

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>OVERVIEW PANEL</b>
<b>Date:</b>	21 November 2023
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Tracy Brennand, Assistant Director, People and Workforce Development
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>IMPROVEMENT TEAM UPDATE</b>
<b>Report Summary:</b>	<p>The Improvement Team was established in March 2022, in response to the Council's challenging financial climate.</p> <p>A jointly agreed programme of work commenced in October 2022 following significant changes to both elected member and senior leadership. Since then the Improvement Team, comprised currently of 6.5 team members, has worked collaboratively with services on small, specific projects to drive change and outcomes through effective project and change management.</p> <p>To date the team has contributed to bringing in £1.3m of grant monies, a reduction in overspend in children's services and achieved cost avoidance by creating more efficient operating models over the duration of the programme to date.</p> <p>Going forward, to support services further in planning and delivery of transformational projects, agreement has been given to develop the team further to enable broader support for improvement, transformation and project/programme management as an enhancement to the existing Improvement Team to scale up pace and impact of the team.</p> <p>This report outlines progress to date since creation of the Improvement Team and sets out the future plans for the service.</p>
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) NOTE the impact made by the Improvement Team to date on the delivery of the programme.</li> <li>(ii) NOTE the plans for the future development of the Improvement Function including – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Development of a Transformation and Improvement Strategy to provide the necessary framework and focus against which all improvement projects will be delivered.</li> <li>b. Development of broader support for transformation and project management</li> </ul> </li> <li>(iii) NOTE the prioritisation of future projects will focus on supporting the delivery of budget reductions, supporting children's services improvement journey and improving outcomes, prioritised using an impact versus complexity analysis.</li> </ul>
<b>Corporate Plan:</b>	The Transformation Programme underpins all aspects of the Corporate Plan, with strong links in particular with Starting and Living Well. The programme will also provide capacity around enablers identified as key to delivering the vision, aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan.
<b>Policy Implications:</b>	There are no direct policy implications associated with this report. Any policy implications associated with any projects outlined in this report have / will be addressed through appropriate governance as

part of each individual project the details of which are subject to validation and will be reported at a later date

**Financial Implications:**  
**(Authorised by the  
statutory Section 151  
Officer & Chief Finance  
Officer)**

The report provides an update on the initiatives supported by the Improvement team to date together with the proposed future programme of work.

On 23 March 2022, the Executive Cabinet approved a budget allocation of £5.000m via Council reserves to support the related costs of the Improvement team and investment required for associated initiatives.

Table 1 (section 2.2) of the report provides a summary of the estimated cost of the team since commencement and forecast to 31 March 2025, an estimate of £ 1.108m that will be financed via the reserve. The cost of the team is forecast to this date to align to the estimated delivery dates of the improvement projects detailed in table 2 (section 2.3).

The team has supported initiatives to date that have delivered improved outcomes, process efficiencies together with cost reductions and cost avoidance.

The remaining reserve balance of £3.892m will ensure that the improvement programme can increase scope, impact and pace and support services in delivering existing and future budget reduction initiatives.

The ongoing and future work programme will prioritise initiatives that support the Childrens Services Improvement Plan and budget reduction projects aligned to the delivery of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Further updates will be reported to future Panel meetings that will include the improved efficiencies and outcomes delivered both on a recurrent and non-recurrent basis.

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

There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

**Risk Management:**

Effective project management helps drive improvement change in the organisation. Exception reporting aids escalation and management of issues and risks to ensure improvement activity continues to deliver at pace thus reducing the risk of project failure.

**Access to Information:**

Not confidential

**Background Information:**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Emily Drake, Head of Payments, Systems and Registrars



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On the 23 March 2022, the Executive Cabinet, approved the establishment of an Improvement Team in response to the Council’s challenging financial climate.
- 1.2 A jointly agreed programme of work commenced in October 2022 following changes to both elected member and senior leadership. Since then the Improvement team, comprising of 6.5 team members, has worked collaboratively with services on small, specific projects to drive change and outcomes through effective project and change management.
- 1.3 This report outlines progress and impact to date since creation of the Improvement team and sets out the future direction of travel for the service.

