

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY**  
**SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**13/12/2018 at 6.00 pm**



**Present:** Councillor Ahmad (Chair)  
Councillors Curley, Davis, Harkness, Phythian and Stretton  
(Vice-Chair)

**Also**

**Present:** Councillors Dean and Jabbar

In Attendance:

Anne Ryans	Director of Finance, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC)
Andrew Sutherland	Director of Education and Early Years, OMBC
Carrie White	Positive Steps
Liam Whitehead	Positive Steps
Stewart Hindley	HR Business Partner, OMBC
Mark Stenson	Head of Corporate Governance, OMBC
Andrew Moran	Assistant Director of Finance, OMBC
Merlin Joseph	Interim Director Children's Services, OMBC
Jennie Davis	Head Teacher for the Virtual School, OMBC
Andy Cooper	Senior Finance Manager, OMBC
Joe Davies	Interim Chief Operating Officer, Unity Partnership
Fabiola Fuschi	Constitutional Services Officer, OMBC

1           **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence received.

2           **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3           **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4           **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions received.

5           **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Value for Money Select Committee meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018 be agreed as a correct record.

6           **MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2018 be noted.

## COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT SEPTEMBER 2018

Consideration was given to the quarterly Corporate Performance report for September 2018.

The Select Committee discussed the possibility to review the performance of Health Services in connections with Health Indicators.

### **RESOLVED** that:

1. The Corporate Performance report 2018/19 Quarter Two be noted;
2. Arrangements be made for the Select Committee to start reviewing the performance of Health Services in Oldham.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Finance which looked at recent Local Authorities financial failures and challenges as reported in the media. The report also presented the findings of a report of the National Audit Office from earlier in 2018, concerning the financial sustainability of Local Authorities. The report also highlighted the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's efforts to ensure attention on financial sustainability remained in focus through the development of a financial resilience index.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources, the author of the report and the Assistant Director of Finance attended the meeting to present the information and to address the enquiries of the Select Committee.

The Portfolio Holder addressed the Select Committee explaining that many Local Authorities in the UK had lost large funding to their core budget, consequently, they had to manage significant financial challenges. In Oldham, Elected Members and Officers worked together to ensure that current financial and demand pressures were managed in line with the Council's governance arrangements. Therefore, the sustainability of managing substantial funding reductions was ensured by regular updates to Scrutiny Committees and Full Council as well as via quarterly reporting to the Audit Committee.

Members sought and received clarification / commented on the following points:

- Local Government finance settlement for 2019/20 – It was explained that Oldham might receive £1M more than what had been forecasted. However, this had to be seen in the context of increased demand for services. For example, Children's Services had required an additional spend of £18M since 2017. Furthermore, £12M were still needed to fill the gap in 2019-20 budget.
- Use of reserves and sustainability for Local Authorities – It was explained that Oldham Council looked at the use of reserves with extreme cautiousness. Reserves had been used diligently and carefully to ensure the best outcomes for residents. Since 2010, the demand for social care had

increased significantly. In the same period, Government funding for Local Authorities had been reduced by 49.1%. Therefore, use of reserves and reductions in other spend had become more important in terms of balancing budgets.

In Oldham, the key task would be not to rely on reserves and, through the Medium Term financial planning, maintaining a forward look at the level of cuts required, review services and put forward adequate strategy to meet service demand.

- Different levels of needs in different Local Authorities – It was explained that the Government was about to launch a consultation paper on fair funding to Local Authorities. A new formula would be devised to decide how financial resources should be distributed at local level to fund services. An option might be a national funding formula for all the Local Authorities and an additional pot for Adult Social Care and Children’s Services which would vary according to local needs.
- Financial sustainability issues mainly involving County Councils – It was explained that as County Councils did not provide full range of local services like single tier authorities, they did not have the same flexibility to manage resources against the demand for certain services. Another underlining issue was that they had not increased their Council Tax.
- National Audit Office’s recommendations to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to develop a long term plan to address the current financial and demand pressures in the sector and to secure its financial sustainability.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The content of the report be noted;
2. The report be distributed to all Councillors.

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## **UPDATE ON THE IMPROVING ATTENDANCE AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

Consideration was given to a report of the People Services Business Partner which sought to update the Select Committee on the position in relation to Improving Attendance at month seven of the financial year 2018/19.

The report also provided information in relation to sickness absence percentages per weekdays per directorate, levels of compliance and return to work interview statistics per directorate, top three reasons for absence and progress on the Health and Wellbeing programme for employees – Fit for Oldham.

