%	22%								
CF28	Looked After children 3 - 15 with a current Personal Education Plan (% Quarterly)	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%							G	↔
CF29	Care Leavers with a Pathway Plan in place (%)	85%	86%	87%	87%	87%	87%	86%							A	↔
CF30	Care Leavers in Touch 17-21 (%) BIRTHDAY CONTACT	81%	90%	88%	84%	85%	84%	92%	93%						A	↓
CF31	Care Leavers 17-21 EET (%) BIRTHDAY CONTACT	56%	51%	47%	51%	50%	51%	54%	52%						A	↓

Summary Performance Charts



Ref	Indicator	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Previous Year	Target	Greater Manchester Average (2021/22)	North West Average (2022/23)	Statistical Neighbour Average (2022/23)	England Average (2022/23)	Last 12 Months	Performance	Direction of Travel
SG1	Children Missing from Education (No)	168	162	151	142	145	153	127	248							A	↑
SG2	Children Receiving Elective Home Education (No)	256	235	230	229	253	266	278	229							A	↑
SG3	% of Children receiving Elective Home Education who are open to Children's Social Care	1.2%	1.3%	1.3%	1.7%	1.6%	0.8%	0.4%	2.2%							G	↔
SG4	Child in Need (all open cases) with a Education Health and Care Plan (%)	14%	15%	15%	14%	13%	n/a	12%	15%								
SG5	Children with Initial Child Protection Conferences held under 15 Working Days (% YTD)	87%	87%	92%	93%	94%	94%	95%	72%	83%	83%	80%	83%	78%		G	↔
SG6	Children with Initial Child Protection Conferences held under 15 Working Days (% IN MONTH)	81%	88%	100%	96%	100%	94%	100%	72%							G	↓
SG7	Initial Child Protection Conferences (No Held)	17	21	23	21	22	30	18	18								
SG8	Attendance at Initial Child Protection Conference by Police	100%	81%	74%	95%	86%	90%	94%	59%							A	
SG9	Attendance at Initial Child Protection Conference by Health	82%	100%	96%	81%	100%	97%	94%	85%							G	
SG10	Attendance at Initial Child Protection Conference by Education	100%	93%	87%	36%	86%	65%	90%	77%							A	
SG11	Child Protection Plan Reviews in timescale (% YTD)	91%	97%	99%	98%	97%	97%	99%	86%	91%	88%	87%	83%	88%		G	↔
SG12	Child Protection Plan Reviews in timescale (% Each Month)	99%	98%	99%	100%	97%	100%	100%								A	
SG13	Child Protection - open over 18 months	5.0%	2.8%	3.2%	4.0%	7.6%	6.1%	3.8%	5.5%							A	↓
SG14	Child Protection - open over 2 years	1.2%	0.9%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	0.6%	1.6%	2.5%	2.1%	3%	3%	2%	2%		G	↓
SG15	Looked After Child Reviews in Timescale (% YTD)	64%	77%	79%	81%	82%	84%	85%	87%	95%						A	↑

Summary Performance Charts



Ref	Indicator	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Previous Year	Target	Greater Manchester Average (2021/22)	North West Average (2022/23)	Statistical Neighbourhood Average (2022/23)	England Average (2022/23)	Last 12 Months	Performance	Direction of Travel
WF1	Child in Need - all open cases (No.)	2148	2118	2200	2269	2255	2299	2137	2175	2087	1978	2271	1752		A	↓
WF2	Child in Need - all open cases (Rate)	416	410	426	439	437	445	427	433	408	387	444	343		G	↓
WF3	Newly Qualified Social Worker on ASYE (% of Social workers FTE)	20%	19%	25%	24%	25%	20%	20%							R	
WF4	Agency Social Workers (% of non managerial Social Work staff)	33%	35%	32%	29%	31%	31%	32%	14-22%						R	↓
WF5	Children with 3 or more Social Worker in the last 12 months (%)	27%	29%	28%	32%	33%	33%	28%	15%						R	↑
WF5a	Child in Need Supervision Completed in the last 4 Weeks		51%	34%	66%	58%									A	↓
WF5b	Care Lever Supervision Completed in the last 8 Weeks		38%	85%	100%	94%									G	↓
WF5c	Supervision Completed in the Last 4 weeks - Excluding Cared for Children and Care Leavers															
WF5d	Supervision Completed in the Last 8 weeks - Cared for Children and Care Leavers															
<b>Caseloads</b>																
WF6	All Social Work Staff - Raw Average	13.9	13.7	14.4	15.0	14.6	14.9	14.3	16-18						G	↓
WF6a	All Social Work Staff - Excluding ASYE	15.6	13.9	14.5	15.4	15.1	14.8								G	↓
WF8	All Social Work Teams - Highest Individual Caseload	26.0	24.0	27.0	33.0	34.0	33.0	40							R	↑
WF9	Children's Social Work Teams - Raw Average	14.0	13.4	14.8	15.0	14.2	15.6	13.6							A	↑
WF10	Children with Disabilities Team - Raw Average	15.0	16.0	16.5	19.0	24.7	20.0	11.2							R	↑
WF11	Cared for Children Team - Raw Average	16.8	16.9	17.2	17.5	17.3	16.5	15							A	↑
WF12	Adoptions Team - Raw Average	5.7	5.2	5.7	5.2	5.3	4.8	5.5							G	↑
WF13	Leaving Care Team - Raw Average (Personal Advisors post 18 caseload)	33.2	29.6	29.4	24.5	20.1	20.1	-							A	↓
WF14	ASYE Caseload	14.5	13.1	14.4	13.8	14.4	15.4	14.6							G	↑

