

***CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD
Supplementary Agenda***

Date Tuesday 17 June 2025

Time 6.00 pm

Venue Lees Suite, Civic Centre, Oldham, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1NL

Notes 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST- If a Member requires advice on any item involving a possible declaration of interest which could affect his/her ability to speak and/or vote he/she is advised to contact Alex Bougatef or Constitutional Services at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

2. CONTACT OFFICER for this agenda is Constitutional Services or email

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD
Councillors Z Ali, Ball, Bishop, Byrne, Hobin (Chair), Hughes, Iqbal, Malik, McLaren, Rustidge and Shuttleworth

Item No

7a Children's Services Action Plan and Finance Update June 2025 (Pages 3 - 12)

Report providing an update on the Children's Service Action Plan and Finance.

8 Family Hubs Programme Update (Pages 13 - 24)

Report updating on the Family Hubs Programme.

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Report to Children and Young People Scrutiny Board

Children's Services - update on Financial Performance, Action Plan and Transformation and Sustainability Programme

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Shaid Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

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17 June 2025

Purpose of the Report

This is an update to a previous report presented to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Board on 2 October 2024 titled 'Children's Services - update on Financial Performance, Improvement Plan and Transformation and Sustainability Programme' to outline progress in relation to Children's Social Care and Early Help action plans and financial performance.

Executive Summary

Financial position

The 2024/25 outturn position for Children's Social Care is pressure of £12.333m after the planned use of £0.336m of reserves.

Children's Social Care Demand

Children's Social Care continues to experience sustained high volumes and complexity of demand demonstrating the impact of contextual factors facing families in Oldham. Services continue to effectively manage demand and maintain manageable caseloads in a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Achieving Excellence Strategy and Action Plan

Following the launch of the 'Achieving Excellence' strategy and action plan in October 2024, service leaders across Children's Social Care and Early Help, working with our partners, continue to drive improvement in the quality of our work with vulnerable children, young people, and their families.

Children's Transformation and Sustainability Programme

The programme continues to deliver ambitious plans across three strategic areas: earlier support for families, placement sufficiency and digital innovation. The programme is making progress to deliver targets and has direct oversight from the lead member for children and young people.

Children's Services in Oldham are keeping children and young people safe, managing and reducing demand for statutory intervention and improving outcomes. We are in a strong position to further improve the delivery of timely and effective services to support vulnerable children, young people, and their families.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Board notes the report and progress to date.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Board

17 June 2025

1 The current financial position of Children's Social Care

- 1.1 As in previous years, the service continued to experience significant financial pressures throughout 2024/25. The previous report, to the board in October 2024, reported the financial position at month 4 (July 2024) which at the time highlighted a potential pressure of £12.261m.
- 1.2 The final 2024/25 position for Children's Social Care was a pressure of £12.333m, slightly higher than the £12.125m reported in the final, month 10 financial monitoring report. The table below presents the financial position, by service area for Children's Social Care at 31 March 2025.

	Budget £000	Actual £000	Use of Reserves £000	Variance £000	Variance M10 £000
Children in Care	42,194	53,959	0	11,765	11,370
Fieldwork & Family Support	11,412	12,954	0	1,542	1,647
Children's Safeguarding	3,041	2,795	0	(246)	(210)
Children's Services Integration	3,535	3,143	(336)	(728)	(682)
	60,182	72,851	(336)	12,333	12,125

- 1.3 The most significant pressure is within **Children in Care** which is reporting an overspend of £11.765m. The main pressure relates to the social care placements budget £11.602m, as summarised in the table below, a range of pressures including £0.441m from reduced contributions from Health for joint funded packages are offset by a positive variance in relation to income received to support Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). There were additional pressures in the residential homes and Permanence service due to agency costs which were offset in part by vacancies in other services such as the Adolescent Support Unit and Children with Disabilities team.

Placement Pressures	Outturn Variance £m
Out of Borough	5.869
Semi Independence	3.977
Secure - Welfare	1.126
Independent Fostering Agency	0.795
Fostering including those placed with Relatives/ Friends	1.217
UASC grant	(1.876)
Continuing Health Care funding	0.441
Professional fees	0.052
Total	11.601

The review of the external placements packages in 2024/25 yielded cost reductions of £3.723m however, new placements cost £3.738m; a small increase of £0.015m.

- 1.4 **Fieldwork and Family Support** is reporting a pressure of £1.542m. There continued to be a reliance on agency staff in 2024/25 which cost £5.680m compared with vacant posts of £4.456m. In addition, the service has a pressure of £0.149m in relation to legal and drug testing costs and payments to external care providers.
- 1.5 **Children's Safeguarding** is reporting an underspend of £0.246m. The main underspend is within the Social Work Academy which relates to reduced staffing costs and additional income received (£0.201m).
- 1.6 **Children's Services Integration** is reporting an underspend of £0.728m. The main underspends are in Business Support (£0.418m) and Targeted Youth commissioning due to increased Youth Justice Grant (£0.226m).

