

**Report to:** **STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING BOARD**

**Date:** 30 September 2020

**Executive Member:** Councillor Bill Fairfoull- Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Member for Children and Families

**Reporting Officer:** Tracy Morris, Assistant Director of Children's Services

**Subject:** **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN- 7 SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS**

**Report Summary:** To update Board on progress of 7 Sustainability Looked After Children.

**Recommendations:** That Executive Cabinet receive this report and:

(a) note the financial impact as a result of the agreed revised the timescales for delivery of the projects as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic together with the outcome of the estimated financial modelling on placements as detailed in section 3 and **Appendix 2**; and

(b) receive a further report in December 2020 given the on-going uncertainty caused by the Covid 19 pandemic.

**Corporate Plan:** The work outlined sits under the Starting Well Programme and strongly aligns to the Resilient Families and Supportive Networks priority.

**Policy Implications:** The report directly links to the Corporate Plan, the Early Help Strategy for Tameside. Furthermore, as the Starting Well Partnership establishes, it is understood Early Help will be a partnership priority.

**Financial Implications:** The report provides an update on the progress and development of the 7 sustainability projects approved by the Executive Cabinet on 27 November 2019.

**(Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)** Section 14 of the report provides supporting contextual budget details for the directorate including an update on the estimated projected expenditure against the £ 2.0 million approved by the Executive Cabinet in November 2019. The estimated favourable variance of £ 0.68 million at outturn is primarily due to recruitment delays. Members should note that the CCG are investing a further £ 0.3 million in posts that will support the Family Intervention Service strand.

It was considered that this investment was a necessity as without it, it was feared that LAC numbers would continue to increase to more than 780 children, which would cost the Council a further £5.2m a year. The introduction of the 7 sustainability projects was intended to mitigate this risk and enable the budget to be reduced over the medium term.

The 2020/21 directorate budget includes additional investment of £ 6.9 million against placements related expenditure and was approved as part of the budget process.

If the sustainability plan were not successful there was a risk that this increased placements budget could overspend again by up to

£5.2m. The Council mitigates such risks by holding a level of general fund balances which will enable it to fund such pressures. As in previous years, the key budget risk relates to placements from both a demand and cost impact. **Appendix 2** provides details of demand assumptions in 2020/21 compared to the related budget alongside 4 scenario's.

Table 2 in section 14.10 provides the estimated additional cost implications of these demand assumptions. These range between £ 2.5 and £ 3.7 million and would be a resource impact on the general reserve.

Members should note that these assumptions are under continual review to understand the implications of covid and associated demand during the current period of the pandemic together with the future year implications on the Council's medium term financial planning. Clearly these assumptions will need revising once we have further details and plans on reductions to demand as the 7 projects progress and the implications of the pandemic are understood.

The expectation is that the Directorate makes all efforts to deliver a balanced budget in 2020/21. The next update on the 7 projects and the financial assumptions and implications will be reported to Members in December 2020.

In addition the directorate budget will continue to be monitored and reported to Members on a monthly basis via the Council and CCG integrated commissioning fund revenue budget reporting process.

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

This report is providing a general update on the progress made to date on the 7 sustainability projects and as Members will note from the financial implications section the main consideration for them when reviewing these projects is currently financial as at this point in these projects there are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

However it would assist Members if the report could explain how covid has delayed the project to date particularly as the service did not suffer a significant reduction in staff due to covid related sickness nor was there an increase in demand on the services through the initial lock down period.

Further whilst it will be a great disappointment to both Members and Officers that there has been a significant increase in the costs associated with these projects together with the Members may now have to consider re appraising the deliverability of all 7 projects particularly in light of the Council's overall financial position.

Alternatively; Members need to be content that the investment in these 7 projects still represents best value for the council and the residents of Tameside.

Therefore robust project management is required to ensure that the council continues to be able to deliver its statutory duties in relation to children and families but also that it does so within budget.

**Risk Management:**

Each project will be closely managed by a multi-disciplinary implementation team working to a named lead officer, reporting to the Assistant Director and Director of Children's Services. Regular reports will also be presented to the SLT.

**Access to Information:**

Background to the development of the strategy can be obtained from Tracy Morris, Assistant Director of Children's Services

**Background Information:**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Tracy Morris, Assistant Director of Children's Services



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## 1. TIMESCALES FOR DELIVERY

1.1 Below is the updated projected timescales for the decision, planning, implementation and anticipated savings of the 7 projects agreed at Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

1.2 It was anticipated prior to COVID that the implementation of the 7 projects, would begin to reduce projected rises of the number of children in our care from September 2020. While exact predictions are difficult to make given the number of variables, success would be measured by the cumulative impact of these measures on local authority numbers and placement mix. Therefore the aim was to:

- Reduced the LAC population to 650 by April 2021.
- Reduced the proportion of residential placements from 16% to 13% by October 2020

### 1.3 Initial timescales

	Nov 19	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sept 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21	May 21	Jun 21
1: Early Help			D	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	I	I	I	I	I	I	S	S	S
2: Family Support Service	D		P	P	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
3: Team Around School	D	P	I	I	I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
4: Duty/Locality	D	P	P	P	P	I	I	I	I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
5: Positive Futures	D					P	P	I	I	I	I	I	I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
6: Fostering	D			P	P	P	I	I	I	I	I	I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
7: Placements	D	I	I	I	I	S	S	S												