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<b>Title / Subject:</b>	Quality Assurance and Audit	<b>Date:</b>	21 December 2023
<b>Report For:</b>	Children's Service Scrutiny Panel	<b>Report By:</b>	Melanie Field Head of Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Principal Social Worker

## 1.0 Introduction & Background information

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the audit findings following the launch of the strengthened Quality Assurance Framework in October 2023 as requested by Children's Service Scrutiny Panel on 8 November 2023.

## 2.0 What we have done to date?

It is recognised that our improvement journey must be underpinned by a robust framework that provides for the development and embedding of a learning culture which is founded upon securing positive outcomes for children.

Diagnostic work across Children's Social Care took place in Summer of 2023 and identified that there was more work to do in order to strengthen the Quality Assurance Framework with specific reference to audit activity.

The findings of this diagnostic work is set in the context of the 2021 focused visit which stated:

*'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. Although leaders have a broadly accurate self-view about the weaknesses in areas of service, their oversight does not have sufficient impact on practice improvement and on children's experiences.*

*Although the results of audit work are collated and reported to senior leaders, these reports remain focused on grades rather than what is required to improve social work practice and the experiences of children. Many individual case file audits provide some good information about strengths and weaknesses and include actions for improvement. However, these actions are often too focused on process and do not routinely have an impact for children.'*

The findings of the April 2022 Ofsted Focused visit identified a number of practice areas requiring priority improvement, thus further supporting the need for a robust Quality Assurance Framework to be embedded. It is recognised that Senior Leaders, including members require a reliable child focused program of quality assurance activity which provides a line of sight into the quality of social work practice interventions along with the impact, difference and outcomes achieved. Furthermore, Senior Leaders including members need to be assured and confident that when practice deficits are identified, there is a swift response to address areas for improvement, learn and improve practice as a result.

The Quality Assurance Framework was refreshed in October 2023 to ensure that it is appropriately focused upon the lived experience of the children and families we work with at Tameside. The framework has been simplified to ensure a sharper focus is placed upon collaborative learning which includes the feedback from the children, parents and carers we work with. The purpose of the framework is help us to answer the question as to what impact, difference and outcome Tameside

has made to children's lives and what needs to happen to ensure we are continuing to improve. This information alongside our performance data ensures that there is a clear line of sight into practice which corresponds with planned learning and improvement activities.

The Quality Assurance Framework holds children at the heart of everything we do and acknowledges that we can always be better. We are ambitious for our children. Thus, the framework underpins the culture of learning at Tameside and demonstrates that the improvement journey belongs to everyone at Tameside.

This work ensures that all staff have an unequivocal understanding that that good social work practice takes place from a foundation of clear bottom lines consistently being in place. Bottom line basics are the current focus of audit and practice improvement activity at Tameside as analysis of most recent audit findings tell us that this must continue to be our priority.

Training in relation to the strengthened audit process has been delivered to all auditing managers and moderators and monthly sessions continue to take place to ensure that audit is well understood as the golden thread that runs through improvement.

A triple lock quality assurance of audits is now in place. This means that all completed moderated audits are quality assured by the Head of QA to ensure the audits provide a reliable evaluation of practice. This will also support the development auditing and moderation skills as every audit provides an opportunity to embed the shared understanding of what good looks like.

Auditing is now recognised as a learning experience. The collaborative discussion and child focused actions to improve practice are immediately acted upon and while there remains work to do in order for practice to be consistently good, the impact of this approach is evident with upscaling of audits in some areas.

