

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Board

Getting to Good Children's Improvement Programme Update

Portfolio holder:

Cllr Amanda Chadderton, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Officer Contact:

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10th September 2019

Purpose of the report:

This report will provide a perspective on the current performance of Oldham's Children Social Care which includes:

- Update Post Ofsted ILACS 2019 and findings
- Improvement Plan and Transformation Programme to support improvement
- Workforce and the new Target Operating Model
- Service Demand Profiles
- Caseloads for Social Workers
- Financial Performance and Demand

1. Findings

1.1 In summary the findings are as follows:

- Following the Ofsted ‘Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services’ (ILACS) framework in January 2019, Oldham have received a verdict of “Requires Improvement to be Good”. To address this, Children’s Social Care created an Improvement Plan to improve the quality of Social Care for children and young people.
- There is clear corporate and political ownership over the children’s agenda which has resulted in significant investment to improve the quality of Children’s Social Work.
- There has been a significant amount of activity undertaken to improve services for children in Oldham through improved management oversight and transformation, which is beginning to show promising results.
- The levels of demand across key profile areas are decreasing unlike last years report which showed substantial increases in demand. Oldham is now below or around our statistical neighbour levels.
- Caseloads for frontline social workers have substantially reduced from last year and are currently below the organisational target.
- The roll out of The Structural Investment Plan is underway to strengthen the Leadership and Management arrangements in Children’s Social Care and to improve capacity across Social Work Teams.
- The financial performance of Oldham Children’s Social Care is stabilising as a result of the investment and closer monitoring of spend.
- The wider environment to improve the quality of Social Work is being delivered through newly identified accommodation and training facilities to improve and to enable Social Workers to practice high quality Social Work.

2.0 The improvement journey

2.1 Oldham Council has the highest ambitions for our children and young people. We want Oldham to be a place where children and young people thrive. We have made significant strides to understand ourselves better and know that more needs to be done to deliver on our ambitions.

2.2 Our self-assessment ahead of the ILACS Inspection provided an honest reflection of the outcomes achieved to date and additional work required - all of which demonstrates our commitment to improvement. There is momentum in Oldham and a strong ambition to deliver a sustainable and collective offer for our children and young people.

2.3 Work to deliver an improvement journey commenced in July 2018 under the Interim DCS to shape a programme of work to deliver the findings of the SIF as part of the 2015 inspection by Ofsted. A 23 Project Programme was shaped by the Transformation Team supporting the Interim DCS. Interim resourcing was approved to support the programme and work started in earnest to deliver 32 tactical and strategic objectives to improve the quality of Social Care.

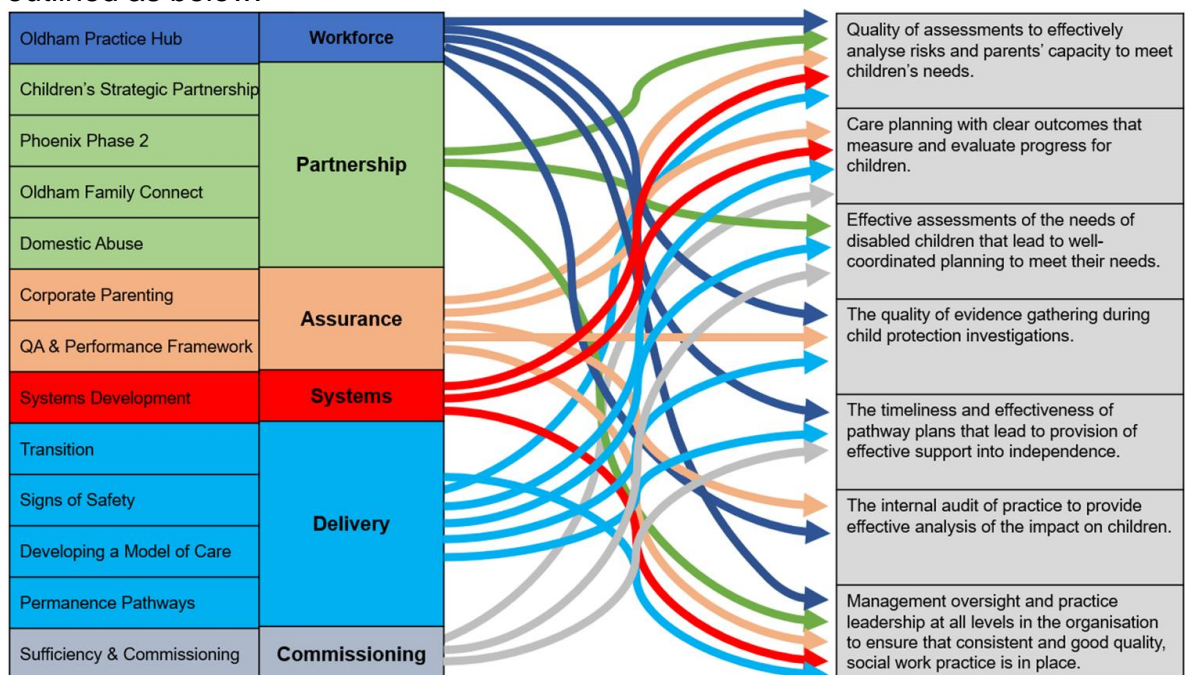
2.4 In January 2019 Ofsted carried out an ILACS inspection of Children Services and returned a judgement that Oldham “Requires Improvement to be Good”. In light of this report, the transformation programme of activity has been revised and 16 projects have been put forward to incorporate the recommendations made in the report. The Transformation Team have therefore devolved a number of the previous projects to Business as Usual allowing the focus to be on delivering key strategic pieces of work, that will have the most impact on improving the quality of social work practice and to improve outcomes for children both in care and in universal/universal plus services.

