

Report To:	JOINT MEETING EXECUTIVE CABINET/OVERVIEW PANEL
Date:	10 February 2021
Reporting Officer:	Sandra Stewart, Director – Governance and Pensions Sarah Threlfall, Assistant Director – Policy, Performance and Communications
Subject:	SCRUTINY – REVIEW AND MONITORING OF CHILDREN’S SERVICES 2018 TO 2021
Report Summary:	To receive for information, a summary of activity undertaken by the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, specific to the oversight and monitoring of Children’s Services for the period 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 municipal years.
Recommendations:	That Overview Panel is asked to note the content of the report and summary of scrutiny activity.
Links to Corporate Plan:	Scrutiny work programmes are linked to the Council’s corporate priorities. Scrutiny activity seeks to support effective decision making and priorities across Tameside.
Policy Implications:	Scrutiny work programmes comprise activity that seeks to check the effective implementation of the Strategic Commission’s policies and if appropriate make recommendations to the Executive with regards to development, performance monitoring, outcomes and value for money.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)	<p>There are no direct financial implications arising from the scrutiny activity set out in this report. The scrutiny function is expected to be funded from existing revenue budgets.</p> <p>The financial context of Children’s services is relevant to this scrutiny activity and is summarised here for context. The Council has allocated significant additional investment to the Children’s Services directorate budget provision over recent years to support service improvements, including seven key sustainability initiatives from 2020/21. Despite the pandemic and significantly increased numbers of open cases in the statutory children’s system since June 2020, cared for children (CfC) numbers has remained static, however the full impact of lockdown is not yet known. Similarly to other local authorities there is the potential for unknown growth in numbers to come forward in the early part of 2021, which may place further financial pressures on the service.</p> <p>The Council’s medium term financial plan assumes that budgetary savings will be achieved from the investment in service improvements with total savings of £7.3m between 2022/23 and 2024/25. A further saving of £0.5m has been identified as part of the 2021/22 budget process to contribute to the corporate savings. In 2020/21 the service is currently forecasting an overspend £4.1m by 31 March 2021. There is a risk that the service will not bring spending back on line or be able to deliver the savings to the timeline or scale assumed.</p>

**Legal Implications:
(Authorised by the Borough
Solicitor)**

Overview and scrutiny committees were established in English and Welsh local authorities by the Local Government Act 2000. They were intended as a counterweight to the new executive structures created by that Act (elected mayors or leaders and cabinets). Their role was to develop and review policy and make recommendations to the council. Today, the legislative provisions for overview and scrutiny committees for England can be found in the Localism Act 2011. Those for Wales are in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, and those for Northern Ireland are in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

There are no legislative provisions for overview and scrutiny in Scotland, though many Scottish local authorities do operate scrutiny committees alongside executive structures. Local authorities also manage processes of 'external scrutiny', where their committees look at issues which lie outside the council's responsibilities. In England, specific powers exist to scrutinise health bodies, crime and disorder partnerships, and Police and Crime Commissioners. Combined authorities are also required to establish overview and scrutiny committees.

Risk Management:

Regular updates to Overview Panel provide assurance that scrutiny is progressing with an effective work programme, supporting good decision making and service improvement.

Access to Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Paul Radcliffe, Policy and Strategy Lead by:

 Telephone: 0161 342 2199

 e-mail: paul.radcliffe@tameside.gov.uk

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council's Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel has responsibility for considering a large remit within Tameside. The oversight of Children's Services, Social Care and Education forms a significant part of the work planned during a municipal year. It is an ongoing priority for Scrutiny to seek assurances on methods aimed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.
- 1.2 Following the Ofsted inspection of Tameside Children's Services in September 2016, the Council has taken a number of direct and positive steps to ensure that effective monitoring takes place regarding improvement activity and service development. A review of monitoring and governance arrangements undertaken in 2017 highlighted the importance of structure. Findings from the review helped to establish greater clarity of roles, responsibilities, oversight and removing duplication where possible.
- 1.3 Scrutiny has a responsibility to establish and maintain an appropriate level of oversight and monitoring. The annual work programme for 2017/18 documented a plan of activity that detailed a need to increase the frequency of contact with Children's Services.
- 1.4 It was important to bring scrutiny members up to speed with 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 and develop communication and engagement methods with the Executive, to promote and enable a supportive platform for two-way dialogue and information sharing.

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 all scrutiny activity related to Children's Services across the three municipal years 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 to date. The information has been categorised into key areas and includes:
 - Formal meetings of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel
 - Working groups
 - Feedback and reporting to the Executive
 - Assurance reviews of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
 - Budget consultation
- 2.3 The report seeks to provide a clear and obvious picture to chronology of activity and reporting.

3. SCRUTINY ACTIVITY 2018 TO 2021

- 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.

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel

3.3 Tables 1 to 3 provide a summary of activity of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, relating both directly and indirectly to Children’s Services at the formal meetings calendared during the three municipal years in question. The narrative provides detail of dates, topics and any reporting that has taken place.

