

***CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Agenda***

Date Wednesday 20 March 2024

Time 6.00 pm

Venue Crompton 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 Paul Entwistle or Constitutional Services at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

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

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS - Any Member of the public wishing to ask a question at the above meeting can do so only if a written copy of the question is submitted to the contact officer by 12 noon on Date Not Specified.

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MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD

Councillors Adams, Bishop, H. Harrison, Hurley, McLaren, Moores (Chair), Rea and Shuttleworth

Item No

- 1 Apologies For Absence
- 2 Urgent Business
Urgent business, if any, introduced by the Chair
- 3 Declarations of Interest
To Receive Declarations of Interest in any Contract or matter to be discussed at the meeting.
- 4 Public Question Time
To receive Questions from the Public, in accordance with the Council's Constitution.
- 5 Minutes of Previous Children and Young People Scrutiny Board Meeting (Pages 1 - 8)
The Minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Board held on 18th January 2024 are attached for approval.
- 6 Participation of Young People aged 16 - 18 in Education, Employment or Training (Pages 9 - 20)
- 7 Repeat Referrals in Children's Social Care (Pages 21 - 26)
- 8 Children's Services - update on Financial Performance and Improvement Plan (Pages 27 - 38)
- 9 Work Programme
- 10 Rule 13 and 14
To consider any rule 13 or 14 decisions taken since the previous meeting.
- 11 Key Decision Document



Present: Councillor Moores (Chair)
Councillors Adams, Bishop, H. Harrison, Hurley, McLaren,
Mushtaq and Rea

Also in Attendance:

Rhys Attwell	Constitutional Services
Paul Axon	Chief Executive Officer Positive Steps

Matthew Bulmer	Director Education Early Years and Skills
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Rick Bolton	Business Manager OSCP
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Julie Daniels	Director of CSE
Henri Giller	Independent Chair Safeguarding Partnership

Chris Lewis	Youth Services
Kelly Rennie	Operations Manager (Positive Steps)

Member of Youth Council

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence received.

2 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no Public Questions for the Board to consider.

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

Noted that questions not received a response from Inspector following the last meeting.

Resolved that: the minutes of the meeting held on 16th November 2023 be approved as a correct record.

6 **YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2023/24**

Paul Axon (Chief Executive Officer) and Kelly Rennie (Operations Manager) both from Positive Steps presented a statutory report, which had been approved nationally by the Youth Justice Board about the Youth Justice Plan 2023/24. Which was presented to the Scrutiny Board over the delegated responsibility and service provisions provided by Youth Justice.

An overview was provided to members about what Youth Justice Services do and what the main objectives are for Positive Steps, these were the following:

- Reducing the number of first- time entrants (FTE) into the criminal justice service
- Reducing re-offending by children subject to statutory Court Orders or Out of
- Court Disposals
- Reducing the use of custody for Children

While additionally:

- Effectively safeguarding the children, we work with
- Effectively protecting the public from harm
- Enhancing the voice and experience of victims of crime committed by children

It was also noted by Members that the vision of Oldham Youth Justice Services is to provide provisions which is the following:

- Child First in its effective partnership approach
- Ambitious and inspirational for the children and families it works with
- Truly collaborative and led by the voice of the child
- Pursuing excellence in governance and leadership
- Achieving outstanding outcomes in inspection programmes

Members were informed about the crime figures around ethnicity. With a discussion taking place around the data and training being conducted by Positive Steps to tackle unconscious biases in the justice system. It was noted that the Youth Justice Services have carried out exercise and training around Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) related issues, even having a serving Police Officer who was currently on secondment undertake diversity and unconscious bias training. It was noted that in general children involved with the Justice System, can have difficult relations with the Police Force, with positive steps trying to encourage one to one session with said Police Officer to try and remove any stigma children using the service may have.

Cllr Colin McLaren raised questions around implementing recommendations on the experience of BAME children within a review, with it being noted by Paul Axon that a review was still currently underway with multi-agency partners, who are aiming to feedback voices to the Youth Justice Board.

It was noted that black and minority ethnic backgrounds are over-represented at all stages of the criminal justice system in Oldham.

Cllr Colin McLaren asked questions concerning prevention and targets that Youth Justice was taking to tackle criminality at a young age. It was noted that an early intervention programme for children who had received no further action taken against them by the Police and Crown Prosecution Services had been



underway with the hopes of being able to help 52 children throughout the year.

Reverend Jean Hurlston asked a question expressing a keen interest to see Youth Justice Services work with families as well as Children, with Kelly Rennie informing members that caseworkers will work with children and families in a two-sided attempt at approaching a child's circumstance and understanding their family background.

There was a discussion around the training being provided for Speech and Language Therapy as well as Neurodiversity training. The Chair felt strongly that if early intervention in life can be carried out for speech and language, it could stop issues later in life. It was also noted that as well as training, counselling sessions are being offered to youths to discuss any issues which may affect them, as well as Nurse Health assessments and Specialist Education such as allowing children to be Park Rangers.

Cllr Helen Bishop asked if the re-offending rates on Page 21 of the agenda pack needed updating. Cllr Helen Bishop was informed, that the data on page 21, were the most up to date data on the reoffending rates on Oldham.

Members noted the success story around re-offending rates, with Oldham being reported as having one of the lowest re-offending rates nationally.

Resolved: That the Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 be noted.

7

OLDHAM SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

The Board considered and discussed the Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 1 April 2022- 31 March 2023. The report was presented by Dr Henri Giller the Independent Chair of the Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership.

It was noted by Dr Henri Giller for additional context that report covered the second year of a three-year strategy, which had been developed by Oldham Council, Greater Manchester Police, and the Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group. To guarantee that all children and young people in the area receive protection and safeguarding.

Members noted the key strategic aims which were the following:

- Excellent practice is the norm across all practitioners in Oldham
- Partner agencies hold one another to account effectively
- There is early identification of new safeguarding issues
- Learning is promoted and embedded
- Information is shared effectively
- The public feel confident that children are protected

Members also noted that performances have continued to be scrutinised and monitored by the Partnership Performance Management group. Data presented showed that contact to MASH was at 29,647, contacts converted to referrals was 5,372, 2906 s47 enquires initiated, 543 children looked after as of March 2023, 507 children on child protection as of March 2023 and 273 children electively home educated.

Members noted safeguarding priorities for 2022-23, with the Partnerships five priority areas for that year being Neglect, complex and contextual safeguarding, domestic abuse, children's mental health and the impact of trauma and transitions. It was further explained that the Partnership had undergone specific developments on modern slavery and the contextual safeguarding around the topic.

Members noted the role of independent Scrutiny within the partnership with there being provisions carried out by an independent person who assesses the effectiveness of the arrangements which had been enacted. It was noted that whole relevant agencies are working with the Safeguarding Partnership, Oldham had faced continued difficulties in staffing across the different partner agencies within April 2022- March 2023. It was further explained that between partnership agencies quality assurance and information sharing is a standard practise, as well as across partnership agency training developments designed to prioritise safeguarding concerns which had been identified.

Members noted that the demand in terms of contact received was significant, with there being 1,200 active cases. It was further explained that Oldham are receiving significant more contact than neighbouring authorities, however it was noted that this does not translate into an increase in referrals being made.

It was expected that the demand placed on Children's Safeguarding Services would continue to grow, with Dr Henri Giller stating that Partnership Agencies would agree on the increase in demand. A suggested solution to slow down increase demand, was earlier intervention strategies.

Cllr Lucia Rea stated that for strategic aims, the Safeguarding team should promote and raise awareness around safeguarding issues through increased advertising, to increase public awareness. It was further stated that schoolwork, around identifying signs and symptoms would be vital, with effective communication being key to safeguarding risks.

Cllr Colin McLaren asked how the safeguarding team are "strengthening the transitional safeguarding offer" from page 62 of the report. It was confirmed that Children's Safeguarding Services are collaborating with multiagency partners work around 'positive steps' in terms of CSE's whole team working around this issue.



It was further explained that youth violence is a joint targeted area of inspection amongst multiagency partners, with Mind Authority initiatives having completed a report on youth violence.

Questions were raised by members concerning provisions if a child have been exploited for criminal intent, with Dr Henri Giller stating that progress had been made to support children who had been exploited instead of prosecuting them.

Cllr Helen Bishop commented on the issue of young men/boys who had been victims of exploitation are less likely to come forward and share with the appropriate authorities their experience. It was noted that there are gender issues within the topic of exploitation, with authorities and partners dedicated to different initiatives to encourage those to who have been victims to speak up.

Resolved that the Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report be noted.

8

RESPONSE TO THE LOCAL AREA INSPECTION ON SUPPORT AND PROVISION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND/OR DISABILITIES (SEND)

Matthew Bulmer (Director for Education) presented the 'Response to the Local area inspection on support and provision for Children and Young people who have special education needs and/ or disabilities (SEND)' to the Scrutiny Board.

Members noted that a joint Ofsted/CQC area SEND inspection of the Oldham partnership had taken place in June 2023. Following the Conclusion of the Inspection the Managing director of Children and Young People for Oldham Council along with the Chief Executive for the Integrated Care Board were informed that the Inspection report had found Oldham Partnership to be inadequate.

Members noted improving government structures was taking place, with a Local Inclusion Partnership Executive Board having been set up. The aim of the partnership board was to bring together key statutory partners including the Oldham MBC, Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board and system partners. To set up an evidenced based local inclusion plan in setting out how the needs for young people and children are delivered in line with the national standards.

Members noted Service Improvements within section 5 of the report. It was discussed that several PAP actions have been completed, a joint area data dashboard had been developed and a speech and language therapy recovery plan had been developed.

Councillor Colin McLaren said that they were pleased to see steps were being taken to address the inadequate outcome of the inspection report and wished to see how the journey will be and what the focus and objectives will be.

Matthew Bulmer said that tackling issues around school age children receiving a SEN report was a priority, with there being 45,000 children and only 3% having an education plan. It was also said that reducing the waiting list for speech and language therapy was an objective, with 1,800 being on a waiting list at the current time. In addition, new governance structures such as the Partnership Executive Board should help with meeting objectives, being provided with comprehensive data and meeting regularly every quarterly.

Councillor Colin McLaren said that he wished to see the steps taken to address staffing issues.

