

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY BOARD
27/11/2025 at 6.00 pm



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

Also in Attendance:

Jodie Barber	Service Manager - Youth Service
Michelle Bernasconi	AD for Social Work
Matthew Bulmer	Director Education Early Years and Skills
Julie Daniels	Executive Director, Children and Young People
Anthony Decrop	Children's Services - Oldham Borough Council
Sheila Garara	Children's Services
Natassja Gollcher	Head of MASH, EDT and Complex Safeguarding
Jack Grennan	Constitutional Services
Shaid Mushtaq	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Gail Stott	Performance Improvement Lead

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received from members of the Board.

Apologies were received from Councillor Mohon Ali as the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, and from Councillor Umar Nasheen as Deputy Cabinet Member for Skills.

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 30th September 2025 be approved as a correct record.

6 PERFORMANCE ASSURANCE REPORT Q1 AND Q2 2025/26

Sheila Garara presented the Performance Assurance Report, noting that the main themes around complaints were disagreements with decisions and regular communication. It was

highlighted that there were 13 live complaints, all of which were in time scale. It was noted that in regard to sickness absence and turnover, it was a challenging environment. Regarding FOIs and SARs, it was noted that there were often delays due to the complexity of cases and the agreement of the requester would be requested to deliver outside of those timescales.

Members queried the metrics for post call customer satisfaction and it was noted that this referred to satisfaction as a percentage, i.e. what percentage were satisfied with the calls. Members also noted that the overdue and completed figures didn't quite add up. It was noted that this did not contain complaints that were still within the statutory timeframe.

Members noted the sickness absence, highlighting it was twice as bad in Childrens as it was across the council at large. It was noted that this was due to stress and the nature of the work. Members queried what the percentage meant for appraisals/ Let's Talks, and it was noted that this referred to the completion rate. It was noted that queries around FOIs and SARS, and number of calls compared to number answered, would be picked up with the team to clarify the information.

Members queried whether there was any correlation with the times of year for sickness absence. It was noted that it was not comparing like for like, and social care is known for higher sickness absence, both nationally and across GM.

Matt Bulmer presented an update on the Education Performance metrics. It was noted that amongst Oldham's statistical neighbours, Oldham was top for attendance in both primary and secondary schools and had the lowest number of permanent exclusions. It was noted that levels of inclusion were very high despite the levels of deprivation.

It was noted that the metric on EHCPs was red, but there was confidence it would bounce back, and it was noted that there were over 4000+ EHCPs in Oldham. It was highlighted that £1.1m in additional SEND staffing funding would help with this. A SEND inspection had taken place and the response was due in January, although the team were pleased with how the inspection went.

It was noted that around the red metric for NEET, commissioned research was being done around this subject. It was noted that it had been indicated that Oldham punches above its weight regarding support and work around NEET. It was highlighted that it remains a priority, particularly with the Employment and Skills strategy.

Members noted that with EHCPs, around 7% of the child population has one in Oldham, which is higher than the national average. It was noted that the rate of increase had slowed and more early intervention work was taking place.

Members asked that regarding the SEND inspection, whether there had been any informal feedback given. It was noted that there had been but that the report was embargoed. It was highlighted that the previous inspections had focused on 2 areas for improvement, access to health services and governance, and the team felt that they had acted quickly where they could on this, but they were national issues too. Members noted that the officers be commended for progress as a step forward, and noted that the figures demonstrated progress.

Members queried the figure of 114% of 2 year olds from working families benefiting from a funded early education place, noting it was more than 100%. It was noted that this was the way the funding works, noting that more people were accessing the funding than were believed to be eligible by the DfE.

Members noted the movement in the figures on EHCPs, and it was highlighted that the service prioritised initial plans over annual reviews, but that reviews were prioritised for children who need it most.

Matt Bulmer noted that it would be his last meeting of the Scrutiny Board and thanked members for their work on the Board.

Tony Decrop presented the Children's Social Care metrics, noting that there had previously been nine reds and these were now mostly green, due to work and investment into resolving them, as well as a more stable workforce. It was noted that both ambers and reds are regularly monitored.

Members queried what the reasons were for care leavers not in education, employment or training. It was noted that there could be a multitude of reasons and that the service would always try to engage with them to see what support could be offered.

Members asked for clarity about what would constitute 'unsuitable accommodation'. It was noted that this could be a couple of different things, from staying with friends, property that the council would disagree with or custody.

Members noted the figures on Page 24 of the agenda pack were going in the wrong direction. It was noted that only a couple of children could skew the figures, but that there were lots of reasons for this. It was noted that the service was supporting placements through mockingbird and that other outcomes depended on stable placements.

Members noted the reflection from the cabinet member, particularly around the reduction in the use of agency staff. It was noted that this had been a big area of focus and investment, particularly the 'Choose Oldham' campaign, and this was better for children and families.

