

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD
02/10/2024 at 6.00 pm



Present: Councillor Hobin (Chair)
Councillors Adams, Z Ali, Aslam, Ball, Bishop, Hughes, Malik
(Substitute), McLaren and Moores (Vice-Chair)

Also in Attendance:

Mohon Ali	Cabinet Member
Rhys Attwell	Constitutional Services
Jon Bloor	Head of Enterprise and Skills
Matthew Bulmer	Director Education Early Years and Skills
Andy Collinge	Head of School Support Services
Julie Daniels	Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help
Sheila Garara	Childrens Services
Steve Hughes	Oldham MBC
Shaid Mushtaq	Cabinet Member
Gail Stott	Performance Improvement Lead
Amanda Youlden	Access Service

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were Apologies for absence from Cllr Shuttleworth.

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 received.

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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd July 2024 be approved as a correct record.

6 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Sheila Garcia presented to the scrutiny board the Corporate Performance Report 2024/25 for Q1 Corporate Performance Report. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of corporate performance against agreed service business plan measures for the 2024/25 Q1 period (April – June). The current reporting format has been developed with the intent of bringing more mature performance reporting online once the ongoing Business Insight, Performance and Strategy Programme (BIPS) Programme and Digital Services Foundation (DSF) Project have been completed. Historically, a full CPR has gone to the Governance, Strategy and Resources (GSR) Scrutiny Board; however, now there are four Scrutiny Boards, it is deemed more appropriate that the constituent parts go to the appropriate

meeting to enable more in-depth analysis and discussion of the CPR.

In relation to data provided in the report, Members and Officers discussed the need for more clearer formatting to make the report easier to read.

In response to questions concerning recruitment freeze, Officers informed Members of the Scrutiny Board that due to the financial position of the council, Childrens Social Care had lost a full team, which had impacted the caseload of social workers. Furthermore, it was noted that the Council are in a GM pledge when it comes to retention, with caseloads being continuously reviewed and managed.

There was a discussion between Officers and Members of the Scrutiny Board that Keeping children in Oldham safe was the priority. It was however noted by Officers that there had been a problem around recruiting experienced social workers, but this issue was not unique to Oldham and could be seen at a national level.

Members expressed the need to get the balance right between experience and newly qualified social workers.

In response to questions about recruitment on a local level, Members of the Board were informed that, there had been apprenticeships and job application advertised.

In response to questions about social workers contract specifying a minimum term of service at the Council, Members were informed that this would not be legally binding, and instead would try to retain social workers by having an enhanced starting salary.

In terms of targets set out in the report, Members of the Board were informed that this would be determined by national benchmarks.

In response to Members questions regarding consistency in children having the same social worker, with Members being informed that each individual case will vary. Stating that changes in social workers would be impacted by retention and high turnover.

Matt Bulmer (Director for Education) noted that in relation to Ofsted inspections, which potential schools may be inspected next, and what schools at the time of the meeting required improvement. In addition, The Director for Education noted that there had been considerable improvements in the schools, that did require improvements.

In terms of supporting children with special educational needs, it was noted that there was significant capacity coming this year on streaming. With an additional 10 advisory teachers who can offer support, in the hopes that enough preventative measures would stop some parents applying for a healthcare plan.

Members of the scrutiny Board noted that Oldham College had been offering entry funded programme from level 2 and 3 accredited courses, and delivered from age 19 onwards, associated with adult lifelong learning.

RESOLVED: that-

- 1) note the progress in implementing the business plan objectives.
- 2) celebrate areas of consistent good performance.
- 3) note the comments on progress.
- 4) consider areas for review (good or poor) that could produce learning for the organisation.
- 5) note the interconnection of these actions with ongoing activities within the Directorate or Portfolio and corporate key projects such as our Cost-of-Living Response and Don't Trash Oldham
- 6) consider benchmarking reports from open data sources.
- 7) review performance in the context of our borough and the demands on our services.

7

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 introduced by Cabinet Member Mohon Ali. The Annual Report was for information and an opportunity for members to scrutinise and challenge activities in the preceding academic year. The report would update the Board on current participation and NEET rates together with a summary on activity during the past academic year and planned in the future to ensure that we are shaping and influencing opportunities where possible for our 16–18- year-olds.

It was noted that the Council had continued 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 SEND (EHC plans) and Children Looked After (CLA) cohort. Due to the contract term coming to an end, the Local Authority (LA) was currently undergoing a procurement exercise, with the new contract being in place on 1 April 2025.

It was noted that the approach across partners in Oldham was to ensure that young people were empowered to access the advice and support they require; that they have opportunities available to engage with young people to hear their voices and respond in the best way.

It was noted that the report would update the Board on Participation, NEET (not in education, employment, or training) and unknown rates across the academic year that began in September 2023 and culminated in July 2024, together with a

summary on activity planned in the future to ensure that are shaping and influencing where possible for our 16–18-year-olds.

Members of scrutiny board were informed that there is work undertaken to try and reduce NEET levels and deploys preventive measures to stop someone becoming NEET status.

Amanda Youlden Provided highlights of the report, informing members of the board that her team are working hard on unknown rate across Oldham, deploying different methods which had reduced the rate to 0.63%, which was approximately 43 people across YR 12 and 13.

Members of the Scrutiny Board were informed that the group “Interventions power Oldham”, a service that offers mentoring, had there funding extended until September 2025.

On top of the support, there has been more resources allocated like with Oldham college where AI had been deployed to look out for any “wobblers” who will identify any patters to stop young people dropping out of college.

Post 16 there has been a population growth, with certain challenges around enough college places. It was noted that there would be a calculation using census data to see what places were available, and if any gaps were present. In addition, Yr 13 participation rate was lower than Yr 12, with there being a need to find out what support could be provided.