1.4 Updated timescales agreed on 20 May in light of the current Covid-19 situation:

	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sept 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21	May 21	Jun 21	Jul 21	Aug 21	Sept 21
1: Early Help	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	I	I	I	I	I	I	S	S
2: Family Support Service	P	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
3: Team Around School	P	P	I	I	I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
4: Duty/Locality	I	I	I	I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
5: Positive Futures	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	I	I	I	I	I	S	S	S	S
6: Fostering	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	I	I	I	I	I	S	S	S
7: Placements	I	I	I	I	I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S

D = Decision. P = Planning. I = Implementation. S = Cost Avoidance/Savings.

- 1.5 As outlined in the attached slides, each of the project leads has identified their anticipated delays, any planned mitigation and revised timescales and associated risks as a result of the implementation of their project in response to the current Covid-19 situation.
- 1.6 The attached slides give an overview of the revised timescales for each project as identified by the project leads and approved at cabinet on 20 May 2020.

A short summary of the key risk areas/impact of the current Covid-19 situation is as follows:

- **Project 1: Early Help** – Implementation of a co-located early help service may be delayed
  - **Project 2: Family Intervention Service** – The key risk is the impact of school closures and resulting limited contact with children and families
  - **Project 3: Team Around the School** – Same above – risk associated with school closures and limited contact on ability to deliver interventions effectively
  - **Project 4: Duty/Locality Restructure** – Difficulty merging teams during Covid lockdown and the impact on the implementation of the new MASH/Early Help Access Point
  - **Project 5: Positive Futures** – key risk is the purchase of Greenwood Avenue as the location for the assessment unit
  - **Project 6: Fostering** – key risk is the services does not recruitment sufficient Foster Carers to meet demand.
  - **Project 7: Placements Review/Sufficiency Strategy** – Capacity of the system during Covid-19, delay in securing standard placements strategy
- 1.7 The new timeline for The Looked After Children's Sustainability 7 projects as detailed in the chart above is as follows;
1. The Early Help project start date for implementation will move from October 2020 to a start date for implementation of February 2021
  2. The Family Support Service project will move the start date for implementation from March 2020 to a start date of June 2020.
  3. The Team around the School project started implementation in January 2020 this has partially been achieved however the date for full implementation date will now be July 2020 instead of March 2020.
  4. The Duty/Locality project started implementation as scheduled this has partially been achieved however the date for full implementation will move from July 2020 to August 2020.
  5. The Positive Futures project start date for implementation will move from June 2020 to January 2021.
  6. The Fostering project start date for implementation was October 2020 whilst the project has started and some areas are due to be implemented, the overall start date for implementation will move to February 2021.
  7. The Placements project had an implementation start date of December 2019 and whilst implementation has start in a limited way the start date for full implementation will move to May 2020.

## 2. OTHER ISSUES TO CONSIDER AS A RESULT OF COVID 19

- 2.1 The Local Authority initial experienced a reduction in the numbers of children referred into the service via our Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub arrangements. As detailed in the previous update report there was a 44% reduction in referrals in the first six weeks of lockdown. This was in the main as a result of Schools closing and the impact of Covid 19 on parents/carers taking their children to for health appointments, attending hospital A&E and going to the GP. We have in recent weeks seen a steady increase in the numbers of referrals and to date the referrals are slightly above the normal rate of referral that this time of year.

2.2 We are still unclear what will happen once lockdown ends and children go back to School fulltime in September. It is anticipated that there will be a further increase in referrals as the hidden harm that has occurred during lockdown is reported by children on their return to School. This in turn may lead to an increase in the numbers of Children subject to Child In Need Plans, Child Protection Plans. We have started to see some of the impact of COVID as lockdown has been eased and have seen an increase in the number of looked after children to 722 (21 July 2020) it is very difficult to predict what will happen moving forward as the immediate external pressures around Covid turn into more long term impacts around the economy. However what is clear is that we are now starting to see the impact with child protection cases escalating in Pre Proceedings via the Public Law Outline. This is when as a Local Authority we believe that there is sufficient evidence to warrant Care Proceedings but the parent(s) are given a final chance to make the improvements the Local Authority are suggesting for example in relation to their lifestyle, their parenting and to themselves as individuals. The issues of concern are clear set out by the Local authority and the parents will have access to Legal advice and representation. The Local Authority will give the parent(s) a timescale of up to 12 weeks for them to start to make improvements and up to 26 weeks to evidence sustained changes.

***Examples of the concerns that could affect the parent's ability to care for their child could include:***

- The parent's drug and/or alcohol abuse
- State of parent's mental health
- Neglect issues

2.3 The number of children's cases currently in pre proceedings is 92 as opposed to 70 in January 2020 an increase of 22. In a number of these cases domestic violence is a key feature. In Tameside we have in the last six weeks seen an increase in the number referrals/contacts into the service in relation to domestic violence. Nationally the thinking predicts that we will see an emerging pressure in this area in September – December 2020 and into 2021.