2 Children's Social Care and Early Help Demand

- 2.1 In line with high levels of demand nationally and in the Northwest, contextual factors such as poverty, deprivation, cost of living, domestic abuse, mental health and neglect continue to have a significant impact on children and young people in Oldham enjoying a happy, healthy, and safe childhood in their families.
- 2.2 There has been a sustained high level of professionals contacting Children's Social Care and Early Help for advice and support, since the last report to the board in October 2024, however referrals for statutory social work services have recently significantly declined, almost to pre-pandemic levels. There are reduced numbers open to early help, sustained numbers of children and young people on children in need plans, reduced numbers on child protection plans and increased numbers of children looked after and care leavers over the past couple of years, as demonstrated in the charts comparing Oldham to our statistical neighbours.



- 2.3 This high volume and complexity of demand has continued into 2025/26, particularly Children Looked After, which demonstrates the impact of contextual factors facing families in Oldham. In April 2025, there were 1,720 contacts into the MASH with 281 (16%) of these converting to referrals for statutory services. Children's Social Care and Early Help were providing support to 3,426 children and young people including 862 open to early help, 1,287 children in need, 424 subject to child protection plans, 589 children looked after and 264 care leavers.

3 Achieving Excellence Strategy and Action Plan Update

- 3.1 Following the Children's Services inspection in May 2024, we've continued a relentless focus on improving outcomes for children and families through the launch of the Achieving Excellence in Children's Social Care and Early Help strategy and action plan in October 2024. Our approach prioritises consistently embedding high-quality, child-centred practice and strengthening multi-agency partnerships to ensure that children, young people and their families receive the right support at the right time.
- 3.2 The Achieving Excellence action plan is reviewed quarterly, enabling leaders to assess and evidence progress and make informed adjustments that drive further improvements to deliver positive outcomes for vulnerable children, young people, and families in Oldham.

3.3 Key strengths and progress

We're managing and reducing demand effectively to keep children and young people safe and have continued the momentum of improvement of our services.

Help and Protection

- **Thresholds and Early Help:** The Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP) reviewed the threshold criteria (Continuum of Need) and shared with partners through briefing sessions. A strengthened early help team in the MASH has improved partner support. Family Hubs have increased accessibility and range of services to support families earlier within their local communities. Early intervention support has helped to reduce referrals to statutory services by 23.8% over the past 12 months, with 85% of families achieving positive outcomes following targeted early help intervention.
- **Domestic Abuse Safety Planning:** Staff confidence has improved through targeted training and quality assurance work. Consistent, high-quality safety planning remains a development priority.
- **Young Carers:** Improved needs identification and information sharing between children's social care and the commissioned provider; with a focus on enhancing case recording and partnership working to identify, engage and support young carers.
- **Neglect:** There is child-centred intervention and protection in response to neglect, supported by training for professionals in identifying neglect at the earliest opportunity. There is partnership focus to further elevate child and adolescent neglect.
- **Child Protection:** Robust oversight has reduced children on plans over 2 years to 1% with improved shared multi-agency accountability of child protection planning.
- **Complex Safeguarding:** Two weeks of action in 2024 engaged 5,000 students and teachers in sessions on sexual exploitation, online safety, peer abuse, and youth violence, with highly positive feedback. There have been 37 arrests in 2024/25 by the Complex Safeguarding Police Team in relation to exploitation and an arrest and charge made in relation to modern day slavery

Children in Care

- **Permanence Planning:** 96% of children have a permanence plan with active consideration of adoption, special guardianship, kinship care, long term foster care and foster to adopt placements. A new Kinship Local Offer is in place.
- **Health Assessments:** The process has been strengthened and management oversight increased. We continue work with health partners to complete within timescales.
- **Placement Sufficiency:** Internal capacity is increasing with new children's homes and more foster carers. The council commitment to direct match Care Leavers to 50% of all available properties is successfully leading to more care leavers living

independently. There is active engagement with local providers to secure placements and we're actively supporting the delivery of the GM RCC and Project Skyline to deliver better commissioning arrangements and 10 new children's homes across GM.

- **Placement Stability:** 56% of children in our care are placed in our own provision which is positive. Multi-agency disruption meetings and support from therapeutic supervising social workers for foster carers and the adolescent support unit help prevent placement breakdowns.
- **Educational Outcomes:** There is strong support via the Virtual School. School attendance is high in primary (95.3%) but lower in secondary (88.6%) with a targeted action plan in place.
- **Life Story Work:** We've developed co-produced practice guidance, later life letters and virtual life story books. Staff training relating to the use of the tools and quality of the content will follow.