## 2. CURRENT PROGRAMME OF WORK AND IMPACT

- 2.1 The current programme of work focusses on small measurable projects, with the team providing capacity for key skill sets:
- Procurement – capacity to complete procurement paperwork and product specifications.
  - Business improvement – reviewing operating processes e.g. process mapping, time and motion studies.
  - IT system development – developing improvements in IT systems e.g. launching new functionality, procuring or rationalising system, or maximising the use of systems already in place.
  - Change management supporting the planning and implementation of new ways of working.
  - Programme management support – project management capacity to ensure projects keep to scope, time and budget.
  - A number of projects also need improvement support where work streams cross multiple directorates to ensure interdependencies are identified and coordinated.
- 2.2 The current team structure is outlined in table 1 below:

**Table 1**



<b>Role</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Head of Service	Strategic oversight and business improvement activity	1
Business Improvement Managers	Business improvement, change management and project management.	3
Business Improvement Officer	Business improvement activity support	1
HR Assistant	Priority processing of recruitment and retention in Children’s Services	1
Procurement Lead	Procurement support	0.5



- 2.3 The team is funded via a £5m Transformational Fund Council reserve. The current actual and estimated cost of the team to 31 March 2025 is provided in table 2. The cost of the team is forecast to this date to align to the estimated delivery dates of the improvement projects detailed in table 2.





**Table 2**




<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>£'m</b>
2022/23 – Actual	0.300
2023/24 – Forecast	0.388
2024/25 – Forecast	0.420
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.108</b>
<b>Reserve</b>	<b>(5.000)</b>
<b>Balance – Forecast</b>	<b>(3.892)</b>


- 2.4 The forecast remaining balance of £3.892m is available to fund transformational and improvement activity.
- 2.5 Over the last 12 -18 months, 18 Improvement Projects have commenced based on requests from services and approved by senior officer and members. These are summarised below. Of these, 4 are in diagnostic phase and 6 in delivery phase. 5 projects have been completed. 3, namely Transitions to Adulthood, Leaving Care and Supported Accommodation have been subsumed into the Children's Improvement Plan and will be progressed under the Children's Improvement governance arrangements.
- 2.6 Projects in diagnostic phase are proposed concepts that are being explored to ascertain if there is a viable project to progress. It usually concludes with a business case being developed or the project no longer being progressed due to viability or return on investment.
- 2.7 Project management methodology is used to provide quarterly updates to members and officers. They provide a high level overview of each project, measures, risks and progress against key milestones. This is a key project management tool to ensure delivery of the Improvement Programme and associated benefits.





<b>Project</b>	<b>Project Outcome</b>	<b>Activity Update</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Diagnostic Phase</b>			
<b>Payments and Income</b>	Modernised consistent ways of making payments (Apple, Card Payments etc.), with improved reconciliation and shifts around charging policy to ensure that we are maximising income whilst being fair and consistent in recovery practices.	The organisation has identified a solution to modernised payment taking online (Apple Pay and G-Pay are available in person via PDQ). The solution provides improvements in reconciliation. Support provided to the MTFS is in place to maximise income and deliver digitised, consistent recovery whilst being supportive to financial vulnerability. This will likely be progressed through with the AD's for Digital Tameside and Exchequer.	Amber – on hold. 
<b>Digitisation in Operations and Neighbourhoods (was mobile working pilot)</b>	Improving the customer experience across the service, streamline back office processes, rationalise systems where possible, including the use of mobile working.	The Council is exploring procuring a new IT system in the service. Systems are being demonstrated and a business case in development for an invest to save project. Amber rating due to capacity affecting progress.	Amber – capacity impacting progress 

Project	Project Outcome	Activity Update	Status
<b>Customer Relationship Management (CRM)</b>	Customer Relationship Management system to improve customer journey and experience	A business case is currently in development to pilot a CRM in Operations and Neighbourhoods.	Green – on track 
<b>Artificial Intelligence (AI)</b>	Explore efficiencies generated through the use of artificial intelligence e.g. customer services.	Linked to the CRM system use of AI in the form of automated chat bots is being explored in Customer Services.	Green – on track 