Matthew Bulmer in response stated that demand on the system is at all-time high, with Oldham Council having the statutory duty to provide provisions and support children with SEN needs. It was explained that significant additional resources have been used in Oldham at Oldham Council within the value 11 million pounds.

Reverend Jean Hurlston asked a question concerning sustainability and 'balancing the books', and if the increase in demand on the service was down to more children having disabilities.

Matthew Bulmer responded that Covid had played a huge part in increasing demand on the service, especially in younger children. It was also stated that in general there had been an inherent increase in the complex demand on the system. With there being a stigma around parents not trusting the system, with additional support being needed to upskill the workforce to deal with growing demand. However, it was noted that this would require more money from central government.

Councillor Maggie Hurley asked what other improvements had been made apart from Speech and Language.

Matthew Bulmer responded that there had been improvements around other neurodevelopment issues, with an integrated team who work with children who have mental health issues through a commissioned service. More however can be done in mainstream settings, but speech and language are a majorly targeted issue.

Councillor Maggie Hurley asked how many children are waiting for a Child Health Plan Plus since the inspection?

Matthew Bulmer stated that they were unsure of the figure and would provide an answer outside of the meeting.

Members were concerned about how many people are having to wait to receive access to Speech and Language therapy, with Matthew Bulmer informing members that work is being conducted with Partners to stop the waiting list rise above 1,800.

Councillor Lucia Rea asked how the figures compare nationally to neighbouring authorities

Matthew Bulmer answered that given social issues, poverty and lack of parents having information about services the overall SEND needs are higher nationally and regionally.

Chair requested an update in six months' time (July) on the progress made for the next inspection.

Resolved that: Scrutiny Board provided a response to the Local area inspection on support and provision for Children and Young people who have special education needs and/ or disabilities (SEND).

9 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Update provided by the Chair, additional update in June 2024 requested over operation Sherwood.

Item 3 and 4 of the work Programme to be a workshop.

Resolved that: the Work Programme be approved.

10 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

Upgrade and Refurbish of Spring Meadows, Stanley Road, Shaw and Medlock Children's Centre.

The Urgency of this matter is due to:

- 1) The decision is needed to deliver a comprehensive refurbishment programme to meet the Family Hub Programme timescales agreed with the Department of Education as part of the requirements of the Family Hub grant and the local Family Hub Board.
- 2) The decision cannot wait until the end of the call-in period because it will delay the start of the programme plan, specifically delaying confirmation of contractors being on site in the first Family Hub on the 15 January as planned with both the contractors and children's centre staff.

11 **RULE 13 AND 14**

The Chair noted that there was no update on rule 13 and 14.

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

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Report to CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY BOARD

Participation of Young People aged 16 – 18 in Education, Employment or Training

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mohon Ali, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Officer Contact: Matthew Bulmer, Director of Education, Skills and Early Years

Report Author: Amanda Youlden, Post 16 Lead for Education and Skills

Ext. 07970 600128

March 2024

Purpose of the report

This annual report is the result of previous requests from the former Overview and Scrutiny Committee to present annual reports to Members to keep them informed of relevant activities and initiatives.

Executive Summary

The Annual Report is for information and opportunity for members to scrutinise and challenge activities in the preceding year. This report will update the Board on current participation and NEET rates together with a summary on activity during the past 12 months and planned in the future to ensure that we are shaping and influencing opportunities where possible for our 16–18-year-olds.

Recommendations

The Board to note the current landscape and experiences of 16–18-year old's which is impacting on their participation in education, employment, or training.

The Board is asked to note the range of interventions currently in place to support young people into EET and prevent the incidence of NEET increasing, given the highlighted issue in relation to sufficiency. To comment and discuss accordingly.

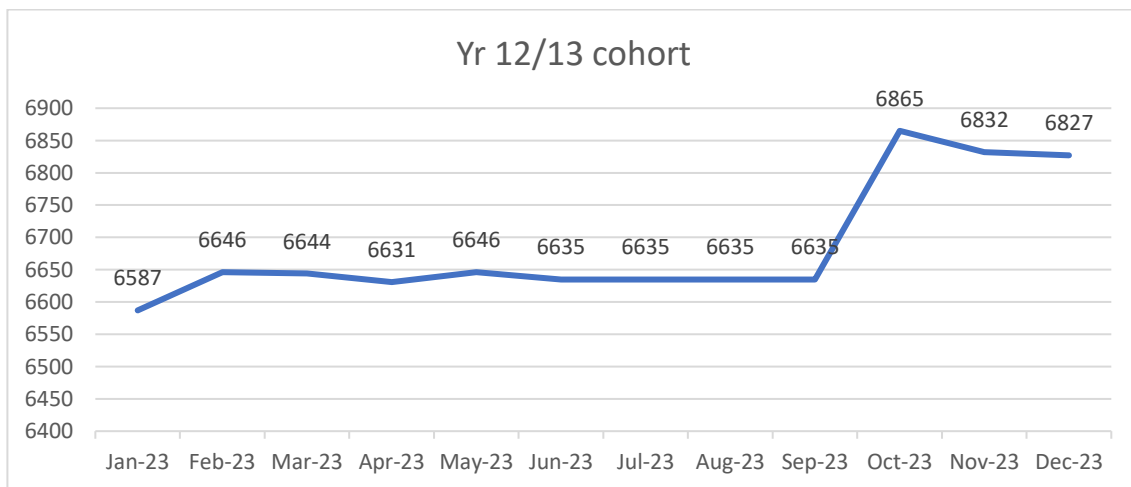
Participation of Young People aged 16 – 18 in Education, Employment and Training

1 Background

- 1.1 The LA continues to fulfil its duties around encouraging, enabling, and assisting young people to participate in education or training and tracking those aged 16 and 17 through the commission of the targeted support offer delivered by Positive Steps. This includes a small resource for our SEND (EHC plans) and Children Looked After (CLA) cohort. Due to the contract term coming to an end, the commissioning and procurement procedures are currently under review by the Children’s Commissioning Team.
- 1.2 Our approach across partners in Oldham is to ensure that young people are empowered to access the advice and support they require; that we have opportunities available and to engage with our young people to hear their voices and respond as best we can. We do this using a partnership approach engaging organisation’s who work with our 16 – 18-year-olds and support them to participate.
- 1.3 This report will update the Board on Participation, NEET (not in education, employment or training) and unknown rates across 2023, together with a summary on activity planned in the future to ensure that we are shaping and influencing where possible for our 16–18-year-olds.

2 Current Position

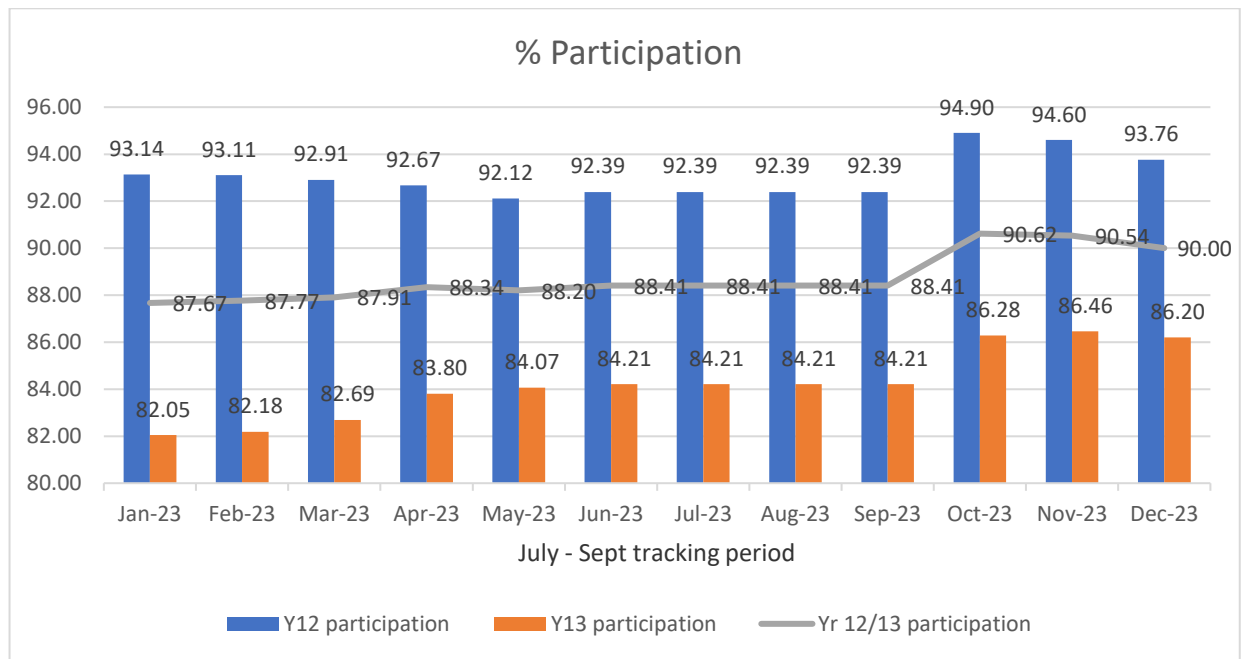
2.1 Cohort numbers



2.1.1 We have seen a notable increase in our cohort numbers for the academic year 23/24. The actual cohort numbers fluctuate month by month, but the average cohort number across 2023 for Y12/13 combined is 6685. 2022’s figure was 6401. This is an increase in actual young people of 284. This increase puts pressure on all service areas, including the LA in meeting its statutory duties, it increases competition for education placements, education providers need to offer more and differentiated places and increases caseloads for staff working to secure placements for young people.

