

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

24 July 2024

Commenced: 6.00 pm

Terminated: 7.53 pm

Present: Councillor David Tilbrook (Vice-Chair) in the Chair; Councillors Charlotte Martin, Andrew McLaren, Jacqueline Owen, Sangita Patel and Tafheen Sharif

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Teresa Smith, Phil Chadwick, Dave Howarth and Peter Robinson

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

2 MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 12 June 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST TEST

The Chair invited the Panel to consider whether to exclude the public and press from the meeting during consideration of agenda item 8 (minute 7 refers) as it contained information that was 'not for publication'.

RESOLVED – That in order to prevent the disclosure of information which was not for publication relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information), the disclosure of which would not be in the public interest, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of agenda item 8 – SEND in Tameside (minute 7 refers).

4 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided an update on the Scrutiny Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year, outlining the Scrutiny Review topics agreed at the previous meeting:

- The experience of unaccompanied migrant children
- Care leavers experience – Entitlements/Rights/Local offer
- Journey of a complaint from a child – how listened to, acted on and fed back to the team

The Chair requested that any Members who had not yet indicated which of the review topics they would like to sit on email the Scrutiny Manager following the meeting to nominate themselves. The Chair advised that once all Members had indicated their preference and a lead officer from the service area had been identified, scoping meetings would be arranged accordingly.

5 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel will take place on Wednesday, 18 September 2024.

6 URGENT ITEMS

The Chair was of the opinion that item 7 (i) – Children's Workforce Data Report (Minute 6 (i) refers), although not included on the agenda, should be considered as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 to enable the Panel to duly consider the position of the Children's Services workforce relevant to the improvements required as part of the recent Ofsted inspection.

6 (i) Children's Workforce Data Report

The Panel welcomed Allison Parkinson (Director of Children's Services) and Tracy Brennand (Assistant Director of People & Workforce Development) to receive a report (copies of which had been circulated) which provided an update on the Children's Services workforce data.

Councillor Bill Fairfoull (Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families)) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Panel.

The Assistant Director delivered a presentation on Children's Services workforce recruitment and retention, highlighting:

- The aims of the Children's Workforce Development Strategy which included promoting Tameside Council's Children's Services as an employer of choice, growing our own via apprenticeships and career change schemes, high performing teams and individuals, compassionate and effective leaders and continuous improvement, engagement and change management. Supported via the People Plan and Workforce Board.
- The key headlines relating to the workforce included that there were 565 full time equivalent staff in within Children's Services, 429 of which were permanent (76%) and 136 agency (24%), and there were 149 full time equivalent social workers, 90 of which were permanent (61%) and 59 agency (39%).
- The current turnover figure for 2024/25 up to July 2024 was 8% in Children's Social Care, 2% in Education and 12% of Social Workers.
- That a multifaceted approach to recruitment and retention had been implemented which included rolling recruitment for social workers, new Tameside jobs page and updated Children's pages in development, recruitment team support for new starter checks and onboarding, revisions to the pay structure to incorporate professional grades and eliminate market supplements, pay and conditions benchmarking, salary matching/top of grade for agency conversations, dedicated induction programme, 'stay' interviews during the first year of joining, regular benchmarking, Greater Manchester Pledge commitment and comprehensive rewards and benefits.
- That work was underway to progress the formal creation of the Social Work Academy to provide more support for newly qualified social workers and ensure that newly qualified social workers were fairly distributed across teams to avoid an over reliance in one area.
- The changes around leadership which included Workforce Board, a commitment to stabilising the workforce, the STRIVE leadership and aspiring leaders programme which 400 members of staff had completed to

date, regular workforce engagement and recognition and improved change management processes to engage, involve and inform the workforce.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Members welcomed the work being undertaken to support recruitment and retention and commented on the importance of a whole system approach, however noted that the turnover rate of staff was still high and queried the reasons that were being cited by staff during their exit interviews.
- In response, it was recognised that whilst improvements were being made, the service was in a difficult space related to the Ofsted inspection rating and need to move from an agency reliant to permanent workforce. It was commented that a variety of reasons were cited during the exit interview process such as staff moving to other Greater Manchester authorities, high case loads or deciding to leave the profession, however initiatives like the Social Work Academy and ongoing development opportunities were expected to improve retention with newly qualified social workers reporting that they were feeling better supported and that caseloads have become more manageable. It was stated that there was a strong cohort of experienced staff within the service and retention of these staff was a key priority for the service. The Director asked for Members support by advocating for the council as an employer of choice and commented on the importance of creating a safe, supportive space for employees. Members were assured that wrap around support was being provided to the workforce to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people and deliver the improvements required as identified by Ofsted.
- In response to a query around the cost of agency staff, it was stated that agency staff filled existing vacancies which reduced the overall expense. It was commented that the service engaged social workers through the Reed framework in Greater Manchester which guaranteed completed checks, no introduction fees and lower agency rates.
- Members welcomed the training offer and asked whether the service worked with local universities to recruit social workers upon completion of their studies.
- In response, it was confirmed that the service works with all local universities to recruit social workers and had recently started engaging with them to recruit educational psychologists, however noted that there were no issues in terms of the recruitment of newly qualified social workers and the challenge was around the retention of staff.
- Members queried the requirement in relation to length of service for social workers.
- In response, it was commented that as part of the Greater Manchester pledge the service would only engage agency workers with two years post qualifying experience which aimed to encourage employees to remain in permanent employment for as long as possible.
- In response to a question around the changes to the jobs system, it was commented that the Greater Jobs system still applied however there would be more dedicated pages with new content for the Children's Services pages through Tameside Jobs and all roles would be advertised through various social media platforms.
- It was requested that the Panel be given the opportunity to review this improved offer in the future to ascertain the benefits and whether this was improving application rates.
- Members commented on the importance of quality assurance and a change management plan and suggested that this be a standing item at Workforce Board.

- The Panel welcomed the use of exit interviews and queried how the service was learning from the feedback.
- In response, it was stated that from a practice perspective, colleagues in Human Resources review the exit interview process to understand the patterns and themes which was shared with the service area on a monthly basis. It was noted that leadership and management, workload and induction had been identified as core areas of improvement as identified through exit interviews which had underpinned the workstreams around the changes to recruitment and retention.
- Members welcomed the variety of employment pathways including apprenticeships and career change schemes and commented on the importance of strong links with local educational institutions in order to provide employment opportunities for local people.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7

SEND IN TAMESIDE

The Panel welcomed Allison Parkinson (Director of Children’s Services) and Deborah Myers (Assistant Director for Education) to receive a report (copies of which had been circulated) which provided an update on the work taking place to secure improvements in SEND across the local area.

Councillor Bill Fairfoull (Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families)) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Panel.

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions, made comments and raised issues on the information contained in the exempt report and appendices that were discussed and responded to in the ‘private’ session of the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CHAIR