

Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

27 July 2022

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 7.30pm

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

Apologies: Councillors Patel, Reid

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

2. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE UPDATE

The Panel welcomed Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Children's Services; and Tony Decrop, Assistant Director, to receive an update on key issues and outcomes related to Ofsted and next steps in terms of the children's social care improvement plan.

Members reviewed the Tameside Children's Social Care Improvement Plan (updated in June 2022). Councillor Fairfoull advised that progress against actions detailed within the plan to be factored within quarterly reporting to the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel going forward. This can ensure transparency of service status and underperformance.

A new Improvement Board accountability framework and a revision of Tameside Safeguarding Partnership delivery arrangements, headed seven priorities detailed within the plan. The Director of Children's Services informed members that the improvement plan has a renewed focus on agreed and shared priorities that aim to have the required impacts. The plan also reflects Ofsted findings from the focused visit and letter published on 6 June 2022.

The panel heard that the improvement plan aligns with the broader locality plan and driven by needs identified within Children's Social Care's self-evaluation (SEF). Detail set within a revised SEF to be reported at the next Scrutiny Panel on 21 September 2022.

A summary was provided on the requirements of the Council to have an improvement board, improvement plan and improvement advisor. This is to undertake a dual role to support, oversee and report on the improvement journey. This also touched upon the intervention notice and priority actions.

The Ofsted new inspection framework will respond in a different way if there is a perceived risk of service deterioration, to be picked up through regular contact. Reporting and inspection will review mechanisms in place to ensure the organisation is at the right level to make decisions needed for children.

Discussion touched upon findings and challenge from Ofsted regarding multi-agency working arrangements across social care, with specific reference to the effective and timely interface with partners, including the Police responding to attendance requests.

Councillor Fairfoull noted a request of the Scrutiny Chair that future consideration is given to further promoting local partnership arrangements and engagement. A suggestion that this could come in the form of a planned one-off event or conference to include key stakeholders, who

could learn from one another, share information and bring about improvement to the lives of children in care in Tameside.

It was confirmed that while immediate attention of the Executive and Children's Leadership Team will remain on delivering agreed improvements and inspection preparation, the purpose and benefits to such an event will be explored in the next calendar year.

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

- The role of the Improvement Board in the delivery and monitoring of improvement progress.
- Opportunities for successful oversight and monitoring – over and above the improvement plan
- Effectiveness of current multi-agency and partnership arrangement.
- Workforce pressures and challenges this presents going forward with regard to permanence, vacancy levels and caseloads for Social Workers.
- Care leavers and transitional services – preparing young people and support.
- Delivering a diverse local placements offer, including growth within local authority foster carers, children's homes and housing options for care leavers.
- Cared for children

Actions

The Chair informed members of agreed actions to be taken forward outside of the meeting:

- Children's safeguarding training to be arranged for members of the Scrutiny Panel. To include an introduction to Children's Social Care and scene setting with regard to service delivery, demand on statutory services and governance arrangements – September.
- Members to visit the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) – September.
- Explore options for benchmarking scrutiny good practice with appropriate GM authority – September / October.

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

3. CORPORATE PLAN SCORECARD

The Panel received the Corporate Plan Scorecard for information.

4. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

Tameside Scrutiny Panels are required to publish an Annual Work Programme of planned activity. Scrutiny will continue 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.

The Chair presented the agreed Annual Work Programme for the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel. The programme has been developed in discussion with panel members, hearing from the Executive and Director and consideration of Ofsted reports.

Discussion followed on the priority of topics and the timetable for future meetings. The Chair confirmed that the following topics will now be explored to inform future updates and review:

- Children's Social Care self-evaluation (SEF) – Scrutiny Panel on 21 September 2022.
- Scrutiny Panel to receive a bi-annual Chair's report of the Safeguarding Children Partnership, to include minutes and actions of partnership meetings.
- Benchmarking scrutiny good practice with appropriate GM authority (future working group).
- Workforce stability and strategy – Social Worker recruitment and retention (future working group)

The Chair also advised members that certain aspects of activity would continue to take place outside of the formal meetings.

5. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair updated members on the following matters.

- Scrutiny and Overview Chairs received role specific training, delivered by the Local Government Association (LGA) on 25 July 2022.
- The Scrutiny Chair had met with the Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); Executive Member (Learning & Achievement); and the Director of Children's Services on 25 July 2022.
- Scrutiny reports were received at Overview Panel on 25 July 2022, with a paper providing the summary of work completed during the 2021/22 municipal year.
- All Scrutiny Panel members were invited to attend a training session delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny on 5 September 2022. A choice of two training sessions at 1pm and 6pm were offered.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 21 September 2022.

7. URGENT ITEMS

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

CHAIR