

**Present:** Councillor Hobin (Chair)  
Councillors Adams, Z Ali, Ball, Bishop, McLaren (Vice-Chair),  
Moores and Shuttleworth

Also in Attendance:  
Matthew Bulmer (Director of Education, Early Years and Skills)  
Anthony Decrop (Assistant Director of Safeguarding)  
Tony Shepherd (Assistant Director, Education & Early Years)  
Jodie Barber (Head of Youth Services)  
Durga Paul (Constitutional Services)

1           **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Hussain, Iqbal,  
Hughes, M Ali and Mushtaq.

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 this meeting to consider.

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

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup>  
January 2025 be approved as a correct record with the below  
amendment.

Cllr Shuttleworth was not present at the meeting and sent his  
apologies.

6           **REPEAT REFERRALS IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE**

Members received a positive update on the rate of repeat  
referrals in Children's Social Care. The rate has been 15%  
which is below the national benchmark of 22.4%. The next  
phase of work is to sustain this progress to ensure the rate  
remains at or below this benchmark

Members queried whether the financial situation of the Council  
has been impacted by the reduced number of repeat referrals.  
Officers explained that there have been savings made by work  
done to secure more permanent social workers and managers,  
so savings have been made on agency fees. However, the key  
benefit of a reduction in repeat referrals is an improved quality of  
practice due to the reduced caseload rather than financial  
savings.

In response to member queries, Officers explained some of the circumstances around which repeat referrals are made. Some referrals are prematurely stepped down, but work has now been done to strengthen the step-down plans once a case is no longer at Social Worker threshold. In other instances, there has been a decreased quality of assessment due to workforce issues. This has been addressed with an improved and more stable workforce with consistent good and outstanding practice being delivered.

Officers confirmed that the reduction in repeat referrals is not due to an increase in the threshold for referrals being made. The referral process has not changed, but the practice has improved due to a more stable and effective workforce.

**RESOLVED** that, the Children and Young People Board notes the report and the good progress to date.

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### **SACRE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Scrutiny Board received the SACRE report from the Assistant Director of Education & Early Years. The Board received an introduction and overview of the Work of SACRE

Members questioned if Secondary schools had specialist teachers in Religious Education, and whether gaps in these were reflected in exam results. Officers confirmed that there are gaps in the provision and other non-specialist humanities teachers are teaching religious education in schools. This is reflected on a national scale with continues challenges in recruiting teachers with a specialty in the subject. Although Officers did note that schools expressed in a survey that they did not feel that it impacted their exam results.

In response to Member queries about vacancies in the SACRE Membership constituent committees, Officers clarified the recruitment process. Vacancies are often advertised through word of mouth, within schools and interfaith forums. Attendance has increased this year, but not across all committees. In attempts to address this, SACRE are regularly working with new venues and visiting different religious centres to engage with different people.

Members noted that there were no exam entries noted for 2 Oldham Secondary Schools and queried whether Religious Education was offered within these schools. Officers clarified that the figures in the report indicated the number of examined courses participated in, and there was a possibility that Religious Education was being offered as a non-examined course in those schools. It is also possibility that the course is being delivered through PSHE, assembly or a tutor group and not necessarily a specialist class. In response to Member queries, Officers are to investigate what the Religious Education Offer is at the 2 secondary Schools and feedback to the Board.

**RESOLVED** that,

1. officers are to determine what the Religious Education offer is within the 2 Schools which have 0 entrants onto the examined course
2. the Children and Young People Board notes the SACRE Annual Report.

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## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Board received the Corporate Performance Report from the Director of Education, Early Years and Skills, Acting Director Children's Social Care and Early Help and Head of Youth Services. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of corporate performance against agreed service business plan measures for the 2024/25.

The Director of Education, Early Years and Skills gave Members an overview of the Performance Measures & Business Plan Report for Education & Early Years. The Board heard a summary of areas where targets were being met or exceeded but focus was on areas where targets were not met. Officers explained that the figure of 51.1% of EHC Plans completed within 20 weeks was just a snapshot of a period in the last quarter, and this figure is currently over 90% which is higher than the national average. Similarly, the figure provided for Annual Reviews is improved from the report and is currently 75%, which is much improved and comparable to the national average.

Members queried whether the Officers had adequate resourcing to effectively address the increased number of EHCP's. The number of EHCP's issues typically increases by approximately 5% each year, last year it increased by 11% which is significantly more than expected. Officers confirmed that a movement to an online Case Management system had increased efficiency. There is also improved quality assurance with the introduction of National AI Software to support processes. These changes have ensured continuation of good service even with the increase in numbers.

In response to member queries, Officers further clarified that the increased number of EHCP's being issued were due to combination of reasons. Some due to people moving into the areas, but figures show that 30% of the 11% increase seen last year were in early years. Work being done to support Early Years settings has led to earlier detection of SEN in children.

Next, the Board heard from the Acting Director Children's Social Care and Early Help on the performance figures within this service. All areas but one saw an improvement since the last quarter. Officers explained that the average workload had reduced and that the number of Agency Social Workers has further reduced from the figures on the report to 25.3% because

of the apprentice/training programme that has been introduced at the Council.



Members raised concerns about the number of children placed within in-house provision. Officers explained that there are initiatives in place and work being done to get closer to the target, for example there are 3 care homes currently being built. Work is also being done to look at the wider family network of children coming into care and the possibility of placing them with extended family or in kinship care.

In response to Member queries, Officers confirmed that there is grant funding in place to create extra rooms/refurbish properties to help to subsidise those who want to foster do not have the space or resources to move to a bigger property.

Finally, the Board heard from Head of Youth Services who reported that all corporate targets are being met or exceeded. The team are carrying 3 vacancies, so they are facing some challenges as Youth Services roles are known nationally are a difficult role to recruit to. In response to Member queries, Officers noted that they were also facing some challenges in finding venues to hold sessions in some districts, particularly in East Oldham, but work is being done to address this. Members commended the good work being done in Youth Services.

**RESOLVED** that, the Children and Young People Board notes the Corporate Performance Report.

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**WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED** that, the Work Programme be noted by the Board.

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**KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

**RESOLVED** that, the Key Decision Document be noted by the Board.

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**RULE 13 AND 14**

N/A

The meeting started at 7.00pm and ended 8.40pm