

Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

10 January 2024

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 7.40pm

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

Apologies: Councillor Tilbrook

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

35. MINUTES

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

36. SEND IMPROVEMENT

The Panel welcomed Councillor Leanne Feeley, Executive Member (Education & Achievement); Allison Parkinson, Director of Children's Services; and Jackie Ross, Interim Lead for SEND, to receive an update specific to the provision of SEND services and required improvements.

Members received a presentation that focused on the following areas:

- Context of the Local Area Partnership
- Recent changes to the local SEND system
- Plans for the next 12 months
- Planned improvements and key activities

It was reported that a SEND Partnership Board has been established, with an experienced independent chair, meeting for the first time in December 2023. The remit has widened and a focus is placed on strengthening partnerships and local area governance. The purpose is to ensure SEND and Alternative Provision arrangements are improved.

Members heard that a diagnostic review has been completed, with some of the recommendations taken forward and accountable to the SEND Area Improvement Board. Further detail touched on the statutory duties in relation to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP), with data provided on the timeliness of EHCPs completed within 20 weeks. This shows that the gap between Tameside and the national average has improved. A quality assurance framework has been presented to the SEND Partnership Board regarding improved system oversight and sustainability.

Leadership and accountability for performance across SEND is being strengthened, with significant investment in SEND leadership and casework. A recovery plan was developed in October 2023 to address the backlog of annual reviews. Annual review improvement recommendations are now scrutinised by the Placement, Provision and Transport Panel. This provides multi-agency oversight, includes schools and bespoke post-16 plans.

It was reported that a lack of MDT response and gaps in the service offer were the biggest barriers to achieving ideal outcomes. The themes were drawn from case review workshops in April 2023, including 32 individual cases to assess outcomes for children and young people, enabling them to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Feedback from the parent/carer forum has shown that parental participation and satisfaction is improving but there is still some way to go. The increase in EHC needs and assessment referrals does show that there is a clear need to improve child and parental confidence in SEN support locally, with positive actions being taken with schools and partners to redefine and promote the graduated response.

Priority actions include the need to establish and promote closer working across the partnership and in ensuring improved SEN support and the graduated response have the impacts required in improving overall outcomes and to address future demand pressures. A breakdown was provided on plans for the next 12 months specific to 10 areas of weakness and the written statement of action.

A summary was provided on delivering better value (DBV) opportunities, key activities and work streams. This is focused around effective inclusion and transition and the system-wide approach needed in order to achieve sustainable outcomes and improvements. Information was also provided on the ongoing work and investment of health partners, CAMHS, the voluntary, community and faith sectors.

Reference was made to SEND improvement across the partnership, along with the challenges and solutions specific to Health and the management of demand and overspend within the high needs block.

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

- The local offer, pathways, demand and support needs.
- The timeliness, backlogs and engagement with children and families.
- The impact of delays and backlogs on outcomes for children and young people.
- SEND provision at secondary level.
- Strategic priorities regarding alternative provision.
- The voice of children and opportunities for co-production within communities.

Actions: The points for action include:

- That SEND improvement remains as a key oversight priority for the Scrutiny Panel going into the 2024/25 municipal year.

37. RESPONSE TO LGSCO FOCUS REPORT

The Panel welcomed Councillor Leanne Feeley, Executive Member (Education & Achievement); and Allison Parkinson, Director of Children's Services, to receive a response to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Focus Report, Parent Power: learning from complaints about personal budgets, published November 2023.

38. CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE

The Panel received the Children's Services Performance and Quality Assurance Scorecard and a response to enquiries made against specific indicators from the meeting on 8 November 2023.

Actions: The points for action include:

- The Scrutiny Panel to receive information at the next meeting, in response to enquiries made against specific performance indicators.

39. SCRUTINY MID-YEAR BUDGET LETTER

The Chair presented response letter sent to the First Deputy (Finance, Resources & Transformation); and the Director of Resources, following the mid-year budget update received on 6 November 2023.

40. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair updated members on:

- Scrutiny annual budget meetings arranged for 15 January 2024.
- LGA training sessions arranged for 6 February 2024 and 11 March 2024.
- Plans to be made for the next Scrutiny Panel meeting, with a focus on outcomes from the recent Ofsted of Children's Services

41. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday 6 March 2024.

42. URGENT ITEMS

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

CHAIR