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## **CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Meeting: 17 March 2021

At: 6.00 pm

### PRESENT

Councillor Wendy Meikle (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Linda Holt (Vice-Chair); Councillors Grace Baynham, Laura Booth, Yvonne Guariento, Becky Senior, Mark Weldon, David Wilson, Harrison (Parent Governor Representative) and Dena Ryness.

### **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interest which they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No interests were declared.

### **2. CALL-IN**

There were no call-in items to consider.

### **3. STOCKPORT AND TAMESIDE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) proposing that the Council explores how it will work together with Tameside Council ("Tameside") in relation to exploring the opportunities for shared services and to update the committee in relation to the secondment of Tameside's current Director of Education to Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council ("Stockport/the Council") to act as a joint Director of Education across both authorities.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Family Services & Education (Councillor Colin Foster) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- It was clarified that Stockport had been awarded Partner in Practice (PiP) status in March 2018 and one of the first local authorities Stockport was asked to partner with by the Department for Education was Tameside. Consequently, for the past three years a very positive and productive relationship had been developed with Tameside in terms of sharing best practice and establishing relationships between the senior management teams that allowed for the sharing of ideas.
- As a result of work undertaken with Tameside through the PiP, their Children's Service inspection significantly improved and there had been benefits for Stockport in terms of the learning from this experience that could be implemented here.
- Tameside's current Director of Education was the Greater Manchester lead for education and was the appointed Senior Responsible Officer for early years work, and building on the strong partnership work that had already been undertaken between the

two authorities the opportunity had been taken to appoint a single director of education with a strong leadership role over both authorities.

- It was stated that while there would be financial savings associated with the appointment, there would be benefits for Stockport through having a strong leader with a strong presence in Greater Manchester that would have a positive impact on the senior leadership team.
- The experience of the past 12 months had shown that significant improvements could be delivered through enhanced collaboration.
- Concern was expressed that the report stated that one of its aims was to provide an update on the secondment of Tameside's current Director of Education, however this had been the first time that the scrutiny committee had been made aware of such a proposal. In response, it was stated that the proposal had initially been shared with Group Leaders before being brought to scrutiny.
- It was stated that while updates had been provided to the Scrutiny Committee in relation to the ongoing work on the PiP, this had not clearly identified the evolving nature of the breadth and scope of the relationship between Tameside and Stockport.
- It was queried why the report had not been accompanied by an equality impact assessment in the light of the fact that the proposals encompassed those services provided to children with complex needs.
- Some members expressed an uneasiness with the principle of appointing a single director of education working across the two authorities and whether this would mean a loss of a bespoke approach and outcomes for Stockport's children.
- There was a concern about an apparent lack of openness in the way in which the proposals had been brought forward and consequent lack of opportunity to scrutinise the matter in more detail at previous scheduled scrutiny committee meetings rather than having to convene an extraordinary committee to do so.
- It was commented that the rationale being used to justify the proposals could similarly be used to appoint a single director of education for the whole of Greater Manchester.
- It was queried why the proposed structure for the provision of education in Stockport was being centred around one individual and what would happen if that individual left. In response, it was stated that it was an opportunity to have the shared service and share the improvements and synergy and economies of scale between both boroughs. It was stated that there would not be a detriment to Stockport children, that there would be strong governance and strong leadership to monitor the regime and monitor the outcomes and improvements.
- Members enquired about the practical arrangements of the shared service and how it would work. In response, it was commented that the details had not yet been worked out as it was an exploration into the opportunities to work with Tameside. It was also stated that shared services have proven to work well in other authorities and at times it is difficult to find the right person for the position. The DfE were also very interested in this partnership and the innovation that it could bring.
- It was confirmed that the decision to second a director of education was within the range of delegations to the Director of Children's Services and the purpose of the report before the committee was about bringing scrutiny and the programme of work together to identify the scope and objectives and that this would include full and comprehensive equality impact assessments going forward.
- It was stated that previously a number of rounds of recruitment was done for the substantive post which was unsuccessful at each stage, confirming the reasons for having the interim role in place to date.

## Children & Families Scrutiny Committee - 17 March 2021

- Scrutiny should have been included on this journey from an earlier stage so that the questions being asked and the concerns being raised could have been addressed and considered through the process.
- Would additional funding be included given the interest expressed by the DfE. In response, it was stated that there would be opportunities to evaluate and monitor performance and any DfE funding would be included in the arrangements.
- It was noted that detailed elements of the shared service was shared a few weeks ago with Group Leaders and the report submitted to scrutiny presents a more detailed way forward.
- A service level agreement would be progressed by the Legal Team and Human Resources with learning from other authorities including accountability and partnership working.
- It was suggested that the secondment proposal should be considered by the Appointments Committee, but in response it was stated that the matter was one that was within the delegation of the Director of Children's Services and not that of the Committee.
- Members reiterated their concerns regarding the lack of openness and transparency with the process and the disappointment as a scrutiny committee in not being involved in the decision making earlier.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.20 pm