2.4 We have also in the last 2-3 weeks (21 July 2020) seen an increase in the number of applications to the courts to instigate care proceedings. This will inevitably lead to a rise in Looked after Children.

2.5 If the predicted increases continue to happen then despite all the work we are doing to reduce the number of Children Looked After via the 7 Sustainability Projects, then the target of a reduction in the number of Children Looked After to 650 by April 2021 may not be achieved and the cost avoidance and savings attached to the 7 sustainability project will not be fully realised.

2.6 Another factor for consideration is that during the recent months the Greater Manchester courts have been undertaking hearings virtually and have taken a cautious approach to final contested hearings and a number these hearings have been adjourned. The Greater Manchester Courts have just started to implement a hybrid model, this approach will hopefully start to address some of the backlog in relation to final contested hearings however the impact of adjourning the hearings has led to a backlog in the Court system which is leading to delays in cases concluding. The Manchester Courts have adopted this approach to ensure that parents and other interested parties are able to engage fully with the proceedings and to prevent future potential challenge to decisions via appeals. This has impacted on the timescales for cases to be concluded the effect of this will be to delay children achieving permanence via adoption, Special Guardianship Orders and by the discharge of care orders. We are unsure at this time the full impact of this on our Looked After Children numbers but it will mean that some children remain Looked After for longer than anticipated with the subsequent financial costs for the Local Authority and the regrettable long term emotional costs for children of not achieving permanence in a timely manner.

- 2.7 The financial implication in relation to the issues above is difficult to quantify however what is certain is that the current projection of a reduction in the numbers of children looked after to 650 by April 2021 and the subsequent savings attached to this reduction will not be realised.
- 2.8 Whilst Covid 19 initially impacted on the progress of some aspects of the 7 projects resulting in some slippage in the timescales. It is promising to note that revised timescales for the 7 projects are all on track with no further slippage predicted at this time. As demonstrated in the power point at set out appendix one

### **3. CURRENT SITUATION**

- 3.1 Tameside's Looked After Children's 7 Sustainability Projects were developed as a response to the following challenges.
- Reduce the need for local authority care. This will be done by strengthening prevention work and improving children's progress through care. Families require more practical support earlier to prevent cases from escalating
  - Stabilise the existing LAC cohort. We currently have too many expensive placements and too many that are placed out of borough. We can stabilise placements by ensuring there is appropriate support and respite provision for both families on the Edge of Care and fostering placements nearing placement breakdown. This will include therapeutic support and support for families so that children can remain with them safely.
  - Step down those children for whom it is safe and appropriate to do so. Too many children remain in care for too long and only leave at the age of 18. This will be through improved care/permanency planning and a range of step-down options: e.g. Special Guardianship Orders or fostering.
- 3.2 Despite the impact Covid 19 we have continued to address the challenges and to work towards implementation of the 7 projects below is a summary of the work we have completed and that we have continued to progress during Covid 19 alongside other work streams we have developed in addition to the 7 projects to address the challenges;

### **4. EARLY HELP**

- 4.1 Each School and Early years setting has a named key worker in the Local Authority who are operating as a team across Early Help and Education. Daily communication is made by the key worker to all schools and settings to ensure that they are open and able to offer places to all our children and young people identified as vulnerable and children of key workers. If the School has any concerns about a child The Neighbourhood Co-Ordinator/Early Help Assessment Advisor will triage the case, this will include checking ICS, assessing what the concern is, liaising with the child Social Worker Tameside Families Together (key worker) where needed, and agreeing actions. This could mean possibly contacting the family to see if they require any additional support and if there are any concerns from the family. This model of support has now been very successful and we have provided support to 349 families and 764 children. We have now developed our offer for Schools reopening in September as follows.
- 4.2 The COVID-19 request for service (Education vulnerable process) will now be weekly contact until October half term. Verbal consent is accepted until end of term (December 2020), this will ensure referrals can be dealt with quicker and easier during the current circumstances
- 4.3 September this is likely to mean no Team Around the School dates will have been booked for the first term, the offer will be:

