Impact and Learning Framework

Children's Community - Tameside

Version 5 - September 2026

> *The objective is not to create a perfect measurement system. The objective is to create a disciplined learning system that helps CCT understand change and make better decisions.*

Registered Charity Number: 1209577

The Children's Community Tameside

The Framework at a Glance

One page, for anyone who needs the shape of this document before the detail.

NORTH STAR

Children and young people thrive because the village around them is stronger.

Children & Families	Community Power	Systems Change & Learning
Stability, resilience, confidence	Voice, leadership, influence	Services and systems responding differently

Belonging	Stability	Early Foundations	Transitions	Influence

Five outcome lenses — a shared vocabulary for describing change, not a separate measurement layer

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Children & family experience	Relationships, power & leadership	Systems, practice & decision-making

LEARNING CYCLE

Listen → Observe → Evidence → Reflect → Learn → Decide → Adapt → Listen again

Ongoing capture · Quarterly sense-making · Six-monthly governance review · Annual review

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1. Purpose of this Framework

Children's Community - Tameside exists to strengthen the village around every child, helping children, young people and families to thrive through stronger relationships, greater community confidence, joined-up support and long-term systems change.

This Impact and Learning Framework sets out how we will understand, evidence and learn from the change we contribute to across children, families, communities and the wider systems around them.

It is designed to help us:

- understand whether meaningful change is happening over time
- learn from children, young people, families, communities and partners
- recognise what is working, what is not working and what needs to change
- provide accountability to communities, trustees, partners and funders
- understand our contribution to place-based and systems change
- strengthen local, regional and wider influence
- use evidence and learning to continually improve our work

This is not primarily a framework for measuring individual projects against fixed targets. CCT works within a complex environment in which children's lives are shaped by relationships, neighbourhoods, services, opportunities and wider social and economic conditions.

Activity, output and outcome are not the same thing

An activity is what we do, a session delivered, a grant given, a food parcel provided. An output is an immediate count of that activity, the number of sessions run, grants given or families attending. An outcome is the change that results for children, families or systems, greater confidence, more joined-up support, a service responding differently. Outputs are useful and easy to count, but they are not evidence of change on their own: a well-

attended session tells us activity happened, not that anyone's life is different as a result.

This framework is concerned above all with outcomes, the change described in Sections 6 and 7. Outputs remain part of our evidence base (Section 9), but as one input into understanding change, never as a substitute for it.

We therefore focus on contribution rather than attribution: understanding the part CCT plays in creating the conditions for positive change alongside families, communities, partners and public services.

2. Our Place, Identity and Scope

Children's Community - Tameside is rooted in Smallshaw-Hurst, where the work began and where long-term relationships, trust and community leadership continue to be built. Smallshaw-Hurst is our anchor place, providing the foundation for learning, testing and understanding what effective community-led change looks like in practice.

From this base, the Children's Community works across Tameside, where there is shared need, readiness and opportunity. Learning from Smallshaw-Hurst informs partnership working, system development and policy influence at borough level.

We are therefore place-based but not place-bound: deeply rooted in one community, with the capacity to support and influence change across the wider local system.

Cedar Park, based in Smallshaw-Hurst, is a key physical and relational anchor for this work — a trusted space where families, staff, volunteers and partners come together, and a natural point from which to observe change across every level described in Section 7.

3. Our Starting Point

Children do not grow up within individual services. They grow up within families, friendships, schools, neighbourhoods, communities and relationships.

Too often, however, support can be fragmented, difficult to navigate or designed around organisational structures rather than people's lives.

Children's Community - Tameside works differently. We work alongside communities rather than doing things to or for them. We bring together families, local organisations and wider services, using lived experience to understand what needs to change and building the relationships that make change possible.

Our role is to connect, strengthen and enable. We seek to:

- build trust and belonging
- strengthen confidence and community leadership
- help families access support earlier
- connect organisations and services
- improve how systems respond to children and families
- turn community insight into evidence and learning
- support change that lasts beyond individual programmes or interventions

This reflects CCT's wider narrative: lived experience, local systems change, evidence and learning, and partnerships that last are central to how change is created.

