

# Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

## 13 September 2023

**Commenced:** 6.00pm

**Terminated:** 7.45pm

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

### 17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

### 18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 26 July 2023 were approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendment.

The following action be noted under Item 4 of the agenda. 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, Councillors Fitzpatrick, Howarth, Martin and McLaren.

### 19. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

The Panel welcomed Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader (Children & Families); Allison Parkinson, Director of Children's Services; Alison Montgomery, Assistant Director of Social Care; Vicki Lawson, Assistant Director of Quality and Improvement; and Jane Sowerby, Assistant Director of Education, to receive an update on Children's Social Care.

The Panel received a verbal update and introduction from Councillor Fairfoull and officers. Details of new leadership and service arrangements was provided, including actions taken to identify and deliver a set of immediate and stabilising priorities within children's social care. The work ongoing will aim to determine the overall effectiveness of services and systems to deliver timely, responsive and quality outcomes for children and families.

It was reported that during recent weeks there has been a relentless drive to assess and analyse the current position of services. The work considers practice improvement and the overarching professional accountability of managers and practitioners in order to build greater trust and confidence in the robustness of systems in place.

The Director of Children's Services provided members with the following headlines of recent and planned activity.

- Completed a rapid review and diagnostic of the effectiveness and responsiveness of services and systems across children's social care.
- Understanding the requirements for practice improvement and moving services forward.
- Review of 'front door' arrangements - Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- Improving response times with regards to social care referrals and risk assessments for children.
- Testing the overall quality of social work practice.

- Addressing the timeliness and assurance of pathway plans for children and improving the frequency for Child Protection (CP) and Child in Need (CIN) contacts and visits.
- Bolstering management oversight at all levels.
- Strengthening the effectiveness of quality assurance tools, case auditing and supervisions.
- Making the best use of available data and performance – developing a scorecard that is child focused. Reinstating the Early Help scorecard.
- Creating a positive environment where the concerns and ideas of staff can be openly shared and discussed.
- Held a full staff briefing session and also met with head teachers.
- Creating a schools, colleges and early year's consultative group.

Panel members sought assurance on the actions taken to stabilise parts of the more formal and statutory provision. This includes areas where possible delays or gaps had been identified, with the priority to remove any potential risks or uncertainty for children.

Members also asked about the future reporting of performance data to the Scrutiny Panel. The current scorecard can be difficult to interpret and understand for the purpose of oversight and monitoring. A request was made that consideration be given towards the future reporting of data and ways to make the information appear more child focused and to provide members with the ability to consider the quality social work practice.

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

- The functionality and effectiveness of current safeguarding partnership arrangements and measuring the impacts
- LADO arrangements
- Placing children at the heart of everything we do
- Learning from complaint to Children's Services - themes and outcomes
- Measuring the impacts of changes on staff members and morale

**Actions:** The points for action include:

- Scrutiny Chair and Deputy Chair to meet with Councillor Fairfoull and Allison Parkinson to discuss a forward plan of the service and the Scrutiny work programme.
- For Scrutiny to receive a performance scorecard that provides greater clarity and with a focus on children and the quality of social work practice.
- The previously formed Scrutiny working group to now commence a review of the effectiveness of services and support for care leavers.
- Training to be provided to the Scrutiny panel members to assist them in ensuring there is effective challenge and scrutiny of the Executive.

## 20. CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE SCORECARD

The Panel received the performance scorecards measuring Early Help and Children's Social Care outcomes.

## 21. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair updated members on the following matters.

- The emerging national issue regarding school closures linked to Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). A service response has confirmed that RAAC is not present in the buildings of local authority-maintained schools.
- Scrutiny members to receive notification and invitation to attend an upcoming Mid-Year Budget session, with a date to be confirmed.

## **22. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 8 November 2023.

## **23. URGENT ITEMS**

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

**CHAIR**