

Report To: **CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

Date: 27 November 2024

Scrutiny Chair / Reporting Officer: Councillor Brenda Warrington
Alison Montgomery, AD Childrens TMBC

Subject: **TMBC RESPONSE TO CHILDRENS COMMISSIONERS REPORT**

Report Summary: Following an Ofsted inspection in December 2023, which rated Tameside children's services as inadequate, and with two inadequate judgments within a five year period, the Secretary of State for Education commissioned a Children's Commissioner to undertake a review into the capability and capacity of the Council to deliver Children's Services.

The Children's Commissioner, a former Director of Childrens Services and former Chief Executive now Chair of Birmingham Children's Trust, Mr Andy Couldrick was appointed in March 2024 and his July 2024 report, published by the Department for Education (DfE) in September 2024, takes an in-depth view of the current position as well as reflecting back over the last five years since the previous full inspection in 2019.

The report can be viewed in full [here](#).

The report reviews the capability and capacity of the council to deliver Children's Services and gives the following key recommendations:

- That the Council retains control over Children's services with the ongoing support of a commissioner up to our next full inspection

That the DfE commission a 'good' rated local authority or Children's Trust to act as a strategic partner to support us to build consistency and resilience as well as innovation and enterprise.

Part of the report recommendations is that the Council retains control of Children's Services with the support of a commissioner. The Council is pleased to advise that Mr Andy Couldrick has been successful in the appointment to this role and will continue to work with us for the coming three years and support our improvement journey.

We must unfortunately acknowledge that Children's Services in Tameside are not currently where we want, and need them, to be. We accept the recommendations of the report and are committed to addressing them with all possible haste.

We have made some progress recently whilst there is still a lot of work to do to help us achieve the substantial and sustainable improvements we are striving for and we are committed as a whole organisation to take swift and positive action to address them.

We have already started to put in place the key building blocks needed to deliver our improvements and to strengthen our quality of practice. Our 'Brilliant at the Basics' programme, Restorative Practice and the '5C's' practice model have been recognised in the report as 'sound' and 'sensible' and will continue to be our model moving forward. We must continue to work hard to embed and sustain our approach across all teams, including the way we work together with our partners.


Recruitment and retention of social workers remains a significant challenge and we are committed to create the stability needed and have in place a permanent workforce, reducing the reliance on agency social workers. We are also currently undertaking a national recruitment process to secure a permanent Director of Children's Services and Assistant Director of Education to support the stability that is needed to take forward our improvements.

The recent introduction of our Social Work Academy to ensure our newly qualified social workers receive a strong learning and development offer and our focus to convert some of our agency staff to permanent employees is a key step for us in addressing these challenges and social workers are starting to report feeling well supported with manageable workloads.

It is important to note that the Commissioners report is not a reflection on individuals but on the capacity and capability of our organisation as a whole. We have a very dedicated and experienced workforce and we regularly receive great feedback from families and our partners across Tameside. We need to continue to support each other to improve our practice and to enable our children and families to thrive. The Commissioner highlights areas of 'impressive' and 'good practice' such as our contextual safeguarding service, early help, commissioning and care order discharges and that we are working on a number of fronts at pace to improve services.

We want to continue to build trust, confidence, be visible and approachable and work together as whole organisation, with our partners, children and families to drive improvement and monitor our performance.

We can, and we will, deliver a better service with better outcomes for vulnerable children and families in Tameside. There is no alternative, and there can be no excuses.

Recommendations:	The Council accepts all of the Commissioner's recommendations published in September 2024.
Links to Corporate Plan:	To achieve our priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very best start in life where children are ready to learn and encouraged to thrive and develop • • Aspiration and hope through learning and moving with confidence from childhood to adulthood • • Resilient families and supportive networks to protect and grow our young people
Policy Implications:	In line with policy and intended to strengthen approach and ensure robust challenge and holding to account of all stakeholders.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)	In recognition of the priority that the Council has placed on achieving improvements in Children's Services, significant additional resources have been allocated to the Directorate over the last few years and continue to be so.
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	There are no legal implications for this update report.
Risk Management:	Any risks associated with the ongoing improvement activity will be captured in the improvement plan, of which are monitored via the Children's Improvement Board.
Access to Information:	The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Alison Montgomery by: <p> Telephone: 0161 342 3644</p> <p> e-mail: alison.montgomery@tameside.gov.uk</p>