- 4.4 Upon schools re-opening schools will book their Team Around the School dates for January onwards  
During the months of September and December we propose two options which each school can agree with The Neighbourhood Co-ordinator:
- 4.5 *Option 1: Each neighbourhood has a virtual 2 hour slot every two weeks.*  
Each school can have a diary invite to their neighbourhood drop in but they will also be able to link with a NB Co-Ordinator outside of this arrangement. These drop-ins will be in conjunction with the Early Help advisor who should be available during these times. If required a Social Worker can be called in or a Tameside Families Together worker if further discussion is needed.
- 4.6 *Option 2: We tier the schools to save on resources.*  
Once schools re-open we are tasked with setting up an academic year of Team Around the School meetings for over 80 schools and providing support with the expected increase in referrals.  
We suggest that creating a tiered approach will help us identify the schools most in need. Red tier could be offered a weekly call by the co-ordinator to discuss cases and support as well as the ability to use monthly drop ins and if and when safe to do so a neighbourhood co-ordinator can go into school with the Early Health advisor and support.  
Amber schools will be offered the ability to use a monthly drop in via skype to discuss cases and will obviously have access to the co-ordinators via phone when required.  
Green schools will be told they can ring the co-ordinators with any concerns as normal.  
The schools will be tiered based on amount of Child Protection/Children in Need, EHAS and how much support they have needed throughout COVID.
- 4.7 From November we plan to return to business as usual with Schools to access the Early Help offer through the normal routes. However this will be reviewed and an enhanced level of support to individual Schools will be offered if necessary.
- 4.8 We have launched the new Tameside MBC Early Help website, which provides information, advice and support for professionals and families available at [www.tameside.gov.uk/earlyhelp/neighbourhoods](http://www.tameside.gov.uk/earlyhelp/neighbourhoods)
- 4.9 The response since the website launch in April 2020 to date has been incredible with **14,057 hits**. These total number of web page hits are an overall number for the web pages (Early Help /Neighbourhoods, Service information Directory, Family Intervention Service, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service.
- 4.10 The numbers of hits are a reflection that the online platform is being received and utilised well with people continuing to access services and information where relevant and families.
- 4.11 Our first ever Virtual Partnership webinar in June was attended by 167 professionals and again the website was promoted and the video of the Partnership Event was uploaded for more professionals to see.
- 4.12 Here is a breakdown of the **14,057** number below:
- The Early Help/Neighbourhood Web pages - **5,821 hits**.
  - The Service Information Directory web pages - **2,567 hits**
  - The Service information Directory offers wide range of information about Children's centres, Activities, Youth Clubs, Toddler Groups, Welfare Benefits, Schools/Education and much more.
  - Family Information Service web pages - **5,015 hits** a
  - Family Information Service offers a broad range of information and support around nursery places, 2-year funding, Play/Pre-school groups, childcare, financial support and more.



- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service web pages - **654 hits**
- 4.13 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service and its aims to encourage and develop partnership between children, young people, parents/carers, schools, the local authority and all other partners who are involved in working to identify, assess and meet the special educational needs of children and young people.
- 4.14 The launch of the website has enabled access to a wide range of information for both families and professionals.
- 4.15 In addition to the Early Help/Neighbourhoods website, we have an existing GROW website for Early Years. This can be accessed via this webpage link: <https://www.gotogrowtameside.co.uk/>
- 4.16 The Grow website helps gives information, support and advice to families with children under 5 years. The website includes lots of information around the groups run at the Children's Centres, information and advice from local Health Visitors, Midwives, Early Years Worker.
- 4.17 Recent figures for June 2020 totals to **3, 401** hits.
- 4.18 There is also a Facebook GROW page and this can be accessed via this link: <https://www.facebook.com/growintameside/>
- 4.19 This platform is to send out posts which include activity ideas, story time videos, rhyme time videos, 'how to' activity videos, BBC Tiny Happy People information, weaning information, virtual baby groups/little learners/communication groups/motor skills groups, celebrations and events information. This has been a vital resource since lockdown for families.
- 4.20 Since March 2020 to date, we have had:
- **335 posts**
  - **4,085 post likes**
  - **1,802 comments**
  - **2,205 post shares**
  - **565,731 post reach**
  - **72,327 views across 78 videos posted**
- 4.21 There is also a Successful Families Facebook Page which was introduced to support families with children 0-19years. [https://www.facebook.com/Successful-Families-in-Tameside-105773811117630/?ref=py\\_c](https://www.facebook.com/Successful-Families-in-Tameside-105773811117630/?ref=py_c)
- 4.22 This platform has videos, helpful information and guidance around a range of areas including Early Years, Parenting, Parental Conflict, Domestic Violence and have specific slots in place for multi-agency teams such as: Youth Service, Healthy Young Minds, Adult Education and Voluntary Sector Organisations.
- 4.23 The work we are doing at an Early Help level to support families at the earliest opportunity will ensure that we not only achieve positive outcomes for Children and Families. But we will also prevent cases escalating through services. The impact of the work will be a long term reduction in the need for higher tier, statutory interventions, including bringing children into care.

## **5. TEAM AROUND THE SCHOOL**

- 5.1 Since the start of the Team around the School in September 2018 to June 2020
- 5.2 449 Families have been discussed at a Team around the school meeting which equates to 783 Children. Of those 783 children only 23 have been referred through to Children Social Care.
- 5.3 85 have been referred to an Early Help Panel with 426 Families being supported at a much earlier stage.
- 5.4 There are now 84 Schools undertaking Team around the Schools which are now happening virtually we have also developed Team around the School + for to work with the Pupil Referral Units being able to identify the need to support children sooner, the medium-term impact is expected to be a reduction in the need for higher-tier, statutory interventions, formal Early Help interventions, Child in Need support and for children to come into care. It is also anticipated that there will be an increase in stepping down of cases, a reduction in cases being stepped up, and a reduction of repeat referrals into the service.