2.1.2 Y12/13 cohort numbers are projected to continue to rise until the academic year 28/29.

2.2 Y12/12 Participation Rates

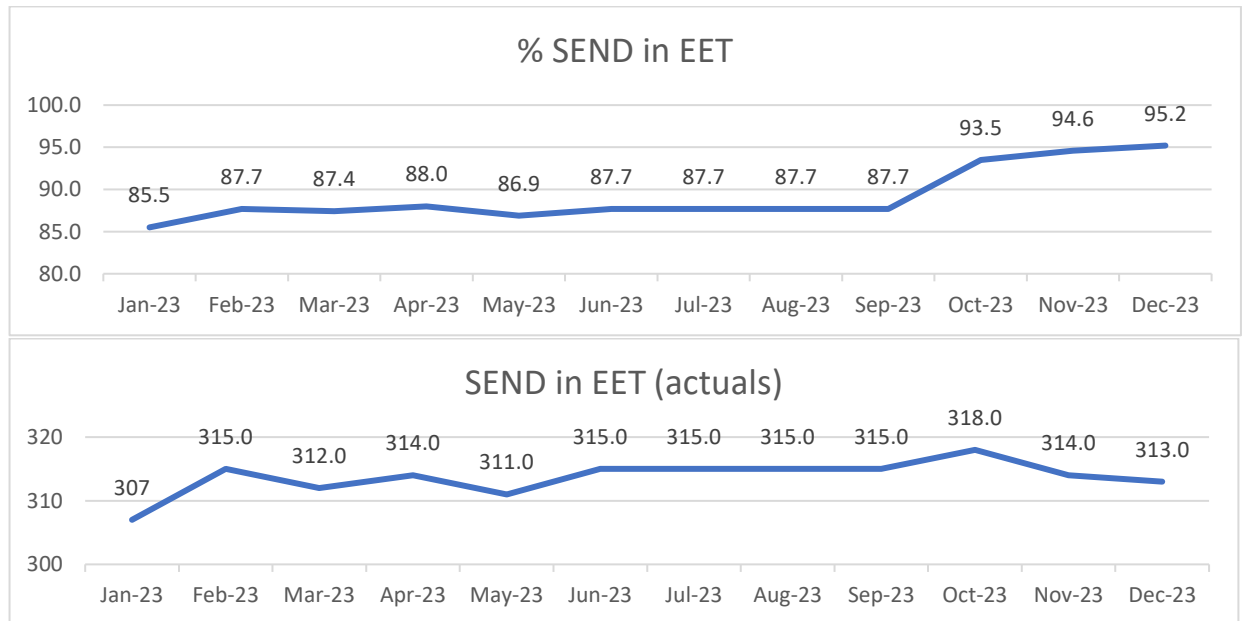


- 2.2.1 Latest reported data (December 2023) indicates that 93.76% of our year 12s are participating in some form of EET (education, employment or training) activity. This % rate of participation has been fairly static over the last twelve months, indicating that our year 12's were relatively settled in their destination following transition from school. Y12 average participation across 2023 was 93.06%.
- 2.2.2 However, following a similar trajectory to last year, participation rates in our year 13 cohort is much lower. Y13 average participation across 2023 was 84.21%. Please note that the Y13 cohort during January 2023 to July 2023 is the cohort most significantly affected by school closures during the pandemic, and its continued effects are still being felt. Professionals, parents, carers and peers demonstrate continuing concerns about wellbeing, in particular loneliness, dissatisfaction with life, stress, anxiety, boredom and concerns about the future all continue to affect young people and their levels of engagement and motivation.
- 2.2.3 From October 2023, the figures shown are the new Y13 cohort and is showing a 2.36% increase in participation on the previous Y13 cohort but shows a significant decrease from their own Y12 participation (6.89%).
- 2.2.4 Historically, there have always been young people that struggle with the transition from Y12 to Y13. This was identified as an issue in 22/23 academic year so for 23/24 we provided additional support at re-enrollment for those who needed to seek an alternative course for Y13. Information from Colleges on who would not be offered a Y13 place was requested so that young people could be contacted and offered support.
- 2.2.5 Whilst mitigations were put in place, it appears that a significant number of Y13 students did not return to the second year of their course. This requires further investigation with the Colleges and wider FE partners to understand the data and how we can work together to support these young people to return to EET activity.
- 2.2.6 The careers advisors supporting the NEET cohort work closely with young people and a range of providers to re-engage them in EET or any appropriate local engagement programs that support young people back on their journey to EET. We expect some positive

engagements during January as young people begin to wish to return to positive activity following the winter break which will be reflected in the February data.

2.2.7 The Connect to Your Future and Empower Oldham programs funded via GMCA have provided an additional support offer for these young people. Teams are able to refer young people to work with a careers coach or mentor. We have case studies of some excellent outcomes, providing us with evidence that if capacity is available to undertake the work and a young person is willing to engage and take on the practical and emotional support that a mentor can offer, they are able to re-engage in positive activity.

2.3 SEND Participation Rates



- 2.3.1 The actual cohort numbers fluctuate month by month across the year, but the average annual cohort number for Y12/13 SEND is 314, and the % participation is steady across the academic year, showing a rise in participation from September of 5.8%.
- 2.3.2 The SEND Team co-ordinates education provision for young people aged 16 – 25 with an EHC plan to ensure they are accessing an education provision that meets the educational outcomes in their EHC plan and supports them to achieve their aspirations.
- 2.3.4 The PfA Steering Group works in partnership with a wide variety of partners (and feeds into the SEND Programme Board) to improve outcomes for young people with SEND, including employment.
- 2.3.5 Oldham was successful in securing additional funding from the DfE to work on a Supported Internship program. The aims of the project are to increase the number and quality of Supported Internships available to young people in Oldham and we are currently in year 2 of the 3-year project. Oldham Council works closely with the two local delivery providers, DfE, Oldham Youth Service and Oldham Theatre Workshop to achieve project aims.
- 2.3.6 SEND Services recently held a Young Person’s Voice SEND and Inclusion Conference. The conference was an opportunity for children and young people with additional needs from Key Stage 3 and above to come together to have their opinions heard, and to speak to key decision makers about priorities in the SEND and Inclusion Strategy. Approximately 65

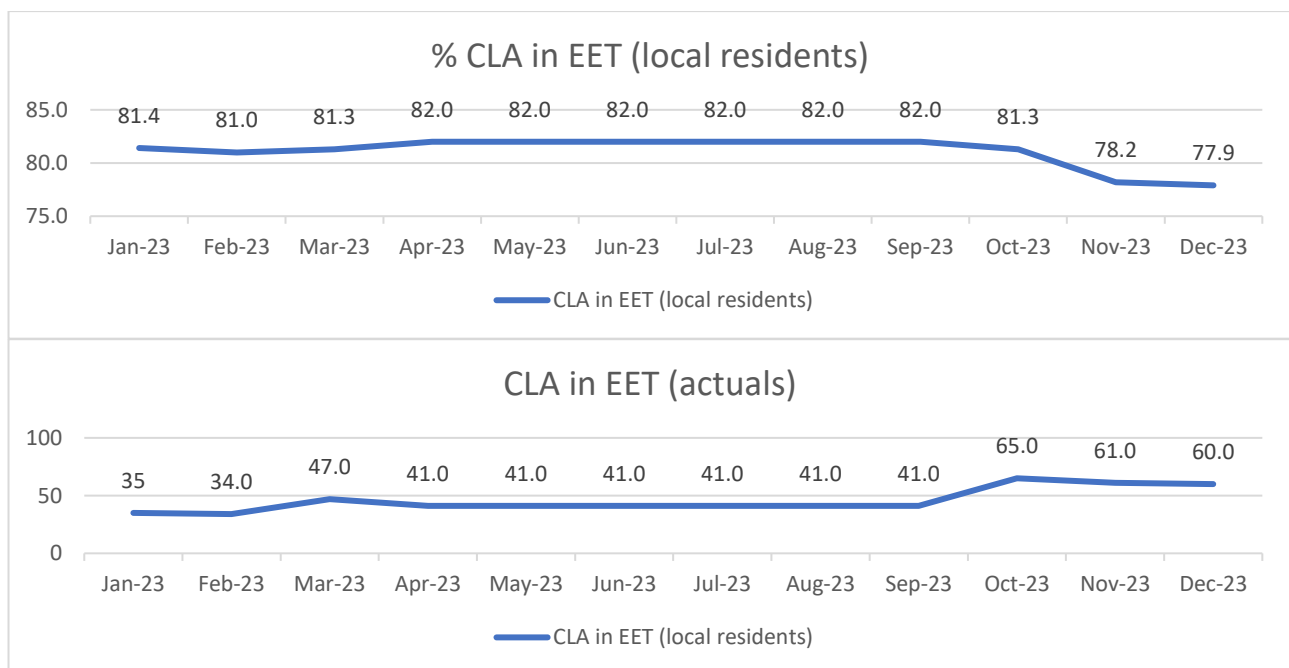
young people attended from 9 Oldham mainstream secondary schools and 2 special secondary schools.

2.3.7 A series of activities were facilitated to support young people to express their views on what is and is not working for them. Barrier Breakers selected the four areas that were most important to them, which included:

1. Education and training.
2. Positive health and wellbeing.
3. Community and social inclusion.
4. Planning/preparing for adulthood.

2.3.8 The conference feedback specifically linked to participation highlighted that young people feel they would like more support around their education, employment, preparing for adulthood, including money management, volunteering opportunities to enhance employability skills and safe independent travel.

2.4 CLA Participation (local residents)



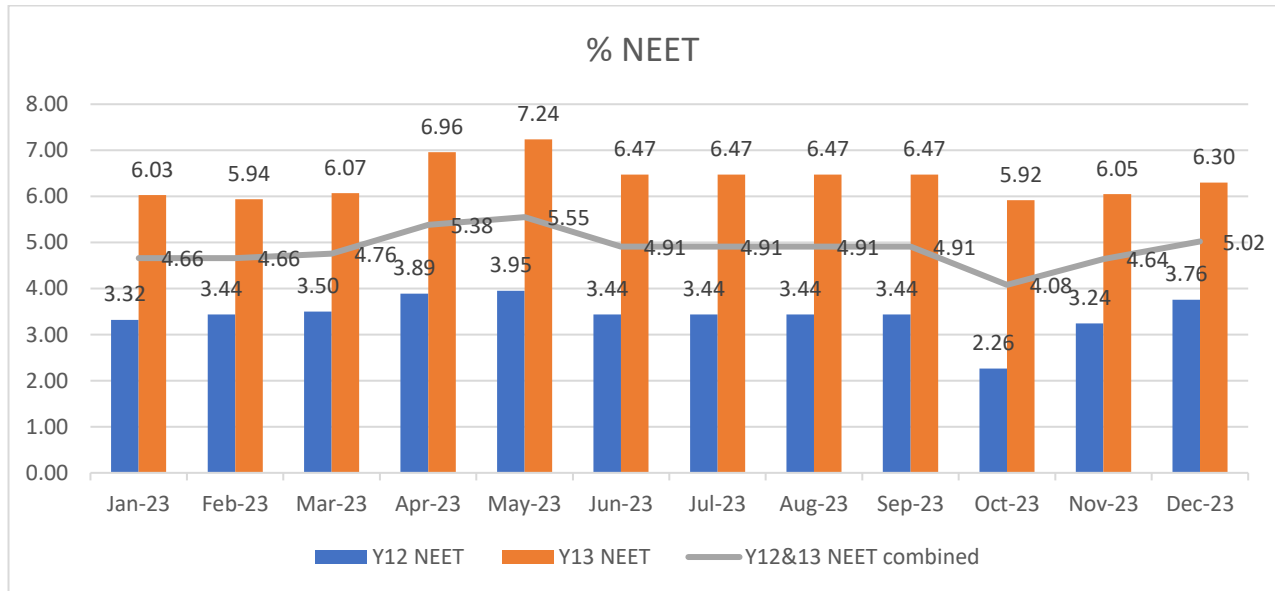
2.4.1 The average annual cohort number for CLA (16 – 18) in 2023 is 45. The smaller cohort impacts the data, but is not unusual to see a bigger statistical drop in EET whilst our most vulnerable young people transition in the autumn term.

