

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD**  
**20/03/2024 at 6.00 pm**



**Present:** Councillor Moores (Chair)  
Councillors Adams, H. Harrison, McLaren, Rea and Shuttleworth  
Reverend Hurlston

Also in Attendance:

Rhys Attwell	Constitutional Services
Matthew Bulmer	Director Education Early Years and Skills
Andy Cooper	Senior Finance Manager
Leanne Cooper	Assistant Director Social Work Services
Josh Charters	Assistant Portfolio Holder to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Julie Daniels	Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help
Sheila Garara	Assistant Director Childrens Services Integration
Amanda Youlden	Post 16 Lead for Education and Skills

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 was a declaration of Interest from Councillor Eddie Moores, who is the Chair of Governors at The Blue Coats School.

4           **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

5           **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD MEETING**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

Note: 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024 to be corrected to include "as present" Reverend Jean Hurlston and Councillor Graham Shuttleworth.

6           **PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 16 - 18 IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING**

The Participation of Young People aged 16-18 in Education, Employment or Training report was presented by Matthew Bulmer (Director of Education, Skills, and Early Years) and Amanda Youlden (Report Author, and Post 16 Lead for Education and Skills).

The Purpose of the annual report was to inform members of the relevant activities and initiatives, with the report offering members the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge the activities in the preceding year.

Members noted that there had been an increase in cohort numbers for the academic year 23/24. The cohort numbers would fluctuate on a monthly basis, with the average cohort number across 2023 for Year 12/13 combined was 6685, being an increase from 2022 by 284. In addition, it was noted that the cohort numbers are projected to rise until the academic year 28/29.

Members noted that the latest reported date indicated that 93.76% of Year 12 had been participating in some form of education, employment, or training (NEET). It was explained to Members that there had been little changed over a 12-month period, showing that year 12's had in general been settled into their chosen route whether education, employment, or training.

Members noted that the number of those not in education, employment or training was at 5%, with fewer people not being able to receive support from the system. In addition, Members acknowledged that only 1% of young people are unknown to education, employment, or training.

Members were informed that there was a digital offer for guidance, information, and training, as well as partnerships with local schools, colleges, and employers.

The Scrutiny Board recognised that the report had identified issues between young people transitioning from Secondary School and College who are at risk of getting lost in the system and not in education, employment, or training.

Members asked questions about point 2.2.2 In the report concerning cohort having significantly affected by school closures during the pandemic, with it being answered that "Empower Oldham" funding had allowed checks to be put into place to ensure that Children at risk are checked upon.

Members were concerned with the issues around the transitioning phase between year 11 to 12 and year 12 to 13, with Members wanting to know what can be done to monitor those children at risk of not ending up in education, employment, and training. The response was that schools hold information and tracks students who are at risk of NEET.

It was also explained that for those students transitioning from year 12 to 13, Colleges have a duty to support their students, with work needed to close the transition gap between Oldham Council and College. In addition, the Director of Education noted that virtual school had been implemented and used to support post 16 student.

Members spoke about a recent Youth Council Meeting, where the issue of youth vaping were discussed with the likened to mental health. Members asked questions about what is being done to help Children and Young People with mental health issues, with the Director of Education stating that Mental Health Cohort teams are within the schooling system, with Mental Health Leads trying to tackle the issue of mental health from a frontline perspective. However, there were a continued issue with access to services due to service demand.

The Director of Education noted that Oldham Council had recently received £300k from the Department of Education for Mental Health Support Offer, with their continuous bidding for more resources as an entire system response to service demand.

Members asked questions concerning the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on young people's mental health, being informed that the pandemic had had an effect on young people's mental health and attendance rates in Schools and College system.

Members noted that there are national guidelines on collecting data, which is followed by the authority. The Director of Education informed members that they could provide information on how the authority collect data and information.

Members were concerned about the carers and families, and what can be done to empower them to support their child. In response to those concerns, it was noted that families' hubs and support families on evidence based parenting courses, as well as an online offer for parenting support services.

Members noted that Parent Panels were playing a role with how family's hubs should be operated.