## **6. FAMILY INTERVENTION SERVICE**

- 6.1 The implementation of the Family Intervention Service has started and we have seen an increase in the number of families receiving support from the Family Intervention workers from 120 allocated cases pre Covid 19 to 300 plus cases allocated to family intervention workers to date with plans for that to increase further. The workers have now moved virtually to the new line management arrangement, planning is currently underway with HR colleagues to issue new contracts to staff and working towards implementing the new rotas and 7 day working by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020.
- 6.2 The CCG has been able to commit to funding the psychological therapy components of the Family Intervention Service. The service manager and commissioners are working with Healthy Young Minds to finalise expectations regarding how the service will operate and are developing a Service Specification with clear outcome and performance measures. This will ensure that comprehensive information will be available to show impact and inform future investment requirements. Staff recruitment will commence in the near future.
- 6.3 It is anticipated that the impact of implementing this will be a medium-term reduction in the need for higher-tier, statutory interventions, including the need for children to be admitted into care. With on-going support for families earlier on, we will see more stepping down of cases and a reduction in step-ups/ escalation of cases. Finally we will see a reduction in the rate of repeat referrals into the service, because families will be able to access support more easily.

## **7. EDGE OF CARE SERVICE**

- 7.1 From 01/04/20 – 30/06/20 the Edge of Care Service has
- Worked with 149 children
  - 40 at Child in Need level
  - 52 at Child Protection level
  - 29 at Children in Care level
  - 28 at Child Protection/Public Law Outline level
- 7.2 Of the 29 that the Children Looked After that the Edge of Care Service has worked with
- 5 Children where subject to Interim Care Orders placed at home with parents.
  - 8 children were supported to maintain their placement

- 16 Looked After Children were supported and rehabilitation home to parents or family

7.3 During the period 01/04/20 – 30/06/20

- The involvement with 64 children has ended of these
- 10 became Children Looked After
- 4 were rehabilitated to the care of family
- 4 placements were stabilised
- 44 Children did not become Looked After and remained in the care their parents

## **8. RESTRUCTURE OF DUTY / LOCALITY**

8.1 The implementation of the new structure is underway with the teams moving towards virtual teams alongside this we are developing a virtual training offer to up skill some staff. One of the key drivers for this was to improve the service we offer to Children and Families and provide stability by reducing the number of social worker involved in children and families lives. Not only is this positive in term of increasing the quality of our service and ensures families do not have to tell their stories multiple times. It also reduces the amount of drift on cases and which ensures children gain permanence at the earliest possible opportunity which is positive and in the best interests of children but also brings with it saving in terms of placement costs and cost avoidance. It is of note in that the number of children who have experienced more than 3 changes of social worker has reduced to 39.9% from a previous high of over 50% this remains a focus for improvement.

8.2 The restructure will go live on 7 September 2020.

## **9. POSITIVE FUTURES (RESPITE AND ASSESSMENT UNIT)**

9.1 Progress had been made with the planned purchase of a property (Greenwood Ave) which was to be the assessment unit. Unfortunately this sale has now fallen through which is a huge disappointment and will have a significant impact on the progress of this strand of the Sustainability Project. We have recommenced our search for a suitable property in Tameside we will review the timeline for this, once a property has been identified.

9.2 The refurbishment of St Lawrence Road has been completed and the property is now ready to be handed over to the service.

9.3 Once the registered manager has been recruited the registration process with OFSTED can commence. It is anticipated that St Lawrence Road will be operational at the end of October with no clear date now for when the Assessment Unit will becoming operational given the very recent set back with the sale of the property at Greenwood Ave having fallen through. I would that it is noted that whilst the St Lawrence Road part of this strand of the project is on track, the timeline for this strand of the project is at risk in relation to the establishment of an Assessment Unit given the number of factors at play.

9.4 The objective to implementing this model is to prevent placement breakdown, and allow children who are at risk of being brought into care to safely remain at home. The model will work alongside the existing Edge of Care and Family Support Service. The target recipients of this model will be children and young people aged 11 and over.

9.5 Respite Unit:

- Will provide up to 72-hour short breaks – planned and emergency
- This is an alternative option to admitting a child into care, and instead stabilise their circumstances and support them
- Children will be allocated a key worker who will remain attached throughout the outreach work and post-respite break

- Speech and language, psychological and police (prevent criminalisation) support will also take place here

#### 9.4 Assessment Unit:

- Will comprise of 1 emergency and 3 assessment beds for a period of up to 12 weeks, integrated with key workers as above.
- This will reduce the number of out-of-area placements, improve initial assessment and planning and will help retain connections with family and community.

9.5 There will be better decisions and oversight of support for the child/young person, with a clear focus on stepping down cases safely. This makes the children/young people involved less likely to remain in expensive, out of area placements and more likely to be supported through fostering placements.

## 10. FOSTERING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

### 10.1 The key priority is to:

- Increase the number of foster carers approved by Tameside that meets the needs and demographics of our looked after children population
- Increase the number of children with more complex needs placed with Tameside approved Foster Carers
- Implement a revised foster carer offer to support retention of foster carers and to support the offer to more children being placed with Tameside approved foster carers.

