

Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

11 January 2023

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 7.50pm

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

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

24. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 2 November 2022 were approved as a correct record.

25. CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE

The Panel welcomed Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Children's Services; Paula Sumner, Assistant Director; and Phil Davies, Chief Superintendent, Tameside District Commander, Greater Manchester Police, to receive an update on local partnership arrangements directly linked to statutory guidance for local authorities and partners to stop children going missing and to protect those who do.

Statutory guidance details a responsibility of local authorities for protecting children whether they go missing from their family home or from local authority care. It is therefore important that effective arrangements and plans be in place to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do. Tameside Safeguarding Children Partnership (TSCP) should also receive regular reports from the authority, analysing local data and intelligence on missing children.

It was reported that in April 2022, the return interview service was brought back in-house, having previously been commissioned to Barnardos. The team is now co-located alongside the Children's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Daily reports are received into the MASH from Greater Manchester Police identifying children who have been reported as missing. This activity prompts the necessary safeguarding checks, with a missing episode created and the relevant professionals and services notified.

The local process and response includes key trigger points for missing children that prompt a Risk Management Meeting (RMM) to take place. Tier 1 - the child has had four missing episodes in a 1 month period or has been missing for 24 hours; Tier 2 – the missing incident is lasting more than 7 days or persistent concerns following the Tier 1 meeting. When a missing child is located a range of safe and well checks are undertaken, with a representative from the missing service to complete a return interview.

Since April 2022 the local authority has been seeking to better understand the cohort of children who go missing. For the period April to September 2022, there was 1177 reported incidents of children going missing. This related to 303 children and it was reported that 130 of those children had more than one missing episode recorded. A small cohort of children had 10 or more episodes recorded.

The local picture for missing children is complex, when taking account of all children living in the borough. Some of the children recorded will be subject to Child Protection/Child in Need plans or is Cared For, but not all of them. The age profile of children that go missing can also be an important factor, in particular older children and teenagers that may be living in supported accommodation, where the approach to reporting a missing episode still applies.

Chief Superintendent Davies reported the police missing person demand. Based purely on the total number of incidents, Tameside is somewhat of an outlier for missing reports within the region. In the last 3 months, 72% of Tameside Police demand is categorised as response to vulnerability, with 48% of vulnerability relating to missing persons.

The Police categorise missing person reports across three risk factors, high, medium and low risk. High risk is considered the default setting for all children aged 13 and under. Medium risk is considered the default for all children aged 14 to 17.

Tameside Police treat missing persons as a district priority given the significant impact on the availability of resources, in ensuring all safeguarding activity is undertaken. The local response is in line with that of the GMP Missing Person's Policy of February 2022. The policy and local practice include:

- 4P Plan – prevent, prepare, pursue, protect.
- Dedicated missing persons officer
- Regular vulnerability and strategy meetings for those who are susceptible to CCE/CSE via MASH or missing person strategy meetings
- Tameside Police Partnership Missing Person meeting, held fortnightly

Next steps include a multi-agency working group has been identified to :

- Review the local missing from home (MFH) Policy to ensure the roles and responsibilities of all partners are agreed and understood.
- Consider learning from recent rapid reviews that have involved children who go missing and the partnerships response to this.
- Agree changes to the system in order to build a missing pathway that will improve internal processes.
- Systemic reports on children who go missing will be provided to the appropriate sub-group of the Tameside Safeguarding Children Partnership, providing a more robust oversight

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

- The volume of missing episodes recorded in the borough and reoccurring behaviour patterns.
- The complexity of need and propensity of behaviour.
- The effectiveness of preventative measures and approach to assessing a child's circumstance as part of the return interview process and for future learning.
- The quantity and quality of return interviews completed within 72 hours of a child's return.
- Identifying children at risk to ensure a targeted response is available at the earliest opportunity and to prevent escalation.
- Risk factors for older children reported missing 'out of hours'.

Councillor Fairfoull and officers thanked for attending the meeting.

26. TAMESIDE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Panel received a progress update on the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan.

The Director of Children's Services provided detail and improvement trajectory against priorities set within the plan. Discussion touched on the sustainability and impacts of improvements, workforce challenges and required attention on the quality and consistency of practice and quality assurance, in line with past Ofsted findings and future inspection framework.

27. CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE SCORECARD

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

28. CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE STRATEGY – RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Panel members received a copy of the final report that concludes the review of Children's Workforce Strategy – Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers. The Chair updated members that the report and completed Executive Response will be tabled at the joint meeting of Executive Cabinet and Overview Panel on 8 February 2023.

29. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair advised members that a number of Scrutiny reports are to be tabled at the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 8 February 2023. Items include:

- Scrutiny Update
- Scrutiny Annual Report – Scrutiny Activity 2022/23
- Children's Workforce Strategy – Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers

All Scrutiny members have received an invitation to attend the Scrutiny annual budget briefing on 16 January 2023.

Meeting papers included a recap on progress against the annual work programme and also a breakdown and summary for members, specific to Ofsted findings and improvement areas drawn from the inspection report of 2019 and subsequent focused visits.

30. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 8 March 2023.

31. URGENT ITEMS

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

CHAIR