2.4.2 Given the additional barriers CLA young people face this requires a higher level of support and our dedicated Careers Advisor support working with social care teams is essential to ensuring these young people are encouraged and supported to re-engage. We continue to provide the additional resource dedicated to this cohort.

2.4.3 Our Virtual School (VS) coordinates further support for the young people in our care to assist them to transition successfully into Post 16 provision. This is provided through a dedicated Post 16 Education Officer. The VS deliver a range of targeted activities and programmes to raise aspirations and participation, utilising information/data in Personal Education Plans (PEPs) on careers advice and guidance. Ongoing liaison with the VS and Positive Steps ensures that there is oversight of Oldham CLA and the careers advice and guidance they have received or require.

2.4.5 Whilst the program is outside of the Y12/13 age range, we have recently received funding to deliver a Care Leaver Multiply (numeracy program) to support care leavers aged 19+ to gain additional maths skills. Although the courses can only be delivered to 19+, the fund can be used to engage CLA young people who may benefit from this type of support in the months leading up to their 19th birthday. These young people will be identified at the Care Leaver NEET monthly meeting and support put in place.

2.5 Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)



2.5.1 The latest reported (December) Y12/13 combined NEET rate currently sits at 5.02% with December 2023 position higher than January 2023. We continue to receive monthly starter leaver information from providers to ensure that an advisor can contact young people who become NEET mid-year to re-engage, reducing the amount of time potentially spent NEET. There are currently 343 young people recorded as NEET with 288 actively seeking EET opportunities. Reasons for NEET are varied some are waiting for the right opportunity (e.g. apprenticeships), some due to health, some are new to Oldham and the UK and are a little further from EET. These young people are offered engagement programs to support them.

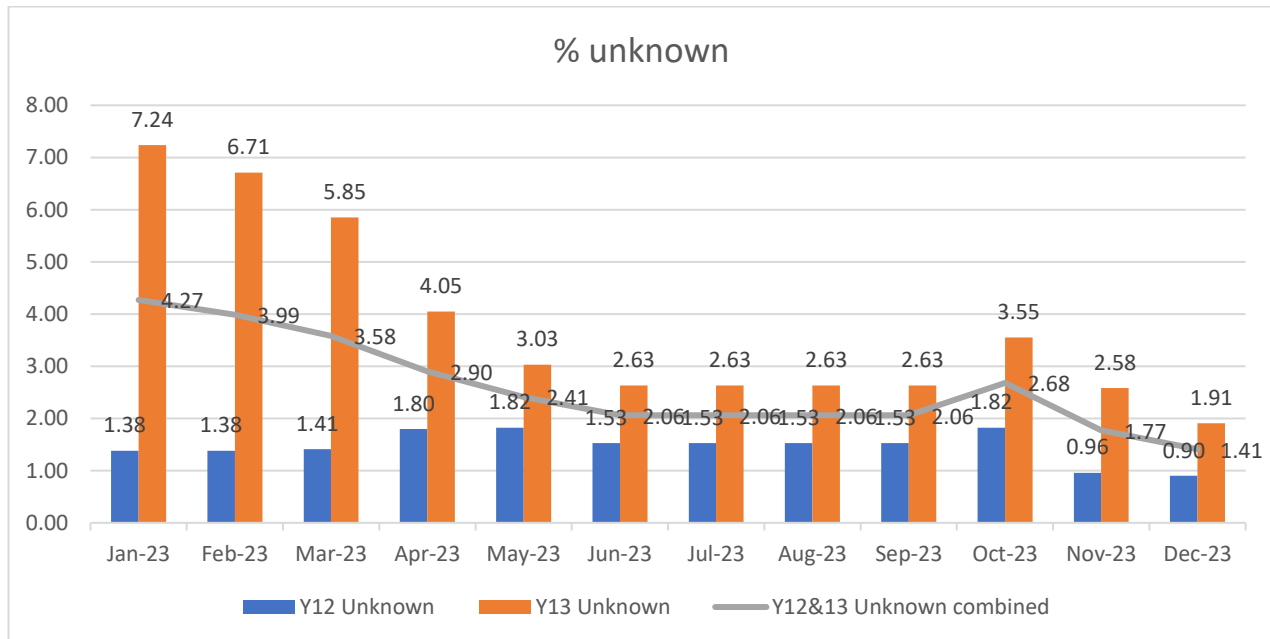
2.5.2 The 55 young people not available to the labour market again are in this position for a number of reasons, mainly illness (mental health a significant contributor), teenage parents and pregnancy and young carers. Our Careers Advisors continue to offer support to these young people, but the intensity is reduced.

2.5.3 In line with the participation data, the NEET data highlights the difficulties our Y13 cohort is experiencing with successfully accessing EET, with Y13's levels 2.94% higher than our Y12 cohort (on average across 2023).

2.5.4 The offer available from post 16 settings is not dissimilar to last year, although the landscape is beginning to change to meet the requirements of the Skills and Post 16 Act. The continued roll out of wider T-Level courses is providing another option for young people to consider, and the T-Level results from both Colleges were encouraging.

2.5.5 Providers have adjusted their offers following the de-funding of traineeships, but await further information on the plan to defund a large number of level 2 and below course, re-shape level 3 (removal of BTEC's) and introduce the Advanced British Standard, a new Baccalaureate-style qualifications for 16 – 19 year olds.

2.6 Unknown (or “not known”)



2.6.1 Work to identify the unknown cohort has been a priority across 2023, and this targeted focus has seen a significant drop in the numbers of unknown young people. As the graph demonstrates, we have reduced the Y12/13 combined % rate from 4.27% in January 2023 down to 1.41% in December 2023. This equates to 191 young people.

2.6.2 This means these young people are now known to us, we know they are safe and we can offer services.

2.6.3 It is difficult to ascertain the reasons for young people becoming unknown, and we will continue to use lived experience, research, peer to peer shared good practice to explore the reasons and work with partners to ensure young people access support.

2.6.4 Positive Steps try several and varied attempts at continued contact but have been required to make the young person unknown as we cannot ascertain a positive EET destination. Follow-up of these young people continues, but some cases can become a strain on resources. Due to the guidance set out by the DfE, although we may have evidence that a young person no longer lives in Oldham, as we are unable to obtain a positive EET destination, we are required to continue to a) keep this young person on Oldham’s database and b) mark them as unknown in our data returns. Work is currently being undertaken to assess what % of young people fall into this category so we can report this.

2.7 Key activity to support participation

2.7.1 Whilst our commissioned service continues to meet our statutory duties in relation to participation, it is acknowledged at a regional level that this cohort requires additional support to enable them to participate successfully.

2.7.2 “Connect to Your Future”, an ESF/GMCA funded project that supported young people aged 15 – 19 ended in September. This project offered enhanced support to young people who were either at risk of or were NEET.

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- 2.7.3 Following the end of “Connect to Your Future” GMCA identified that this group continued to be a high risk group that required continued additional support, therefore funded a program via UKSPF funding. Locally known as “Empower Oldham”, the offer will be for 15 – 19-year-olds (up to 25 with SEN and 21 if care experienced) who are at risk of or NEET, and will provide bespoke enhanced support, either individually or in groups to move them into a positive EET destination. Delivery of the program officially commenced in early December and our January return to GMCA indicated we have 21 young people on program.
- 2.7.4 Engagement programs are essential for young people and provide an essential part of the pathway from NEET to EET. We currently have a number of organisation’s offering provision in Oldham or GM that young people can access that will support young people to engage and obtain skills for education, employment or training. Due to the number of funded projects available for young people in Oldham, it became increasingly difficult to navigate what is available for young people. Use of the padlet; [Positive Steps \(padlet.com\)](https://www.padlet.com) which provides a visual of what’s currently available to young people to support them to become EET continues to be used widely. The padlet is continually updated and is available for young people, parents and professionals to use.
- 2.7.5 Oldham’s Post 16 Team, Get Oldham Working, Job Centre Plus and Positive Steps continue to work together to deliver Oldham’s Youth Hub, finding ways to work collaboratively to expand the offer in place. The initiative works in a supportive, young person focused and positive outcome-based way that supports young people aged 16 – 25 years old to access support to enable them to participate in activity that will lead to an employment opportunity. The Youth Hub hosts our Youth Hub Collaborative, which is a network of agencies sharing information and service offerings to support young people to achieve.
- 2.7.6 We have recently seen an increase in young people returning to the physical spaces to discuss re-engaging, but Digital IAG is a mechanism we continue to enhance so further choice is available. As adults working with young people we acknowledge the need for us to adapt our communication channels so we are available to young people on the platforms they choose to engage with and allow us to be a part of.
- 2.7.7 The Employment and Skills Partnership Board has been established and the strategy and action plan developed. Work with our Comms Team on production of the strategy document with a view to a public launch in late February/early March. Our strategy has 4 priorities, with young people’s employment being priority one.
- 2.7.8 Following the success of the Young Person’s Careers Event in September 2023, Leaders have agreed it will run again. We aim to be more ambitious with the scope of the event for 2024, with a wider representation of employers across the GM region being requested to attend. The Employment and Skills Board will be the oversight body for the development of the event, which is agreed to take place in late September 2024.
- 2.7.9 Post 16 Service and the Business Team are developing a Comms Plan to keep Oldham Businesses better informed of the activity in relation to young person’s employment and skills with a view to engaging more businesses in the agenda, including update on the Integrated Technical City Region.
- 2.7.10 Oldham has successfully been awarded a grant to deliver a GM Care Leaver Multiply (bespoke maths course) Offer. The first program is due to commence at the end of March 2024 and aims to increase confidence, maths skills, increase employment skills and serve as a pathway to further education, training or employment for Care Leavers aged 19+. The fund can work with 18 year olds to prepare them for the course.

