

Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

26 July 2023

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 7.40pm

Present: Councillors Roderick (Chair), Tilbrook (Deputy), Fitzpatrick, Howarth, Karim, McLaren, Robinson, T Smith

Apologies: Councillors Martin, Owen

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

10. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 7 June 2023 were approved as a correct record.

11. CARE LEAVERS

The Panel welcomed Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families); Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Children's Services; Tony DeCrop, Assistant Director; and Susan Harris, Head of Service, to receive an overview of care leaver services to inform a review into the effectiveness of services and support to care leavers in Tameside.

Members received a Corporate Parenting summary, as at April 2023. This included a snap shot of data related to the number of children in care and care arrangements. It was reported that the overall number of care leavers in Tameside has increased year on year, with data provided from 2015/16 onwards. The current position does show a slight reduction in numbers for the first part of 2023/24. It was added that the growth can be attributed to the borough having a higher than average population of children in care and an increase in age 21+ cohort following the extension of statutory duties.

Further introductory and contextual detail was provided on the Leaving Care Service, caseloads, capacity and the structural phases of a service redesign. Support, and outcomes were also detailed in relation to the Cared for Children Health Team and outcomes associated with education, employment and training for care leavers. This included:

- Relaunch of a weekly Young Persons Drop-In
- There have been 20 Care Leavers starting jobs this year with the support of the Youth Employment Scheme
- Support is in place to maintain employment through collaborative work with the leaving care service, job centre plus and other agencies
- Virtual School increasing the post 16 offer to care leavers – new role to be established
- DFE bid for targeted EET support
- Apprenticeship / trainee offer

The Panel received a summary of the Care Leavers improvement journey, with direct reference made to a review undertaken in May 2022 by Mark Riddell, DFE Care Leavers Specialist Advisor, with findings and a series of recommendations for improvement. The DFE letter was

included within the meeting papers and a separate presentation provided detail against each of the recommendations and actions taken to deliver the changes.

The Director of Children's Services advised members that Tameside is very much still on a journey of improvement for care leavers. The service has taken on board all of the recommendations for improvement and recognises the need to offer a better service for care experienced young people in Tameside. It was added that recent investment and a recruitment exercise has successfully appointed a new permanent Service Manager for Care Leavers, a new Participation and Inclusion Officer, to achieve a sharper focus on the caseloads and capacity of Personal Advisors.

It was reported that data shows Tameside as a potential outlier, in relation to statistical neighbours, for the number of care leavers age 21+ that remain open to services. Going forward it is important to plan how services work with this cohort in order to assess vulnerability and risk, undertake more targeted work, having effective and informed pathways that enable safe and timely transition work and step down from services at the right time for each individual.

Reference was made to some of the positive action taken by the Council with the addition of care leavers as a protected characteristic category for equality impact and assessment when looking to mitigate negative impacts and outcomes at a local level.

Councillor Fairfoull and officers responded to a number of questions from the Panel on:

- The Virtual School, with a reporting of only one dedicated worker for care leavers.
- Concerns around outcomes for care leavers not in employment, education or training (NEET) – cross service and partnership working (public and private sectors).
- The social and health inequalities for care leavers – mental health and homelessness.
- The role and capacity of Personal Advisors given caseload numbers, growth in demand and how the new structure will support and improve this going forward.
- The areas in need of more target work and strengthening gaps in accommodation and housing.
- The choice and quality of accommodation made available to care leavers in Tameside.
- The Council's offer for care leavers and how to ensure this covers all young people placed outside the borough when it comes to accessing housing, education and employment options in different areas of the country.
- The systems and/or safeguards in place within the Council and housing partners that aim to reduce and remove a need for care leavers to present as homeless or access temporary accommodation.

Actions: That a working group is established to review the effectiveness of services and support for care leavers in Tameside. The Chair sought the interest of panel members and confirmed that the working group will consist of the Chair, Deputy Chair and Councillors Fitzpatrick, Howarth, Martin, McLaren.

12. CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE SCORECARD

The Panel received an update on progress against indicators set within performance scorecards measuring Early Help and Children's Social Care outcomes.

13. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair presented the agreed Scrutiny Annual Work Programmes for 2023/24.

14. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair advised members that a meeting of the Executive with Scrutiny Chairs and the Chair of Overview took place on 22 June 2023, to discuss activity and plans for the year ahead.

The Scrutiny Annual Work Programme report is to be tabled at the next meeting of Overview Panel on 1 August 2023.

The Chair had recently visited Manchester Council to meet with the Scrutiny Chair and Executive Member for Children's Services.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 13 September 2023.

16. URGENT ITEMS

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

CHAIR