4. Our North Star

Children and young people thrive because the village around them is stronger.

When the people, relationships and services around a child are stronger, more connected and easier to access, children are more likely to feel safe, confident and positive about their future.

Our impact framework therefore looks beyond individual activities and asks a broader question:

Is the village around children becoming stronger, more connected and better able to support them to thrive?

This directly reflects CCT's positioning that children are more likely to thrive when the people and services around them are confident, connected and supportive.

5. Our Strategic Impact Areas

CCT's impact is understood through three areas of change for children and families, resting on a fourth: the sustainability of CCT itself. The three outcome areas and the foundation are different in kind, not just in number — the foundation is what makes the other three possible over the long term, not a fourth outcome alongside them. Section 8 reflects this: only the three outcome areas are mapped against the levels in the Impact Matrix, with the foundation tracked separately.

Children & Families	Community Power	Systems Change & Learning
FOUNDATION — A Sustainable Children's Community		

5.1 Children and Families

We want children, young people and families to experience greater stability, resilience, confidence, opportunity and wellbeing. We want families to be better able to navigate challenges, access support earlier and move from periods of crisis towards greater stability.

Evidence may include changes in:

- confidence
- connection and belonging
- access to support
- family stability
- resilience during periods of pressure
- opportunities available to children

- experiences of key transitions
- parents' confidence in supporting their children

CCT's existing work in areas such as Family Grants, Holiday Bites/YES Days, Joy of Reading, community meals, early-years work and the Grocery/Pantry provision already contributes to this area.

5.2 Community Power

We want children, young people, parents and residents to have greater voice, confidence, influence and leadership within their communities and the systems that affect their lives. We want to see progression from: taking part → shaping activity → influencing decisions → leading change.

Evidence may include:

- parents and residents shaping priorities
- children and young people influencing decisions
- community-led activity
- increased confidence to challenge or advocate
- Parent Champions influencing local and wider discussions
- residents taking on leadership roles
- greater shared ownership between professionals and communities

Community leadership and resident power are described as being at the heart of CCT's model.

5.3 Systems Change and Learning

We want services and organisations to work differently because community insight, evidence and partnership working have influenced the way decisions are made. This can include:

- stronger collaboration between organisations
- clearer and more connected pathways for families
- services responding earlier

- practice changing following community insight
- lived experience influencing commissioning or policy
- learning from CCT being adopted elsewhere
- changes in how organisations work with communities
- local learning influencing Greater Manchester or wider practice

CCT's role is not simply to deliver services. A significant part of the model is bringing together schools, health, housing, voluntary organisations, local government and wider partners, and using community insight to influence how the wider system responds.

5.4 The Foundation: A Sustainable Children's Community

Long-term impact also depends on CCT itself being strong and sustainable. Unlike Sections 5.1 to 5.3, this is not an outcome for children in its own right — it is the ground the other three stand on. These foundations include:

- strong governance
- sustainable and diversified funding
- Cedar Park as a trusted and sustainable community asset
- capable staff and volunteers
- strong partnerships
- appropriate organisational systems
- effective evidence and learning processes
- organisational independence and resilience

These are not, by themselves, outcomes for children. They are what enables CCT to create and sustain those outcomes over time — tracked through the minimum evidence dataset (Appendix A) rather than through the Impact Matrix.

6. Our Outcome Lenses

Across our strategic impact areas, we look for change through five broad lenses: Belonging, Stability, Early Foundations, Transitions and Influence. These are a shared vocabulary for describing change already happening

within the strategic impact areas and levels — not a fourth measurement system layered on top of them. The same piece of evidence can usually be read through one or more lenses; the lenses are a way of seeing what is already being gathered, not something additional to gather. They already appear within CCT's brand narrative, so the same language runs from delivery, through this framework, to how we describe ourselves publicly.