2.7.11 To enhance Oldham's offer to young people, we have collaborated with three secondary schools and Oldham Sixth Form College and Oldham College to design a small pilot to develop a model of transition for identified young people that may benefit from a different approach. The pilot consists of three strands of activity:

- Refine information sharing processes between schools and Colleges to improve the support put in place by both school and College to enable students to successfully transition to post 16 placements.
- A small, appropriate group of young people in secondary school to benefit from an offer from Oldham College (term-time) and "Empower Oldham"¹ (summer break). The purpose would be to introduce the College environment and keep young people engaged and empower them to thrive in their future environment.
- Increased awareness of post 16 education for students and enhanced visibility in schools.

Upon completion of the pilot, dependent on success and following a thorough evaluation and possible adaptations, we plan to grow the pilot at a steady pace. This growth is very much dependent on all parties working to ensure the success of the project.

2.7.12 Within the statutory guidance on duties relating to the participation of young people in EET, local authorities have broad duties to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training.

One of these duties is to:

- Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people in their area who are over compulsory school age but under 19 or aged 19 to 25 and for whom an Education, Health and care plan is maintained. This is a duty under the Education Action 1996. To fulfil this, local authorities need to have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision.

Oldham is experiencing a gap in its offer for 16 –18-year-olds, namely Entry Level/Level 1 study programmes. Work is ongoing to address this gap and Oldham College have indicated a strong intention to support us to close this gap and we are working closely with them on a plan. In addition, a request for external providers to deliver in Oldham has been issued, and we currently have six providers initially expressing an interest in possible delivery. There are some barriers in relation to funding and building availability and this may prevent some providers entering the marketplace.

2.7.13 In addition to 2.7.12, there are a number of contributing factors to sufficiency being an issue, and it must be noted that currently sufficiency is being discussed across all 10 GM local authorities as an issue. There is work ongoing to submit a paper to the GM Education, Skills, and Employment Support Joint Oversight Board (JOB) to highlight the issue and lobby government to support us to address the sufficiency issues we are facing regionally.

2.7.14 As mentioned Oldham's sufficiency issue is multi-faceted, we have many factors impacting us here in Oldham, some are listed below;

- Post 16 Curriculum Reform
- Defunding of traineeships
- Providers changing strategic direction of their service delivery.
- Providers ceasing to deliver in Local Authority areas.
- Providers being more selective in the students they accept onto courses.
- Increases in cohort numbers for Y12/Y13
- International new arrivals.
- FE staff recruitment issues

¹ Empower Oldham is a NEET prevention offer for 15 – 19 year olds, delivered by Positive Steps.

-
- Colleges implementing increased behaviour standards policies.
 - Young person resilience impacting on ability to sustain placements.
 - Qualifications criteria being inflated by colleges due to increased competition
 - % of young people not gaining GCSE Maths and English at an appropriate level.
 - Basic, soft skills specific to the sustaining Post 16 placements or apprenticeships.
 - DfE funding arrangements.

2.7.15 Over recent years, Oldham had a number of training providers delivering both study programs across Oldham which supported our sufficiency duty. Unfortunately, these providers have been reducing steadily over time, both in their offer for young people, or leaving the borough completely.

2.7.16 Although the proposed Eton/Star Free School will deliver 240 post 16 placements from September 2026, the provision is very different to the offer training providers deliver and services a completely different cohort of young people. Therefore, Eton/Star doesn't replace our training provision and enable us to provide the appropriate provision this cohort of young people need.

2.7.17 In addition to the reputational risk our gap in provision identifies, it also highlights a potential risk to families. The lack of placements, particularly for activity that has multiple start dates during the academic year, may impact family household budgets via the ceasing of child benefit if a young person is NEET.

2.7.18 If a young person is NEET but engaged with services, the family can apply for a child benefit extension of 20 weeks, providing evidence the young person is working with a TIAG provider to the DWP. If an appropriate placement is not identified, there is no mechanism we are aware of, for extending this benefit. This could impact household budgets as it would trigger the loss of child benefit and potentially associated tax credits.

3 Priorities over the next 12 months and plans

3.1 Whilst item 2.7 highlights our key activity for the next 12 months, some of the issues we are currently facing require prioritisation due to the risk factors they present to young people's participation. We believe the following three items are the priorities we need to focus on for the next 12 months.

3.2 Sufficiency

3.2.1 Oldham's current sufficiency gap is our highest priority for us to address over the next 12 months. If the sufficiency issue is not addressed, we will not have appropriate provision to move young people into when they are ready, which will increase our NEET rate. In addition, Empower Oldham will work with young people to support them to move into destinations successfully. However, our sufficiency gap presents us with potentially nowhere to move these young people onto, which will disappoint young people and risk them becoming disengaged.

3.2.2 We are addressing this issue via a number of routes which are described in more detail at items 2.7.12 to 2.7.18.

3.3 Employment and Skills Strategy and Partnership Board

3.3.1 The public launch of the strategy and communication of the Board, its members and the programme of work to be undertaken by the Board will be priority for the next 12 months.

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- 3.3.2 The partnership board has an action plan of work across the four priority areas (young people, economic inactivity, securing skills for the future economy and employers role in the curriculum). Ensuring the work across the four areas of the action plan is delivered will be a key focus for our team over the next 12 months.
 - 3.4 Transitions pilot
 - 3.4.1 Our young person priority has identified young people's difficulties with engaging in Post 16 provision. Perceived issues with poor behaviour - impacting on post 16 sustainability of mainstream further education progressions.
 - 3.4.1 Working with our partners, Oldham College, Oldham Sixth Form College and Positive Steps, we are developing a small pilot which will support approximately 15 young people with an enhanced package of support to transition to Post 16 provision successfully. More detail is provided at 2.7.11. Feedback and the growth of the pilot over the next 12 months will be a key priority for our service.
 - 3.4.2 The refining of information sharing between pre and post 16 providers the pilot includes will ensure providers are better informed and therefore able to put in place the correct support mechanisms both pre and post transition.
 - 3.4.3 The enhanced offer of "Empower Oldham" as part of the transitions pilot will strengthen the offer, and ensure young people continue to be engaged with their post 16 provider over the long summer break.

4. **Co-operative Values**

- 4.1 **#ourbit:** Working with partners to create quality work prospects - and ensuring all residents can access new skills and opportunities and be work-ready
#yourbit: Making the most of the education and skills offer and aiming to better yourself
#result: An ambitious and socially mobile borough
- 4.2 The work links closely with the Council's Corporate outcome on an inclusive economy which includes strong links via the Employments and Skills Strategy to the Economy Board.

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Report to CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY BOARD

Repeat Referrals in Children's Social Care

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

Officer Contact: Julie Daniels, Interim Director of Children's Social Care

Report Author: Ben Lawton, Head of Children's Assessment and Intervention Service, Leanne Cooper, Assistant Director Social Work Services.

20 March 24

Purpose of the report

This is an update to a previous report to the committee in March 23 titled 'Repeat Referrals in Children's Social Care' on the repeat referral performance, key challenges impacting on the performance indicator and the service response for improvement.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Children's Scrutiny Board notes the report and progress to date.

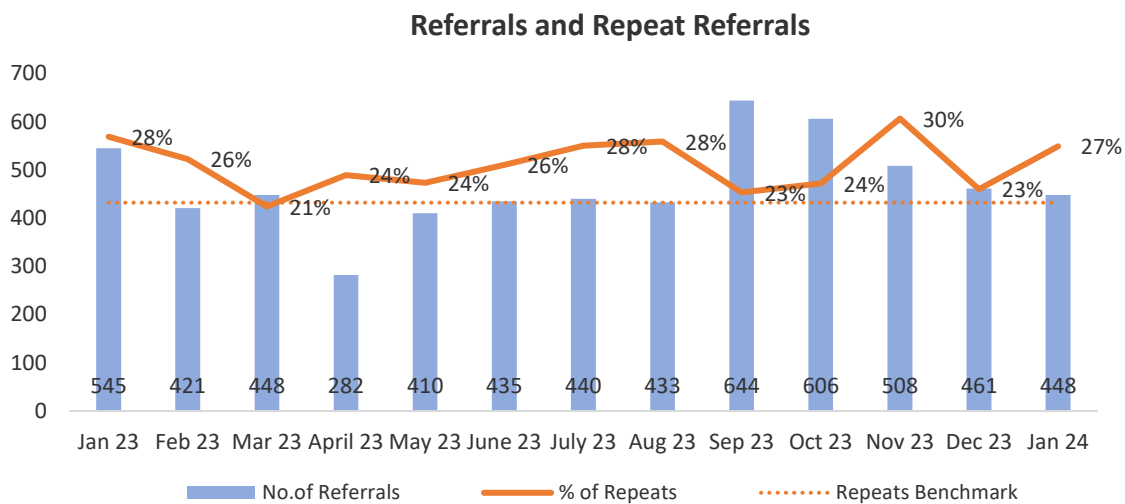
Repeat Referrals in Children’s Social Care

