Children and Families Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Resource Management and Governance Scrutiny Committee 1 March 2022

UPDATE ON PROGRESS FOR SHARED SERVICE FOR EARLY YEARS EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT

Report of the Cabinet Member for Children, Family Services and Education

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To share an update on progress with developing shared leadership for the early years functions of the School Improvement Teams across Stockport and Tameside Councils. This report builds on previous updates to scrutiny committee and provides further information and assurance on the stages taken for due diligence in development of shared services proposals.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Stockport's Children and Young People Strategy 2020 – 2023 and Borough Plan ambitions for caring and growing show clearly that our vision is for all children and young people to have the best start in life, our ambition is for Stockport to be the best place for all children to grow up and inclusion is at the heart of our work with children and young people.

2.2 Building on the strong partnership work between Stockport and Tameside through the Partners in Practice (PIP) programme and the strong shared ambitions between both authorities a shared services programme of work is in place to explore and scope options to deliver enhanced and sustainable services to improve the life chances for individuals 0-25 years. This will draw on the experience and learning already gained to develop a model, which aligns with the GM Framework for Integrated Public Service Reform, and the Greater Manchester Children and Young People's plan 2019-22.

2.3 This work will:

- **Build** upon already strong relationships for many years
- **Support** a proactive response to the porous borders between each local area and those children crossing the boundaries for settings/schools and care arrangements
- **Secure** significantly better outcomes for children and young people through sharing and rolling out of best practice and innovation and co-creating solutions to system issues.
- **Identify** potential economies of scale and savings for both boroughs.
- **Maximise** the learning, experience, and successes from both Stockport and Tameside developments.
- **Establish** the conditions for further innovation and reform.

2.4 A shared Director of Education has been in post since April 2021 which has brought robust, sustainable leadership in Stockport. Harnessing the best practice and capacity in each borough to ensure there is both breadth and quality in the offer of support we make available to school leaders, children and families. His expertise and knowledge is well known and well respected and is having an impact for Stockport.

2.5 Through a shared services programme of work, we set out to explore and scope the options available to deliver enhanced and sustainable services to improve the life chances for individuals 0-25 years.

2.6 In line with our Children and Young People plan it is our intention that this work will secure significantly better outcomes for children and young people through sharing and rolling out of best practice and innovation and co-creating solutions to system issues as well as identifying potential economies of scale and facilitating and supporting a financially resilient position to establish the conditions for further innovation and reform

Consideration of Benefits

2.7 A key part of this process is to understand the benefits of the approach for our organisations but most importantly for the children and families in our boroughs. In each proposal the appraisal will balance the benefits of a shared service against the risk.

2.8 There are challenges and issues facing both authorities around capacity and diminishing resources as a result of multiple factors not least the challenging financial landscape and the impact of the pandemic. There are opportunities through this proposal to support the Council's MTFP position as well as bringing a collaborative approach to responding to the longer-term impact of Covid-19.

2.9 For school improvement there is much written on the benefits of collaboration across systems not least in education. Prof Mel Ainscow and colleagues have carried out a series of studies that have generated considerable evidence that collaboration can strengthen improvement processes by adding to the range of expertise made available (see: Ainscow, 2010; Ainscow & Howes, 2007; Ainscow, Muijs & West, 2006; Ainscow et al., 2003; Ainscow & West, 2006; Ainscow et al., 2005; Muijs et al., 2010; Muijs et al., 2011).

2.10 Together with the work of others (eg Chapman & Hadfield, 2010; Fielding et al, 2005; Hill, 2008), these studies indicate that collaboration between schools has an enormous potential for fostering the capacity of education systems to respond to learner diversity. More specifically, they show how such partnerships can help to reduce the polarization of schools, to the particular benefit of those students who seem marginalized at the edges of the system, and whose performance and attitudes cause increasing concern.

2.11 As we are working through the development of the early years proposal the following additional benefits relating to collaboration and scale are emerging:

- Link the continuing professional development, whole service work of the advisers in Stockport and Tameside (assessment, curriculum development, leadership training)
- Promoting peer support/collaboration across schools – facilitated on the basis of good quality information gleaned by officers
- Brokering subject based/leadership contracts at scale when needed which potentially could be cheaper
- Wider range of colleagues available to provide bespoke intervention using an 'at a distance' group of trusted colleagues
- Create unified accountability structures
- Create a more sustainable funding stream to support aspects of posts
- Common issues will emerge which could be managed more swiftly and in a more cost-effective basis if done across two LAs to avoid duplication
- Common representation at GM level for project development
- Wider forums for practice sharing
- More balanced roles, especially for the most senior post-holder, with a clearly defined job description