The author of the report accompanied by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources attended the meeting to present the information and to address the enquiries of the Select Committee.

It was reported that the position following month 7 of the current financial year showed performance at 32% over target, this meant that an average of 4.65 working days had been lost per employee against a yearly target of 6 working days.

The main reasons for absence were: musculo-skeletal, mental health and stomach, liver and digestion. There was a continuous focus, via extensive management communication, on policy compliance, return to work interviews and stage meetings. Detailed data was provided on days lost per service, absence by age, gender, short term and long term sickness and absence per directorates.

With regard to Fit for Oldham, the health and wellbeing programme for Oldham Council's employees, it was reported that bespoke training had been introduced to support mental wellbeing in the workplace. Regular health checks were offered on a quarterly basis. A variety of activities such as running clubs, knitting classes, gym membership were in place to support members of staff with their physical and mental wellbeing.

Members sought and received clarification / commented on the following points:

- Comparison with other Local Authorities in the region – it was explained that, last year, Oldham Council had performed second lowest authority in Greater Manchester for sickness absence. Greater Manchester Combined Authority sickness absence average in 2017/18 had been 9.80 days and Oldham year end outturn in the same year had been 8.38 days. This position had been consistent with performance in previous years;
- Acknowledgement of the importance to support the health and wellbeing of members of staff as most important asset to the organisation;
- Interaction between Human Resources and HR Advisory and Payroll in Unity Partnership – It was explained that there was a close relationship and a support mechanism was in place.
- Policy compliance and Directorate Management Team – It was explained that information on policy compliance was feedback to Directors who would challenge Heads of Service to adhere to the policy.
- Commending the work on mental health and the support in place for employees – It was explained that a different approach had been adopted and when contact with the employee was not possible, the employer would liaise with a family member. This helped in the return to work process.
- Managing absences and financial loss – It was explained that a support system was in place through working with partners and Trade Unions to reach out for people who needed help. The trend was going in the right direction but greater changes needed to be seen in the next months. The workforce had been reduced significantly

(about one third of the entire workforce in eight years) and most services had been affected. Systems and checks were in place to address this difficult situation.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The contents and actions contained in the report to improve attendance at work be noted;
2. The current sickness absence position as at month seven be noted;
3. The update on the health and wellbeing programme, Fit for Oldham, be noted.
4. A full year report be presented in six months.

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**LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Service, Looked After Children on the number of children in care, the types of placements they were allocated to, the reviews, the education outcomes and the cost to the Local Authority.

The report author, accompanied by the Interim Director of Children's Services, the Director of Finance and the Senior Finance Manager attended the meeting to present the information and to address the enquiries of the Select Committee.

It was reported that both at national and local level, the number of Children Looked After (CLA) had increased consistently since 2013. In Oldham, an increase of 37 cases (per 10,000 population) had been registered between March 2016 and March 2018. These figures were affected by the rise in cases of domestic abuse. It was also reported that in recent months, the number of CLA had been on a downward trend and this had placed Oldham in a better position compared to its statistical neighbours. It was reported that this was due to a more stringent management oversight of decision about children becoming looked after as well as a stronger focus on children safely exiting care.

Overall, this was an improving picture but still some challenges had to be addressed. For example, the increasing level of complexity in new and existing cases; this was often connected with domestic violence and parental mental health. Children were also at risk of sexual exploitation and this affected the stability of placements. Children's Social Care Budget saw CLA as its largest overspend due to out of the area placements and in-house fostering. A revised operating model had been proposed to address the overspend by reducing the demand for placements and achieving better value for money via better commissioning.

With regard to the education outcomes of CLA, it was reported that 2017/18 data had not yet been validated. Therefore, the report mainly focused on 2016/17 information. Positive outcomes had been registered for Key Stage 2 and 4, improving trends, Oldham had ranked 19th nationally, in combined reading, writing and maths, achieving expected standards. This

was higher nationally, regionally and in comparison to statistical neighbours. With regard to outcomes for Key stage 4, Oldham had been ranked 11<sup>th</sup> nationally for English and Maths GCSEs.



