

## **Children's Services Improvement – 12 month refresh**

### **Introduction**

On 5 July 2022, following a Focussed Visit to the Integrated Front Door of Children's Services by Ofsted, Tameside Council and our Partners were issued with a Notice to Improve Services for Children by the DFE. This Notice to Improve requires the Council and Partners to comply with a series of actions as identified by the Children Act 2004 (Section 11). This report describes the action to be delivered by the Council and Partners in the context of the Improvement Notice and progress made in the 12 months since the inspection.

This report lists the specific requirements set out in the DFE Improvement Notice and the Tameside response to date on the requirement to improve set out by Ofsted and DFE.

### **Adviser arrangements**

The Secretary of State has chosen to appoint an adviser to provide advice to the Department for Education (the Department) and the council. The council will work with the adviser until some such time that the Secretary of State is satisfied this is no longer required.

Frances Craven was appointed as the DFE Improvement Advisor for Tameside in September 2022. The Improvement Advisor has undertaken multiple site and staff visits to Tameside Children's Services on a monthly basis.

Frances has brought challenge and advice to the corporate leaders of Tameside MBC, meeting every two weeks with the Director of Children's services but also meeting with the Leader, Lead Member for Children, Chair of Children's Scrutiny, Chief Executive, Area Commander from GMP, Education Leaders, NHS System Leaders, the Leadership Team across Children's Services and key service personnel.

Tameside Children's Services also brought in a dedicated project manager to support the Improvement Advisor to compile appropriate reports and service reviews and set the agenda at the request of the Improvement Advisor.

### **Improvement Plan**

*The council's improvement plan will deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement. The plan should cover the areas identified in the Ofsted report of 6 June 2022 as well as recommendations made by the adviser.*

### **Tameside response:**

A draft improvement plan created by the new DCS was presented to full Council in June 2022 and signed off by partners in July 2022. This action plan was updated and refreshed with partners and managers across Children's Services in response to the DFE 6 month review held in January 2023 to address the areas of work that the DFE suggested should be strengthened. A revised plan was agreed and updated and signed off in February 2023 and is monitored via each board meeting and actions agreed in a forward plan for each meeting. A whole series of partner communications and staff newsletter on improvement actions have been positively delivered and reviewed by partners also issued monthly.

Children's Scrutiny Committee have received detailed update reports on delivery of the improvement plan actions on a quarterly basis included additional scrutiny attention exploring any action areas rated Red or Amber with assurance given by the relevant part of the system, notably the workforce recruitment and retention actions, Police and Social Care responses to children who go missing and the quality and timeliness of assessment at the multi-agency front door.

To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:

*a. The content of the improvement plan and a record of progress against it must be kept up to date.*

Tameside response:

The Improvement Plan Actions have been monitored by the DCS, Children's Leadership Team and Project Manager on a bi-monthly basis and revised and risk assessed for timely delivery every month. The actions in the plan have been updated monthly with risk assessment of delivery reported to the DFE Advisor and improvement board. The updated plan has been received by all partners with updated assurance issued to the Leader of the Council, Lead Member for Children and Chief Executive on a monthly basis.

*b. The council must ensure it establishes and maintains an improvement board, which the council will be responsible for; improvement board is to have an independent chair in place who will oversee the implementation of the improvement plan and report to the improvement board on progress against the objectives in the plan, to a timetable agreed with the Department. It can commission updates from partners in order to do this;*

Tameside response:

Tameside and partners had retained an Improvement Board since it was rated Inadequate in 2016. The board had developed a high level improvement document that although laudable, did not get close to identifying actions that were addressing the specific Leadership, service capacity, system effectiveness, oversight of performance and practice quality issues that were found to be lacking in the Ofsted Focus Visit in April 2022. The DCS and AD Children's Social Care had already identified that a revised improvement plan was needed to drive forward essential improvements for children and to enable the workforce to practice effectively.

In line with the Improvement Notice, Tameside swiftly established a new Children's Improvement Board working to deliver the new Improvement Action Plan in August 2022. The DFE Appointed Improvement Adviser agreed to chair the new Board in October 2022.

Supported by the dedicated Programme Manager, the revised Board included critical partners who had not previously been engaged in the Children's Improvement Board previously including the new Council Leader, new Chief Executive, new Area Commander, also we brought in Education Leaders, and agreed a forward programme of reports to undertake deep dives in to the journey of the child across partners and all the way through the system from front door through to Child In Need, Child Protection, Pre Proceedings, Cared for Children in Care, Care Leavers and Quality Assurance.

The Improvement Board has met routinely every month to track and review the ambitious improvement plan and has undertaken additional deep dives in to areas of partnership performance in line with data reports, audit findings and feedback from case audits and thematic analysis.

*c. Reports to the improvement board should include data, analysis and recommendations supported by evidence of impact of improvements on the quality of services for children in need of help and protection;*

*d. The council should highlight those objectives which are slow to progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened;*

*e. The views of frontline staff and of children and young people will be taken into consideration in the development of practice and standards.*

Tameside response:

The Improvement Board has received revised data scorecards including analysis of trends on a monthly basis and in addition we have established ten key partner data improvement measures that really demonstrate partner agency improvements in terms of timeliness but also improved quality of responses to children across sectors.

Reports and audits of practice have been delivered to the Board in the context of areas where we appear to be out of step or an outlier when compared with our statutory neighbours and challenge and scrutiny applied to address areas of weaker performance.

Detailed case audit reviews have also been undertaken in respect of areas of concern to understand in greater detail what the system and agency response means to the lived experience of Children and Young People with a view to share accountability and action.

