

REVIEW AND MONITORING OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2021 TO 2023

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In May 2022, the Council added a third scrutiny panel with a remit dedicated to Children's Services. A significant amount of agreed activity for the newly formed Children's Services Scrutiny Panel aims to deliver 'critical friend' challenge to the Council's Executive specific to Children's Social Care and Ofsted improvement.
- 1.2 It is an ongoing priority for Scrutiny to seek assurances on methods aimed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. Planned activity includes regular oversight of the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan, statutory services, Early Help, Youth Services, the safeguarding partnership, Education and SEND.
- 1.3 Prior to May 2022, the scrutiny of Children's Services was included within the remit of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel. The panel had instructed a fixed Children's Working Group to consider matters on Children's Services and Education. The working group actively sought assurances on the lived experience of children and young people about the services they receive.
- 1.4 A previous report titled, Review and Monitoring of Children's Services 2018 to 2021, was tabled at the joint meeting of Executive Cabinet and Overview Panel on 10 February 2021, **APPENDIX 1**.
- 1.5 Scrutiny members remain informed of published findings from the Ofsted inspection and approach of the Council's Executive in responding to significant challenges and external pressures. Scrutiny continues to review the operational and strategic priorities and required improvements from the most recent Ofsted inspection and subsequent focused visits, **APPENDIX 2**.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Scrutiny in practice remains mindful of the suitability and appropriateness of timings with regard to the impact and value of planned activity. This includes the selection and order of topics and updates received during the year. The annual work programme creates a structured pathway informed by performance monitoring, past findings and insight to challenges for the year ahead.
- 2.2 This paper aims to provide a comprehensive summary of scrutiny activity related to Children's Services across the two municipal years 2021/22 and 2022/23. The information has been categorised into the following areas:
 - Scrutiny activity and formal meetings of the Scrutiny Panels, including the Children's Working Group
 - In-depth review (feedback and reporting to the Executive)
 - Assurance reviews of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
 - Scrutiny budget consultation
 - Training and development

3. SCRUTINY ACTIVITY 2021 TO 2023

- 3.1 Scrutiny activity continues to adopt a combination of approaches to review service and performance updates, respond to formal consultations, focus reports of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and areas in need of more in-depth review. This includes a responsibility for:

- Engagement and consultation – to provide responses to pre-decision activity
- Research and insight to a particular issue
- Review of decisions and recommendations

3.2 Scrutiny activity continues to be undertaken outside of the formal meetings, with all findings and recommendations presented to the full panel for comment and approval. The flexibility allows for speedier and timelier work to be undertaken, creating an enhanced opportunity to both influence and inform the impact of decisions being made. It is also necessary to monitor and evaluate outcomes from past activity and to review the implementation of recommendations.

Scrutiny Activity

3.3 Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of activity of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel and the Children’s Working Group during the 2021/22 municipal year. Table 3 provides a summary of activity undertaken by Children’s Services Scrutiny Panel for the 2022/23 municipal year. The content provides detail of dates, topics and any reporting that has taken place.

Table 1: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2021/22

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
10 June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual work programme developed. Includes priority topics related to Children’s Services and Education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reported to Overview Panel.
29 July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); and Director of Children’s Services to present findings from the Ofsted focused visit that took place on 12 and 13 May 2021.
13 January 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Executive Member (Lifelong Learning, Equalities and Culture); and Director of Education, to receive an update on the SEND inspection outcomes and actions. • Assurance review of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Focus Report – <i>HELP! Learning to improve council services for domestic abuse victims</i>, published November 2021.

Table 2: Activity 2021/22

Children’s Working Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering marketing and recruitment • Children’s sustainability projects • Children’s Social Care Improvement Plan

Table 3: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2022/23

Children’s Services Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
27 July 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual work programme developed. Includes priority topics related to Children’s Services and Education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reported to Overview Panel

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); and Director of Children's Services to receive an update on key issues and outcomes related to Ofsted and next steps for the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan.
21 September 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Executive Member (Education & Achievement); and 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 in July 2022. Attendance of the Director of Children's Services to provide a verbal update on the Self Evaluation Framework (SEF) and improvement priorities. Children's performance Scorecard.
2 November 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Assistant Director and heads of service to receive an update on placement strategy and capacity across in-house and external provision, including fostering recruitment.
11 January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); Director of Children's Services; and Tameside Divisional Commander, GMP; to update on local partnership arrangements directly linked to statutory guidance for local authorities and their partners to stop children going missing and to protect those who do. Progress update on the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan. Children's performance scorecard. Scrutiny report on Children's Workforce Strategy – Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers.
8 March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of the Executive Member (Education & Achievement); Director of Children's Services; and Assistant Director of Education, to receive an update on SEND improvements. Tameside Safeguarding Children Partnership – Annual Report 2021/22. Children's performance scorecard.

