

PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10/02/2022 at 6.00 pm



Present: Councillor Ahmad (Chair)
Councillors G. Alexander, Byrne, Hindle, Iqbal, Kenyon and Malik

Also in Attendance:

Councillor E. Moores – Cabinet Member: Children and Young People

E. Devaney – Director of Children’s Services

A. Ryans – Director of Finance

S. Kipling – Assistant Chief Executive

M. Stenson - Assistant Director of Corporate Governance and Strategic Financial Management

N. Consterdine – Assistant Director (Youth, Communities and Leisure)

A. Cooper - Senior Finance Manager

S. Lockwood – Chief Executive (Oldham Community Leisure Limited)

L. Oates – Senior Practitioner (Children’s Services)

K. Barrick - Adoption Now

P. Thompson – Constitutional Services

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Islam.

2 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business for this meeting of the Committee to consider.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interests.

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions received.

5 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 18th November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

6 **COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT SEPTEMBER 2021**

The Committee considered the Council’s Performance Report for September 2021, which was presented by the Assistant Chief Executive.

The Council’s corporate performance report monitored delivery against the Covid-19 Recovery Strategy. The Committee was informed that 92% of actions within the recovery strategy were on track for completion within the specified period or had already been completed. 71% of updated targeted measures were also on track for completion. The Council Senior Management Team would continue to closely monitor all actions, risks and other

measures introduced that supported the successful delivery of the Covid-19 Recovery Strategy which was a key priority for the Council. The Committee's report provided Members with a breakdown by work area and themes and further details on exceptions were also included in the report.

The report highlighted the following actions/measures that were coded red (unlikely to achieve a positive outcome in the specified timescale), for which portfolio holders and lead officers were requested to be accountable.

- a. Building more affordable homes
- b. Safeguarding and supporting the Borough's most vulnerable residents
- c. Working with communities to improve health and wellbeing
- d. Helping those adversely affected by Covid-19
- e. Reducing poverty and helping people get back on their feet

In considering these 'red coded' areas of work, the Committee sought assurances from Officers that remedial action was in place to attempt to rectify the various problems that had been highlighted in the report.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7

REVENUE MONITOR AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2021/22 MONTH 8 – NOVEMBER 2021

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Director of Finance that provided Members with an update on the Council's 2021/2022 forecast revenue budget position, detailed at Annex 1 to the report and the financial position of the Authority's capital programme as at 30th November 2021 (Month 8) together with the revised capital programme 2021/2022 to 2025/2026, as outlined in section two of the report at Annex 2. An opportunity was taken to update the forecasts and grant detail in the report where information had been received more recently and has an impact on the financial projections included within the submitted report.

In terms of the revenue position, the current forecast outturn position for 2021/2022 was a projected surplus variance of £2.672m after allowing for approved and pending transfers to and from reserves. This position included additional costs and pressures that had been identified by the Authority in the current financial year as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The additional pressures included forecasts of both income shortfalls and additional expenditure that had impacted on the Authority's budgets. The pandemic continued to affect nearly all aspects of the Council service delivery. The most significant areas of concern remained the People and Place, Children's Services and Community Health and Adult Social Care Portfolios. Action was being taken and would continue for the remainder of the financial year to address variances and take mitigating action as detailed in the report.

Information on the Quarter 2 position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Collection Fund was also outlined in the submitted report. There were currently no significant issues of concern in relation to the HRA. The Collection Fund position was improving, with a reduced in-year deficit of £12.159m (of which the Council's share was £11.785m) compared to £13.712m at Quarter 2, directly because of Covid-19. Government grant compensation of £13.092m would offset this to produce a forecasted surplus of £1.307m which would be available to support the 2022/2023 budget. Whilst the DSG continued to be an area that would be facing a financial challenge, recent funding announcements had contributed to an improved position, reducing the cumulative deficit and bringing the DSG towards an enhanced balanced position in 2023/2024.

In terms of the Capital Position the Committee's report outlined the most up to date capital spending position for 2021/2022 through to 2025/2026 for approved schemes. The revised capital programme budget for 2021/2022 was £52.588m at the close of month 8 (30th November 2021), a net decrease of £33.414m from the original budget of £86.002m. Actual expenditure to 30th November 2021 was £23.801m (45.29% of the forecast outturn). The forecast position would continue to change as the financial year ended with additional reprofiling into future years. The Month 8 Revenue Monitor and the Capital Investment Programme 2021/2022 report had been presented to the Council's Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27th January 2022 alongside the 2022/2023 budget reports. That Committee had noted the report and commended it to the Cabinet for approval at its 'budget' meeting, that was to be held on 14th February 2022.

Resolved:
That the report be noted.