Care Leavers

- **Pathway Planning:** A revised approach has been co-produced with young people to align with their aspirations and needs.
- **Transitions:** All care leavers have a dedicated PA from age 17 to develop relationships and promote smooth transitions to post-18 services. A new transitions team has been developed with more work needed for earlier transition planning from age 14 collaboratively with adult social care.
- **EET Support:** 56% of 17–18 year olds and 47% of 19–21 year olds are in education, employment, or training (EET). Barriers include financial support and post-year 13 destinations. A new pre-apprenticeship programme has launched and two care leavers have apprenticeships in the council.

Workforce Stability

- **Stability:** 84% of team managers are permanent. Use of agency social workers has halved to 24.1%. There is a strong student/apprentice and newly qualified social worker pipeline through the 'Grow our Own' model and a positive retention culture.
- **Caseloads:** Average social worker caseloads are manageable at 16.9. 36% of social workers have <15 cases and a further 27% have 15-19 cases.
- **Workforce Development:** Robust learning offer with a focus on domestic abuse safety planning, purposeful intervention and planning, assessment and analysis.

Practice Quality

- **Quality Assurance:** Practice quality and consistency has improved, especially in child's voice, planning and visits. Consistency in assessments and supervision are the areas of focus.
- **Family Engagement:** 91% of practice audits include family involvement. Areas of focus based on family feedback are changes in social worker and communication.

Data and Insights

- **System Developments and Reporting Tools:** We've developed a bespoke centralised data system and dashboards to provide real-time performance tracking for management oversight and significant case management system developments for better recording of key practice areas including out of hours duty, early help, complex safeguarding, domestic abuse and fostering.

3.4 Priorities in 2025

Continuing to build on the progress across the themes outlined above, our priorities include:

- Further strengthening the consistency and quality of practice.

- Further work to embed the Continuum of Need across the partnership as we continue to receive a high number of contacts due to partners seeking support and advice.
- Continued embedding of learning from quality assurance activities.
- Delivery of our local and GM placement sufficiency commitments.
- Further strengthening workforce stability with more permanent workers.
- Transforming our services through the design and implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme exploring our multi-agency approach to family help, child protection and family networks in line with national reforms, supported by diagnostic work with Newtons.

4 Children's Transformation and Sustainability Programme Update

4.1 The children's transformation and sustainability programme is delivering ambitious plans across three strategic areas linked to the council pillars of change outlined in the Ready for the Future corporate plan:

- **Earlier Support for Families:** delivering more support for families, at an earlier stage, preventing the need for intensive support from statutory services, through the co-design and implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme in line with national reforms.
- **Placement Sufficiency:** providing a stable home for every child in our care and care leavers by increasing the number of council foster carers, residential provision, local externally commissioned placements and securing suitable accommodation for over 18s care leavers and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).
- **Digital Innovation:** Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to improve efficiency in the delivery of services, reducing administrative tasks to enable more time to directly support children, young people and families.

4.2 Workstream progress and impact are outlined below:

4.2.1 Strand 1: Earlier Support for Families

- The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme is a national reform to deliver priorities outlined in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill currently going through parliament. A cabinet report outlining the reforms, governance arrangements and required programme resources has been presented on 16 June.
- The FFP Board will commence in June, and terms of reference have been drafted to co-design Family Help, multi-agency child protection teams and family network models in line with the national guidance.
- Partnership engagement briefings with Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership, secondary schools, cabinet members/Senior Leadership Team.
- We've attended DfE webinars and engaged with pathfinder LAs and other regionals LAs that have started to develop their models of delivery.
- We are taking a phased, no risk approach, particularly in relation to Family Help.
- There continues to be a reduction in referrals and re-referrals into children's services based on families that have received early help and social work support.

4.2.2 Strand 2: Placement Sufficiency

Foster Care

- There are 319 children placed in internal fostering with 123 of these in kinship care, an indication of how the service is stretching our foster carers to ensure children are placed in a stable and caring family home.
- Two specialist foster care 'Mockingbird' hubs are successfully supporting children and young people to remain in placements with their foster carers providing stability and

contributing to managing significant placement costs which, if the placements had broken down, the children would most likely be placed in high cost placements. We are on track to open two more hubs in 2025/26.

- The Fostering Service has a number of recruitment and retention initiatives, including the Step Forward programme, to provide an enhanced allowance to recruit skilled carers to accommodate younger children placed in external residential children's homes.