**Oldham**  
Council

Members sought and received clarification / commented on the following points:

- Adoption time scale – it was explained that, in Oldham, the adoption time scale had been reduced from 501 days in 2015 to 430 days.
- Out of the area placements – It was explained that Oldham had 41% of CLA placed out of the area. However, they were placed within 21 miles from their home address, in line with the Government measure to improve long term stability, quality of relationship and to avoid disruption to schooling.
- Education outcomes and issues on progress for Key Stage 4 – It was explained that services faced challenges linked to the social and mental health aspects of young people's lives. For those children placed in external provisions, the intention was to return them to in house provisions in order to achieve better outcomes through collaboration amongst education, health and social care professionals. It was also stressed that services wanted to take on board the voice of children; it was statutory provision that each CLA had an Education and Health Care Plan (HECP), so education and health and care professionals could work together to support children and young people to achieve their targets.
- CLA's overspend – Details of the overspend were provided. It was also explained that recruitment of foster parents was ongoing; Oldham had joined You Can Foster agency to increase its visual advertising campaign.
- Foster parents recruitment in Oldham and comparison to its statistical neighbours – It was explained that Oldham in house provision compared well to its statistical neighbours. The aim was to increase the capacity to place children locally.
- Academies and CLA – it was explained that there was statutory guidance in place that all school establishments had to follow. In addition to this, there was a forum where all schools, including Academies and the Virtual Head Teacher met regularly. Although Academies had different policies and procedures, they were generally very responsive and prepared to build up relationships with professionals who worked with CLA.
- Reasons for spike in CLA figures – It was explained that there were various reasons, however, more children were coming into care and less could exit care safely. However, more preventative work was ongoing to reduce these figures.
- Percentage of children subject to abuse or neglect – It was explained that the majority of CLA had been subject to neglect and emotional abuse. However, in domestic abuse, it was difficult to separate the two.

- Austerity and impact on society – It was explained that the financial climate and the challenges that families faced in terms of domestic abuse, substance misuse and sex exploitation, all had an impact on children.
- Placement Stability – It was explained that different causes could contribute to make a placement not stable, for example a planned move, such as adoption, was a positive outcome although it had an impact on the stability of a previous placement. Social care and education professionals worked together to ensure that education provision was maintained to contribute to a greater stability for CLA.
- Education, Employment and Training for CLA and care leavers - It was explained that there was a dedicated career advisor for CLA and care leavers. 70% of care leavers in Oldham were in Employment, Education or Training. The Corporate Parenting Panel had the responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of these children.

**RESOLVED** that the content of the report be noted.

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**UPDATE ON NEET (NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING) POSITION AT SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2018**

Consideration was given to a progress report of the Head of Inclusion and Post 16 which sought to inform the Select Committee of the current NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) position and activity. The report included information about a number of other programmes which were running alongside the Local Authority commission and aligned and positively contributing towards participation rates for young people in Oldham.

The Director of Education and Early Years attended the meeting to present the information and to address the enquiries of the Select Committee.

It was reported that it was the responsibility of Local Authorities to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training. Oldham Council engaged with Positive Steps to provide information, advice and guidance to particular vulnerable groups such as those who were Looked After, Care Leavers, those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those who were at risk of becoming NEET post 16. Oldham Council also utilised funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to provide additional support to 15 to 18 year olds via pathways that focused on resilience, confidence and independent travel. This work complemented the intervention of the Local Authority.

Members were informed that, although the figures outlined in the report were generally positive, they were not definitive as a large proportion of young people were still waiting for their destinations/educational placements to be established.

Arrangements were in place to ensure that activities and progress on key areas were monitored.



**Oldham**  
Council

Members sought and receive clarifications / commented on the following points:

- NEET performance per ward – It was explained that these figures could be provided.
- ESF and UK leaving the European Union – It was explained that pathways funded via the ESF were in place until March 2020. However, given the uncertainty linked to the outcome of the negotiations between the UK and the European Union, it was not possible to plan any future retendering for the same programme.

**RESOLVED** that the content of the report be noted.

12 **WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19**

**RESOLVED** that the Work Programme for 2018/19 be noted.

13 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** that, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they contain exempt information under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and it would not, on balance, be in the public interest to disclose the reports.

14 **THE UNITY PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE REPORT, 2017/18**

Consideration was given to a progress report of the Chief Operating Officer, Unity Partnership, on the performance and value for money provisions and monitoring of the contract between Oldham Council and Unity Partnership for the annual period ending on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

The author of the report and the Oldham Council representative on the Unity Partnership Joint Venture Board were in attendance to present the information and to address the enquiries of the Select Committee.

**RESOLVED** that the content of the report be noted.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.12 pm