

## **NORTH STRATEGIC NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM**

**31 January 2023**

**Commenced:** 6.30 pm

**Terminated:** 8.10 pm

**Present:** Councillors Bowerman (Chair), Glover (Deputy Chair), Bray, Choksi, Fairfoull, Huntbach, McNally, Patel and Turner

**In Attendance:** Tony Decrop                      Assistant Director of Children's Social Care  
Lisa Morris                                      Strategic Domestic Abuse Manager

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors Cartey and Drennan

### **9. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED**

**The Minutes of the meeting of the North Strategic Neighbourhood Forum held on 15 November 2022 were approved as a correct record.**

### **10. CORPORATE PARENTING**

The Chair welcomed Tony Decrop, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care, who attended the Forum to deliver a presentation on the Council's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent.

It was explained that being a Corporate Parent was the collective responsibility of the whole council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for Children in Care and Care Leavers. A child in the care of the Council looked to the Council to be the best parent it could be. Every member and employee of the Council had the statutory responsibility to act for that child in the same way that a good parent would act for their own child. As Corporate Parents, there was a need to understand information and data relating to children and young people and provide challenge in those areas where better outcomes needed to be achieved.

It was reported that there were 656 Children in Care in Tameside (53% male and 46% female). Foster Care was the largest placement resource for Children in Care (63%) and there was continuous work to recruit and retain Tameside Foster Carers to keep young people linked to their community. There were 68 children in residential children's homes with ongoing work to reduce this figure, as it was strongly believed that the best place for a child was within a family setting as every child had the right to family life. The vast majority (90%) of children had been subjected to a review health assessment and 60% of children in care had a dental check, with efforts being made to increase this figure.

It was further reported that there were 517 Care Leavers (19 – 21 year olds), 95% of which were deemed to be in suitable accommodation and contact was maintained with 97% of them. Education, Employment and Training rates were an area of concern with only 51% of 19-21 year olds and 50% of 17-18 year olds falling within this category. It was important to develop a clear Education, Employment and Training strategy across the Council to increase access to work placements and apprenticeships.

Members were informed that the Children and Social Work Act 2017 set out seven corporate parenting principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to Cared for Children and Care Leavers, which were as follows:-

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of children and young people.

2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
4. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Members were advised that the Corporate Parenting Board had responsibility to ensure that the Council fulfilled its Corporate Parenting duties in partnership with other statutory and partner agencies. The Board ensured that the strategic Corporate Parenting objectives were delivered and that the Pledges and the Care Leaver Local Offer was adhered to. Engagement of children and young people was key therefore the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Forum were represented at the Corporate Parenting Board.

It was emphasised that corporate parenting was a whole council and partner endeavour and not the sole responsibility of Children's Social Care. It required services across the whole council, health, schools and partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for Cared for Children and Care Leavers. The role of Corporate Parent was proactive and Tameside's Corporate Parents worked closely with their partners to ensure that the needs of children were clearly identified and met at every level. This encompassed the strategic planning, commissioning and integrated delivery of services.

The vision, pledge and priorities for children and young people were outlined and included prioritising health and wellbeing; providing a safe place to live; listening to and seeking the views of the child; helping them to understand what was happening in their lives and involving them in the plan for their care.

Members queried Tameside children and young people being placed outside of the Borough. The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care explained that every effort was made to keep children and young people in their communities but this was unfortunately not always possible to achieve despite a big commitment by the Council to do so. The reasons for this were outlined and included sufficiency of placements in the area; a child being placed with relatives or friends who did not live in the area; Tameside registered foster carers not living in the Borough and a child possibly needing a specialised placement that was not located in Tameside. Monitoring was undertaken for children and young people who were placed more than 20 miles away and children had been moved from residential accommodation outside of Tameside back into the Borough. It was right for them to live within their area, especially when they became Care Leavers in order to access wrap around services.

Members raised concerns with regards to children from outside the Borough being placed in private residential homes within Tameside due to a number of issues constituents had experienced in recent years. The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care explained that this was a regional issue and they were notified of any placement within the Borough. They were consulted as part of the planning application process and Ofsted would begin registering providers from April 2023, ahead of new national standards becoming mandatory for all providers in Autumn 2023, with full inspections commencing in April 2024.

In response to questions regarding staff retention, it was confirmed that although this was a national issue and a challenge for all, due to a shortage of social workers and a competitive jobs market, the Council had a staff retention strategy and the workforce was stable, especially in the Fostering and Cared for Children's teams.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care for a very interesting and informative presentation.