Residential Placements, Supported Accommodation and Independent Living

- Plans are progressing well to open three new internal children's homes. Blackshaw Lane Children's Home in Crompton (4 placements) is open, following Ofsted registration. Hayle Road in St James (2 placements) has commenced refurbishment work and is on track for September 2025 opening. A third property (2 placements) remains to be identified, with three property options currently being explored, this is forecasted to open in 2026/27.
- Targeted commissioning and market management has created 14 local semi-independent placements (for 16-18 year olds) and 22 local over-18s placements with continued work through fortnightly tracking of externally commissioned placements to reduce placement costs, ensure more children in our care are placed locally and support more Care Leavers into independent living via housing matches and commissioning arrangements.

4.2.3 Strand 3: Digital Innovation

- Children's Services are piloting the use of a bespoke AI tool developed for statutory social work to produce instant minutes of meetings and case supervisions. We're also piloting the use of AI in the production of Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) for children with SEND following assessment. Both projects are in the early stages of testing with the opportunities to extend the use of AI models across council services to improve efficiency.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 Service leaders continue to effectively manage and reduce demand for children's services in Oldham, maintaining manageable caseloads to an average of 16.9, through the recruitment and retention of social workers and managers, to be able to provide timely and intensive support and intervention work with children, young people, and families. There is a stable senior leadership team driving ambitious and innovative transformation within a culture of continuous learning and improvement.
- 5.2 Council-wide strategies with an increased focus on early intervention and prevention in local communities seeks to address the high levels of demand for statutory services. Additionally, through the continued delivery of the Achieving Excellence strategy and action plan, and Children's Transformation and Sustainability Programme, Children's Services in Oldham are keeping children and young people safe, improving outcomes and are in a strong position to further improve the delivery of timely and effective services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.
- 5.3 The overspend position of £12.333m reflects the significant pressures the Children's Service has faced in recent years, mainly as a result of increased external residential costs for Looked After Children and the Council's position reflects the national pressures in the sector. The budget process for 2025/26 took into account the emerging pressures, particularly around Children's Services, however, the continued increase in demand for the service means that the Directorate will need to work hard to contain pressures in 2025/26. Robust monitoring processes are in place and future reports will be brought back to the

Children and Young People Scrutiny Board on the position throughout the 2025/26 financial year.

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Report to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board

Start for Life and Family Hub Progress Report

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Officer Contact: Anthony Decrop, Acting Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help

Report Author: Bruce Penhale, Assistant Director Early Help

17 June 2025

For information

The purpose of this briefing is to provide an updated position on the progress in implementing Oldham's Start for Life and Family Hub programme and next steps in the ongoing development and linkage to wider children's services reform.

Executive Summary

There was a total of £3,648,000 investment in the Start for Life and family hubs programme in Oldham during the three years 2022/23 - 2024/25. This included investment in high quality services in the period from conception to age 2, such as midwifery and health visiting, together with parenting support to help to make the transition to parenthood as smooth as possible, meaning that more children are healthy and ready to learn at age 2 and ready for school at age 5.

Delivery of the programme will contribute to a reduction in inequalities in health and education outcomes for babies, children and families across Oldham by ensuring that support provided is communicated to all parents and carers, including those who are hardest to reach and/or most in need of it.

Considerable progress has been made in the development and delivery of Oldham's Start for Life and Family Hub programme during the first three years of the programme, and this will be enabled to continue during 2025/26 with funding of £1,381,700 during 2025/26 though there is currently no certainty about the future funding of the programme in 2026/27 and beyond.

Parent's and carers voices are at the heart of Oldham's programme development. As well as collecting feedback from partners and stakeholders a Parent Carer Panel approach has been developed to help design the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme. Focus groups and forums have met over the duration of the programme and we have heard from a range of voices including fathers, new parents and parents from ethnic minority communities.

Key achievements during the first three years of the programme have been to:

- create 7 welcoming Family Hub spaces for families to access Start for Life services
- ensure the Family Hubs and the Start for Life programme delivers rapid, visible support for families in communities,
- develop a digital and virtual offer to give parents and professionals access to information and support when they need it 24/7.

The priority areas for 2025/26 are:

- Improving the IT connectivity in the Hubs so that staff can work there more effectively, and enabling introduction of screens which support better communication with service users;
- Implementing the Synergy case management system as part of wider work to strengthen performance management, assess need and evaluate the impact of activity;
- Further developing the digital offer for parents and carers in particular through enhancing the range of App based resources and promoting takeup of these;
- Increased delivery of an outreach offer for e.g. parenting support and breastfeeding support at alternative venues and times which better meet the needs of service users; and
- Commissioning evaluation of elements of the programme to evidence the impact of interventions and inform future commissioning.