### **3.0 Audit findings**

The audit tool provides judgements across 7 key areas of practice which, in Tameside are referred to as 'brilliance at the basics'

Since September 2023 there has been reduction of the number of inadequate moderated audits month on month.

The moderated audits continue to provide a more reliable measure of quality of practice due to the strengthened model.

All audits consider outcomes for children which is based upon the previous 6 months of practice. As such, audits will continue to identify legacy poor practice whilst also recognising improving practice most recently. This accounts for the variability of judgement within the requires improvement and good categories.

Improving practice is evidenced within upscaling of some judgement within key areas of the children's files such as demographic information, summaries and chronologies. This provides demonstrable evidence of the collaborative learning and improvements as a direct result of audit activity.

The quality of audits is improving which provides a more reliable judgement of the quality of practice with children and families. There is more work to do to ensure that feedback from children, their families and carers is consistently sought and triangulated with the child's file when undertaking audits.

Learning from audits tells us that practice is variable. Some more work is required to strengthen the quality of children's assessments and plans. This includes ensuring timely planning for permanence and how this is evidenced on children's files.

There is further work required to strengthen management oversight and supervision to ensure timely progression of children's plans. The impact of Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs requires strengthening to demonstrate the difference they are making for children's outcomes.

Chronologies require strengthening across all areas of children's services to ensure these are meaningful for children and to inform assessments.

Direct work with children and young people can be further strengthened to ensure this is consistently evidenced on children's files and analysed in order to inform planning.

September 2023 moderated audits		
	Primary Audits	Moderated Audits
<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>Requires Improvement</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Good</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>0</b>

October 2023 moderated audits		
	Primary Audits	Moderated Audits
<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Requires Improvement</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Good</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>38%</b>

November 2023 moderated audits		
	Primary Audits	Moderated Audits
<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Requires Improvement</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>Good</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>25%</b>

#### 4.0 Conclusion

Work has rapidly been undertaken to strengthen the Quality Assurance Framework and Governance structure. Whilst it is recognised there is more work to be done, we are confident that the resource and structure is in place to deliver against the plan. In order to drive practice improvement the strategic decision to hold firm our expectations of practice bottom lines supports unequivocal understanding of what good practice looks like when supporting outcomes for children. The strengthened framework has received oversight of the Children's Improvement Board and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel as part of the performance and governance structure thus ensuring this model addresses previously identified weaknesses and underpins the improvement journey. Audit data is reported to both forums.

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## Chair of Overview Panel

## Chairs of Scrutiny Panels

**Councillor Jacqueline North**  
**First Deputy**  
**Finance, Resources & Transformation**

**Ashley Hughes**  
**Director of Resources**  
**Section 151 Officer**

Tameside One  
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Ashton-under-Lyne  
OL6 6BH

email: paul.radcliffe@tameside.gov.uk  
Ask for Paul Radcliffe  
Direct Line 0161 342 2199  
Date 9 November 2023

Dear Councillor North,

### **Scrutiny mid-year budget update 2023/24**

We write in response to the mid-year budget update presented on 6 November 2023. Thank you for the time taken to provide all scrutiny members with the opportunity to receive a comprehensive appraisal, which included an overview of key financial assumptions, the current budget position and a forward view regarding risks and pressures.

Budget monitoring information continues to inform work priorities for the Scrutiny Panels and regular updates 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, inflationary pressures and the need to support individuals and families in Tameside.

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. Scrutiny activity remains aligned with priorities set within the Council's Corporate Plan and relies on insight of the Council's budget and financial plan.

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 the remainder of 2023/24 and beyond. Please pass our thanks to the Director of Resources and the Interim Assistant Director of Finance for attending the sessions. The Council's Overview Panel will receive a summary of this activity at the next meeting on 21 November 2023.

The Council continues to demonstrate a firm commitment to meet all financial challenges and budget reductions. The current position does appear somewhat precarious when considering that in order to close the budget gap a significant amount of in-year savings need to be delivered. This comes at a time when statutory services are experiencing high levels of demand and a lack of certainty that pressures will subside any time soon.

The Director of Resources reported that all previously identified savings for 2023/24 will be delivered in full, which equates to £15.979m for the financial year. With the successful redirection of £5.425m, this leaves budget reductions of £10.554m to address. Members were presented with a Month 5 performance table that was RAG rated and showed £2.523m in Red and £3.046m in Amber, which account for more than 50% of the target required.