## **RESOVLED**

**That the content of the presentation be noted.**

### **11. DOMESTIC ABUSE**

The Chair welcomed Lisa Morris, Strategic Domestic Abuse Manager, Population Health, who attended the Forum to deliver a presentation in respect of Domestic Abuse and the White Ribbon Accreditation.

Members of the Forum were notified that the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 had introduced a new definition of Domestic Abuse as follows:-

- Behaviour of person A towards person B is domestic abuse if –
  - A and B are each aged 16 or over and are “personally connected” to each other and
  - The behaviour is abusive
- Behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following:
  - Physical or sexual abuse
  - Violent or threatening behaviour
  - Controlling or coercive behaviour
  - Economic abuse
  - Psychological, emotional or other abuse
- Children as victims of domestic abuse:
  - Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who -
    - (a) sees or hears, or experiences the effect of, the abuse, and
    - (b) is related to A or B.

A graph detailing the prevalence of domestic abuse in Tameside was shown, which detailed a year on year rise in the number of domestic abuse incidents, referrals and high-risk cases. The number of referrals to Bridges in 2021-22 was 1150 and not 5 as detailed in the presentation. The data would be separated into individual wards and circulated to Members in order to give a detailed picture of their areas. There was a 10-year Greater Manchester Gender Based Violence Strategy to challenge the attitudes and social conditions that sustain or excuse gender-based violence and deliver whole system improvements in responses to those affected by it. Details were provided of the “Is This Ok” campaign.

It was explained that domestic abuse was a gender based issue; ONS data (2020) identified that 82% of victims were female compared to 18% of males and 92% of those using harmful behaviours were male. Two high profile cases of femicide in the UK in 2021 were highlighted alongside more recent incidents, which had forced a national conversation on male violence against women and the consistent national narrative was helping to drive the issue forward.

Members were advised that White Ribbon Accreditation was a nationally recognised programme for organisations who were committed to improving their workplace culture, progress gender equality and ending violence against women and girls. The accreditation was divided into four key areas, which supported the organisation to assess capabilities and current practice, enabling the identification of appropriate actions:-

- Strategic Leadership
- Engaging Men and Boys
- Changing Culture
- Raising Awareness

White Ribbon Ambassadors and Champions were key to the delivery of the White Ribbon Action plan. Ambassadors were men within an organisation who acted as formal representatives of White Ribbon. They were positive role models who took a stand against male violence against women

and girls and encouraged other men and boys to do the same. Champions could be both males and females, but tended to be primarily females who supported the White Ribbon work and the ambassadors within their organisation.

Members were advised that the Domestic Abuse Strategy aimed to address domestic abuse across seven key priority areas as follows:-

- Making domestic abuse everybody's business
- Creating safe spaces for disclosure
- Meeting the needs of victims through local services
- Helping victim-survivors stay safe in their homes
- Better outcomes for children impacted by domestic abuse
- Identifying problem behaviours early
- Holding perpetrators accountable

Key to the delivery of the ambitions was a collective commitment to achieving them. The local offer was available to anyone affected by domestic abuse irrelevant of gender, age, sexuality, religion or disability.

Members were further advised that there were many training opportunities available, asked to promote domestic abuse communication campaigns wherever possible and to challenge any misogynistic attitudes and behaviours that they encountered. Details to sign up to be a White Ribbon Ambassador or Champion were provided alongside information for Bridges, both of which would be circulated to Members.

Members asked if the domestic abuse campaigns were highlighted in schools. The Strategic Domestic Abuse Manager responded that educating young people was key to the overall agenda therefore it was incredibly important to raise awareness of this issue to young people. Members were informed that a theatrical production focussing on violence against women, which would involve the Youth Council, had recently been approved and would be performed in schools across the Borough.

Members commented on the increase in domestic abuse, and the complexity of incidents, and the impact this was having on the Police. It was confirmed that it was a big priority for the Police and they were actively involved in the Domestic Abuse Steering Group that had system wide partners and met on a regular basis.

Information was sought and provided on the ongoing work to engage with hard to reach communities regarding this issue.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Domestic Abuse Manager for a thought-provoking presentation.

#### **RESOLVED**

**That the content of the presentation be noted.**

#### **12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

#### **RESOLVED**

**That the date of the next meeting of the North Strategic Neighbourhood Forum, scheduled for 28 March 2023, be noted.**

**CHAIR**