Project	Project Outcome	Update	By when	Planned Impact	Status
<b>Delivery Phase</b>					
<b>Review of financial policies in Children's – SGO</b>	Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) - Compliant up to date financial policy and protocols in place in children's services	Delayed due to Children's Improvement work.	Dec 24	Compliance with SGO statute with clear operating protocols and robust financial oversight.	Amber – on hold 
<b>Children's and Adults financial systems</b>	Digital solutions in place to enable Children's and Adults in their response to key regulatory and legislative drivers - OFSTED areas for priority action and the People at the Heart of Care: Adult Social Care Reform White Paper. The 2 financial IT systems will interface directly with the case management systems to generate adults and children's payments.	Adults system implementation due March 24.  Children's scoping commenced in line with October 24 go live.	Mar 24  Oct 24	More robust financial oversight and more efficient operating systems. Staff time inputting will be reduced and data will be timely and provide greater clarity.	Green – on target 
<b>Locality and Land Property Gazetteer (LLPG)</b>	Update and review of LLPG – how it is updated, and managed for the authority.	LLPG has been brought in line with required national standard and business as usual model established. Work is now focussing on using this data set as a 'single version' of address data in our IT systems.	Mar 24	Grant income of £0.012m  National LLPG standard achieved. IT systems using LLPG data to improve data intelligence around addresses in the borough. This will enable services to work more effectively and join up data sources. This will generate future financial benefits.	Green – on target 
<b>Customer Experience Improvement in Waste Services</b>	Improvement of waste services operating systems and processes to improve the customer experience, increase efficiency and reduce failure demand.	On hold due to children's improvement work	Feb 24	Reduction in complaints in waste services.  Reduction in contacts to customer services.  Software developed to improve efficiency	Amber – on hold 

Project	Project Outcome	Update	By when	Planned Impact	Status
				of operating model.	
<b>Car Parks</b>	Car parking infrastructure that meets the needs of our residents and businesses with modern cashless payment options in place.	Digital payment methods now in place in for 17 car parking machines in the borough.	Was Sept 23. Delivered Oct 23	Collection of car parking fees in month one (October) has increased by 32% compared to the same period in the last year.	Green – on target 
<b>Website</b>	A refresh of the website to modernise and improve the customer experience.	A new refreshed look and feel of the website has been implemented.  Page reduction of 40% has been achieved and content refreshed.  Further reductions of content and pages will continue as business as usual.	July 23 Now Nov 23	Improved look and feel of the website to improve customer experience.	Green – on target 
<b>Children's Improvement</b>	Development of the Children's and SEND Improvement plans and self-evaluation frameworks. Programme management oversight to drive change, maintain pace and ensure delivery against improvement plans.	Children's social care improvement plan and self evaluation framework are complete and a delivery plan developed to drive improvements outlined in the plan.  Self evaluation framework for SEND also underway.	To be reviewed 31 Mar 24	Improvements in children's service. Improved OFSTED outcome. Improved outcomes for children and families.	Green – on target 

Project	Project outline	Impact	Status
<b>Completed Projects</b>			
<b>Business Process Improvement – SEND</b>	Children's Services SEND –the improvement team have helped the SEND to service to move to using their case management system Capita One. This has enabled more streamlined processes and better data provision for the service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase of KPI for initial Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCPs) within 20 weeks from 32% in Dec 21 to 60.3% above national average in April 23.</li> <li>- Process notes and training across team.</li> <li>- Cessation of inefficient practises.</li> <li>- All data now recorded in the Capita ONE case management system (prior to intervention data and performance information was absent which affected management oversight and the ability to plan).</li> </ul>	