1 Background

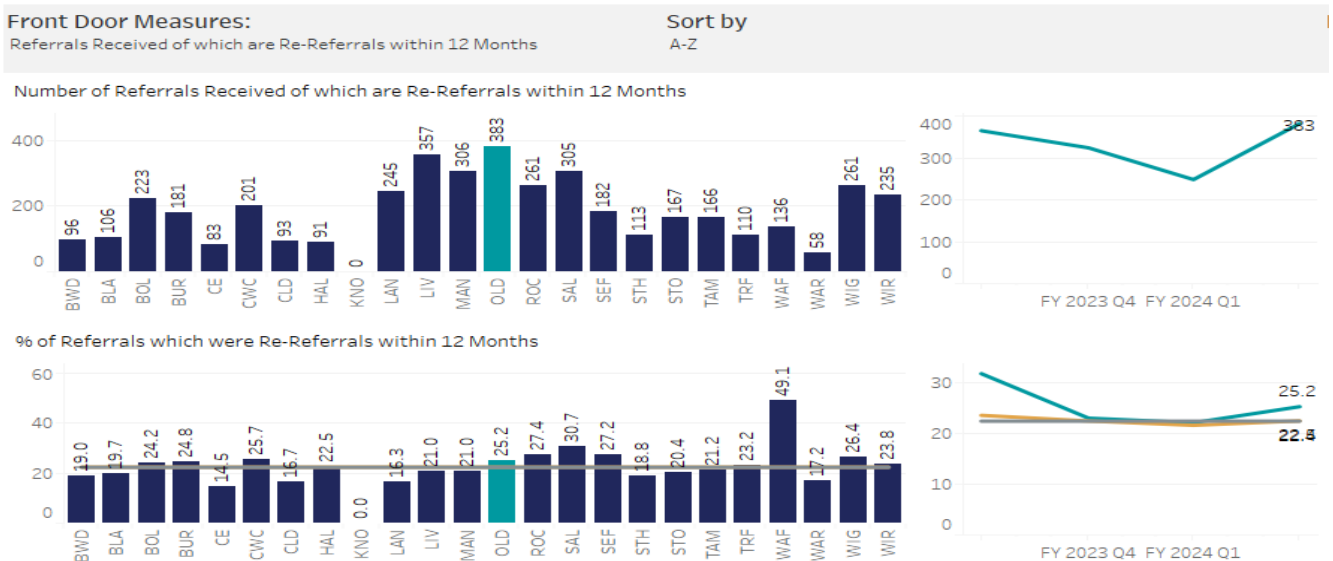
1.1 This report to the committee considers the current challenges across the Children’s Social Work Service, focusing in particular on the variable trajectory of repeat referrals over the past year. A re-referral relates to a family who has received two or more referrals through to Children’s Social Care services within a twelve-month period.

2 Current position

2.1 Since April 23 the trajectory of re-referrals into Children Services has steadily increased with a peak of 30% in November. There was a reduction in December 23 to 23% however re-referral rates for January 24 saw a further rise up to 27%. It is noteworthy that we remain higher than the repeats benchmark as indicated below and indicates a continued fluctuating pattern.



Regional information Group Q2



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- 2.2 The percentage comparison between Q2 2022 and Q2 2023 shows a 6.5% reduction in repeat referrals. This remains 2.7% above the north west average, however represents movement in the right direction. It is noted that there was a spike in demand in Autumn 2023, which has been a significant contributing factor to the number of repeat referrals into the service as noted in November 23 and January 24.
- 2.3 It is notable, that Oldham has the highest number of children subject to repeat referrals in the North West, however this mirrors Oldham also having the highest referral rate in the north west.
- 2.4 A key line of enquiry and deep dive was completed in October 2023. Reasons for repeat referrals are nuanced and complex in nature. There are multiple factors driving the repeat referral rate. Other quality assurance work across the service has been completed to feed into the broader picture surrounding repeat referrals (for example, dip sampling of supervisions, practice reviews etc)
- 2.5 The findings appear to highlight consistent themes evident in cases where there have been three or more referrals within a 12 month period. Many of the cases reviewed highlight that situations have been viewed through a singular lens and lack challenge or enquiry, despite recent history of social care intervention. It is notable that there had been some stability and reduction to rates of repeat referral prior to the spike in referrals in September and October 23. This increased demand saw average caseloads rise in the service from 19 to 23 and has impacted upon quality of work.
- 2.6 It is evident from some of the cases reviewed that instability within staffing has impacted. Changes of manager impacts upon management 'grip', and changes of social worker either lead to a 'start again' approach or lead to work being rushed to ensure timeframes are kept to, often at the expense of quality.
- 2.7 There is a theme noted relating to consent. Numerous cases have been closed without adequate step down given there is no parental consent to do so and threshold for statutory intervention is not crossed. If threshold for statutory intervention is not met case closure is the remaining option, however this does not reduce the likelihood of there being a further referral.
- 2.8 From review of repeat referrals (as per the process for repeat referrals in the Assessment and Intervention Service – see paragraph 3.2), there remain a proportion of examples where consent with one or multiple referrals was not obtained or uncertain, and consent has been overridden given the concerns raised leading to referral. Historically, there has been a trend whereby consent has not been a key consideration at the point of screening resulting in more referrals being processed. This issue has been addressed within MASH and changes have been implemented to address this ensuring that consent to referral is explicit, as well as clear management rationale to instances where it is deemed proportionate to override consent.
- 2.9 Supervision quality is variable, ranging from good examples where reflection and purposeful discussion are evident to case where direction is set with little challenge or scrutiny. Supervision sets the tone for the intervention and pressures around management of numbers rather than management of situations can sometimes be challenging.
- 2.10 In the midst of the sample seen, it is encouraging to note that there were some good pieces of work noted and that some repeat referrals are as a result of a different issue that could not have easily been predicted or prevented.

3 Key challenges and service response

- 3.1 The review findings have been shared with all team managers across the Children's Assessment and Intervention Service. All managers and social workers are aware of the expectations and minimum standards as defined within the practice standards.
- 3.2 There has been an increased drive towards quality of assessment and planning in the service in recent months in particular. The importance of ensuring children experience a timely and proportionate response where professional curiosity and challenge is clear is recognised. This has been modelled by heads of service to strengthen this approach through weekly case discussions for cases where they have been repeat referrals within the last 6 months, and also at the point of a case closure where there has been more than one referral within the same timeframe. This practice is well embedded and enables the service to identify key themes. Learning is shared with the manager and social worker directly and themes relating to screening, threshold or consent are shared with the Head of Service for MASH. Reflections, and challenge are duly recorded on the child's file to evidence oversight and where required, to set actions.
- 3.3 The step-down case transfer policy from Children Services into Early Help has been shared with all managers in the Assessment and Intervention Service and to ensure this process is following there are now monthly meetings between Heads of service from MASH, Assessment and Intervention, Early Help and Positive Steps to ensure that this process runs seamlessly.
- 3.4 The introduction and implementation of the relational model as championed by Professor David Thorpe has seen some changes initially in the number of contacts and referrals into Children's services, and this work continues. Challenges remain across the partnership in terms of a shared understanding of threshold and this has been a continual theme. Indeed there remains a high proportion of contacts (over 68.9% in Jan/Feb 24) that lead to information, advice, and guidance each month. Discussions continue to take place with key partner agency leads to ensure they are committed to providing children, young people, and families with the earliest possible early help, however depleted resources across the wider partnership have impacted on partners being able to deliver earliest possible intervention.
- 3.5 The recruitment and retention of suitably skilled and experienced social workers continues to be a significant challenge. We are working hard to strengthen our recruitment and retention offer to encourage experienced frontline workers to join Oldham on a permanent basis. The proposed national changes to agency work will likely support the drive towards a more permanent and skilled workforce. Indeed, the 'GM pledge' has seen an increase in staff wishing to seek permanent employment with the local authority, particularly in the senior social worker and Team Management layer. Stability in the workforce will enhance the opportunity to train and embed quality practice across Children's services.
- 3.6 Whilst demand remains high, the getting to good programme has observed a shift from improved compliance to that of improved quality. The Assessment and Intervention Service has consistently maintained high levels of completed assessments within timeframe. That said, we continue to recognise that poor quality assessment is a key factor in repeat referrals and drive towards improved assessments across the service. Work to address this has increased in the past 6 months. It is noteworthy that the repeat referral rate is cumulative and therefore is not demonstrative of improved step down plans for a period of around 6 months.

3.7 Case loads have been stable for some time in the service over the past year ranging from 19-23 on average. The additional investment into the service has meant that the transition from a duty and assessment service to an assessment and intervention service has been successful, with the additional capacity being used to support longer term interventions with family through the Child in Need Process.

4 Links to corporate outcomes

4.1 Meeting our statutory duties as corporate parents of children looked after and care leavers and providing timely and appropriate access to services and support to meet the needs of children, young people and families in Oldham is central to the co-operative values of the Council:

- **Thriving Communities** where people have the power to be healthy and happy and can make positive choices about their lives.
- **Co-operative Services** underpinned by collaboration, integration and innovation that improve outcomes for residents and create effective and seamless services.
- **An Inclusive Economy** where everyone has a fair chance to improve their living standards, wages and skills.

5 Priorities

5.1 The service will continue to drive forward the overview and scrutiny of practice across the whole system to track key themes and trends affecting re- referrals. Key actions to continue are:

- 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 all opportunities to support children and families has been explored.
- Weekly Head of Service oversight of all contacts where there have been three contacts into the Duty and Advice Service.
- Recruitment and retention strategy to continue to be our key focus in being able to create a stable and permanent workforce.
- Weekly close the loop sessions with practitioners and managers to share key learning from practice case reviews and dip sampling of assessment and interventions.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Repeat referrals will continue to require ongoing scrutiny. We have seen a modest reduction on the overall all percentage of cases where multiple referrals are received. Continued modelling of practice, feedback from practice review activity and reflective learning sessions have been positive contributors to the progress made. It is

acknowledged that further work is required to ensure the conditions for success are met. Stability in staffing is a key factor to this and we are proud to have increased the proportion of permanent managers over the last year from 27% to 64% with the view that this increased permanence of staff will lead to better embedded quality practice in the longer term.

Report to Children's Scrutiny Board

Children's Services - update on Financial Performance and Improvement Plan

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

Officer Contact: Julie Daniels, Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help

Report Authors: Andy Cooper, Senior Finance Manager / Sheila Garara, Assistant Director Children's Services Integration

20 March 2024

Purpose of the Report

This is an update to a previous report presented to the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 March 2023 titled 'Children's Services - update on Financial Performance and Getting to Good Programme' on progress in relation to Children's Social Care improvement plans and financial performance.

Executive Summary

Financial position

The month 9 financial position of Children's Social Care is a forecast pressure of £13.348m after the planned use of £0.269m of reserves.