In-depth Review

3.4 The Children's Services Scrutiny Panel has recently completed the following in-depth review.

- Children's Workforce Strategy – Social Worker Recruitment and Retention.
 - Findings and recommendations reported to the joint meeting of Executive Cabinet and Overview Panel on 8 February 2023.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

3.5 Complaints raised by the public and service users can be an important source of information to help councillors identify issues that are affecting local people. The learning available from complaints can therefore play a key part in supporting the scrutiny of public services.

3.6 Scrutiny continues to review decisions and focus reports of the LGSCO, to inform in-year work priorities. The aim is to ensure learning opportunities be shared with services in a timely

manner and for a formal response and/or position statement to be returned to the appropriate Scrutiny Panel within agreed timescales.

- 3.7 The Scrutiny Panel has completed assurance reviews for the following LGSCO reports.
- Focus report – HELP! Learning to improve council services for domestic abuse victims (published in November 2021).
 - Focus report and response of the Executive Member tabled at the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 9 February 2022.
 - Focus report – Out of school, out of sight? Ensuring children out of school get a good education (published in July 2022).
 - Focus report and response of the Executive Member tabled at Overview Panel on 26 September 2022.

Scrutiny Budget Consultation

- 3.8 The independence of Scrutiny enables members to seek assurances on budget planning, process and monitoring. It is appropriate for budget priorities to inform future Scrutiny activity and work programmes.
- 3.9 The Scrutiny annual budget meeting is part of the Council's formal consultation and budget setting process. The meeting primarily focuses on Scrutiny's input to the budget for the year ahead, with a view to reflect on the information received during the year and to inform future priorities. A mid-year budget update also forms part of Scrutiny monitoring and feedback to the Executive each year.
- 3.10 The most recent Scrutiny mid-year budget update took place on 3 October 2022. The First Deputy (Finance, Resources and Transformation), received a formal response of the Scrutiny Chairs, capturing a range of points for consideration in supporting the Council's ongoing work in this area. The letter was tabled in a report to the meeting of Overview Panel on 21 November 2022.
- 3.11 Scrutiny annual budget meetings held on 16 January 2023, with a response letter of the Scrutiny Chairs sent to the First Deputy (Finance, Resources and Transformation); and Interim Director of Finance – Section 151 Officer. The letter was tabled in a report to the joint meeting of Executive Cabinet and Overview Panel on 8 February 2023.
- 3.12 The sessions have enabled members to seek further assurances on the Council's approach to setting a balanced budget and to mitigate risk or exposure to any external or unforeseen financial pressures. Scrutiny activity of Children's Services has highlighted demand pressures and challenges associated with long-term financial sustainability.

Training and development

- 3.13 There is an ongoing commitment to ensure all scrutiny members receive a suitable level of training and guidance. In addition to online resources, it is important that new and existing members have access to external provision based on scrutiny principles, national guidance and expectations.
- 3.14 Detail below on training, development and benchmarking sessions delivered during the 2022/23 municipal year.
- **20 July 2022** - Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Scrutiny and Overview Panel invited to attend an afternoon training session delivered by the LGA and Councillor Bryony Rudkin (Political Peer).
 - **5 September 2022** - All Scrutiny Panel members invited to attend a training session delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) - Essentials of Effective Scrutiny.

- **12 September 2022** - All members of the Children's Scrutiny Panel invited to attend an online training session on Children's Safeguarding, delivered by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team within Tameside Children's Services, to include scene setting delivered by the Assistant Director.
- **14 September 2022** – All members of the Children's Scrutiny Panel invited to a visit of Children's Social Care Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) / Early Help access point.
- **29 November 2022** - Benchmarking exercise - Tameside Scrutiny Chair and Deputy Executive Leader (Children's and Families) met with the Scrutiny Chair and Executive Member for Children's Services at Manchester City Council.