Belonging

Are children, families and residents feeling more connected, valued and part of their community?

We may see:

- stronger relationships
- reduced isolation
- increased community participation
- greater trust
- people feeling welcomed and valued
- stronger informal support networks

Stability

Are families better able to manage pressure and experience greater stability?

We may see:

- earlier access to help
- reduced immediate pressure
- increased confidence to seek support
- stronger family resilience

- improved ability to navigate services
- families moving from crisis towards greater stability

Early Foundations

Are children and families receiving the support needed during the earliest stages of childhood?

We may see:

- stronger parental confidence
- improved access to early-years support
- increased school readiness
- stronger relationships with early-years services
- intervention happening before difficulties escalate

Transitions

Are children and families better supported through important changes in their lives? This could include transitions:

- into early years
- into school
- between primary and secondary education
- through adolescence
- between services and stages of support

Influence

Are children, young people, parents and communities increasingly able to shape the decisions affecting them?

We may see:

- increased confidence to speak
- involvement in decision-making
- community-led activity
- influence on services

- changed professional practice
- local insight influencing wider policy or strategy

7. Understanding Change at Different Levels

Impact is understood across three interconnected levels. They should not be seen as a simple linear journey — change at one level can influence another, and progress may happen at different speeds.

7.1 Level 1: Children and Family Experience

We ask: what is changing in the everyday lives and experiences of children and families? Examples include:

- increased confidence
- stronger relationships
- greater sense of belonging
- earlier access to support
- reduced isolation
- greater stability during periods of pressure
- improved experiences of services and opportunities

7.2 Level 2: Community Relationships, Power and Leadership

We ask: what is changing in relationships, confidence, power and leadership within the community? Examples include:

- parents moving from participation to influence
- residents taking leadership roles
- stronger relationships between professionals and communities
- shared problem-solving
- greater community ownership
- children, young people and parents shaping priorities

7.3 Level 3: Systems, Practice and Decision-Making

We ask: what is changing in organisations, services and systems because of community insight and collective action? Examples include:

- changed professional practice
- stronger collaboration
- earlier intervention
- clearer pathways
- changes to policy or commissioning
- greater use of lived experience in decision-making
- learning from Tameside influencing practice elsewhere

8. The Impact Matrix

Sections 5 and 7 describe two different ways of looking at the same change: what we are trying to achieve (our strategic impact areas) and how change actually happens (the three levels). Reading them together, rather than as separate frameworks, keeps this document connected to strategy and to the Board's own priorities. The table below shows, for each of the three outcome-facing strategic impact areas, what evidence at each level typically looks like.

Strategic Impact Area	Level 1: Individual & Family	Level 2: Relationships & Power	Level 3: Systems & Practice
Children & Families	Reach and engagement across Family Grants, Holiday Bites/YES Days, Joy of Reading and the Grocery/Pantry; feedback on confidence and stability.	Families shaping the design of activities and support; growing self-advocacy.	Earlier, less crisis-driven referral patterns; partners adapting practice around food insecurity and cost-of-living pressure.

Strategic Impact Area	Level 1: Individual & Family	Level 2: Relationships & Power	Level 3: Systems & Practice
Community Power	Individual parents' growing confidence and willingness to take part.	Parent Champions moving from participation to leadership and policy engagement (for example, the two-child benefit limit, Free School Meals, Best Start).	Decision-makers visibly responding to community-led advocacy.
Systems Change & Learning	Families experiencing more joined-up, less fragmented support.	Shared problem-solving between practitioners and families, informed by the Theory of Change and pilots such as SendDigital.	Evidence from CCT — including From Crisis to Resilience — shaping practice, commissioning or policy.

A Sustainable Children's Community does not appear as a fourth row. As Section 5.4 sets out, it is the foundation beneath this matrix rather than an outcome for children in its own right, so its health is tracked through the minimum evidence dataset (Appendix A) instead.