Members queried whether the Board could do more to highlight where progress had been achieved. Others members noted the

role of the Scrutiny Board was to scrutinise, not just be a backslapping exercise. Members noted the need to find a balance, including celebrating achieving progress against the odds, and the need to address problems, not just highlight them.

Jodie Barber presented the Youth Service metrics, noting that all four were on target, but that demand outweighs capacity and that the service was carrying vacancies. It was noted that the target of sessions is 2000, not 3000 as in the report.

7

ANNUAL REPORT COMPLEX SAFEGUARDING HUB 2024/25

Natassja presented the report, noting the joint vision around complex safeguarding. The structure of the team was outlined and it was highlighted that the team were also working with partner agencies. It was highlighted that a focus of the team was prevention and this was being carried out with training and student inputs in schools and care homes. It was noted that 10 VR headsets were being used to provide students with workshops on decision making on knife crime and exploitation. Over 300 students had used these so far and they had been well received.

On the issue of prosecutions, it was noted that there were 132 open investigations and 38 adults had been arrested with nine ongoing police investigations. An update on Operation Sherwood was also provided. It was noted that 1200 young people had gone missing from home in 2024/25 and that return home interviews were carried out.

It was highlighted that the Complex Safeguarding Team had undergone a peer review undertaken by GM, and areas of strength and reflection were identified. It had been noted that the feedback received from the peer review had been positive.

It was noted that on performance, there was a want to improve the figures for young people achieving a positive goal/aspiration that they had themselves set upon opening to the team, and the key priorities for 2025/26 were outlined.

Members queried whether the Councillor steering group still existed and it was noted that it did. Members also noted the work done around knives, highlighting that it was proactive, not reactive. It was highlighted that the team was linking with other LAs such as Manchester on this issue and others, such as county lines.

Members noted a need to do more on prevention and questioned whether this work was going to be extended, particularly to staff. It was noted that part of the offer was school support. It was noted that this was an area of improvement and that work was ongoing to coordinate with partners. Members also queried how homeschooled children would access these resources, and it was advised that there were provisions both for

being invited into schools to take part and for alternative offerings.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

8

CHILDREN'S SERVICES - UPDATE ON FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE, ACTION PLAN AND TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMME

Sheila Garara and Tony Decrop presented the update, noting that it is reported to scrutiny twice a year. It was noted that the Month 6 position was £5.278m overspent, and it was highlighted that the key pressure was the high cost of external placements. It was noted that most of the underspends were in relation to vacancy management, which were not affecting frontline services.

It was noted that demand for services was down due to reduced referrals, which showed that work was starting to have an impact.

It was highlighted that there were now Red, Amber, Green (RAG) ratings on the Action Plan. It was noted that the strengths included lots of work having been done around children at risk of homelessness, young carers, multi-agency work and collaboration. It was highlighted that Oldham had the highest number of foster carers. It was noted the next children's home would open in 2027, and that the homes that were already open had been delivered cheaper and faster than in other areas of GM. It was highlighted that First Choice Homes were launching a proactive pledge the day after the Scrutiny Board meeting.

Members noted the new Childrens Homes and queried whether financial impacts were being seen already on this. It was noted that this would take time and there were hidden costs, but that the homes were keeping young people within the borough. It was noted that there were better outcomes and more control in Council-run homes as to who was being let in in regard to external visitors etc.

Members noted the pressures in continuing health care funding, and it was noted that over the years, there had been continued reductions and this had been escalated to health bodies. It was noted that there was a need for joint commitments and that there was strict criteria, but that lots don't meet that criteria.

Members queried Project Skyline and placements, noting that other authorities can undercut for placements. It was noted that Project Skyline's timescales were not any time soon. It was noted that the scheme was for 10 care homes across the 10 boroughs, and that 4 were progressing so far, and one was being looked for in Oldham. These homes would be open to all ten boroughs, whereas the three the Council already has are just for Oldham. It was noted that the first Skyline opening would be December 2026. Regarding placements, it was noted that the vast majority of children were placed within Greater Manchester.

Members queried whether when young people turn 18, does the Council continue to support them if needed. It was noted that as a legal care leaver, the Council is responsible for them and offers support up to 25. Work is also carried out when young people are 16-18 to prepare them for this transition.

Members noted the £2.852m of savings to be identified by the end of 2025/26, and queried what scope there was for this. It was noted that lots of work was being done around other options, and that there had been a focused effort. It was noted that the situation would be clearer once the government's financial settlement was released in December, and that for this year, other resolutions were being examined.

RESOLVED: That the Board note the report.

9 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the draft 2025/26 Work Programme be noted.

10 KEY DECISION DOCUMENT

The Scrutiny Board considered the Key Decision Document, which records key decisions that the authority is due to take.

RESOLVED: That the Key Decision Document be noted.

11 RULE 13 AND 14

There were no Rule 13 or 14 decisions to report.

The meeting started at 18:00 and ended at 19:40.