To note this has focussed on the referrals in to the front door from partners, with detailed analysis undertaken in to attendance at Strategy Meetings, Child Protection Conferences and Core Groups. A deep dive in to front door contacts has directly resulted in action across organisations that have resulted in a reduction in contacts that do not meet threshold for assessment but require information and advice. We have revised the threshold guidance and delivered extensive agency training plus remodelled our Early Help service and strategy in direct response to identified need in families that was formerly being met mainly through statutory assessment which was not always necessary or appropriate.

This deep dive analysis has resulted in significant investment from Tameside MBC in doubling case holding capacity and increasing support in to schools to support both direct work with families but also specialist support to undertake high quality assessment and plans in line with the practice model signs of safety.

We have achieved a significant increase in attendance at Strategy meetings by reconfiguring how colocated workers meet on a daily basis when risk emerges on cases in the front door, reducing any delay or drift and ensuring attendance at 98% from agencies compared to 40% at the time of the focussed visit. We have also remodelled the duty rota with Social Workers co-located with all partner agencies in the front door, again significantly reducing delays in case allocation and initial safety planning and risks better managed.

### **Department for Education reviews**

*6. Officials or advisers from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the improvement agenda at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate.*

*7. These reviews may cover, but are not exclusive to: culture; performance; leadership, management and governance; workforce and management oversight; early help; and multi-agency arrangements.*

#### Tameside response:

In January 2023 the DFE officials undertook a 6 month progress review of Tameside Improvement Board. The review involved a series of meetings with key leaders, interviews with partners and focus groups with managers and front line staff.

The overarching feedback from DFE Officials was that Leaders, Managers and workers could demonstrate evidence of improving services for Children.

The letter and feedback made suggestions to further improve communication, workforce development and progression opportunities, leaders' visibility to all staff, improved engagement with Schools and Education Leaders to improve services further. All recommendations have been directly responded to in the refreshed action plan. The refreshed plan is now being monitored by the Improvement Board on a monthly basis.

The majority of Improvement Actions in the original Improvement Plan that was finalised by Partners in August 2022 have now been delivered. A summary report demonstrating what we said and what we have delivered is attached to this report.

The second 12 month review is due to take place on 20 June 2023 where the DFE will test the impact of our Improvement focussed work has had on our Partners, our front line practitioners and leaders.

8. *From time to time, the adviser may require that a diagnostic review or assessment of performance in a specific service area is undertaken by a local authority or other party agreed with the Department.*
9. *For any review or assessment, the council must provide the person(s) conducting it with:*
  - a. *access to, and time with, staff and leadership;*
  - b. *accurate and up to date data on performance and quality.*
  - c. *facilities to carry out the reviews;*
  - d. *access to case files, minutes of meetings, supervision records or any other relevant information.*
10. *Prior to any reviews, the council should provide its own assessment of improvement. This may reflect, but is not limited to:*
  - a. *progress against the improvement plan objectives'. Staff surveys'. Staff supervision and the quality of feedback.*

#### Tameside Response

The Council, agreed with DFE funded SLIP support, has undertaken a Peer Review of the effectiveness of Tameside Safeguarding Childrens Partnership by Stockport Council. Review findings and recommendations have been fed back to the Safeguarding Partners but also the Improvement Board in April 2023.

The result of this review and improvement recommendations are being implemented through the introduction of a new proposed Safeguarding Partnership structure to enable improved engagement from partners beyond the current framework. Leaders have agreed to appoint a new Independent Scrutineer role, have agreed to fund and appoint a full time Partnership Board Manager to concentrate on improving the business management and challenge of practice risks and learning in contrast to the previous arrangement of a shared Board Manager arrangement with Adults Safeguarding Board.

Also through DFE SLIP agreement, we have brought in external support and challenge from Salford Childrens Services who reviewed our threshold application at the front door, our step up and step down processes, the effectiveness of our in-house Residential Homes offer and the Placement and Brokerage service.

The Improvement Board had assurance feedback from Salford at the April 2023 Board meeting that demonstrated very effective threshold application, robust decision making for children and timely allocation of cases in the front door. All learning points have been adopted by partners as we implement the new integrated model for improving the front door in May 2023. This work is being led by a dedicated steering group of multi-agency partners as a direct result of the analysis from the Improvement Board deep dives and data reviews.

Tameside has also worked with Warrington Children's Services to undertake a Peer review of our Pre-proceedings and PLO process to ensure that the work we do to consider actions we need to undertake prior to undertaking children and families through the court is built upon best practice.

A very detailed review that we arranged mutually with Warrington as a trailblazer in the North West, this again identified that we have good tracking in place, are improving our case records and file preparation and involving children in the process. This review told us what we knew that we need to improve, to embed the PLO toolkit.

*11. Taking account of the measures set out in this improvement notice and the adviser's feedback, the council should aim for actions included in the improvement plan to be delivered by the end of June 2023 (within 12 months of the Ofsted Focussed Visit) or sooner, where appropriate*

Tameside response:

The Improvement Plan has been revised and risk assessed per action under the seven improvement priorities at every Improvement Board since August 2022. We produced the Plan on a Page to share with all staff at all levels of the organisation to improve awareness of the workforce and young people and families.

The six month DFE review resulted in leaders completing a stocktake of the original priorities and actions with a simple –“We said – We did” summary of all we have delivered.

We have agreed and co-designed with partners a refreshed action plan and have included the production of digital profiles of Improvement Board Members and brought in front line workers to attend Board to validate evidence of our workforce in the improvement actions in the plan and in reports.

The Board has also agreed a forward plan for agenda items that follows the action timelines that we have agreed in the refreshed plan so that we keep to task and maintain effective risk management of improvement delivery pace.