This matrix does not need to be fully evidenced at all times. Its purpose is to show, at any point, where evidence is strong and where an area or level needs more attention — and to give new work (a new pilot, a new partnership, a new funding stream) an obvious place to be understood, rather than sitting outside the framework.

The five outcome lenses in Section 6 cut across every cell of this matrix rather than adding a fourth dimension to it. Belonging, for example, can

show up in a family's individual experience, in a Parent Champion's growing confidence, or in a school changing how it welcomes new starters. The matrix and the lenses are two views of the same evidence, not two separate exercises.

9. Our Evidence Approach

No single measure will tell us whether the Children's Community is making a difference. We will therefore use an evidence basket, bringing different forms of evidence together.

9.1 Numbers and Patterns

Quantitative information helps us understand:

- who we are reaching
- participation and repeat engagement
- reach across communities
- demographic patterns where appropriate
- demand and referrals
- participation over time
- patterns that may require further investigation

Numbers help us understand what is happening, but they do not automatically explain why it is happening or whether meaningful change has occurred. A minimum dataset that every strategic impact area collects as a matter of course is set out in Appendix A.

9.2 Lived Experience

Children, young people, parents and residents help us understand what change feels like. This may include:

- conversations, feedback and interviews
- group discussions and creative methods
- community research

- quotes and stories
- Parent Champion insight
- co-produced evaluation

9.3 Behaviour and Relationships

Sometimes meaningful change is visible through what people begin to do differently — for example, a parent who previously attended activities begins shaping them, a resident begins advocating for others, a family seeks support earlier, or practitioners begin working differently with residents.

9.4 Systems Evidence

Where CCT seeks to influence the wider system, evidence may include a service changing its approach, organisations collaborating differently, community insight appearing in strategies or plans, changed commissioning decisions, new ways of working, policy influence, or CCT's learning being adopted elsewhere.

9.5 Professional and Practitioner Insight

Staff, volunteers and partners regularly observe patterns that may not immediately appear in formal data. Reflective practice therefore forms part of our evidence base.

Quantitative data is interpreted alongside qualitative insight, lived experience and professional judgement — never as a standalone measure of impact.

10. From Evidence to Learning

Collecting evidence is not enough. The purpose of this framework is to turn evidence into learning and learning into action. For each significant area of work we will regularly work through the following questions, in order:

1. What are we seeing?
2. What appears to be changing?
3. What evidence supports this?
4. What evidence challenges our assumptions?

5. What might be contributing to the change?
6. Who is not benefiting or being reached?
7. What has surprised us?
8. What are communities telling us?
9. What should we continue?
10. What should we change?
11. What should we test next?

This process allows CCT to remain responsive rather than continuing activity simply because it has always been delivered.

11. Direction of Travel

For complex areas such as community leadership and systems change, change will not always be appropriately expressed through a numerical target. We will therefore also assess direction of travel using a simple four-stage maturity model:

1. Emerging — there are early signs of change
2. Developing — there is growing evidence that new behaviours, relationships or approaches are becoming established
3. Established — there is consistent evidence of change across different sources
4. Embedded — the change has become part of normal community or organisational practice and is less dependent on CCT's direct involvement

Embedded is not automatically the right stage to aim for everywhere, and a judgement of Emerging or Developing is not a failure. A brand-new pilot or a newly formed partnership should be expected to sit at an earlier stage, and reaching for "Embedded" framing too soon can mask fragility or hide reliance on a single relationship or individual. The right question is not "have we reached Embedded" but "is this the stage we would expect for this piece of work, and is it moving in a healthy direction."

This will not be used as a league table or performance score. Each judgement will be accompanied by:

- evidence supporting the judgement
- evidence or experience challenging it
- what needs to happen next

Any judgement of Established or Embedded is reviewed with community members before it is finalised (Section 14).

12. Learning from Individual Activities

Individual projects and activities remain important sources of evidence, but they should not become separate impact frameworks. For significant pieces of work — such as Holiday Bites, Parent Champions, Family Grants, SendDigital, Joy of Reading, Cedar Park activity or specific partnership initiatives — CCT uses a short Impact and Learning Record, set out in full in Appendix B, to capture what is being tried, what is being noticed and what has been learned.