### 10.2 We have to date

- Recruited to all fostering management posts and social work vacancies on a permanent basis. No temporary cover through agency staff as of the 07.06.2020
- Continued work with children's systems team round extracting data around compliance and performance within the fostering service.
- Introduced a Performance & QA framework within the fostering service to manage and monitor performance.
- There is now a monthly compliance report that is produced to ensure service is compliant with regulations and minimal standards. Also enables KPI's to be monitored and challenged.
- A weekly regulation 24 report that highlights those in and out of regulation. Provides service and management oversight.
- Review of the offer to foster is now drawing to a conclusion and draft paper was made available on week of 29.6.2020. This included review of payments to carers alongside what the support offer is.
- Work around foster carer payments is underway with Payroll Service. Katie Sherriff is leading and all payment forms will move into ICS rather than continue with paper.
- A Marketing and recruitment budget for 2020/21 has been agreed
- Previously agreed additional resource has evolved from a standalone Special Guardianship Order support team to a Discharge from Care/SGO support team. This includes 4 family intervention worker's that will work across both the fostering service and the discharge/SGO support team. Will support placement stability and transitions to SGO's. This has been resourced from within existing capacity.
- Two successful recruitment campaigns in March 2020 and May/June 2020. Increase in initial enquiries, resulting in new assessments of prospective carers.
- Fostering service now manage own enquires and expression of interest's.
- The dedicated business support team is now in place and is already making a positive impact.

### 10.3 We are working on

- Embedding signs of safety practice model into the fostering service.
- Recruiting to the post of the marketing and recruitment officer.

- Delivering face to face virtual training to foster carers via Zoom.
- Business support team implementing process and systems to support and improve the fostering service.
- Next recruitment campaign in August 2020 that will target those who have worked at home during lock down and want to continue to do this by being a foster carer
- Consider the outcome of the foster carer offer project and progress chosen recommendations.
- Re-launch of permanence strategy to ensure plans of permanence in relation to SGO and Long Term Fostering.
- Establishing a permanence panel to monitor and review children's plan and support safe discharge of care orders and reduce Looked After Children numbers.

#### 10.4 Future plans

- Establish a 24 hour/365 days a year helpline for foster carers to access out of office hours.
- Launch the 'foster carer offer' that will support recruitment of new carers and retention of existing foster carers.
- Recruitment strategy targeting foster carers specifically older children and siblings to reduce use of external placements.
- Consideration for a 'therapeutic fostering scheme' for children that are identified as complex to prevent them being placed in residential setting.
- The dedicated business support team is now in place and is already making a positive impact.

## 11. CARE LEAVERS

- 11.1 Weekly meetings are taking place to urgently progress the expansion of the Transition Support Service under the existing agreement for a further 10 dispersed supported bedsits. Local availability of suitable one bed tenancies has led to delay, however, Social landlord Moss care St Vincent have delivered two tenancies to a very high standard . A further property on the same street has been identified for development, with planning permission pending that will create a further two tenancies. A larger property has been identified with plans being drawn up for conversion into a further six tenancies, four of which will be identified for our Care Leavers alongside two older peer support tenants. This would also provide for a new team base for our Transition Support Service with the potential for improved facilities that would support our independence skills training offer. Plans are also under way to expand the currently agreed 10 units to 17.
- 11.2 We are continuing to engage our partners across both the commercial and social housing sector in seeking the additional properties. A planned sufficiency review is proposed that will model our care leaver move on accommodation needs for the next 5 years. This will include proposals to increase our Supported Lodgings offer. Essentially, focus remains on reducing the substantial overspend created by Care Leavers remaining in high cost placements without timely access to suitable move on accommodation.
- 11.3 Work has been continuing in partnership with the 10 Greater Manchester Local Authorities under the banner of the recently established GMCA Care Leavers Trust. Of late the focus has been on the core aims of the project; Free public transport for all Care Leavers, a partial offer to Care Leavers seeking access to Education, Employment and Training (EET) opportunities has been secured via the Princes Trust, a wider offer remains pending a GM Transport review with the request made for care leavers to be identified as a concessionary group. There has also been progress on developing a GM wide data set and in also seeking to agree a consistent minimum financial entitlement offer across Greater Manchester. Tameside's existing comprehensive Local Offer already meets the vast majority of the minimum expectations being sought. Further core objectives of the Greater Manchester joint work includes securing mentoring for all Care Leavers, access to free prescriptions,

improved access to mental health services as well as access to greater EET opportunities, linking in with the national Care Leaver Covenant scheme. The 100% Council Tax discount is now available for all care leavers up to the age of 25 and in line with our extended Corporate Parenting duties, this offer is matched for all our Care Leavers living across the 10 Greater Manchester Local Authorities.

- 11.4 A recent meeting with the Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN) has led to an external funding bid that if successful will support the recruitment of two full time staff by GMYN to be based in the Leaving Care team.