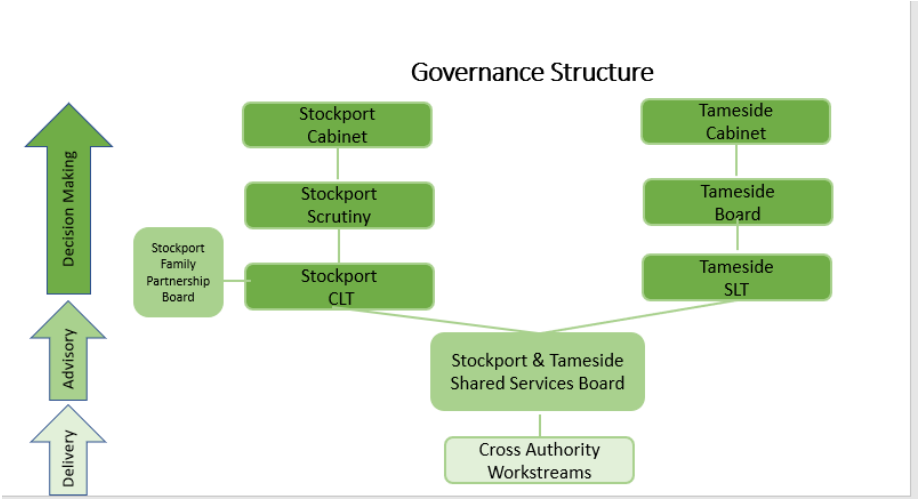
- Clear understanding about how this post holder works with other strategic leads working with the under 5's to deliver the whole LA offer to our youngest children

Governance and oversight

2.12 Effective governance and oversight is key to ensuring the effective and safe delivery of the shared services programme. The overview arrangements are outlined in fig.1. Ultimately accountability resides within individual organisations and decision making on final proposals will be overseen through council governance arrangements. The Cabinet Member for Children, Family Services and Education and the Council's Director of Children's Services (DCS) have lead responsibility for this programme. In recognition of the cross-cutting implications for this programme, and in response to feedback from Scrutiny Committee in January 2021, this update is also being presented to the CRMG scrutiny committee (as well as Children and Families scrutiny committee who are the lead committee) for additional oversight and consideration of strategic risks relating to finance and governance. This reflects the committee's different areas of responsibility.

2.13 A shared services programme board has been established and is advising this programme of work with representatives from both councils including lead members, DCSs, finance, legal, human resources, and school representation to explore areas for collaboration, scope and options. It will also provide a valuable cross authority overview of the more detailed proposals as they come forward. The programme board is advisory, and all decisions will be brought through the governance processes of each Council ensuring each authority remains autonomous in the matters affecting its residents. For example, in Stockport through regular reporting to CLT; Scrutiny Committees and Stockport Family Partnership Board.

Fig.1 – overview of governance and oversight arrangements



2.14 This is also an area that has been identified within our risk log for continued oversight (as outlined in section 7)

Shaping early options to test ideas

2.15 A series of options have been explored and scoped through a number of cross authority workstreams. This exploration has looked at where collaboration can help us to deliver enhanced and sustainable services to improve the life chances for individuals 0-25 years. This to draw on the experience and learning already gained to develop a model, which aligns with the GM Framework for Integrated Public Service Reform, and the Greater Manchester Children and Young People's plan 2019-22.

2.16 The programme board has advised on a phased approach to the work in recognition of the complexity and importance of maintaining levels of service delivery. The focus in phase 1

includes exploration of a shared Out of Hours Service; a Quality and Improvement Hub and a model of School Improvement across both authorities which could release leadership capacity and realise opportunities across early years foundation stage.

2.17 To develop a proof of concept this will look initially at leadership in early years education improvement and will begin with the development of the following shared leadership roles:

- Head of Education Improvement for Early Years
- Lead Childminder Officer
- Lead Officer for QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) work
- Lead for Early Years Settings (PVI)

2.18 The proposal is that the early years delivery teams will continue to serve their own areas, with the shared leadership team working across both authorities.

2.19 Stockport and Tameside share the ambition to develop their strengths in early years practice. The shared leadership model provides the opportunity to draw from a larger pool of practitioners, utilising the skills and best practice across the two authorities. This should reduce the likelihood of insular thinking, encourage the sharing of ideas and support a culture of mutual challenge which in turn should enable us collectively to develop more creative solutions to common problems.

2.20 This approach will support improved communication and relationship management and create conditions for good leaders to lead provision of good quality schools within properly integrated children's services. We are proposing an integrated model of school improvement that increases capacity but allows us to do things differently in each authority. Responding to differing priorities, leadership, and governance.

