
Briefing to Cllr Abdul Jabbar**Date:** 28th March 2018**Subject:** Challenges and considerations related to Homelessness**For Information****Report of:**

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Portfolio holder:

Cllr Abdul Jabbar
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Summary of the issue:

This briefing summarises recent homelessness numbers and provides statistics on a number of areas such as welfare reform, child poverty and children social care demand.

Homelessness

There has continued to be an increase in the number of households approaching Oldham Housing and Advice Service. In particular, as at the end of Q3 there had been an increase (from 2016/17 to 2017/18) in the number of households assessed due to being at risk of homelessness (174 households at as Q3 2016/17 and 364 households as at Q3 2017/18) and owed the full duty (64 households at as Q3 2016/17 and 140 households as at Q3 2017/18).

The reasons given for loss of last settled home include:

- Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support
- Loss of private rented accommodation
- Loss of lodgings from parents or other relatives or friends
- Relationship breakdown
- Domestic violence

Whilst Oldham still reports a large number of cases where homelessness is prevented, (1654 to end of Q3) preventions are becoming more difficult as prevention options are becoming fewer, particularly for households impacted by welfare reform.

Current challenges and considerations:

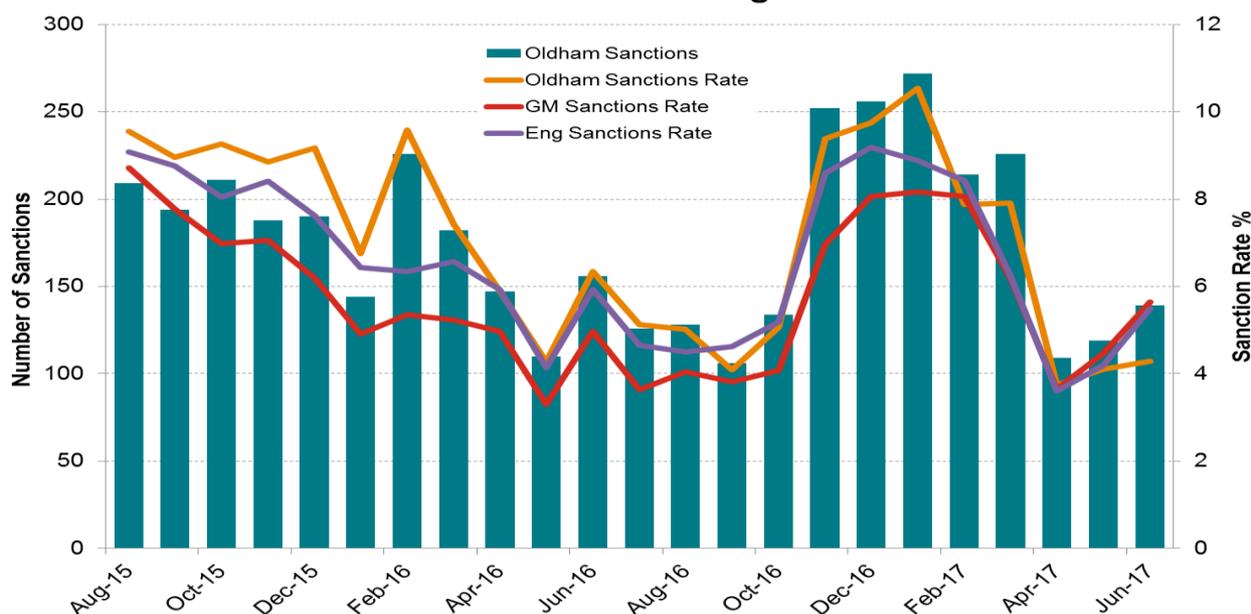
Universal Credit Full Digital Service (UCFS)

Very high levels of arrears for households on UCFS. Social housing providers report that 55%-80% of households in arrears as opposed to 18%-20% for self-payers/HB claimants. FCHO report that they are owed £424k in respect of UCFS, 624 households have had a Notice Seeking Possession served. The rollout of UCFS has been postponed in new areas.

With the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) in Oldham in 2014, UC claimants quickly formed the majority of unemployment claimants and so these claimants were sanctioned under the UC regime.

The sanction rates for Universal Credit claimants in Oldham were initially considerably higher than those seen under Job Seekers Allowance at the same time at around 9%. The rate then fell from August 2015 to August 2016 to around 4%, before then increasing to almost 12% (equivalent to 1 in 9 claimants). This mirrored a similar trend nationally which saw rates double across the country, suggesting a change in national sanctioning policy.

Universal Credit Sanctions: Aug 2015 - Jun 2017



This has since returned to levels similar to those seen before the peak. Up until March 2017, UC sanction rates in Oldham had been consistently above the Greater Manchester and national averages, however in recent months Oldham's rate has dipped below the GM and England averages¹.

Benefit Cap

As at August 2017, 334 households capped in Oldham, 39 households capped by £100-150 per week. Making access to affordable housing difficult for larger families approaching housing services. Households capped whilst still receiving housing benefit are able to claim Discretionary Housing Payment.

Mortgage Repossession

Increasing number of notifications are being received from lenders that possession proceedings being commenced. Support for Mortgage Interest payments are due to change in April 2018. This will now be paid as a loan rather than a benefit and the amount claimed or paid (plus interest) will be reduced from the equity of the property when sold. This may make it more difficult for households to re-mortgage or to achieve a sale if equity is reduced

Out of Area Placements

As at December 2017 Manchester had 120 households accommodated in the Oldham area. Oldham Council has requested that they cease further procurement until agreements at a GM level have been agreed and confirmed.