In response to questions over young people becoming mentors for their peers, it was noted that while there is no direct information on this to be provided to the Scrutiny Board. It would not be uncommon for schools and colleges to have peer related mentorship schemes in place.

In response to questions by Members about addressing other mental health issues and careers convention, the Director of Education stated that they would be happy to provide a verbal update on the issue.

**Resolved** that:

- 1) The Scrutiny Board noted the current landscape and experiences of 16–18-year-olds which are impacting on their participation in education, employment, or training.
- 2) The Scrutiny Board noted the range of interventions currently in place to support young people into EET and prevent the incidence of NEET increasing.

## REPEAT REFERRALS IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

The Repeat Referrals in Children's Social Care report was Presented by Julie Daniels (Interim Director of Children's Social Care) and Leanne Cooper (Assistant Director Social Work Services).



Members noted that the graphs in the report showing Oldham in comparison to neighbouring authorities. It was noted that the rates shown in the graph fluctuate often for referrals and repeat referrals.

Members were informed that there had been an increase in Oldham for domestic abuse incidents, with there being a multi-agency meeting for those at high-risk domestic abuse with the aim of identifying safety plan for young children and families.

Members noted that there had been new systems introduced for reviewing reports, which had been implemented by the Head of Service for Oversight. It was explained to Members that a deep dive had showed that the reasons for referrals could not be predicted.

Members noted the priorities of the Service, including re-referral tracking meetings to continue to be chaired by Heads of Service both at the point of the re-referral and at the point of case closure to ensure opportunities to support children and families had been explored. Weekly Head of Service oversight of all contracts where there have been three contracts into the duty and advice service. Recruitment and retention strategy to continue to be the key focus in being able to create a stable and permeant workforce. Weekly close the loop sessions with practitioners and managers to share key learning from practise case reviews and dip sampling of assessment and interventions.

Members were informed that repeat referrals will continue to require ongoing scrutiny, with the service receiving between 500-600 referrals a week. With Oldham having seen a modest reduction on the overall percentage of cases where multiple referrals had been received.

In response to Members questions regarding partner agencies collaborating with schools, it was confirmed that there was weekly meetings and monitoring which had been taking place.

Members noted that there has been a need to intervene at an earlier stage with these who are vulnerable, with an early help panel being introduced at a district level, in the hopes of achieving early intervention.

In response to questions regarding recording referrals, Members were informed that every single contact would be stored on Oldham Councils electronic system.

Members noted that there was no National database for referrals made at other authorities, however if a family known to Oldham

did move into a new area the authority would notify and arrange a meeting to share information.

In response to questioned by Members about the data showing that January was a higher month for referrals, it was noted by Interim Director of Childrens Social Care that there were seasonal trends, with January being known as a normal peaking trend.

In response to questions by Members concerning temporary accommodation and supporting refugee families, it was noted that it's a case-by-case basis with individual status determining the varying degrees of social care intervention required by the authority.

Members noted that when demand escalated the authority did respond to where the demand was high, however as a consequence it does create a budgetary pressure, in a time where authorities are facing increasingly restricted budgets.

**Resolved** that:

- 1) The Childrens Scrutiny Board noted the report and progress to date.

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

The Childrens Services Update on Financial Performance and Improvement Plan was provided to the Scrutiny Board by Julie Daniels (Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help) and Andy Cooper (Senior Finance Manager).

The Senior Finance Manager provided a summary of the current financial position of Children's Social Care, Members noted that for 1.1. of the report directorate had benefited from significant additional financial investment over recent years, due to the recognition of the demand pressures faced by Children's Social Care. The resources have been invested to align budgets to expenditure in demand led services, strengthen the management structure and to expand the cohort of social workers.

Members noted that for 1.2 of the report that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2023 reported the financial position for 2022/23 at month 9 which at the time was highlighting a pressure of £13.171m for Childrens Social Care. In addition, it was explained by the Senior Finance Manager that this had increased in the final quarter of 2022/23 and an overspend of £13.806m was reported at the end of the fiscal year.