The implementation of the programme has been closely intertwined with a number of wider developments, and this will continue and develop further during 2025/26. Key connections have been with:

- Reorganisation of the 0-19 Service into the Integrated Children and Families Service;
- Family Hubs staff becoming part of the wider Early Help Service
- Implementation of the district working model; and
- From 2025/26 the national programme of reform of services for children and families through the Families First Partnership programme.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board:

- note the update and progress made in delivery of the Family Hub and Start for Life programme
- recognise the connectivity to a wider range of developments relating to meeting the needs of children and families, which provide opportunities for more effective multi-agency working built around the district model, but also risks around the continuity of funding for delivery of this in 2026/27 and beyond.

Start for Life and Family Hub Progress Report

1 Background

- 1.1 In April 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that Oldham was one of 75 upper tier local authorities to receive government funding to deliver Start for Life and Family Hub services over the fiscal years 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25. Oldham received £3,648,000 capital and revenue funding to create a network of Family Hubs. The programme was then extended by the new government for 2025/26, and Oldham was allocated £1,381,700. Funding is received based upon demonstrable progress against the key milestones and effective delivery of the minimum expectations set down in guidance.
- 1.2 The Start for Life & Family Hubs model is founded on the principle of services being more accessible, better connected, and more relationship centered. The programme aims to make a positive difference to parents, carers, and their children by providing a mix of physical and virtual spaces, as well as outreach, where families can easily access non-judgmental support for the challenges they may be facing. The programme aims to join up support for parents and carers by integrating services across health (physical and mental health) and social care as well as through voluntary and community organisations and education settings.
- 1.3 The DfE has set out the core services that it expects to be delivered through Family Hubs.
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activities for children aged 0-5• Birth registration• Debt and welfare advice• Domestic abuse support• Early language and the home learning environment• Early childhood education and care and financial support (Tax free childcare, Universal credit childcare)• Health visiting• Housing support• Infant feeding support• Intensive targeted family support services• LA 0-19 Public Health Services• Mental health services | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Midwifery / maternity• Nutrition and weight management• Oral health improvement• Parent-infant relationships and Perinatal mental health support• Parenting support• Reducing Parental conflict• SEND support• Stop smoking support• Substance (alcohol/drug) misuse support• Support for separating and separated parents• Youth Justice services• Youth services – universal targeted |
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This is not an exhaustive list, so local authorities can choose to deliver additional services.

- 1.4 Services are expected to be available to families in the following ways:

- Face to face at a family hub

- Through a family hub but received elsewhere in the network (for example via outreach, at a youth centre, a clinical setting such as a health centre, a voluntary, community or faith sector setting).
- Virtually, through the family hub, including static online information and/or interactive virtual services.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 Considerable progress has been made in the development and delivery of Oldham's Start for Life and Family Hub programme during the first three years of the programme. This has been aligned with a series of wider developments including the restructure of the former 0-19 Integrated Right Start and School Nursing Service into the Integrated Children & Families Service; the Supporting Families programme; Holiday Activity Fund (HAF); and the implementation of Place Based Integration. A key development during 2025/26 will be alignment with the national Families First Partnership programme of reform in children's services.
- 2.2 Our ambition is for Family Hubs to provide a universal offer for all families based on the following principles:
- *A partnership model* with local communities which families want to access. *Uniting multiple parts of the public sector*;
 - Every family in Oldham should receive the *support they need, when they need it* delivered through trusting and supportive relationships;
 - All families in Oldham should have *access to the information and tools* they need to care for and *interact positively* with their babies and children, and to look after their own *health & wellbeing*;
 - *Family Hubs* in Oldham will *be integral to the way* we plan and deliver family services in our 5 districts through a *dispersed delivery approach* (hub buildings, virtual offers and outreach);
 - They will *provide early family help* from pregnancy, through a child's early years, later childhood and up to the age of 19 (or up to age 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities) by *increasing access to a range of services through a single point of access*.
- 2.3 Capital funding has been utilised to refurbish and rebrand six existing Children's Centres as Family Hubs, which all opened during 2023/24 and 2024/25, with the other 10 former children's centres decommissioned. New branding has featured on signage, online and promotional materials. The seven hubs are:
- Beever Hub, the first hub to be launched in July 2023 (Central district)
 - Stanley Road Hub (West district)
 - Medlock Vale Hub (East district)
 - Shaw Hub (North district)
 - Spring Meadows Hub (South district)
 - Alexandra Hub (Central district)
 - Oldham Library Hub enhances existing access to information, help and support for families from across the borough.