8

CHILDREN'S SERVICES - UPDATE ON FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Director of Children's Services that provided an update on an earlier report, which had previously been presented to the Council's former Performance and Value for Money Scrutiny Select Committee, at its meeting held 17th December 2020 (entitled 'Ofsted – Children's Services - Update on Financial Performance and the Improvement Plan') regarding progress in relation to the Children's Social Care improvement plans and financial performance.

The Committee was informed that there had been good progress made in the Council's improvement journey and that the Authority has revised its Getting to Good plan and, as such, will closely monitor progress of key actions, within clearly defined governance arrangements, to drive improvements and ultimately get the Council's Children's Services to 'Good', based on internal and external findings.

The service was responding to significant sustained volumes and complications associated with demand in contacts into MASH, Early Help, Domestic Abuse and Child Protection. Our Children Looked After numbers have slightly increased. Caseloads are manageable but Social Work Teams with pressure are Children's Assessment and Fieldwork teams. Recruitment and retention of experienced social workers was a strategic priority.

Members of the Committee were reminded that that the 2022/2023 Budget Select Committee meeting on 27th January 2022 included an update on the month 8 financial position of the Council, this included a forecast pressure of £4,308k for Children's Social Care, further detail is provided in section 4 of the report.

Throughout 2021, Children's Services had made good progress against its service improvement plan despite facing continued increased volume and complexity in demand for statutory children's social work services. Children's Services had refreshed their self-assessment of children's services, which now more accurately reflects where the Service is on its 'improvement journey', and the priorities and actions that will need to be undertaken to enable the target of 'Good' being reached. This will form the basis of the Council's Annual Conversation with Ofsted in March 2022.

Overall, the multi-agency partnerships were positive and senior leaders were working hard to build and maintain good relationships across the partnership, working towards a common vision of outcomes for children and young people in Oldham, through the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Children's Services continues to develop strong multi-agency arrangements and partnership working, including exploring how they can broaden further partner representation within the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). This work was overseen by the newly formed MASH Assurance Board which demonstrated the commitment across Oldham in ensuring the MASH is further strengthened to provide the best response to our children, young people and families in need of help and protection.

A Getting to Good Board had been set up, independently chaired by a senior leader in Children's Services sector led improvement. The board was to provide the drive and focus required to ensure that the identified practice improvements are achieved and evidenced, resulting in Oldham's Children's Services being judged 'good' or better. This will be achieved through the promotion of a culture of high challenge and high support within the board and across the service.

The Council's Children's Services had been inspected by Ofsted in November 2021. The focused visit looked at children in need or subject to a protection plan. This included a detailed review of

cases, speaking to social workers and managers in Fieldwork Services and Children with Disabilities Service.

Resolved:
that the report be noted.

9

REPEAT REFERRALS IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

Further to Minute 16 of the meeting of the Performance and Value for Money Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held 17th December 2020, the Committee scrutinised a report of the Director of Children's Services which updated Members on the repeat referral performance, key challenges impacting on the performance indicator and the service response for improvement.

The submitted report considered the current challenges across the Children's Social Work Service, focusing on the variable trajectory of repeat referrals within the last six months. A re-referral related to a family who had received two or more referrals through to Children's Social Care services within a twelve-month period.

Across the six-month study period the trajectory of re-referrals into Children Services was shown to have been variable. Re-referrals were 26% in December 2021, which was a 2% increase on November's reported figure and a 5% increase compared to October. Oldham's rate remains higher than both the Borough's Statistical Neighbours (21%) and the England (23%) averages.

A deep dive review of this matter, that was undertaken in 2021 identified:

- The impact of Covid-19 continues to increase the level of demand and re-referrals relating to domestic abuse and mental health
- Children and families in Oldham have experienced significant impact throughout the pandemic, where the re-referral relates to a significant different concern or unexpected event in comparison to the previous assessment or intervention provided by Children's Social Care
- Cases coming into Children's Social Care that should be supported earlier through partnership led early help
- Local context of increased levels of deprivation and poverty, and the increasing pressures this would place upon families
- There have been some missed opportunities in Children's Social Care to prevent re-referrals through earliest targeted intervention

The report acknowledged that the rate of repeat referrals required on-going scrutiny. The increase in rate though should be considered within a broader context of the increase in referrals. The implementation of an Assessment and

Intervention Service, later in 2022, should provide greater opportunity to work with children, young people and families differently. Through a relational approach, the quality of assessment and intervention should consequently improve. The investment from the Council into a systemic approach to practice for all practitioners and multi-agency partners, should enable the focus to remain on delivering good quality services to the Borough's children, young people and families.

Resolved:
That the report be noted.

10 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

The Committee considered the latest Key Decision Document, which set out the Authority's Key Decisions scheduled to be made from 1st January 2022.

Resolved:
That the Key Decision Document be noted.

11 **PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received a report detailing the Committee's Work Programme for 2021/22.