## **12. PLACEMENTS REVIEW & SUFFICIENCY**

- 12.1 The revised Commissioning and Brokerage service has been establishing the foundations of proper commissioning, contracting and quality assurance processes including; implementation of a monitoring framework, contracts/placement agreements, a listening coproduction framework, and a single point of entry for all placement requests to take greater control of decision making.
- 12.2 A multi-agency placement panel has been established since January a finance rep attends this meeting. The service has been working with finance to deliver a step change in the cost modelling of placements.
- 12.3 A data dashboard has been drafted to bring together to align key finance, performance and commissioning indicators to increase scrutiny. Developing work streams include a desktop review and attendant action plan focused on all commissioned placement in Independent Fostering Agency placements and Residential Provision; actions are wide but include a focus on ensuring all placements are in receipt of appropriate discounts, and reviewing the continued requirement for additional services commissioned, as well as identification of agreed performance
- 12.4 We have completed a successful rapid pilot of the 'Deep Dive' approach from No Wrong Door and adapted for Tameside, which started in late April and is now moving to an extended trial with a view to full implementation across all residential placements. Deep Dives are to be focused on ensuring we achieved permanence for young people and barriers are removed to ensure more of our children are in family environments.
- 12.5 Emergent work is to focus on transition, care leavers and constructive links to internal fostering services. Market development work is starting with a focus on increasing the number of our children living in Tameside.
- 12.6 Continuous improvement work on the new foundations established for the service remains important. We have worked with the CCG who have established a new Children and Young Person's Individual Commissioning Manager to support the developments outlined above, plus the Transforming Care agenda, and work with all partners to commission services as appropriate to meet needs.
- 12.7 The intended impact of this will be a medium-term reduction in the need for residential placements for Looked After Children. This will bring us more in line with our statistical neighbours in terms of placement make-up. It will improve the matching of placements to children's needs. It will increase the availability of step-down placement options. Quality Assurance of cases will reduce readmission and future long-term costs. Finally it will contribute to reducing the number of Looked After Children in Tameside.

### **13. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'S SERVICE**

- 13.1 There is a significant work being undertaken in support of and alongside the Looked After Children's 7 Sustainability Projects within the Looked After Children's Team.
- 13.2 To support the priorities in the 7 projects (Placement sufficiency) we have developed and the implemented a placement tracking panel which has the function of considering all new requests for placements for children coming into care, placement change requests and also any requests for increase in care packages. This has been in place since January 2020 and continues to develop and strengthen its function. The learning from the first 4 months of this panel that we need to ensure the children we are looking after are, in the right placement with the legal order that supports a long term plan for children.
- 13.3 We are starting to achieve this by using the data in a much more sophisticated way. This will support how we reduce the numbers of looked after children as we can target the right children to exit care safely. We are trying to achieve this in a number of ways.
- 13.4 We have moved some existing resource from within the Looked after Childrens Service to create a Discharge from Care team. This team will be dedicated to progressing applications for discharges of care orders for children looked after where it is safe to do so. The support is also part of the team remit where an Special Guardianship Order is made.
- 13.5 We are developing a permanence panel this will be starting in September. This is a panel that will track and make decisions about children who are already looked after and what their plan of permanence is. Permanence is defined as needing to have 3 elements, physical permanence (Placement) emotional permanence (attachment to a primary care giver) and legal permanence (the correct legal order to support the plan). This panel will be the place where the newly established Discharge Team will be a part of so that they can pick up children quickly to progress the discharge of their care orders to either SGO or no order if those children are placed at home with parents.
- 13.6 There is work being developed across the service with the social work teams about understanding permanence and this is being done as part of a review of the permanence policy and also some direct work with teams to strengthen the practice of achieving permanence at the earliest opportunity. This work needs to be embedded before the work of the panel can be fully effective. We are however working hard to create the right environment for practice to develop.
- 13.7 Part of this is to understand the likely outcomes for children currently in care proceedings. We are now in a position where we can oversee the numbers of children in care proceedings and what the predicated outcome from court will be. We are starting to track those children where it is predicated that at the end of proceedings they will have a care order, that will mean they will continue to be looked after, or they will end on a different type of order that results in them ceasing to be looked after. Having this oversight now allows us to look at the different types of orders and placements combined so we can start to challenge the planning decisions for children and ultimately inform future practice.
- 13.8 We are developing an Integrated Looked After Children's Health and Wellbeing Team and - a task and finish group has been established to bring together resources in the Council, ICFT and Pennine Care to create an integrated team. This will ensure a coordinated support offer, focused on early identification of health and wellbeing needs and close working with foster carers and providers to meet the needs and thereby improve outcomes.
- 13.9 We believe that by having all these key elements functioning that we will be able to reduce the numbers of children who are looked after and reduce the costs to the Local Authority. These will not be quick fixes as the critical part to all of the above is building the infrastructure and the right conditions to grow practice. Once embedded the long term

outcomes for Looked After Children will be significantly improved and overall numbers of Children In care will be reduced and the cost to Local Authority will also be reduced.

## 14. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 A sum of £ 2.0 m recurrent investment was approved by the Executive Cabinet on 27 November 2019 to support the 7 key sustainability initiatives from 2020/21, together with a further £ 0.3 m investment via the CCG for posts that will support the Family Intervention Service strand.
- 14.2 This report also provided details of the potential increased demand based on current year intelligence. This has resulted in an additional £ 6.9 m budget increase to the directorate budget in 20/21. The business case for this investment was based up facing costs of up to £5.2m in addition to the placement budget provided if LAC numbers continued to increase at their former trajectory, to more than 780 children in care. The investment in the sustainability projects was aimed at mitigating this risk. The Council manages such risks through its reserves and contingencies. 14.3 There was also further investment of £ 1.8 m allocated to finance potential additional cost implications of pay increments and inflation, external legal fees, regional adoption inter agency fees, and systems related improvements. This resulted in total additional investment of £ 10.7 m in 2020/21.
- 14.3 The £ 2.0 m relating to the 7 sustainability projects as outlined in this report has been allocated to the various strands as set out in **table 1**. The table also provides an initial estimation of the projected cost against this investment in 2020/21. The estimated variations are primarily due to recruitment delays.