3.0 Transformation Activity to Improve Service Quality

3.1 The Transformation Programme is tasked to support the Improvement Plan and management action to improve Social Work Practices in Oldham. The Programme provides the structures, processes and social work models to enhance practice.

3.2 The wiring of the projects has been mapped to the areas of improvement that Ofsted have identified for improvement. Individual project scoping has determined where each activity will deliver an improvement in practice to help improve outcomes for Children.

3.3 The projects linked to Ofsted Improvements that are required in Oldham are outlined as below:



* Three wider transformation projects not shown in the above are Structural Investment Plan, Workforce Strategy and Metropolitan Place and Accommodation.

3.4 The key focus of the programme is:

- Creating the governance in overseeing the Getting to Good Portfolio Board, chaired by the Lead Member for Children’s Services and the Children’s Change Board chaired by The Deputy Chief Executive.

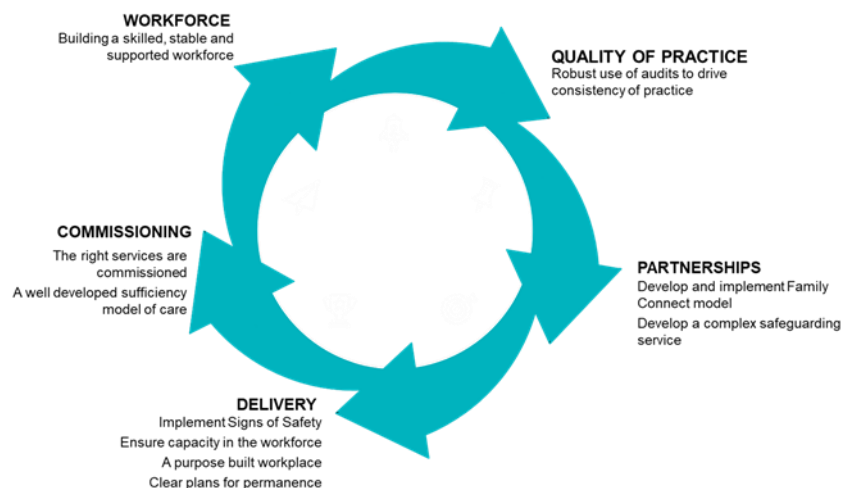
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- To mobilise the Investment of £12m over 3 years to support the strengthening of Social Work and Children's Services in Oldham.
 - To support the embedding of the new Senior Leadership Structure with recruitment to the new structure taking place across the Autumn.
 - To ensure full recruitment to the new structure of Social Workers by the end of 2019, including the development of the Oldham Practice Hub.
 - To manage the Capital Programme to support the move to new accommodations in the Autumn.
 - To support the development and roll out of new models of practice such as Signs of Safety and Stockport Family.
- 3.5 In November 2018, the Council approved the Investment of £12m across three years to strengthen the management across Children's Services and provide the required numbers of Social Work Practitioners needed to provide a good service as part of a new Target Operating Model.
- 3.6 Following the redesign of our Services, recruitment to the new structure is underway. This will take place through managed waves of recruitment activity over a 6-month period. This will allow the Directorate to embed new managers and practitioners in a stable and measured manner.
- 3.7 Consultation on the new Senior Management structure has been completed in May 2019 and recruitment is ongoing to populate the new leadership team. The new Senior Leadership Team is planned to be in place by the end of the year.
- 3.8 Additional Senior Practitioners and Team Managers are in the process of being recruited, which will decrease the overall management span of control to improve supervision and support to front line Social Work Practitioners. This improvement mitigates a major risk in last year's report to Overview and Scrutiny on our performance.
- 3.9 The recruitment to the additional Social Work roles is continuing. Under current timelines our enhanced Social Work structure will be fully populated by the year end. The new Operating Model places an additional 17 FTE Social Work roles in the new structure and enhances some grades to attract experienced staff to Oldham. These posts are to be placed across the Assessment, Long Term, Permanence and Fostering teams to improve the quality of Social Work.
- 3.10 Additional roles have been created in the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service to reduce caseloads and improve the quality of independent review of Social Work to ensure that adequate professional oversight of cases takes place to ensure that children receive the right services and care planning appropriately.
- 3.11 The programme is supporting the creation of our designated professional learning and development structure the Oldham Practice Hub to provide high quality learning and development to our Social Workers to improve the quality of practice. It is anticipated the Hub will be fully recruited to by December 2019.
- 3.12 The Programme will also support the capital move to more appropriate accommodations in November 2019 to allow Social Workers to practice high
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quality social work with children and young people in a specifically designed child-friendly environment.