Resolved:
That the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme 2021/22 be noted.

12 **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 three 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.

13 **REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY - UPDATE**

The Committee scrutinised the Adoption Annual Report 2021/2022 which had been prepared by 'Adoption Now'. Adoption Now is a regional Adoption Agency that provides adoption services on behalf of six local authorities – Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside. Adoption Now had been providing adoption services on behalf of Oldham Borough Council since 20th November 2017.

Achieving adoption for children contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in line with priorities that are set out in various other Council plans.

During the first six months of 2021/2022 (April – September) 16 children were subject to a decision that they should be placed for adoption. In the full year, 2020/2021, there were 25 children with a new plan that they should be adopted. These numbers

were slightly higher than the previous year which had been affected by court delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Most children who were placed for adoption were of a white British origin although there was a significant proportion from other, mainly Asian, backgrounds.

On 30th September 2021 there were 12 children with a plan for adoption awaiting placement and not yet matched. Of these children all but two were linked to adopters and these two were siblings who were awaiting the outcome of court proceedings.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

14

OLDHAM COMMUNITY LEISURE PERFORMANCE

The Committee scrutinised a confidential report of the Director of Public Health which provided Members with a performance update on the activities Oldham Community Leisure for the period of 1st April 2021 to 31st December 2021. This period covered the recovery period following the Covid-19 related closure of facilities in 2020/2021.

The Committee was advised that in December 2012, the Cabinet had approved a recommendation to appoint Oldham Community Leisure (OCL) following a competitive process as the preferred bidder for a new 10 plus 5-year contract to operate and manage the Council's leisure facilities. The contract became operational in April 2013. The current contract, without the 5-year optional extension, ends 31st March 2023. Ongoing work was being done to extend the contract.

Under normal circumstances, prior to the onset of Covid-19, the Leisure contract was performing well. The level of subsidy the Council provided was low in comparison to some other Greater Manchester authorities and many nationally. The outcome and outputs, stipulated in the contract, were also being met. In addition, memberships were high, the external inspections of the centres were all very good or excellent, and customer feedback was also good. The overall financial performance of the Trust was also positive. The Covid-19 situation had presented several significant issues to all Leisure providers across the country, not just OCL, and sport generally due to the two forced closures and a restriction on activity in Oldham's Leisure Centres when they have been open. In addition, strict guidance on all team sport activity and cancellations of all National Governing Body of sport has further impacted, resulting in cancellation of block bookings, a reduction in the use of facilities and an impact on income.

The Leisure contract extension, which is a 10 plus 5 years, will be due for consideration during the 2022/2023 financial year. Initial discussions had already taken place prior to the onset of Covid-19, to look at extending this but with some changes to the contract and additional social value activity and measures added. If an additional 5-year extension was agreed the contract would finish at the end of March 2028.

Resolved:

1. That the performance of Oldham Community Leisure for the period of 1st April 2021 to 31st December 2021, be noted.
2. That an update report be presented to the Committee in the autumn of 2022, to show a full year recovery, from Covid-19.

15

PARTNERSHIP RISK DASHBOARD

The Committee scrutinised a confidential report which set out the Council's risk dashboard which highlighted potential future risks to the Council from partnerships and other commercial interests. The Committee were informed that examples of financial loss in other Authorities had identified that the poor supervision of companies/partnerships including by their 'Regulatory Committees' had found evidence that they had failed to identify and scrutinise the associated risks. This Committee had therefore requested that the Assistant Director of Corporate Governance and Strategic Financial Management prepare a report which analysed the potential risks to the Council from those partnerships with which it had an interest, to assist it in determining its future programme of work.

The work to prepare this report had identified the companies/partnerships with which the Council had an interest and then used a 'traffic light' system to rank the various risks (green, amber and red), to the Council as at 31st January 2022.

These partnerships and the current assessment of risk have been split into seven categories: 100% Council Owned Companies; Companies in which the Council had an Equity Stake; Special Purpose Vehicles; Council Initiatives; The Green Agenda; Local Government Association; and Residual Commitments. The Partnership Risk Dashboard was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report. It had been suggested that the Assistant Director for Corporate Governance and Strategic Financial Management should present the individual sections of the Dashboard to the Committee providing further detail on the assessment of risk. This would allow, if required, further targeted information including, if agreed as appropriate, more detailed reports on partnerships to be presented to a future Committee meeting.

Members of the Committee commented concerning ongoing work to deliver the aims of the Northern Roots Company, which it was reported was entering a key phase. In this regard Members requested that detailed report, on the activities of Northern Roots be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee. Members also sought the submission of a report on 'grant giving' organisations, both based within the Borough and regionally, to a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.

2. That a report, on the activities of Northern Roots be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.
3. That a report on 'grant giving' organisations, both on those based within the Borough and regionally, be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.



The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 8.40pm