**Table 1**

Project	£'000		
	2020/21 Investment	Forecast 2020/21 Expenditure	Variation
Early Help Service	0	0	0
Family Intervention Service	524	383	(141)
Team Around School	70	41	(29)
Duty / Locality Team Reconfiguration	0	0	0
Positive Futures (Respite / Assessment Unit)	569	251	(318)
Fostering Service Review	193	13227	(616)
Placements Review (Incl Leaving Care posts)	633	510	(123)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,989</b>	<b>1,312</b>	<b>(677)</b>

**\*Additional £0.3 m CCG investment in Family Intervention Service not included in the above table.**

- 14.4 As in previous years, the key budget risk relates to placements from both a demand and cost impact. **Appendix 2** provides details of demand assumptions in 2020/21 compared to the related budget alongside 4 scenario's.
- 14.5 **Scenario 1** represents a growth in the numbers of Looked After Children until September based the profile of children who have come into the care of the Local Authority from 30/03/20 to 10/05/20. During this period we have seen over 42 % of children placed with Foster Carers this includes Connect Carers who are usually members of the child's extended family who have been assessed by the Local Authority as safe to care for the child



or children and who are then considered Local Authority Foster Carers and are paid and supported by the Fostering service in the same way other Foster Carers are. However they are only approved to care for the specific child or children they are connected to. 30% of children remained placed with their parents; this happens when the court issues an Interim Care Order which gives the Local Authority shared parental responsibility with the parents but does not approve the children being removed for their parents care pending a further hearing. The remaining 28% were placed in some form of residential or supported lodgings provision.

- 14.6 **Scenario 2** represents a growth in the number of Looked After Children to 743 weighted towards Connected Carers. The other factor in this scenario includes a reduction in the number of Looked after Children as a result of the care orders they are subject to being converted to a Special Guardianship Order. A Special Guardianship Order is when the person or persons who have been caring for a child make an application to the courts to discharge the care order and grant a Special Guardianship Order which means the child is no longer Looked After and that the Special Guardian is granted parental responsibility for the child. This does not produce any cashable savings as the Special Guardian is entitled to an allowance which is comparable to the Local Authority Fostering rate. It does however produce some savings for the Local Authority in terms of Social Worker, and IRO time and the associated cost of Local Authority involvement in a child's life it is also linked to much better outcomes for children.
- 14.7 **Scenario 3** predicts growth in the number of Looked After Children weighted towards a growth in the number of children placed with Connected Carers and no Special Guardianship Order Conversions.
- 14.8 **Scenario 4** is based on the number of Looked After Children remaining on the current trajectory and the number of children looked after remaining at 718 for the rest of the financial year. We are still unclear what will happen once lockdown ends and children go back to School but it is anticipated that there will be an increase in referrals as the hidden harm that has occurred during lockdown is reported by children on their return to School. This in turn may lead to an increase in the numbers of Children subject to Child In Need Plans, Child Protection Plans and an increase in the Number of Children who are Looked after by the Local Authority. The figure of 718 Children Looked After is the least likely of the 4 scenarios to be achieved.
- 14.9 The estimated variance of each scenario compared to the budget allocation is summarised in table 2.

**Table 2**

<b>2020/21 Placements Budget - £ 34.109 m</b>	<b>Level of Risk Reserve required (£ m)</b>
Scenario 1 - Growth to Sept assumed on placement profile since COVID outbreak	3.7
Scenario 2 - Growth to 748 weighted towards connected carers + 3rd quarter reduction in LAC converted to SGO's NO COST BENEFIT	2.3
Scenario 3 - Growth weighted towards connected carers / no SGO conversions	2.3
Scenario 4 - Continue current trajectory and hold at approx 718 LAC full year	2.5

- 14.10 The change in forecast costs of each scenario when comparing between periods 3 and 4 is predominately due to an increase in the number of external residential placements which has increased the costs for all of the scenarios.
- 14.11 Additional analysis of forecast total expenditure by placement type and age banding, together with related volumes will be included in future monitoring reports to provide further context on where the related forecast cost increases or reductions are arising between

reporting periods. It is envisaged that this additional analysis will be included by the period 6 (30 September 2020) revenue budget monitoring report.

- 14.12 If the service is unable to reduce its total placements to around 650 by the end of the financial year, there will be a further budget pressure which will need to be funded in 2021/22 financial year, as the sustainability projects will not have delivered to plan, and thereby increasing the level of savings and efficiencies required to balance the overall Council budget to fund the higher than expected placement numbers. Members will be updated on the likely financial impact in 2021/22 as part of the month 6 revenue monitoring report.

**15. RECOMMENDATION**

- 15.1 As stated on the report cover.