2.21 It is important to note that the role the Local Authority with schools and settings has changed significantly in recent years driven by the existing national Academies Programme. The imminent white paper, which existing commentary indicates will be emphasising a drive towards academisation, is expected to enhance and accelerate this direction of travel so we need to think about implications for Stockport Council. However, despite this change, the role of the LA in education is clear it is enduring, and we must be confident in our leadership. The role of the LA can be described in the following way:

- advocate for all children especially the most vulnerable,
- commissioner of high-quality places,
- intelligent broker of school support,
- leadership for the whole borough (priority setting, values)

3. INFORMATION

Developing Shared Services Proposals

3.1 Taking forward this initial shared services proposal as a proof of concept will allow a specific focus on one area of development with cautious consideration of what needs to be in place to proceed safely and with positive outcomes for children and their families.

3.2 As each shared services option is explored there is very careful and deliberate consideration and appraisal of options taking place to ensure there is effective risk management and oversight.

3.3 There has been strong partnership work between Stockport and Tameside over a number of years that has supported a good understanding of the systems, approaches and challenges facing each authority. This has been enhanced through the cross authority workstreams (as described in paragraph 2.15) which have closely considered the context for each borough

whilst developing individual proposals. This is careful and deliberate work which is progressing at a pace which will allow considered and detailed analysis of the opportunities as it is important that we are satisfied in every case that this is the right thing for the residents of Stockport.

The insight we are using to inform proposals

3.4 As part of this scoping exercise there has been detailed analysis of contextual information from Stockport and Tameside to inform the viability of the options brought forward.

3.5 As can be seen in the data presented in **appendix 1** there are both differences and similarities evident between the two authorities. Some key examples are outlined below:

- ***Population growth (an area*** ONS Mid-Year estimates for both Stockport and Tameside show a steady increase in total population however over the last 5 years the number / % of total population the 0–4-year age range makes up is declining. Based on ONS mid-2020, Stockport / Tameside 0-4 population would be estimated at 31,083.

- ***Areas of difference – inequalities*** Tameside and Stockport differ when reviewing levels of deprivation and low-income families. Whilst Stockport does have pockets that fall within the 10% most deprived this equates to 8.9% of all LSOAs, for Tameside this is 20.6%. This disparity in deprivation is echoed in the measure percentage of children (under 16) living in low-income families.

- ***Areas for further understanding.*** Stockport has a higher proportion of outstanding schools (27%, or 20% of learners) compared to Tameside (10% of schools, 12% of learners), but we are very similar in the terms of the proportion of good/outstanding and inadequate. It is however important to note that due to the pandemic there has been a gap in the inspection schedule. In addition, there has change to the framework since some schools were last inspected.

- There are challenges for both boroughs to improve the good level of development (GLD) outcomes in the early years eg In Stockport for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and overall levels of GLD in Tameside.

How we are appraising options

3.6 Each option will be the focus of a risk management process which is applied at each stage of proposal development.

Stage 1 – formulation of options through the cross authority workstreams which include Heads of Service from each affected service area and a presentation to the programme board chaired by the DCSs and with Portfolio Holders, HR, legal and finance leads from each authority advising.

Stage 2 – a period of due diligence to assure that the proposed changed models make sense for each authority. This will include consultation and engagement, identification of effective methods of monitoring improvement and bringing back of this detail through the governance process of each authority.

Stage 3 – implementation with continued scrutiny including regular reporting to scrutiny committee and establishing (where necessary) appropriate delivery forums with clear accountability to the Stockport Family Partnership Board and organisational governance (e.g. senior CLT leadership and Cabinet Member) monitoring the impact through Portfolio Performance and Resources Reports.

3.7 This process will involve the risk management teams in each authority and bring assurance through effective risk management and oversight with robust due diligence of each different option.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 With regards to sharing of services generally, it is hoped that the types of financial considerations will cover a number of areas such as shared skills and capacity; shared contractual arrangements to identify procurement savings or opportunities for further income generation. It worth noting that the benefits of this arrangement are not purely financial as outlined in section 2.7, it is also about building resilient sustainable services for children and families which in itself can reduce demand. Also working at scale can bring improved purchasing power and improved leverage when approaching developments and planning services.

4.2 In relation to the proof of concept, the roles identified in the new School Improvement early years leadership structure will be funded half by each authority, this has the potential to release efficiencies to support the Council's medium term financial plan.

