

Report to: EXECUTIVE CABINET

Date: 23 November 2022

Executive Member: Cllr Leanne Feeley - Executive Member for Lifelong Learning, Equalities, Culture and Heritage.
Cllr Bill Fairfoull - Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families)

Reporting Officer: Ali Stathers-Tracey – Director of Children’s Services

Subject: **TAMESIDE & STOCKPORT PARTNERSHIP REVIEW IN LIGHT OF SEND INSPECTION OUTCOME AND EDUCATION POLICY CHANGES**

Report Summary:

On the 24 March 2021, the Executive Cabinet agreed to a single Director of Education operating across Tameside and Stockport and that Director to be the existing Assistant Director for Education at Tameside to support the exploration of how we could do things differently in education services with less money and share best practice across traditional boundaries

Given the significant demand and extra pressure on the Council to reform and improve systems for children, it is essential that we revisit this previous Partnership sharing decision and focus all available resources and expertise on the needs of our children here in Tameside

Since the original decision to share services, Tameside has had a full Inspection of SEND services in November 2021, requiring us to commit to a formal written statement of action with ten priority areas of improvement for us to address.

Tameside is currently remodelling the service delivery of early help and prevention, social care and 0-19 Health Services in to Family Hubs. Schools provide essential anchors in our local communities, Tameside is identified as one of 75 Family Hub pilot areas, this will require the Council to reset our relationship with Early Years settings, Schools and Colleges to work better in terms of offering more effective Early Help to respond to the Family Hub funding requirements and offer a more joined up service that address the needs of Children before problems occur.

OFSTED Inspected Childrens Social Care and Early Help services through a Focussed Visit to the Integrated Front Door in April 22. They found that some areas of services had deteriorated since their previous monitoring report meaning that we have a significant way to go to improve our service across the Childrens Directorate.

Tameside and Stockport have a track record of working successfully together in Children’s Services over the past four years, which continues with Stockport acting as our Partner in Practice. This will continue in parts, however with all of the additional demands and pressure to reform the system, we no longer have the capacity to share services beyond 2022 with the exception of the approach to Early Years Service in order to maximise expertise and support this well-developed concept. .

Recommendations: That Executive Cabinet be recommended to approve the giving of notice under the service level agreement with Stockport to end the

shared Director of Education arrangement resulting in Tameside's Assistant Director for Education returning to his substantive post to lead the work required by Tameside Childrens Services in the context of significant changing policy and SEND Improvement work.

Links to Corporate Plan: This proposal supports two of Tameside's Corporate Themes namely Transformation and Continuous Improvement

Policy Implications: It is likely that a number of Policies and associated Procedures will be impacted and those will be identified and appropriate governance completed to consider and agree any changes as may be necessary.

Financial Implications: Tameside's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is £242.095m for 22-23, which expected to overspend in-year by £2.257m due to pressures on the High Needs allocation. Added to the deficit brought forward from 2021/22 of £3.243m results in the total expected deficit to be carried forward into 2023/24 being £5.500m. The joint approach to service delivery have not resulted in savings other than a small reserve of £0.048m.

(Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer)

The legal responsibility for sound financial planning and sustainability will continue to be the responsibility of the separate Section 151 Officers of the respective organisations.


Legal Implications: The shared Director of Education post was governed by a Service Level Agreement between Tameside and Stockport Councils. Under the terms of the Service Level Agreement either party can terminate the arrangement on providing not less than four weeks' prior written notice.

(Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

Risk Management: The program has been overseen by a Program Board from both LAs including Lead Members, DCSs, finance, HR and school representation. An explicit objective of this programme board was to identify and firm up areas for collaboration, however all of the areas designated for Social Care shared teams were not appropriate given the outcome and focus of the Tameside OFSTED Improvement Notice in July 2022.

The National Policy Framework to reform the SEND and Education system means that the risks of sharing leadership capacity with Stockport could result in the Council failing in our duty to reform and improve the service

Background Information: The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting – Ali Stathers-Tracey