Table 1: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2018/19

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
14 June 2018	<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 on 30 July 2018 • Panel receive the most recent Ofsted monitoring letter with summary of findings from the visit that took place on 18 and 19 April 2018.
8 November 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Executive Member for Children and Families; and Director of Children’s Services regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ofsted monitoring - Improvement priorities - Governance and safeguarding arrangements
10 January 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel receive the response letter of Scrutiny Chair to the Executive, providing collective feedback of points raised at the meeting on 8 November 2018.

Table 2: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2019/20

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
13 June 2019	<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 on 29 July 2019
25 July 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Executive Member for Children and Families; and Director of Children’s Services regarding improvement priorities. • Panel receive overview of the recruitment and retention of foster carers in Tameside, to inform future activity of the Panel.
7 November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel receive update on the Peer Review of Domestic Abuse, elements of which are pertinent to outcomes for children and young people. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scrutiny feedback and learning from Peer Review reported to Overview Panel on 18 November 2019

9 January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel receive a service response to a focus report of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman on complaints related to Education, Health and Care Plans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assurance review of LGSCO focus report on SEND reported to the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 12 February 2020.
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Table 3: Scrutiny activity and oversight 2020/21 (May 2020 to February 2021)

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel	
Date	Activity
11 June 2020	<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 on 27 July 2020 • Panel members to provide feedback and learning received from communities on Covid-19. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feedback and learning reported to Overview Panel on 27 July 2020 and shared with all directorates across the Strategic Commission
5 November 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Executive Member for Children and Families; and Director of Children’s Services regarding Social Care Improvements
14 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of the Executive Members for Neighbourhood Services; and Health Social Care and Population Health, to provide an update on Domestic Abuse in Tameside.

In-depth Review

3.4 The integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel has completed the following in-depth review on a topic specific to Children’s Services.

- Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers
 - Reported to the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 12 February 2020
 - Follow up activity undertaken by the Children’s Working Group on 12 November 2020

3.5 To note, the remit of the Scrutiny Panel also includes Adult Services, Health and Population Health, to which review activity has taken place during the period in question.

Children’s Working Group

3.6 In direct response to outcomes from the Ofsted inspection of Children’s Services in September 2016, the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel established a fixed working group. A primary focus of the group was to consider ‘voice of the child’ aspects detailed within Ofsted findings.

3.7 Established in the 2017/18 municipal year, the working group remains in place and has developed further to consider matters relevant to Children’s Services and Education. The working group meets in private four times a year. Membership for 2020/21 includes seven councillors from the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel and co-opted members.

3.8 Findings and actions from working group meetings are presented to the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, for information and sign off. Activity of the working group is routinely reported to Overview Panel as part of the Scrutiny Update paper.

3.9 Table 4 provides a summary of activity and reporting undertaken by the Children’s Working Group for the period 2018/19 to 2020/21. In general, the working group will provide direct feedback within the timeframe of each meeting. When deemed appropriate the group may also respond directly to the Executive with findings and possible recommendations.

Table 4: Activity 2018/19 to 2020/21

Children's Working Group	
2018/19	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and Attendance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Response paper to the Executive Member for Lifelong Learning with findings and recommendation for reading and attendance. • Corporate Parenting and Care Leaver Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Response letter of Scrutiny Chair to the Executive Member for Children and Families. Reported to Overview Panel. 	
2019/20	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing • Looked After Children Sustainability Projects • Tameside Early Help Offer 	
2020/21	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts of Covid-19 on Education in Tameside • Follow up activity on the review and recommendation related to the Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers 	

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

- 3.10 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. Complaints can therefore play a key part in supporting the scrutiny of public services
- 3.11 From 2019/20 onwards Scrutiny has reviewed decisions made by the LGSCO on a monthly basis, to inform in-year work priorities. The attention of scrutiny concentrates primarily on the shared learning detailed within the focus reports and key questions for good practice. This will also contribute to the evidence gathered throughout the municipal year when developing annual work programmes.
- 3.12 The Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel has undertaken assurance reviews regarding the following LGSCO reports specific to Children's services and Education.
- Focus report - Not going to plan? Education, Health and Care Plans two years on, (published in October 2019)
 - Reported to the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 12 February 2020
 - Focus report – Careless: Helping to improve council services to children in care
 - Reported to the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel on 10 February 2021

Scrutiny Budget Meetings

- 3.13 The Scrutiny annual budget meeting is part of the 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.
- 3.14 The meeting provides an opportunity for scrutiny members to consider the information and impacts. Feedback from the meeting is shared directly with the Executive Member with responsibility for finance, in the form of a letter from the Scrutiny Chairs. The letter provides an account of discussions captured at the meeting and is tabled at the joint meeting of Cabinet and Overview Panel held in February.

- 3.15 From 2019/20 onwards a mid-year budget update meeting has been added to the calendar and takes place in September, in advance of the annual meeting in January each year. All scrutiny members receive an invitation to the meeting.
- 3.16 The sessions have enabled members to seek further assurances on the Strategic Commission'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 long-term financial sustainability.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 As set out on the front of the report