5. KEY TIMESCALES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY YEARS PROPOSAL

Milestone description	Date expected	Output at milestone
Further conversations with Trade Union Representatives to brief on the proposals regarding Shared Services	March 2022	Trade Unions briefed
Stakeholder engagement in a 'Listening Exercise' on Shared Services phase 1 proposals including Schools, PVI Settings, wider stakeholders, children and families	Spring 2022	Report on engagement with stakeholders
Agree job descriptions for new early years posts	April 2022	Job descriptions established
Bring full early years proposal through governance	June 2022	Approval for implementation
Where required revised service specification(s) complete and shared	End June 2022	New service specifications

6. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Engagement with partners involved with the Shared Services programme has taken place, including with schools. The Shared Services programme board includes colleagues from both Stockport and Tameside and with schools from both boroughs represented.

6.2 Updates have been shared with Children and Families Scrutiny Committee. Feedback from Scrutiny Committee will continue to inform the development of these proposals.

6.3 Updates have been shared regularly with Union colleagues at Education Joint Consultation Group (EJCG).

6.4 Updates are shared with Parent Carer forum PACTS, feedback will inform the development of this proposals.

6.5 A Listening and Engagement exercise will take place in early 2022 on all children's transformation to:

- shape proposals
- test and validate assumptions made
- understand implications and/or concerns regarding implementation

The Stockport Schools Forum will be a co-consultee throughout this process.

7. RISKS

7.1 This report has noted some of the key risks and considerations that will be further explored as this programme is developed.

Risk	Implication	Planned action to explore and mitigate risk
Governance arrangements These proposals are being developed and delivered in partnership with another council and it is essential there is adequate senior officer and member oversight of individual shared services initiatives in both Councils.	Failure to plan governance and scrutiny arrangements between Councils has the potential to impact pace and ability to deliver successful shared services projects. Members may not be given adequate chance to scrutinise shared services proposals.	Children and Families Scrutiny Committee is regularly updated and on the Shared Services programme. A shared services programme board is advising this programme of work with representatives from both councils including lead members, DCSs, finance, legal, human resources, and school representation to explore areas for collaboration, scope and options. The programme board is advisory, and all initiatives and decisions will be brought through the relevant scrutiny and governance processes of each Council. There is a programme team in place which has developed a joint Stockport and Tameside milestone plan to ensure key scrutiny and approvals are synchronised across the two Councils. Developments will be reported as part of the regular Portfolio Performance and Resources Reports (PPRRs)

Maintaining level of service There are differences in the structures, processes and levels of need across both authorities. It is important neither Council experiences any diminution in the levels or quality of service to children and young people as a result of sharing services.	Failure to adequately scope, model, scrutinise and implement and proposed shared service might have detrimental impacts on the levels of service to Stockport Children and Young people.	Individual proposals for shared services will be subject to the due diligence processes described. Careful attention to anything which could impact on the capacity, resilience and reputation of Stockport will be considered and reported through the governance processes referred to above. The programme plan will support this as will joint ownership via shared Director of Education. As part of the appraisal and design process for any new model we will ensure that future governance arrangements are clear and robust. These will be underpinned by agreements stipulating performance levels and risk sharing clauses as well as contingency arrangements in the event of any significant failure in performance of any shared service so the Council can still discharge its statutory duties.

8. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 It is not expected that this will be a Key Decision under the Constitution since the changes are intended to retain and improve services and expertise through collaboration, rather than to reduce the service offer. Nor is it expected that the changes will see transfers of staff under TUPE (either into or out of SMBC), significant unbudgeted change or change that is outside the policy framework.

8.2 A shared services agreement will be required to document both the Council's and Tameside's contribution to the shared structure. As this is developed, it will become clearer whether any secondment arrangements are required or beneficial or not, and develop provision to take into account any considerations raised in relation to human resources

9. HR CONSIDERATIONS

9.1 The proposal for shared leadership across the early years teams in Stockport and Tameside will involve the senior level staff currently in post working across both authorities. There is no reduction in the number of posts. It will be necessary to consider the detail of any newly proposed posts compared to existing posts, including the future location of work, which will then determine the most appropriate process to follow in order to make the necessary changes.

10. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 As each proposal is considered, the requirement for an equalities impact assessment (EqIA) will be assessed and developed accordingly.

10.2 With regards to the proof of concept proposal it describes the development of shared services for school improvement and early years leadership and does not propose any change or reduction in frontline services, either to the early years setting or to families and children. Therefore, on balance, the proposal is not expected to have a direct impact on service provision and a full EqIA is not required. However, further developments or changes to the proposal will be monitored for any disproportionate outcomes and may be subject to equalities analysis, in which case an EqIA will be conducted as and when we acquire new information that suggests a potential impact on service users.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

That members note the report and provide any comments and observations.

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