

# Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

7 June 2023

**Commenced:** 6.00pm

**Terminated:** 7.30pm

**Present:** Councillors Roderick (Chair), Tilbrook (Deputy), Fitzpatrick, Howarth, Martin, McLaren, Owen, Robinson

**Apologies:** Councillors Patel, T Smith

## 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

## 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 8 March 2023 were approved as a correct record.

## 3. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT

The Panel welcomed Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); and Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Children's Services, to receive a summary of improvement actions and responses during the past 12 months.

It was reported that on 5 July 2022, following an Ofsted Focused Visit to the Integrated Front Door of Children's Services, Tameside Council and partners were issued with a Notice to Improve services for children by the Department for Education (DfE). The notice requires the Council and partners to comply with a series of actions as identified by the Children Act 2004 (Section 11).

A summary report provided detail on the actions to be delivered by the Council and partners in the context of the Improvement Notice and progress made during the 12 months since inspection.

Panel members heard that the Secretary of State has chosen to appoint an advisor to provide advice to the DfE and the Council. The Council will work with the advisor until such a 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 and has undertaken multiple site and staff visits to Tameside Children's Services.

Councillor Fairfoull advised members that Frances has brought challenge and advice to the leadership team, meeting every two weeks with the Director of Children's Services and also meeting with the Executive Leader, Lead Member for Children, Chair of Children's Scrutiny, Chief Executive, Area Commander from GMP, Education Leaders, NHS System Leaders and the Leadership Team across Children's Services.

The Director of Children's Services advised that the Tameside Improvement Plan aims to deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement, covering areas identified in Ofsted's report of 6 June 2022, as well as recommendations made by the Improvement Advisor. In January 2023 DfE officials completed a 6 month progress review, with feedback and suggestions targeted at

improving communications; workforce development and progression opportunities; visibility of leaders to all staff; improved engagement with schools and education leaders to improve services further. All recommendations have been directly responded to in a refreshed action plan.

A second review is due to take place on 20 June 2023 where the DfE will test the impact that our improvement work has had on services, partners, our front line practitioners and leaders.

Panel members reviewed a document titled 'Tameside Improvement Plan on a Page' which is to be shared with staff at all levels; along with a summary report demonstrating what 'we said, we did' against improvement priorities and actions.

Councillor Fairfoull and Ms Stathers-Tracey responded to a number of questions from the Panel on:

- The service offer and how this looks and feels for children and families.
- The refreshed improvement plan, including the role of partners and performance / outcome monitoring.
- The current position of services, ongoing pressures and immediate priority actions.
- The importance of effective Early Help and prevention services.

**Resolved:** That Cllr Fairfoull and Ms Stathers-Tracey be thanked for attending the meeting.

#### **4. REVIEW AND MONITORING OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2021 TO 2023**

The Chair presented a summary report of Scrutiny oversight, monitoring and review of Children Services for the period 2021 to 2023. The report will be tabled at the next meeting of Overview Panel on 1 August 2023.

#### **5. ROLE OF SCRUTINY**

The Chair presented an update and recap on the role of Scrutiny within the wider framework of the Council.

#### **6. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME**

Tameside Scrutiny Panels are required to publish an Annual Work Programme of planned activity. The programme of work will cover a two-year rolling period that is to be reviewed, updated and agreed on an annual basis. Scrutiny will continue 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:

- Research and insight on a particular issue, including desktop reviews
- Review of decisions and recommendations
- Follow-up (from previous review / recommendations)
- Engagement and consultation – to provide responses to pre-decision activity
- Consideration of decisions and reports of the Ombudsman
- Receive updates on key issues as they arise
- Active monitoring of national and regional policy and substantive variation to services

The Chair presented a list of potential topics for the 2023/24 municipal year, with comments from members noted to inform the final document. Next step is for Overview Panel to receive the Scrutiny Work Programmes report on 1 August 2023.

Discussion followed on the priority of topics and the timetable for future meetings. The Chair confirmed that the following topic will now be explored to inform a future update and review:

- Effectiveness of services and support to care leavers

Scrutiny activity will continue to take place outside of the formal meetings, with all findings and recommendations presented to the full panel for comment and approval.

## **7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 26 July 2023.

## **8. URGENT ITEMS**

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

**CHAIR**