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Tameside and Stockport have different areas of strength and areas for improvement and it was recognised at the time of the decision to enter in to a trial partnership that there was potentially a mutually beneficial opportunity to each learn from one another to deliver whole system improvements. At the time when Cabinet agreed an opportunity to explore a shared service partnership, it was in the context of exploring opportunities to accelerate plans for transformation across both localities sitting within the Greater Manchester (GM) area.
- 1.2 Tameside and Stockport have had a track record of working successfully together in Children's Services over several years, including through the DfEs Innovation Program and as Partners in Practice. The relationships that we have forged with the shared Director of Education since December 2020, put us in a strong position to continue to share operational services where they bring efficiency and learning in the current pressured delivery climate.
- 1.3 In the context of the changing political and policy climate for Children's services, it is in the best interest of service delivery to make swift decisions and prioritise all available resources and expertise in order to improve outcomes for Children in Tameside as we fully emerge from the Covid Pandemic and face new challenges around the cost of living.
- 1.4 The decision to give notice to end the Service Level Agreement with Stockport reflects the very different position that the performance of Children's Services in Tameside is at compared to Stockport. Since the agreement was taken to share the director of education role, Tameside in comparison to Stockport is embarking on a significant journey to improve, including having a formal Improvement Notice from DFE, significant improvements in SEND Written Statement of Action and formal monitoring response plus a need to remodel our Social Care and Early Family Help service in to localities. Under the new Cabinet and new Director of Children's Services, it is critical that we align all available expertise and capacity to achieve our ambition to be Good and Outstanding for Children.
- 1.5 We can demonstrate strong evidence of sharing knowledge and expertise around the Education and Schools agenda between the two Councils and the impact of this learning is clear in respect of our ability to interpret National Guidance and delivery models in a more consistent way. This is best evidenced in the opportunity to maximise our shared expertise to improve our Early Years and schools readiness offer by creating a new model to focus on this area of improvement common to both Councils. However, in other aspects of improvement work for children, Tameside is in a very different place to Stockport and our focus now needs to shift to an intensive support model for Education and SEND Improvement.

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 To recognise the considerable benefits that the shared Director arrangement has brought in respect of sharing knowledge, expertise and building the relationship across services 0-25 years.
- 2.2 To recognise the work undertaken to model a shared Early Years quality improvement service across the two Councils, which make sound financial sense given the gap that both Councils are experiencing in recruiting and retaining our workforce. This has enabled Early Years improvement expertise to work across Early Years settings and better prepare children to be school ready. There are plans to bring a report back to Executive Cabinet to enable formal agreement for this service to be implemented during 2023/24.
- 2.3 To accept that while the original decision to explore further models of shared services across Education and Social Care had merit, it is no longer appropriate or deliverable given the need

to maximise all leadership and expert capacity and resources to focus on our improvement agenda for children and local families.

- 2.4 To recognise and acknowledge the excellent quality of Director led work delivered by our Assistant Director of Education and the need to harness his expertise and leadership in Tameside to implement the significantly changed policy environment we now work within. This decision also reflects our high challenge improvement work to achieve better outcomes for Tameside Children, Schools and wider Partnership work and needing full time dedicated Assistant Director for Education leadership in place to take forward the local improvement plans.
- 2.5 The original shared Director arrangement committed to focus on improving outcomes for both Children in Tameside and Stockport, and we can see from some of the focus on early language and reading in our recent key stage performance results, that in respect of maintaining a focus on Early Years improvement is absolutely where our focus should continue. However it is difficult to say whether improved outcomes are a result of having a partnership in place given the complexities of pandemic recovery influencing the experiences of children and the ability of institutions supporting their development to improve outcomes overall. This is a challenge at national level also, but would suggest that the current arrangement makes it more complicated to understand if the shared learning across multiple Councils is helping or not.
- 2.6 Tameside Council needs to be confident that we are doing everything in our power to focus attention and resources to deliver the very best services for our Children at a time of unprecedented change and pressure on our schools and our families. To bring back our shared capacity has not released financial efficiency directly from Council base budget as the shared arrangements only effects external grant expenditure provided by the DFE (Dedicated Schools Grant).
- 2.7 The original partnership ambition to build upon the sharing arrangements and create further innovation and opportunities for further investment will continue without the need for a shared director arrangement. This will bring capacity back to officers in Tameside to engage in work directly focused on our residents locally, at GM and national level to further build our influence and credibility with DFE and GMCA.
- 2.8 This work has been supported and led by a joint Director of Education working across both councils through a secondment agreement.
- 2.9 This position was intended to operate on an interim basis and be reviewed during this process to ensure the arrangement remained fit for purpose. The joint director has led the Education/SEND services across both councils. The original decision was to keep the arrangement under review with a report due back to Cabinet within an initial 12 month period and prior to the agreed 2 year period of the secondment. This agreement has now been in place for 18 months since the original agreement was put in place.
- 2.10 There has been a dedicated Programme Board established to oversee the partnership work linked to this agreement, chaired jointly by the DCS from both Stockport and Tameside. This Partnership Board also includes Lead Members for Education, HR, the relevant Assistant Directors, School Representation plus other Senior Officers across both organisations. In the current pressured climate, it is difficult to justify officer time and additional work when the improvement landscape for children and the needs for Tameside in particular are so pressing and significant. Therefore it is proposed that the shared Partnership Board for the programme would come to a natural end in January 2023.
- 2.11 A proposal for establishing an Early Years shared service model to be worked up for a future Cabinet decision in 2023.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 While there have been some significant benefits in terms of learning from the Service Level Agreement with Stockport, it is within the changing policy and improvement landscape for Tameside that the current arrangements were made at a very different time for services. The original report and recommendations were taken under different leadership arrangements, we can no longer continue to share our leadership capacity in the children's arena for reasons outlined in the report above.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 As set out at the front of the report.