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- 2.4 The Family Hub sites support co-location of a multi-agency core team that includes early years practitioners, health visiting and school nursing. All have a clinical space for midwifery services to deliver anti-natal and post-natal care, and this space could be utilised for other health services. The Early Attachment Service is based at Spring Meadows Family Hub.
- 2.5 The Family Hubs funding needs to be delivered against a set of programme strands, which are primarily focussed upon early years. These are: infant feeding; perinatal and infant mental health and parent infant relationships (PIMH)s; support for early language through the home learning environment; parenting support; and publishing the Family Hub and Start for Life offer. Further detail of activity against these is set out at Appendix 1.
- 2.5 Alongside the opening of the Hubs, there Strong links have been established with health providers Northern Care Alliance and Pennine Care and the VCFSE sector, and their services have been commissioned to deliver aspects of the programme.

Alignment with wider developments

- 2.6 As well as the required delivery of activity within the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme, there have been several other closely related developments which support better integrated family help services:
- The former 0-19 Health Visiting and School Nursing service has been restructured into the Integrated children and Families Service, with services delivered jointly with the Northern Care Alliance (NCA) under partnership arrangements for joint working between health and local authorities within the framework of Section 75 of the NHS Act 2006. Following the restructure, which was effective from 1 January 2025, there are five district teams of health visitors and school nurses delivering universal services to children and families, together with a targeted team supporting families with children open to children's social care – allowing a more focussed response where there are safeguarding concerns.
 - Alongside this, there are teams of staff who support the delivery of services through the family hubs. These staff were TUPE transferred from NCA into the local authority, and comprise 5 Family Hub Managers (who will play a lead role in co-ordinating and developing preventative family help services in each district), 6 SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and Inclusion Practitioners who work with early years setting around early identification and support for children who may have additional needs; 29 Child & Family Practitioners who deliver a range of interventions with children and families and support health visitors in undertaking the mandated 9 month and 2-2.5 year development checks; and 13 Business Support Officers who provide reception and administrative support for the family hubs and health visiting and school nursing teams. In addition there is a Parenting Team with 6 posts, which is jointly funded through Family Hubs and the Supporting Families programme. In the run up to the restructure there were restrictions on recruitment, and the teams are currently building up to full capacity as a number of vacant posts within the structure are filled.

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- The Integrated Children and Families Service has a joint management team across the Council and NCA, so that the operation of the family hubs and the health visiting and school nursing services is closely aligned, with a range of services delivered from the hubs and staff hotdesking in the hubs as well as from other locations including the district town halls.
 - A further organisational change was implemented within the Council during March 2025, which brought together staff within the Council Family Hubs teams as part of the Early Help Service. This will enable better co-ordination of the family hubs offer with the targeted early help teams in the districts, domestic abuse team and staff delivering low level mental health support for children and young people. This will support a better integrated family help offer in each of the five districts.

3 **Next Steps**

3.1 The extension of Family Hubs funding for 2025/26 has enabled the continuation of the funded activity for a further year. which will allow activity to become more fully embedded and for systems to become better established. Some of the key planned developments using family hubs and start for life funding during 2025/26 are:

- Implementing Council wi-fi (as well as NCA wi-fi) within each of the family hubs which will facilitate hot desking and allow screens to be installed which can be used to communication with service users in the hubs e.g. through promoting services / delivering awareness raising materials;
- Further limited capital improvement works to increase delivery capacity within the Hubs;
- Implementation of the Synergy case management system (currently being piloted within Beever family hub) which will enable information about activity in the hubs to be captured more effectively, supporting evaluation of the impact of interventions;
- Developing the resources available to parents through Apps which can be accessed via mobile phones and other devices, in particular through expanded use of the Essential Parent app and the Anya breast feeding support App;
- Increased delivery of an outreach offer for e.g. parenting support and breastfeeding support at alternative venues and times which better meet the needs of service users; and
- Commissioning an academic evaluation of elements of the programme to evidence the impact of interventions and inform future commissioning.

3.2 Alongside this we will continue to develop the district working model to deliver a better co-ordinated universal and targeted family help offer within the five districts. This will include:

- Expanding the range of services which are part of the multi-agency district teams delivering support for children and families from the family hubs and outreach venues in each district – for example services addressing domestic abuse and expanding the support offer for families with older children available through family hubs (the current offer is primarily focussed upon under 5s);

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- Strengthening district working so that there are stronger pathways for families around support relating to particular issues as need escalates, and developing a more tailored offer in each district which reflects the needs of the different populations in each;
 - Strengthening systems for performance management in order to better drive improvements in outcomes for children and young people.

3.3 This will be aligned with the wider national programme of reform of children's services to be delivered through the Families First Partnership programme. This includes a range of important changes, but in relation to alignment with the family hubs and start for life programme, incorporates development of new multi-agency arrangements to deliver family help. This aims to improve children's outcomes by understanding and responding to the needs and circumstances of the family as early as possible. Family Help will take place within communities, bringing together local services under a combined, multi-disciplinary practice approach and service offer. It will be underpinned by a set of key principles that will inform the delivery of services:

- wrapping support around the whole-family at the earliest opportunity – using the expertise of multi-disciplinary practitioners;
- Ensuring consistency of relationships between children, families and their lead practitioner;
- Adopting one plan that will stay with families but adapt as needs change.