It was confirmed that those currently in Red are not expected to be delivered in the financial year and challenges remain in order to deliver those currently in Amber. To date £1.702m has been achieved with £3.283 identified in green as achievable and on track.

In addition to the current budget reductions and savings requirements, revenue monitoring information highlighted a significant in-year overspend across directorates. With £13.021m predominantly attributed to Adults, Children's Social Care and Place. Members were advised that current variances are to be addressed by officers and through management actions to balance the budget. Should difficulties be encountered then alternatives will need to be put forward.

This does appear somewhat ambitious and challenging given the persistence of demand and external pressures. Vigour and intensity is needed within budget monitoring arrangements to support this and members remain cautious of accounting measures that may be needed should actions or revised plans not be achieved.

Reference was made to the role of the Star Chamber process and members highlighted a requirement of the Executive to fully oversee and challenge key areas relating to budget reductions and in-year variances within their portfolios. 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 and members are keen to ensure future decisions are robustly costed and achievable, without jeopardising service quality or requiring late or unplanned financial adjustments.

A question was asked on the Capital Programme and how this is financed. A total figure of just over £15m was shown against a funding source of receipts and reserves. Upon enquiry members heard that a significant amount of the expected receipts are yet to be achieved, with concerns that they may not be fully delivered in this financial year.

Members shared concerns on the challenges and uncertainty associated with short-term funding settlements and ambitions of the Council to set a more robust medium term financial plan. It is accepted that a greater level of confidence can be achieved should longer funding arrangements be granted to local authorities beyond the next financial year.

Recent activity of the Scrutiny Panels has highlighted a need for the Council to address growing local challenges around accommodation and placements, which too have a significant reactionary impact on the Council's budget when taking account of statutory requirements in relation to Homelessness, Adults and Children's Social Care. Scrutiny members would fully support and endorse a borough-wide accommodation sufficiency strategy. It is not felt that this is something that each decision maker and directorate can do in isolation, but requires a collective and partnership approach with key stakeholders in housing.

Trends in current spend appear increasingly reactionary in parts and building resilience, evidence and business cases can allow the Council to plan for the future and make positive investment decisions. This will ultimately aim to improve outcomes for individuals while also benefitting parts of the budget.

Improving outcomes for children and vulnerable residents remains in place as a budget pressure, with talks of associated costs with regard to external children's placements and the need to achieve greater permanence within parts of the workforce and exposure to external markets.

Effective budget monitoring must take precedence, with the aim to promote a transparent and honest culture for the reporting of in-year budget and savings difficulty. Reducing delay and ensuring issues are flagged at the earliest opportunity is now key to overall success. It is also felt that the role of financial oversight and expertise may need to extend further in a more coherent and partnership role with services.

A number of questions that may require further consideration include:

- The savings most at risk of not being met and actions required.
- Challenges and viability of non-statutory and discretionary services going forward. Reviewing for best value.
  - A specific and pertinent point was raised on future budget commitments for the upkeep, cleanliness and appearance, 'look and feel', of the borough. Any changes would be detrimental to the borough's future success and prosperity.
- The financial position the Council now finds itself in regarding the previously pooled budget arrangement and separation/detachment from the CCG (now ICB).
- Options to alleviate significant placement costs and building greater capacity in Tameside.
  - The Council making the best use of its powers relating to homes, accommodation and placement needs for vulnerable residents and allocations for care leavers.
- Issues and challenges specific to workforce and external markets. Examples were provided regarding Educational Psychology and Social Workers.
- Facilities Management arrangements and making the best use of Tameside's buildings and venues across all towns - income generation, current pricing and advertising.
- Pivotal role of the Council's asset management and disposal plans.
- Access to health funding and contributions - can more be done to support costs associated to specific Children's Social Care interventions and placements.
- Continuing to grow our tax base – meeting our housing targets, inward investment and business growth.
- Demand projections and a need for greater mechanisms of prevention and early intervention – overarching plan, population growth, future pressures / dependency.
- A relentless and uncompromising focus on achieving outcomes and making best use of the money available for the residents and businesses we serve.
- Improving customer interactions and ability of the Council to respond through enhancements in digital solutions and website navigation.

We are pleased to say that the Council's leadership and Executive remain fully engaged with all aspects of Scrutiny activity and options will be explored to incorporate greater and more frequent oversight of budget and financial information within planned activity and in-depth reviews.

Yours sincerely,

**Councillor Michael Smith – Interim Chair of Overview Panel**

**Councillor Claire Reid – Chair of Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel**

**Councillor Hugh Roderick – Chair of Children's Services Scrutiny Panel**

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

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