Children's Social Care Demand

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

Getting to Good (GtG) Programme

The GtG programme continues to drive improvements in the quality of practice in Children's Social Care and Early Help. The programme has expanded its focus to a thematic approach, working with partners to continuously drive improvements in the quality of our work with vulnerable children, young people, and their families.

Children's Transformation and Sustainability Programme

The programme is delivering year one of an ambitious five-year programme across three strategic areas: earlier support for families, workforce stability and placement sufficiency. The programme is making progress to deliver targets and has direct oversight from the lead member of children and young people.

Children's Services in Oldham are keeping children and young people safe, seeing more positive outcomes and 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's Scrutiny Board notes the report and progress to date.

Children's Scrutiny Board

20 March 2024

Children's Services - update on Financial Performance and Getting to Good Plan

1 The current financial position of Children's Social Care

- 1.1 The directorate has benefited from significant additional financial investment over recent years, predominantly 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.
- 1.2 The service experienced significant financial pressure throughout 2022/23, the previous report; to the Performance, Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2023 reported the financial position for 2022/23 at month 9 which at that time was highlighting a pressure of £13.171m for Children's Social Care, this increased in the final quarter of 2022/23 and an overspend of £13.806m was reported at the end of the financial year. It was recognised there was a need to invest further to deliver the council's priority of supporting children and young people. Cabinet at its meeting on 12 December 2022 approved the report 'Children's Services Investment Proposals' which outlined an investment of £14.700m for 2023/24. This comprised of £11.800m recurrent funding to stabilise the financial position and one-off funding of £2.900m into several invest to save initiatives. The table below presents the expected financial returns.

Table- Children's Social Care Investment Proposals- December 2022

Investment Plan	2023/24 £k	2024/25 £k	2025/26 £k	2026/27 £k	2027/28 £k	2028/29 £k
Providing The Best Care	583	(548)	(181)	(102)	14	(71)
A Better Place to be a Social Worker	2,941	(1,610)	(1,097)	(730)	(650)	(791)
Supporting Foster Carers	(624)	(742)	(908)	(461)	(362)	(432)
Investment Initiatives - Reserves	(2,900)	2,900	0	0	0	0
Return on Investment	0	0	(2,186)	(1,293)	(998)	(1,294)

2023/24 Financial Position

- 1.3 The council's forecasted revenue position for 2023/24 at 31 December 2023 (month 9) is projecting an adverse variance of £16.642m. This includes a forecasted pressure of £13.348m for Children's Social Care and incorporates the use of reserves totaling £0.269m. The table below presents the financial position, by Directorate for Children's Social Care at month 9.

Table- Summary Financial Position Month 9

Children's Social Care	Revised Budget £k	Forecast £k	Use of Reserves £k	Variance M09 £k
Children in Care	36,066	47,229	0	11,163
Fieldwork & Family Support	12,478	15,369	-88	2,803
Children's Safeguarding	3,256	2,986	-31	-301
Children's Services- Integration	2,639	2,472	-150	-317
Total Children's Social Care	54,439	68,056	-269	13,348

- 1.4 The single largest area of financial pressure is within the placements budget which is forecasting a net adverse variance of £11.634m. Despite the additional investment of £14.700m, there have been further demand pressures in 2023/24 both in the number of children requiring placements and the cost of individual/existing placements. In addition, there have been some delays in the invest to save initiatives which have contributed to the pressure such as the delivery of a children's home. The table below analyses placements by type.

Table- Analysis of Placement Expenditure

Placements at Month 9	Revised budget £k	Forecast £k	Variance £k
Out of Borough Placement- Gross	11,251	20,915	9,664
Continuing Health Care Contribution	-1,233	-2,009	-776
Out of Borough Placement- Net	10,019	18,907	8,888
Semi - Independent Unit	2,395	4,620	2,225
Childrens Independent Foster Agency	1,945	2,395	450
Parent and Baby Assessment Placement	612	822	210
Services - Professional Fees	0	92	92
Staying Put Scheme	201	268	67
Secure - Remand	0	43	43
Direct Payments – PA Support	199	228	28
Assistance To Families Grants	0	19	19
Special Guardianship Payments	1,335	1,350	16
Allowances To Foster Parents	4,992	5,003	11
Shared Lives	0	11	11
Payments To Other Local Authorities	101	110	9
Direct Payments	0	1	1
Residence Orders Payments	28	26	-2
After Care Section 24 Payments	88	67	-20
Adoption Allowances	316	240	-76
Foster Care Placements- Relatives or Friends	1,327	1,245	-83
Expenditure	23,558	35,447	11,888
Contribution From Other Local Authorities	0	-90	-90
Former UASC - Care Leavers	-207	-287	-80
Supported Accommodation Reform	-77	-155	-77
Other Recoveries Of Costs	0	-6	-6
Non-Residential Income	0	-1	-1
Staying Put Grant	-201	-201	0
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)	-636	-636	0
Income	-1,122	-1,376	-255
Total	22,437	34,070	11,634

- 1.5 The largest area of pressure is Out of Borough Placements with a forecast pressure of £9.664. As at 31 December 2023 there were 58 children placed in this category of care at a weekly average cost of £6,500. There are 16 current placements projected to 31 March 2024 with a weekly cost that is higher than the average and the highest cost per week is £22,085, equivalent to £1.148m per annum. The overspend is netted down to £8.888m 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.

- 1.6 In addition to increased pressure on placements there continues to be a reliance on agency staff, in social work and related posts, to address demand and help maintain a fully established workforce. The hourly rates paid to agency staff have increased significantly in the last two years. The pressure at month 9 is £2.388m and is the main contributing factor to the overspend of £2.803m within Fieldwork and Family Support. Other contributing pressures are Assistance to Families (£0.203m), No Recourse to Public Funds (£0.124m) and Legal Costs (£0.076m)
- 1.7 It should be noted that whilst there continues to be reliance on agency staff there has been a slight reduction in 2023/24 which is a result of the appointment of permanent staff through an improved 'Choose Oldham' recruitment campaign and the 'Growing Our Own' workforce model with newly qualified social workers progressing into full case-holding social worker roles following their Assisted and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) where they have a protected caseload. The percentage of agency staff in Social Work England Qualified posts has reduced from 44.8% in April 2023 to 38.9% in December 2023
- 1.8 The agency rates have become a particular focus due to increasing costs, both nationally and locally and from 1 November 2023, Oldham signed up to the Greater Manchester (GM) Pledge which means that any new agency workers starting from the 1 November 2023 will be paid at standard rates agreed across GM. The rates apply to social workers, senior social workers, senior practitioners, and team managers but does not apply to existing staff.
- 1.9 Offsetting the overspends are underspends of £0.301m and £0.317m respectively within Children's Safeguarding and Children's Services- Integration; both predominantly as a result of staffing underspends
- 1.10 There continues to be recognition of the ongoing demand pressures in 2023/24 and a further £9.613m will be invested in Children's Social Care in 2024/25 which represents a total investment of £24.313m (£21.413m recurrent) over 2 years. The £9.613m recurrent funding is to further stabilise the financial position. In addition, the children's investment plan is intended to deliver a range of invest to save initiatives in 2024/25. The investment plan is currently being refreshed with finance colleagues, the Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help and the Assistant Director of Children's Services Integration.
- 1.11 Council at its meeting on 28 February 2024 approved budget reductions for Children's Social Care of £3.317m for 2024/25 and a further £1.037m for 2025/26. The deliverability of these reductions will be monitored and reported during the budget monitoring cycle in 2024/25.

2 Children's Social Care and Early Help Demand

- 2.1 Against a backdrop of increased demand nationally post-pandemic and particularly in the Northwest, contextual factors such as poverty, deprivation, the pandemic, and cost of living crisis are having 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 people contacting Children's Social Care and Early Help for advice and support with an associated increase in referrals for statutory social work services. This has led to increases in the numbers of children and young people across all our cohorts (children in need, children subject to child protection plans,

children looked after and care leavers) with 50% additional demand compared to 3 years ago, as demonstrated in the charts below comparing Oldham to our statistical neighbours.



2..3 This high level of volume and complexity of demand, which was unprecedented in 2022, has been sustained throughout 2023 and into 2024 demonstrates the impact of contextual factors facing families in Oldham. In February 2024, there were 2,026 contacts into the MASH with 407 (20.1%) of these converting to referrals for statutory services. Children's Social Care and Early Help are providing support to 4,110 Children and Young People including 1,372 children and young people open to early help, 1,401 children in need, 511 subject to child protection plans, 590 children looked after and 236 care leavers.

3 Getting to Good Programme update

3.1 As part of the delivery of the Getting to Good Strategy, the "Getting to Good" (GtG) programme was launched across Children's Social Care and Early Help services in October 2022 to:

- Enhance the quality of frontline practice to support vulnerable children, young people, and their families.
- Continue to effectively manage continued high levels of demand.

-
- Sustain performance of some key indicators.
 - Improve the stability of the workforce.
- 3.2 The programme has focused on four key strategic priorities (the 4p's): Practice, People, Partnerships and Processes, which are underpinned by delivering the seven fundamentals of practice: management oversight and key decision making, reflective supervision, visits to children, assessment, plans, case summaries, and chronologies.
- 3.3 The programme fostered collaboration across services and with partners to collectively drive improvement. A series of focused "sprints," each lasting twelve weeks, were implemented to maintain momentum and ensure targeted, achievable goals. This agile approach has been supported by detailed performance and quality assurance reporting to gauge the effectiveness of interventions and identify areas needing further attention.
- 3.4 To ensure a comprehensive focus on enhancing the quality of frontline practice, a robust governance structure is in place, with management oversight of the programme through the Children's Assurance Board, led by the Managing Director for Children and Young People and Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help to closely monitor progress and impact. Progress and impact have been effectively challenged and supported through regular reporting to the chief executive, the independently chaired Getting to Good Board, the portfolio member and leader of the council.
- 3.5 The Local Government Association (LGA) peer review and North-West Association of Children's Services (NWADCS) peer challenge have recognised the positive impact of this agile programme approach.
- 3.6 **Key achievements in 2023** – improving the lives of children and young people through quality of social work:
- We're managing demand, keeping children and young people safe and seeing more positive outcomes.