Members of the scrutiny board expressed their opinion that any feedback concerning college age students, was more appropriate to come from students rather than the college itself.

In response to questions concerning children’s disability team in 2.36 of the report, Members were informed that there will be a follow up after the meeting concerning the publication of the transition booklet described in the report.

Members were informed that in relation to working with partners, the council were seeking to utilise the private sector and charity sector and bring them on board with NEET related issues.

There was a discussion about the need for more vocational and alternative approaches to the standardised curriculum, with it being expressed that every child learns differently.

RESOLVED: that-

- 1) The Scrutiny Board note the Participation of Young People aged 16 – 18 in Education, Employment or Training report.
- 2) Note the range of interventions currently in place to support young people into EET and prevent the incidence of NEET increasing.

The report for Delivery of Additional School Places and Admissions was delivered to the scrutiny board by Andy Collinge ((Head of School Support Services). The report would provide a briefing and update to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board on the delivery of school places and school place preference rates within the Local Authority (LA.)

To provide an update on the delivery of additional school places and the work of the Council's Education Support Services including Allocation of school places by ward; The percentage of residents who are offered a school place of choice (1st or top 3 preferences); Overview of the current demand for school places.

It was noted that Appendix 1 attached to the report, showed the detail for 1st and top 3 preferences in Oldham for secondary places by ward. In 2023, 80.4% of residents were offered their first choice of secondary school; this decreased to 75.7% in 2024. In 2023, 91.2% of pupils gained a place at one of their top 3 preferences of secondary school; in 2024 this had increased to 94.1%. In the majority of wards over 90% of residents are offered a place at one of their top 3 preferences. It was noted that national rates for secondary for first preferences are 82.9% and top 3 preferences are 94.6%.

It was noted that Appendix 2 showed first preferences rates for primary places in Oldham by ward. In 2023 92.9% of pupils gained a place at their first preference school; there had been an increase this year to 94.1%. In 2023, 96.6% of pupils gained a place at one of their 3 top preferences for primary schools; this had increased to 98.1 % in 2024. National rates for primary places are first preferences 93.2% and top 3 preferences 98.6 %.

In response to questions concerning the Academy trust-maintained schools, Matt Bulmer the Director of Education, Skills, and Early Years informed the Scrutiny Board are not allowed to be extended in size by local authority. The Local Authority responsibility is to ensure that all children in Oldham receive a school place in Oldham.

There was a discussion concerning Waterhead Academy, with the Director of Education, Skills and Early Years informing the Scrutiny Board that Waterhead Academy had an agreement with other local schools that it would not receive late admissions into the school, in order to try and improve its Ofsted standing.

Members were concerned about the reputation of Waterhead Academy, with there being a desire to see the reputation of the school improved. The Director of Education, Skills and Early Years did reflect that schools like businesses have to manage their own reputation, with a suggestion of more public engagements with parents and the community potentially helping to improve the reputation.

RESOLVED: that-

- 1) The Scrutiny Board noted the report for Delivery of Additional School Places and Admissions.

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CHILDRENS SERVICES - IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND FINANCE UPDATE REPORT



Julie Daniels the Director of Children’s Social Care and Early Help presented the Children’s Services - update on Financial Performance, Improvement Plan and Transformation and Sustainability Programme. It was noted that this was an update to a previous report presented to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Board on 20 March 2024 titled ‘Children’s Services - update on Financial Performance and Improvement Plan’ on progress in relation to Children’s Social Care improvement plans and financial performance.

Members noted the financial position the month 4 financial position of Children’s Social Care, was a forecasted pressure of £12.261m after the planned use of £0.315m of reserves.

Members noted that in terms of Children’s Social Care Demand, that Children’s Social Care continued to experience sustained high volumes and complexity of demand demonstrating the impact of contextual factors facing families in Oldham. It was explained that Services continued to effectively manage demand and maintain manageable caseloads in a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Members noted that in terms of Achieving Excellence Strategy and Improvement Programme, it was noted that there was the successful “Getting to Good strategy and improvement programme” which was being re-launched as ‘Achieving Excellence’ following the positive outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection. Service leaders across Children’s Social Care and Early Help, working with partners, continued to drive improvement in the quality of work with vulnerable children, young people, and their families.

Members noted that in terms of Children’s Transformation and Sustainability Programme. The programme had continued to deliver ambitious plans across three strategic areas: earlier support for families, workforce stability and placement sufficiency. The programme was making progress to deliver targets and has direct oversight from the lead member for children and young people. Children’s Services in Oldham are keeping children and young people safe, improving outcomes and were in a strong position to further improve the delivery of timely and effective services to support vulnerable children, young people, and their families.

Members of the Scrutiny Board were informed that the Council were piloting the new Mockingbird model, which had seen positive feedback.

In addition, there would also be 30 newly qualified social workers, which would meet previous targets set out, with Members being informed that 7 social workers were due to qualify soon.

It was noted that Cabinet, had agreed in March 2024 to create three children's homes, with Members of the board being informed that good progress had been made with developments.

In response to Members questions concerning the Council funding the secure welfare, it was confirmed that this was a court ordered payment up to £32,000 a week. The Council had no option but to follow the court ordered payment.

In response to questions about why the council was using independent fostering carers, it was noted that this were due to a shortage in fostering carers.

RESOLVED: that-

- 1) That Members of the Scrutiny Board note the update on Financial Performance, Improvement Plan and Transformation and Sustainability Programme report and progress made.

10 **WORK PROGRAMME**

RESOLVED: That to note the work programme.

11 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

RESOLVED: That to note the Key Decision Document.

12 **RULE 13 AND 14**

N/A.

The meeting started at 18:00pm and ended at 20:15pm.