Our children and families in Tameside need and deserve services from us that are always delivered in a timely and effective way, and to consistently high standards. We have not been able to meet those standards for some time, and are still not meeting them now, a year after Ofsted’s inspection, and that is why our shared priority is to **increase the momentum of improvement**. Our ambition is to deliver services that are good or outstanding, and this new Improvement Plan is focused upon the next 12 months and securing consistent basic standards as the secure foundation for further improvement in future years.

I write this foreword following my first 15 days as the Director of Children’s Services, and with the benefit of having heard from a full range of children, parents, practitioners on the frontline, supervisors and managers, senior leaders within Children’s Services, our Partners, other departments across the Council, and from Ofsted and the Department for Education (DFE). Therefore I approach resetting the Improvement Plan here with **confidence**, in order to increase the pace of our improvement building on the progress made over the past year and the previous plan.

I accept Ofsted’s judgements in full, and their inspection report and monitoring visit letters have provided a focus for our priorities, although as this plan demonstrates, our **ambition** goes much wider than the Ofsted recommendations in order to drive the sustained improvements we wish to see. The commitment to supporting the improvement of our Children’s Services from Tameside Council is clear, as demonstrated by the leadership provided by the Executive Leader, Lead Executive Member and Chief Executive. The Council has committed an extraordinary level of resources to meet the extraordinary levels of demand and the additional capacity needed to drive improvement, and the success of this improvement plan is key to delivering a financially sustainable service for the future.

Children’s Services have experienced an exceptionally difficult year, with extraordinary increases in demand that have produced very high workloads despite the increases in capacity that have been put in, with instability and high levels of turnover in the leadership team and across the workforce, and with the continual pressures that come with an Inadequate judgement. I want to thank our frontline staff for maintaining their commitment and their engagement in our improvement journey throughout these pressures.

Whilst this plan is essentially a single agency one in order to provide the focus necessary, I will be paying particular attention to improving **partnership working**, starting with a recognition that there is a difficult legacy in Tameside from previous years when Children’s Social Care thresholds were too high, and there was insufficient attention to building effective joint working at both frontline and strategic levels. Wider partnership issues will be addressed in the Tameside Safeguarding Children’s Board (TSCB) revised Improvement Plan and overseen by the Improvement Board.

I aim to update this Foreword to the plan on a quarterly basis, and the plan itself will remain a dynamic document. The intention is that we stay **focused** upon delivering against the key priorities set out here, following through month on month, but that the detailed actions to drive our improvement will develop over time in order to ensure maximum impact of our delivery.

**James Thomas**
Director of Children’s Services
November 2017
VISION AND VALUES

We want children and their families in Tameside to be successful.

We will work to ensure that positive opportunities and effective help are available at the earliest opportunity – enabling children and their families to make the choices that mean they can thrive and achieve.

Where children and families do need to access support, services will be responsive, of a high quality and focused on achieving self reliance.

We will seek to break the cycle of dependence on services, and support children and young people to grow in a stable and settled environment.

Children will have a better experience of their time growing up in Tameside and be supported to realise their aspirations.

Core Values & Principles:

• Child centred

• Honest and respectful

• Services based on effective relationships

• Commitment to continual improvement

• A culture of public service

Children in Tameside will always receive the help and protection that they need when they need it.
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Those with core responsibilities for the delivery of this Improvement Plan are set out in brief below.

The key focus will be on Core Standards – marrying compliance and quality – and space for action on key priorities from what Data & Quality Assurance tells us is needing particular attention.

- **Improvement Board**
  The independently chaired Improvement Board retains strategic oversight of the Improvement Plans for Tameside’s Children’s Services and the TSCB. The Executive Leader of Tameside Council, Executive Member for Children’s Service and Chief Executive and Accountable Officer for Tameside Council and Tameside and Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group are core members of the Children’s Services Improvement Board.

- **Lead Executive Member**
  The Lead Member will continue to provide democratically accountable leadership for Children’s Services, and will ensure that effective governance arrangements are in place, in particular for the very particular responsibilities that the Council holds as corporate parents.

- **Tameside Safeguarding Children’s Board (TSCB)**
  The independently chaired TSCB provides oversight of the work of all partners to safeguard children in Tameside, and will deliver against its own improvement plan in close co-ordination with Tameside Children’s Services.

- **Director of Children’s Services (DCS)**
  The DCS holds the primary lead role for the development and delivery of this Improvement Plan

- **Children’s Services Leaders and Managers**
  Every senior leader and every manager in Children’s Services has a responsibility for driving improvement in every part of the service.

- **Frontline Practitioners and Business Support**
  Every practitioner and all those in support roles have a responsibility for meeting the clear expectations that are set for them, and therefore has a key role in delivering improvement for Tameside’s children.
What will be the impact for children?

- Our children will have their needs clearly identified and those needs met with effective interventions rooted in relationship based practice which is effectively structured and managed.

What will we do?

- We will be crystal clear about our expectations of core casework standards
- We will measure the extent to which practitioners are meeting these standards
- We will focus supervision and management strategies upon those standards which we are not meeting.