Closure of Oldham County Court

Oldham Citizens' Advice report that there is a potential increase in the number of outright orders for possession being granted when the customer has not attended court hearings.

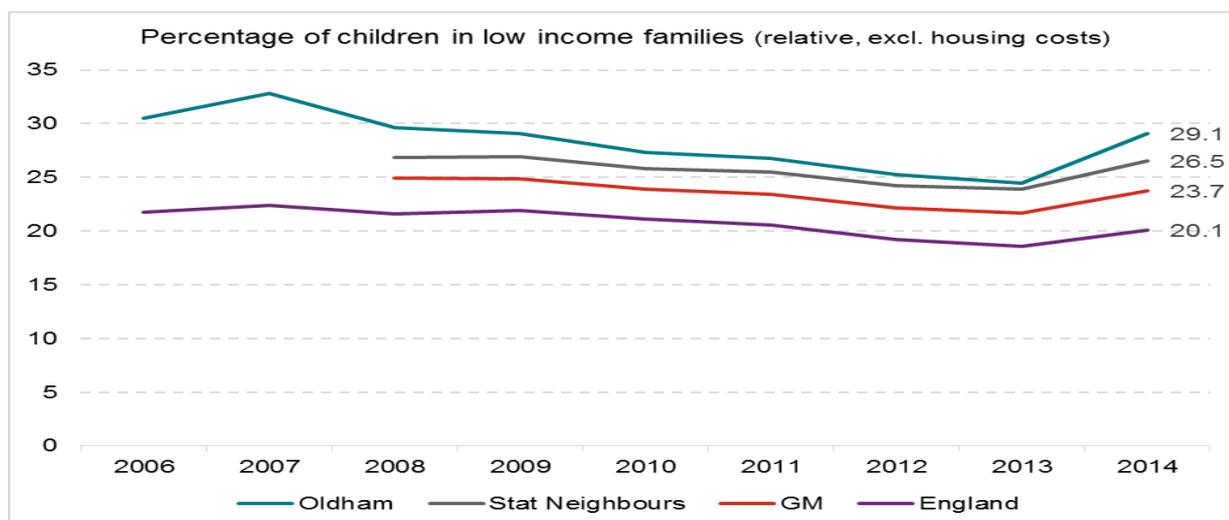
Anecdotal evidence suggests that residents cannot always afford transport costs to get to Manchester and/or feelings of anxiety are sighted as reasons for non-attendance.

Child Poverty

Determining what the recent trend in child poverty is depends on the indicator used. Generally most indicators involve a comparison of family income to 60% of the median national average. Relative poverty indicators use the mean national average for that financial year, which changes every year.

Since 2014 relative poverty has increased. When housing costs are taken into account the percentage of children in poverty is much greater and the trend since 2003 is overall stagnation in poverty levels in relative terms.

The HMRC calculation is a relative indicator that does not take into account housing costs. Using this indicator, the graph below shows that the level of child poverty in Oldham has been consistently above the national (by around 7 points) and Greater Manchester (by around 4 points) averages. Additionally it has also been above the average of authorities that are demographically similar to Oldham (Statistical Neighbours), by between 1-2 points. In 2014 Oldham has the 24th highest rate of child poverty out of 152 local authorities.



Recently the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) developed a measure for the End Child Poverty Coalition that uses more up to date datasets to extrapolate what the HMRC figure in the graph above would be today. It was using this measure that Coldhurst was widely reported to be the ward with the highest levels of poverty in the UK at 62.2%

This figure is considerably higher than that reported for Coldhurst by HMRC in 2014 (44%) and there are two reasons for this – firstly relative poverty is increasing and secondly the CRSP methodology includes housing costs whereas the HMRC measure does not and is therefore 50% higher.

Children Social Care demand

Over the past three years there have been significant increases annually in the numbers of children open to children's social care across all levels of service. The current demand for children's social care is high. We currently have more looked after children, children subject to child protection plans and children who are in need than we have had at any other point.

Headline figures are as follows:

	2015	2016	2017	Jan 2018	Stat neighbours
Number of referrals	2171	2732	3447	4768	n/a
Rate of referrals	376.4	468.6	586.2	810.9	674.3
Number of assessment completed	1851	2267	2821	4522	n/a
Number of children open to service	1537	1877	2550	2975	2290
Number of families open to service	986	1089	1404	1556	n/a
Rate of S47	105.5	194.8	155.1	313.3	198
Children in need (assess/CIN)	821	1133	1736	1879	1478
% of total open cases	53%	60%	68%	63%	(64%)
Child Protection Plans	326	329	316	561	292
% of total open cases	21%	17%	12%	18.8%	(12%)
Children Looked After	390	420	495	535	520
% of total open cases	25%	22%	19%	17.9%	(22%)

From the figures above it is evident that we are currently experiencing a high level of demand for children's social care in comparison to our statistical neighbours.

ⁱ Unfortunately as the DWP currently are only able to report on UC 'Live Service' sanctions and Oldham has moved to 'Full Service', it is now no longer possible to report on UC sanctions until DWP are able to publish sanctions under the full service regime. This, combined with the fact that there are so few JSA claimants to give a representative figure, means that we will not have any informative new sanctions figures for some time to come