Early Help

- Early help positive outcomes have been achieved for 90% of families at case closure.
- Better integrated working relationships with schools.
- Additional capacity across the early help district teams to manage demand and strengthen management oversight of cases. Caseloads have reduced, supporting improvement in timeliness and quality of work with children. Young people and their families.
- Learning from quality assurance activity has informed training in the use of genograms and chronologies. There is evidence of good case recordings and information is child focused. The improved early help performance dashboard gives managers greater oversight of activity for better performance management.

Help and protection

- The Children's Duty and Advice team in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has been remodeled to enable professionals to seek timely advice and guidance regarding children and families they are supporting via the phone instead of through an online referral, which continues to be used out of hours.
- There is a timely response to identified risks and concerns. The timeliness and quality of assessments, visits, direct work, Children in Need (CiN) and Child Protection Plans (CPP) and reviews are progressively improving leading to direct help for families.
- Robust management oversight and multi-agency planning for all high-risk child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and children missing from home/care.

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- During 2022/23, the expanded Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) team have supported 352 survivors of abuse with 378 children to access safe accommodation, either through a refuge, dispersed accommodation, or sanctuary support to remain in their own home.
 - Investment in a perpetrator offer to respond to high levels of domestic abuse incidents.

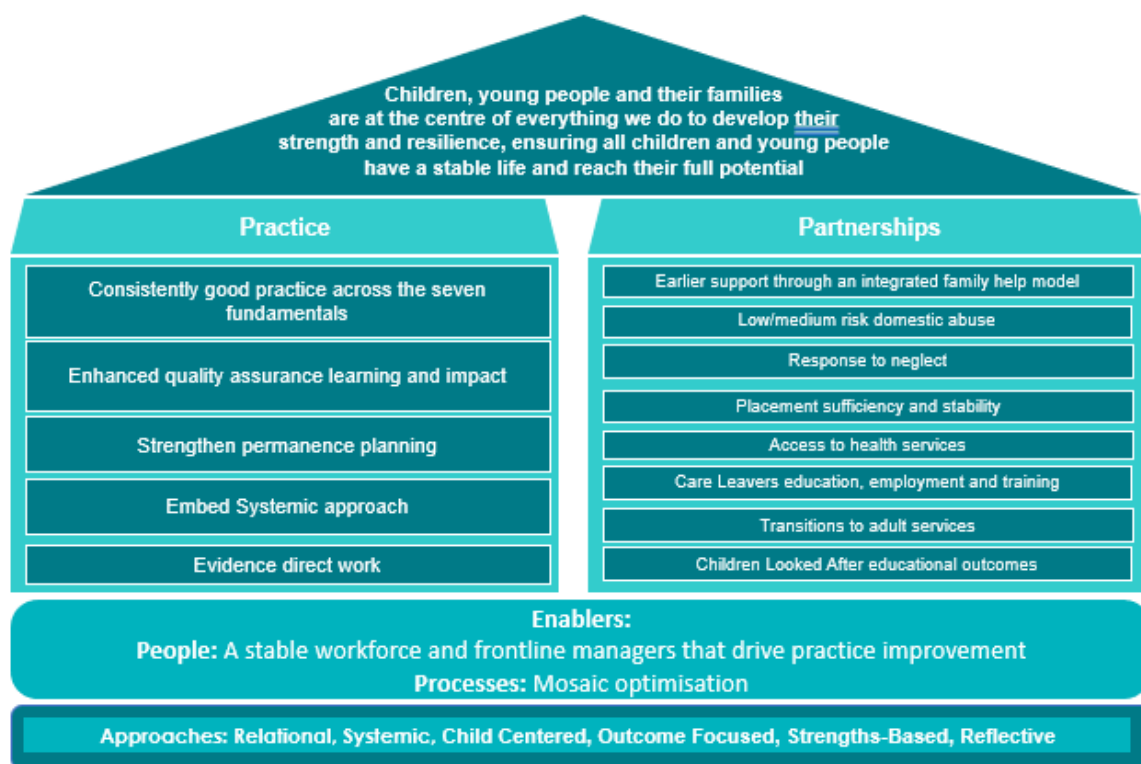
Children in care and care leavers

- More children are achieving permanence outside public care through adoption, Special Guardianship Orders, and reunification with parents.
- There's been a sustained focus on recruitment and retention of foster carers leading to an increase in connected/kinship carers enabling our children and young people to live in familiar communities, remaining in their schools, and maintaining links with family and friends.
- The quality of visits and direct work with children and young people has improved. Care plans are reviewed regularly, child's views are well represented, and most children and young people participate in their care planning.
- Personal Adviser (PAs) have positive, trusting, and stable relationships with care leavers, they know their young people well, are regularly in touch with them and have an excellent understanding of their needs and circumstances.

Workforce

- The early help service has retained a stable and experienced workforce, who have excellent knowledge and understanding of Oldham's communities. There is low staff turnover and no agency workers.
- Social workers have manageable caseloads at an average of 17.
- There is an embedded and consistent focus on the fundamentals of practice for all staff and managers.
- Introduced a monthly induction for all new starters so they have a full understanding of the service area they work in, how they fit into the wider directorate in achieving the council's priorities and have an overview of the issues and challenges faced by children, young people, and families in Oldham.
- There are reduced complaints and increased compliments from children, young people, and families.

3.7 Improvement priorities in 2024 – the GtG programme will continue throughout 2024 following a recent refresh of the strategic priorities and actions in the Getting to Good Strategy. The agile programme approach will continue, focusing on targeted improvement interventions, through systemic, relational, and strengths-based approaches across key themes, to meet the complex needs of children, young people, and their families, which are outlined below:



3.8 Within each thematic area there are high level actions, to be delivered and reviewed quarterly, enabling us to assess and evidence progress and make informed adjustments that will drive further improvements to deliver better outcomes for vulnerable children, young people, and families in Oldham.

4 Children’s Transformation and Sustainability Programme update

4.1 Our ambition is to be the best borough for children and young people and the staff and services that work with them. In December 2022, the council made a £14.7 million investment into vital children’s social care and family support services in the borough.

4.2 The children’s investment plan, as set out in section 1.2 of this report, set the mandate for delivering ambitious plans through a five-year **transformation and financial sustainability programme** across three strategic areas:

- **Earlier support for families:** delivering more support for families, at an earlier stage, without needing intensive support from statutory services through an integrated model of family help
- **Workforce stability:** making Oldham a great place to work with children and young people by recruiting and retaining great social workers and managers through a ‘grow our own’ workforce model.
- **Placement sufficiency:** providing a stable home for every child in our care by increasing the number of council foster carers, residential provision, local externally commissioned placements and securing suitable accommodation for over 18s.

4.3 Workstream progress and impact are outlined below:

Strand 1: Earlier Support for Families

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- Beaver family hub has significantly transformed accessibility for information and support for families with the centre seeing twice as many families than the other children's centres combined. Stanley Road family hub will open in March 2024. The remaining 4 family hubs at Spring Meadows, Medlock Vale, Shaw, and Alexandra will be open by the end of April 2024.
 - In addition to investment in targeted early help capacity, which is currently supporting over 1,300 children and young people, there has been investment in a range of services to support earlier intervention including:
 - £60k per annum in grants to VCSFE groups.
 - Homestart services.
 - Partnership workers providing intensive support to schools.
 - Parenting team supporting parents at all levels of need.
 - Online parenting advice.
 - Strengthening support through the domestic abuse team by appointing engagement workers to work with medium risk victims of domestic abuse.

Strand 2: Workforce Stability

- As part of the 'Grow our Own' workforce model, we continue to successfully recruit newly qualified social workers (23), apprentices (16), Frontline students (11), Step up to Social Work students (2) and Return to Social Work placements (2) (February 2024).
- A bespoke recruitment campaign 'Choose Oldham' is having a positive impact with increased interest in social work roles through social media campaigns, apprentice drop-in sessions and a Manchester Metropolitan University career fair.
- Between January 2023 and December 2023, 63 social work qualified staff were recruited, 34 of which were external and 28 internal staff who progressed or changed role.
- The service is adhering to the Greater Manchester agency pledge which has been in place from 1 November 2023, recruiting agency social workers via the Reed framework and complying with the agreed rates of pay.
- The agency rate of our full establishment is at 19.7%, and of Social Work England qualified staff is 38.5% at February 2024.

Strand 3: Placement Sufficiency

Foster Care

- Through a bespoke recruitment and retention strategy there are 310 children in care are living with internal foster carers, the highest number for a considerable time following the registration of 25 new foster carers this financial, indicating the positive impact of the investment in increasing foster carer allowances.
- The first specialist foster carer Mockingbird constellation launched on 2 March at Cockfield Farm, that will support five foster carers to improve placement stability. The second constellation will launch in June 2024 in line with the investment plan.
- We have seen an increase in the number of children exiting care through special guardianship orders (6%) and adoption, including foster to adopt (19% compared to 13% in 2022/23).

Residential Placements

- A robust business case has been undertaken and cabinet report submitted in March 2024 to accelerate the invest plan target of delivering one new children's home to three homes by seeking approval to refurbish an existing asset Royton Children's Centre into a 1 x 4 bed children's home for 3 placements by January 2025 and purchase and refurbish 2 x 3 bed homes acquired on the open market for 4 placements by April 2025.
- Launched the Strategic Partnership Provider Pledge in December 2023 that has strengthened partnership working across the local provider market, with shared

responsibility to deliver high quality placements that meet children and young people's needs and to improve placement sufficiency.

- Participation in GM projects i.e. fostering recruitment, House Project and Project Skyline as part of the GM strategic commissioning arrangements for new residential provision, increased foster carers and specialist support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).
- As part of commissioning market management, we are developing lease options for securing local semi-independent placements for 16-18 year olds and securing homes for independent living for care leavers and UASC aged over 18 years with council housing colleagues, local housing providers and private landlords in line with the placement sufficiency strategy.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 Service leaders continue to effectively manage high demand for children's services in Oldham, maintaining manageable caseloads to an average of 17, 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 such as place-based integration in local communities and an increased focus on early intervention and prevention seeks to address the high levels of demand for statutory services. Additionally, through the delivery of the Getting to Good programme, and Children's Transformation and Sustainability Programme, Children's Services in Oldham are keeping children and young people safe, seeing more positive 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.

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