The Senior Finance Manager noted that a Cabinet meeting on 12 December 2022 approved the report Children's Services Investment proposals which had outlined an investment of £14.700m for 2023/24. This would compromise of £11.800m

recurrent funding to stabilise the financial position and one-off funding of £2.900m into several invest to save initiatives.

The Senior Finance Manager noted in 1.3 of the report that the Council's forecasted revenue position for 2023/24 on 31<sup>st</sup> December (month 9) was projecting an adverse variance of £16.642m.

The Senior Finance Manager noted that there are 16 current placements projected to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 with a weekly cost that is higher than the average and the highest cost per week was £22,085 equivalent to £1.148m per annum. In addition, it was also noted that the overspend was netted down to 8.88m by a forecast over recovery of £0.776m on continuing Health Care Contributions. The other areas of significant placement related pressures are semi-independence for 16- to 18-year-olds with a forecast overspend of £2.225m and the use of Independent Fostering Agencies £0.450m.

It was reported in 1.8 of the report that Oldham had signed up to the Greater Manchester (GM) Pledge which would mean that any agency workers starting employment from the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 would have to be paid at standard rates across GM. The rates would apply to social workers, senior social workers and senior practitioners and team managers however the standard rates arrangements would not apply to existing staff.

It was reported by the Senior Finance Manager that offsetting the overspends are underspends of £0.301m and £0.317m respectively within the Childrens Safeguarding and Children's Services- integration; both predominantly as a result of staffing underspends.

It was reported in 2.1 of the report that since post pandemic, there had been an increase in demand particularly in the Northwest due to poverty, deprivation and the cost of living which had an impact on children and young people in Oldham.

It was noted in the report at point 2.2. that there had been a sustained elevated level of people contacting Children's and Social Care and Early Help for advice and support with an associated increase in referrals for statutory social work services. As a consequence of this, there had been an increase in the number in children and young people across all cohorts by 50% compared to 3 years ago.

The Senior Finance Manager gave an update on the "Getting to Good Programme Update," with programme intended to enhance the quality of frontline practise to support vulnerable children, young people, and their families. As well as to continue to effectively manage the continued elevated levels of demand the programme may face, by sustaining performance of some key indicators and improving the stability of the workforce.

The "Getting to Good Programme" focused upon four key strategic priorities which was Practise, People, Partnerships and

Processes. It was noted that the improvement priorities in 2022/24 are an agile programme which would be able to focus on the targeted improvements required to meet the complex needs of children, young people and their families as outlined in point 3.7 table.

An update was provided on Children's transformation and sustainability programme, with the ambition for the programme being to be the best borough for the children, young people and the staff and services that collaborate with them. It was noted that the authority had made a £14.7 million investment into children's social care and family support services in the borough.

In addition, Members noted that Children Social Care had been undertaking work around independent foster services to ensure that children placed into foster care remain in Oldham.

In response to questions concerning why the authorities pay for children and young people placed into the justice system, the response was due to their status as looked after children.

In response to questions by Members about how the demand was sustainable long term, it was noted that the authority was trying to manage the long-term impact by introducing early intervention to balance resources.

In response to questions concerning the level of supervision social workers receive, Members were informed that their line manager would operate the clinical supervision, with mentorships in place for 1<sup>st</sup> year social workers, who in high end cases may need emotional support, as well as health and wellbeing support from the authority itself.

In response to questions regarding the mapping of early help cases, it was noted that they are mapped geographically with the most demand in the central district of Oldham.

Chair requested that this report to be brought back to Scrutiny Board in 6 months' time.

**Resolved that-**

- 1) That Members of the Scrutiny Board noted the Childrens Services update on Financial Performances and Improvement Plan.

9 **WORK PROGRAMME**

**Resolved-** that

- 1) The Work Programme be noted by the Scrutiny Board.

10 **RULE 13 AND 14**

The Scrutiny Board noted under Rule 13 of the Constitution, a report titled "Capital Investment to Safeguard School Places at the Bluecoat School" to be considered by Cabinet on Monday, 18th March 2024.

11 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

There was no Key Decision Document required.

The meeting started at 18:00pm and ended at 20:05pm.