The evidence from these pieces of work is then brought together to understand the cumulative impact of the Children's Community, rather than viewing each project in isolation.

13. Our Learning Cycle

The framework operates as a continuous cycle: Listen → Observe → Evidence → Reflect → Learn → Decide → Adapt → Listen again. The annual review should answer what changed, what evidence supports this, what contribution CCT made, what we learned, what remains difficult, and what should change next year.

The table below summarises each stage of the cycle: what happens, who is involved, and what it feeds into.

Frequency	What happens	Who is involved	What it feeds
Ongoing	Staff, volunteers, partners and community members notice and capture important learning through everyday activity. Not everything needs to be formally recorded.	Staff, volunteers, partners, community members	The evidence basket (Section 9); early flags for quarterly sense-making
Quarterly	Structured sense-making against the reflective questions in Section 10, including where progress is and is not being seen and whether any communities are benefiting more than others.	CCT staff, framework lead	Adjustments to delivery for the next quarter
Six-monthly	Trustees and strategic partners review direction of travel across the strategic impact areas, focused on learning and decision-making rather than reporting activity.	Trustees, senior leadership, strategic partners	Governance oversight; strategic course-correction

Frequency	What happens	Who is involved	What it feeds
Annually	Evidence is brought together to understand cumulative change across strategic impact areas, outcome lenses and levels, with community members directly involved (Section 14).	Community members, trustees, strategic partners	Annual review; Impact Report; funder narratives; next year's priorities

14. Community Voice and Ownership

Community members should not simply be sources of evidence. Children, young people, parents and residents should help decide:

- what matters
- what questions should be asked
- whether our interpretation reflects their experience
- what the evidence means
- what should happen next

This is a minimum, not an aspiration

"Where possible" is not sufficient as a standing qualifier for the annual review or for judgements that matter most. At minimum, community members are directly involved in the annual sense-making review (Section 13), and any judgement of Established or Embedded under the maturity model (Section 11) is reviewed with community members before it is finalised. Quarterly reflection should include community voice wherever the timescale allows, but the annual review and any Established or Embedded judgement are not treated as complete without it. Where this minimum is

not met in a given cycle, the framework lead records why and how it will be addressed next time.

This reflects CCT's commitment to working with communities rather than doing things for them, and to ensuring lived experience shapes decisions from the beginning.

15. What We Will Not Do

We will not reduce complex change to a single number. We will avoid measures that:

- stigmatise families or communities, or undermine trust
- treat residents as research subjects rather than partners
- imply CCT alone caused a particular outcome
- create incentives to prioritise numbers over relationships
- collect information without a clear reason for doing so
- gather stories simply to demonstrate success
- audit communities or manage the individual performance of staff, volunteers or families

We will be equally interested in what worked, what did not work, and what we learned from both. This is an ethical and methodological choice, not only a practical one.

16. Roles and Responsibilities

Children, young people, parents and residents

Help identify what matters, contribute insight and help interpret what change means.

CCT staff and volunteers

Notice, capture and reflect upon evidence and learning through everyday practice.

Partners

Contribute evidence and insight, participate in shared learning and identify wider system change.

Impact / Framework Lead

Acts as a learning steward: maintains the shared evidence base, brings evidence together, supports sense-making and ensures learning is used.

Senior Leadership

Uses evidence and learning to inform strategy, resource allocation and organisational priorities.

Trustees

Provide oversight, challenge assumptions and use impact evidence to support strategic decisions and accountability.

17. Communicating Impact

The same evidence should be capable of supporting different conversations.

For communities

You told us → We learned → We changed

For trustees

What is changing → How we know → What needs attention → What we are doing next

For funders and commissioners

Need → approach → contribution → evidence → learning → future direction

For strategic partners

What community insight tells us → what needs to change in the system → what we can do collectively

For regional and national influence

What we have learned in Tameside → what may be useful elsewhere

This reflects the Evidence and Learning pillar of CCT's brand narrative, which aims to turn community insight into evidence and innovation and share what works locally, regionally and beyond.