3.4 This programme includes developing a new role of Family Help lead practitioner which can be undertaken by staff with a range of professional backgrounds, and developing a single assessment tool which will be used across the partnership at different levels of need – helping to reduce the need for families to “tell their story” multiple times to different professionals. Under the new model there will no longer be a requirement for social workers to be the lead practitioners for work at child in need level (Section 17 of the Children Act), though it will still require social work oversight. This will ensure greater continuity of support for children and families by professionals with whom they have an existing relationship, reducing transfers between support from different services.

3.5 Taken together, these programmes of change will lead to a comprehensive reorganisation of the model for delivering family help organised around Oldham's five districts with a better co-ordinated multi-agency approach for families accessing universal, targeted and specialist support.

3.6 There is currently no certainty about whether the additional funding for the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme will continue beyond 2025/26, and if this is not extended it is a risk for the ongoing funding of the activities commissioned through the programme. The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, to be released on 11 June, may provide some indication of the direction of travel. There has been some press discussion about the impact of the previous Sure Start programme, which might indicate an intention to further develop the family hubs model. However it is clear that there will be a need for the Council and our partners to consider how to make best use of the range of resources available to meet the needs of children and families in a co-ordinated way.

4 **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- 4.1 The DfE monitor progress of Oldham's transformation delivery plan for family hubs and start for life. The monitoring includes submission of quantitative data on implementation and metrics identified by the DfE for the duration of the programme, as well as self-assessment of system maturity.
- 4.2 Governance is provided through the Start for Life & Family Hubs Strategic Partnership, jointly chaired by the Director of Education, Early Years and Skills and the Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help. The Partnership brings together a cross section of senior leaders from across the Council, health and VCFSE sectors. The partnership provides direction for the development, coordination and delivery of the programme. Progress is reported through regular highlight reports. It is likely that the governance arrangements will evolve during 2025/26 to support better co-ordination with the other strands of work identified above.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 It is recommended that Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board:
- note the update and progress made in delivery of the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme
 - recognise the connectivity to a wider range of developments relating to meeting the needs of children and families, which provide opportunities for more effective multi-agency working built around the district model, but also risks around the continuity of funding for delivery of this in 2026/27 and beyond.

6 Appendices

Appendix 1: Family Hub and Start for Life Achievements Years 1-3

Theme	Activity
Infant Feeding (breastfeeding support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding the successful UNICEF Baby Friendly accreditation for the former 0-19 Right Start and School Nursing Service. This scheme sets best practice standards for each of the key funded strands in infant feeding and the parent-baby relationship. • The UNICEF Happy Baby leaflet has been purchased and is now distributed to families as part of the peer support offer. It is now in all Hubs for use with antenatal families as part of a meaningful conversation around breastfeeding and the importance of early relationships with parents and babies. • Parents can now access a range of information and support on <u>infant feeding</u> and <u>breastfeeding</u> through the Family Hub website. • Breastfeeding training has been delivered to health visiting

	<p>teams, Early Help staff, student nurses, student health visitors, student health and social care staff enabling them to have sensitive conversations. A virtual training session has been provided for GPs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homestart have been commissioned to deliver an enhanced infant peer support service. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to volunteers ○ Face to face peer support during the post-natal period through drop ins and Baby Bistros in hubs. ○ Breastfeeding equipment loan scheme with approximately 30 breast pumps on loan each month ○ Breastfeeding peer support groups each week in Family Hubs ○ Delivery of virtual antenatal breastfeeding basics workshops
<p>Perinatal and Infant Mental Health and Parent Infant Relationships (PIMHs) Pregnancy – 2 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents have 24/7 access to universal information and support on perinatal and infant mental health through the Family Hub website • The <i>Your Baby and You</i> booklet has been purchased to support the universal pathway. Every family with a new birth receives a copy of the booklet delivered by health visitors as part of the 6–12-week mandated health and development visit to ensure additional support with the contents. • Health visitors have received the evidenced based <u>Newborn Behavioural Observation</u> (NBO) training. This gives health visitors a tool and enhanced knowledge, skills and confidence in supporting parent-baby relationships. • PIMHs champion train the trainer course has been delivered to staff including; mental health midwife, SALT therapists and play workers, health visitors and the therapeutic social worker. This will support sustainability of the PIMHS offer. • Capacity of the Early Attachment Service has been increased to give more direct support to referred families and to increase training. This better equips the workforce and enables delivery of new high-quality evidence-based approaches. These can be delivered digitally or via family support work and group programmes for families. The EAS service has been able to increase capacity and/or recruit to key posts (PIMHs family support worker, therapeutic social worker, speech and language therapist). This increased capacity has enabled more families to access support as the team are to offer more outreach by visiting families on the postnatal ward, baby bistro's etc