PRIORITY 1: GOOD STANDARDS FOR EVERY CHILD AND FAMILY

SERVICE SPECIFIC
3 TAMESIDE STANDARDS FOR PARTICULAR SERVICES

Safeguarding Standards
- Responding to risk – thresholds, child protection enquiries and compliance with Working Together
- Reducing risk – effective interventions, core groups and conferences
- Securing long term safety – care proceedings

Looked After Children and Care Leaver Standards
- Focus on Pathway Planning – compliance and quality
- Placement standards
- Education and health needs

COMMON CORE
7 TAMESIDE STANDARDS FOR ALL

- Child’s views always obtained
- Assessments: including chronologies
- Plans: Clear and SMART (specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and time-based)
- Reviews which measure progress with rigour
- Whole family approach
- Multi-agency working
- Supervision
What will be the impact for children?

- Children will experience consistency and continuity by having the same social worker.

What will we do?

- We will improve our recruitment to ensure we have the number and quality of social workers and other roles that we need.
- We will improve our retention of staff, to ensure that we can deliver effective relationship based practice.
- We will stabilise the workforce by reducing the level of turnover and increasing the proportion of permanent against agency.

“A commitment to reducing caseloads will mean we can spend more time with children and provide higher quality assessments and care. Providing a work/life balance for social workers as well as quality training and supervision will boost workforce stability as well as ensuring we give the best support to families.”
PRIORITY 3: IMPROVING PRACTICE THROUGH BETTER LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

What will be the impact for children?

- Children will have their needs met through stable and effective service responses.
- Children’s views will be taken into account in strategic planning and prioritising.

What will we do?

- Make better use of resources and leadership capacity
- Provide clearer, more efficient and involved leadership that can be measured against good practice standards
- Ensure leaders fully understand frontline issues

“By us striving to improve, young people feel they are valued and that we care. We hope that they will then have more trust and confidence in our efforts to provide them with the best possible service.”

Paul Bradley
Residential Practice Manager
What will be the impact for children?

• Children will receive the right support from the right service so that they experience consistency and continuity.

• Children will see more of their allocated social worker.

What will we do?

• We will reduce demand which is currently too high at all points across Children’s Social Care.

• With partners, we will work with partners to deliver a more effective Early Help offer in Tameside, which meets lower levels of need without social work intervention.

• We will work more effectively to ensure that the duration of social work interventions are shorter.

• We will ensure that services have sufficient capacity to meet demand effectively.

“I’m passionate about children understanding the services provided to them and ensuring they have a voice so we can work together to improve their outcomes and aspirations.”

Yasmin Samms
Family Intervention Worker
PRIORITY 5: IMPROVING SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE

What will be the impact for children?

• Children who are at risk of significant harm will be protected urgently and effectively.

• Children and families will experience assessments and interventions as supportive, and will be offered help at the earliest opportunity.

• More children will be helped to stay safely within their family networks, rather than coming into or staying in care.

What will we do?

• Effectively identify specific forms of risk to children and respond proficiently, in particular:
  CSE
  Missing from home
  Domestic abuse
  Parental substance misuse
  Parental mental ill health
  Neglect

“We have an excellent team and we want to achieve the very best outcomes for all our children and young people in Tameside. As part of this, it is important to us that we listen to our children and young people and work closely with partner agencies that we have positive working relationships with to ensure our children are supported and safeguarded.”

Jakia Islam
Customer Care Officer in The Hub
PRIORITY 6: IMPROVING PRACTICE TO CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS

What will be the impact for children and young adults?

- Children in care will flourish, and their outcomes will improve in relation to educational attainment, mental and physical health, and placement stability.

What will we do?

- We will ensure more children can remain in their family networks through more effective intensive casework and family support.
- We will ensure children who do need to be in care move as quickly as possible to the most appropriate permanent placement.
- We will deliver on our Pledge to our Children in Care as corporate parents.
- We will improve educational and health outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- We will improve the quality of placements through investment in our foster carers and children’s homes, and through more effective commissioning.

“Training – as well as working closely together as team - is invaluable in helping to nurture and guide each child as individuals, supporting them to flourish and be the best they can be.”

Marie Buxton Rickard
Foster Carer
ACTING ON YOUR FEEDBACK TO FURTHER DRIVE IMPROVEMENT

Our staff and partners are key stakeholders in the improvement journey and are critical in helping us to identify priorities and drive further improvement.

Here are some examples of where your feedback has already made a difference:

You said...
“The improvement plan feels like it’s about Ofsted and not about children.”

We did...
Senior leadership agreed and revised the improvement plan with the involvement of staff. The new plan is clear about what we will do to improve and how these actions will impact on children and families.

You said...
“We need to slow down on making changes and that we need to reflect and learn if we are to make real improvements.”

“It feels chaotic”

We did...
The priorities for service improvement have now been clearly defined and the senior leadership team will focus on only making the necessary and planned changes relating to these priorities.

You said...
“We need clarity on what our staffing will look like going forward.”

We did...
A key piece of work has been undertaken to establish the required current structure of our workforce, the range of roles we need and also the numbers of staff we need to carry out our work. This work will form the foundation to build our workforce stability.

You said...
“Communication isn’t consistent, we get told different and conflicting information from day to day.”

We did...
We have centralised our weekly communication to all staff in the form of the Children’s Services newsletter. This is evolving with the expectation that all Heads of Service will make valuable contributions to the weekly briefing. We also want to profile the excellent work within our service and encourage contributions from all staff who have something valuable to share.