18. A Living Framework

This framework is intentionally not fixed. It will evolve as CCT develops, community priorities change, evidence improves, partnerships mature, the wider system changes, and CCT learns more about how change happens.

The framework will be reviewed annually, but elements can be adapted sooner where evidence or community insight indicates that a different approach is needed. This applies to the framework's mechanics as well as its content: the outcome lenses, the maturity model, the rhythm of reflection and the tools used to capture evidence should themselves be revisited as the organisation's capacity and systems develop.

As set out at the front of this document, our aim is not a perfect measurement system but a disciplined learning system — and that remains the test to apply whenever the framework itself changes.

19. Our Commitment

Through this framework, Children's Community - Tameside commits to understanding impact in a way that is:

Community-led — because people with lived experience should help decide what meaningful change looks like.

Relational — because trust and relationships are fundamental to sustainable change.

Evidence-informed — because decisions should be informed by multiple forms of evidence.

Proportionate — because evidence gathering should support the work rather than overwhelm it.

Reflective — because understanding why something has or has not worked is as important as recording what happened.

Adaptive — because learning should lead to action.

Honest — because meaningful evaluation includes uncertainty, challenge and things that did not work as expected.

Long-term — because place-based change develops over years, not individual funding cycles.

Appendix A: Minimum Evidence Dataset

This is a floor, not a ceiling. Teams may collect more where useful, but this is what should exist for every strategic impact area before the quarterly and annual reflection points in Section 13. It is reviewed annually alongside the framework itself (Section 18).

Children & Families

- Number of children, young people and parents engaged, by activity (Family Grants, Holiday Bites/YES Days, Joy of Reading, Grocery/Pantry, community meals, early-years work)
- Repeat engagement, at least at a simple yes/no level per family
- Geographic spread across Tameside neighbourhoods
- Referral source and route into support
- At least one structured piece of feedback or conversation captured per quarter per major activity

Community Power

- Number of active Parent Champions and volunteers
- A simple record of each Parent Champion's stage of involvement (taking part / shaping activity / influencing decisions / leading change)
- Number and nature of policy or decision-making engagements Parent Champions have taken part in
- At least one piece of co-produced or community-led evaluation activity per year

Systems Change and Learning

- A current list of partner organisations actively collaborating, and the nature of that collaboration
- A dated log of influence and systems-change moments (a changed practice, a policy conversation, a commissioning decision) recorded as they happen

- Learning captured from pilots such as SendDigital and research such as From Crisis to Resilience

Foundation: A Sustainable Children's Community

- Reserves position and funder diversification (number of funders, proportion from any single source)
- Governance and policy compliance items due in the year
- Cedar Park utilisation and financial sustainability
- Staff and volunteer numbers and turnover

Cross-cutting minimum

- At least one annual sense-making session with direct community participation (Section 14)
- A completed Impact and Learning Record (Appendix B) for each significant piece of work
- A maturity-model judgement (Section 11), with supporting and challenging evidence, recorded at least annually for each strategic impact area

Appendix B: Impact and Learning Record Template

For significant pieces of work — for example Holiday Bites, Parent Champions, Family Grants, SendDigital, Joy of Reading, Cedar Park activity or specific partnership initiatives — CCT completes a short Impact and Learning Record, working through the following questions in order:

1. What are we trying to change?
2. Who are we working with?
3. Which CCT strategic impact area does this contribute towards?
4. Which outcome lenses are relevant?
5. What activity has taken place?
6. What are we noticing?
7. What evidence do we have?
8. What are families and communities telling us?

9. What has worked?
10. What has not worked as expected?
11. What have we learned?
12. What will we do differently as a result?

Completed records are brought together to understand the cumulative impact of the Children's Community, rather than each piece of work being read in isolation (Section 12).