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mental health practitioner has been funded within NHS Oldham <u>Talking Therapies</u> service. This post supports lower level/ universal mental health support across FHs, baby clinics, etc. • A grant agreement is in place with the neonatal charity <i>Spoons</i> to support whole families, practically and emotionally from admission to the neonatal unit and beyond, in collaboration with NHS and other services. This enables proactive identification, targeting and support of newborn Intensive Care Unit families.
Home Learning Environment/Early Language Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents can access information and support on home learning and speech development through the Family Hub website. • The Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) (MIR) evidence based early literacy programme has been delivered to support home learning and improve outcomes for 3- and 4-year-olds. This has included training practitioners to deliver the training to support sustainability beyond the funded programme. Delivery has included: • Children and families involved in MIR receive 1:1 home visits and attend literacy events to support the HLE. MIR parent booklets and activity guides have been shared with all partners involved in MIR projects. These include Family Hubs, HomeStart, schools, Early Years settings, POINT, libraries and parents/carers as well as providing copies to families. • Homestart have been commissioned to deliver the 8 week Play, Learn, Grow course. • Support for children with SEND has been expanded through extension of MIR intervention. Resource card & packs have been created in partnership with POINT and shared with families. Regular SEND drop ins (2 per month) are now delivered in hubs by Oldham Parent Carer Forum to ensure families have access to POINT services, be signposted to additional support/services, understand what is available and how to access, as well as peer to peer support • Investment has secured the Early Years Better Communication Team which includes 2 speech and language therapists and a language development worker. The team deliver a comprehensive training and coaching programme for practitioners working in early years settings and schools.

<p>Parenting Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents can access a range of universal information and support on parenting through the Family Hub website. This includes information about face-to-face delivery, online parenting programmes such as Solihull online parenting courses, Essential Parent digital library and the Chat health text messaging service. • The parenting team, consisting of a Parenting Co-ordinator, 4 parenting officers and a Business Support Officer is part funded through the programme. The team deliver an evidence-based parenting offer, with a suite of parenting programmes which enhance our universal and targeted Early Help offer to parents across a wide range of subjects and covers parenting, child development, relationships, emotional wellbeing health etc.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Baby Bonding (24 wks Conception to 1yr) ○ Triple P Baby (up to 12 months) Awaiting training April. ○ Solihull Approach ○ Triple P Discussion Groups (2-9yrs) ○ Family Links Nurture Programme (2-13yrs) ○ Youth Connect 5 (Parents of young people aged 9-16yrs) • Funding has also been utilised to strengthen the role of the local VCFSE sector in delivery of parenting support and programmes as part of the outreach offer. For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Homestart deliver a range of peer support and social networking opportunities. This includes recruiting and delivering a Dad Matters peer support programme. Activities include :<i>coffee and chat, walk and talk</i>, With You in Mind (WYIM) <i>sessions</i> are being held across the Family Hub network ○ Positive Steps have been commissioned to lead and facilitate aspects of our Parent panel offer to ensure the voice of seldom heard communities is heard and is used to inform our offer • Action Together has been commissioned to provide a leadership role in relation to a number of community base projects including running a small community grant programme to support small-scale community-based activity.
<p>Family Hub & Start for Life offer, including Parent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The digital and communication element of Family Hubs has been supported by paying for increased capacity in the Corporate Communications Team to work alongside the

Carer Panels	<p>delivery teams and commissioned services to deliver key activities, including promoting activity on social media, developing the website, and raising the profile of the programme in Oldham. For example, the work of the parenting team will shortly feature on BBC North West Tonight.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Oldham Family Hub website is live, giving an overview of the services and information available to families in supporting a child make the best start in life. For example, there were 6,700 views of the Family Hubs website in May 2025. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Through the website families can register to be part of our Parent panels, give feedback on Family Hub services and register to receive the new digital newsletter. ○ Families and professionals are able to access a wide range of information, practical guidance and videos which are accessible on the new Family Hub website available 24/7. • 10,000 Family Hubs and Start for life leaflets have been printed as part of our new branding work and have been distributed to all new parents and residents via the Hubs, local events, VCFSE sector and staff working closely with residents. • <u>Action Together</u> has also been commissioned to raise awareness of Family Hubs and the Start for Life offer with its members from the VCFSE, this includes hyper local grassroots, volunteer led community groups, right through to large charities who deliver commissioned services in the borough. This will include regularly sharing Family Hubs promotional materials.
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