

Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

21 September 2022

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 8.00pm

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

Apologies: Councillor Owen

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

9. MINUTES

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

10. RESPONSE TO LGSCO FOCUS REPORT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Officers thanked for attending the meeting.

12. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SCORECARD

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

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

13. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair updated members on the following matters.

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

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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

15. URGENT ITEMS

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

CHAIR