		<p>- Proactive planning of EHCP reviews for schools.</p> <p>- Launch of the SEND portal - an online portal for schools to communicate and share information in an efficient way.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that KPI outcomes require further work. There continue to be challenges with review EHCPs; a service review is being implemented to address this.</p>	
<b>Business Improvement – Business Link Team, Children’s</b>	A review of systems and processes in the Business Link Team	Improved systems and processes, team stabilised, efficiencies generated preventing the need for additional capacity to be added to the team. Cost avoidance of the equivalent of 2 grade C admin positions.	
<b>Housing Benefit in Children’s</b>	Ensuring young people who are eligible to have their support paid for through housing benefit or universal credit housing element claim their full entitlement and that this is offset by the Council for any costs currently incurred.	New staying put policy in place on 1 Feb 23 that improves the offer for carers and young people and enables care leavers to claim universal credit housing element to cover their rent where eligible. The amount payable to carers has increased from £177 per week to £260 per week. An proportion of this additional cost is, where applicable, funded via universal credit.	
<b>Early Help</b>	Project Management expertise to support the redesign of Early help.	Performance management support of the Early help Transformation programme delivered in 22/23.	
<b>18+ Care Leaver Placements</b>	18+ Care Leavers in the right placements with the right support and a reduced reliance on semi-independent provision.	In this project the number of young people over 18 years old in semi independent provision was reduced from 56-20. As at November 2023 this has reduced further to 11. Over 18yr old semi independent placements on average cost £1067 per week. The reduction equates to a gross cost reduction of over £1.8 million over 2 years. As the Council still maintains a duty of care to young people to the age of 25, there will be other costs to support these young people dependent on their needs.	

2.8 Since September 2023, the team’s capacity has been focussed on supporting the Children’s Improvement journey. The Head of Service is Children’s Improvement lead and, with the Business Improvement Managers, providing capacity and support to the development and delivery of the Children’s Improvement Plan and SEND Improvement Plan. It is acknowledged that the shift in focus has impacted on the delivery of other elements of the programme but is considered an essential change considering the necessary pace required in Children’s Services.

2.9 The team have also assisted in delivering ad hoc pieces of work outside of the programme, relating to but not exhaustive:

- Wrote a new Joint Care Leaver Housing Protocol in Children’s services.
- Supported in writing a successful bid for £1.3m funding (Staying Close Bid)
- Providing recruitment and retention capacity in Children’s services to support priority recruitment of hard to fill posts. This includes undertaking employment checks and



completing recruitment paperwork and processes to free children's staff capacity to focus on frontline work.

### **3 FUTURE OF THE IMPROVEMENT TEAM**

- 3.1 A Transformation and Improvement Strategy will be developed following engagement with elected members and officers. The strategy will provide the necessary framework and focus against which all improvement projects will be delivered.
- 3.2 Going forward, to support services further in planning and delivery of transformation and improvement projects, agreement has been given to develop the team further to enable more focused support on improvement, transformation and project/programme management to be in place and to enable the scale up pace and impact of the team.
- 3.3 The programme of work will continue to align to the Corporate Plan and directorate business plans, with projects that focus on Children's Services being prioritised in light of the current OFSTED Improvement work. Key projects that support the delivery of Council budget reduction initiatives will also feature heavily in the programme.
- 3.4 Not all projects will bring direct financial benefit. Improvements to basic operating models may feature to enable stabilisation of services and provide a sound foundation for future service transformation work.
- 3.5 Identification and prioritisation of new projects will be based on an impact compared to complexity analysis with resources aligned to each specific project in recognition of the variety of skills and knowledge required.
- 3.6 Digital transformation, organisational development and finance underpins multiple projects so working closely with these enabling functions is imperative to ensure a consistent approach is applied to project/programme management.
- 3.7 Further investment in the Improvement function will be required to ensure that the programme can increase scope, impact, pace and support services in delivering budget reduction initiatives. Centralising and recruiting existing capacity from within services will reap the benefits of organisational knowledge. The capacity requirements required in the team are currently being developed. The team will have a central core of staff with resources flexing and changing as projects are on and off boarded and different skills sets are required.
- 3.8 A central Project/Programme management approach will also bring rigour to delivery plans and standardise the organisation's approach to project management working alongside services.

### **4 CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The Improvement team have worked closely in partnership with services over the last 12 -18 months.
- 4.2 With a refocus of the Children's Improvement Plan, Improvement team capacity and its impact will be scaled up.
- 4.3 The development of a Transformation and Improvement Strategy following engagement with elected members and officers will be prioritised. This will provide the necessary framework and focus against which all improvement projects will be delivered.
- 4.4 The programme of work will continue to align to the Corporate Plan and directorate business plans, with projects that focus on Children's Services being prioritised in light of the current OFSTED Improvement work. Key projects that support delivery of budget reduction initiatives will also feature heavily in the programme although some projects will focus on improved outcomes, without a direct financial impact.

## **5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 As set out at the front of the report.