- 3.13 The Directorate is also rolling out a recognised set of tools with Signs of Safety to support consistent decision making in social work practice. These tools will help to improve consistency of practice using recognized methodology and approaches that support good outcomes.
- 3.14 The Council is also implementing our localised version of Stockport Family Model to improve our pre-statutory early help offer (Oldham Family Connect). The Council has been awarded £390k through GMCA to adapt the model of early help to meet our needs. Oldham Family Connect will work with partners such as schools and early years settings to help better support children and families beyond the front door to help manage demand and to help reduce the number of re-referrals.

4.0 Ofsted Improvement Plan

- 4.1 The ILACS inspection in January 2019 mandated the Local Authority to create an improvement plan to address areas of Social Work Practice that require improvement.
- 4.2 We have made significant strides to understand ourselves better and know that more needs to be done to deliver on our ambitions. Prior to the inspection from July to December 2018, targeted management activity was focused on delivering operational and long-term sustainable activities to improve the overall performance of Children's Services. Our Improvement Plan focusses on four key areas of improvement that include; Standards of Practice, Practice Improvement, Learning and Development and Quality Assurance. The actions of the improvement plan are focused around the core themes of our improvement journey in Oldham.
- 4.4 The Council submitted the draft improvement plan to address the areas of improvement that were deemed necessary by Ofsted on 11th June 2019. The plan was created with partners across the Council to capture the quality improvement that is required to get services to Good. The plan identifies individual task and finish activities to which officers will track improvements under the overview and governance arrangements that are outlined in the Improvement plan.
- 4.5 In July 2019, the Draft Improvement Plan was provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The purpose of providing the plan is to ensure that sufficient review and challenge can be provided on the progress being made against the areas of improvement identified to Ofsted.



4.6 Ofsted have written formally to the Council on 21st August 2019, to confirm that the plan satisfactorily reflects the areas identified for improvement in the inspection report. The Regional Lead Inspector has also confirmed that the plan identifies clear actions to address these areas to improve the services for children in Oldham. A copy of the letter has been included for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as Appendix 1.

5.0 Improvement Plan Activity

5.1 The Directorate are now formally tracking progress against the four areas of the Plan, that was approved in August 2019, on a monthly basis. The actions being undertaken are now being monitored with individual ratings to provide scrutiny and challenge to the areas of improvement that have been identified.

5.2 As part of the DfE approved Partners in Practice agreement (PIP), Stockport Council are now supporting our improvement journey and a PIP plan is in place to improve key areas of our practice that were identified by Ofsted and that are included in our improvement plan. These specifically relate to Early Permanence, Care Leavers and Complex Safeguarding.

5.3 The plan has been assigned ratings based on improvement. The plan is currently in its launch period and will be subject to audit and ongoing feedback. Rating thresholds have been created to test the current activity and performance activity against each action. A red rating will be applied where the activity is behind schedule or below the required rate of improvement. An amber rating is applied where activity is in the process of being delivered or is awaiting sign off and completion. A green rating is applied where the activity is on track or has been completed.

5.4 The plan, which is now in its first review cycle, is currently rated Amber overall. This position is line with our estimation at this stage of the start-up activity and where the current improvements are to be expected across the 18-month improvement plan.

5.5 Two areas at this stage are currently rated Red. These are likely to be downgraded to Amber once the Auditing schedule has been formally approved in

September 2019.

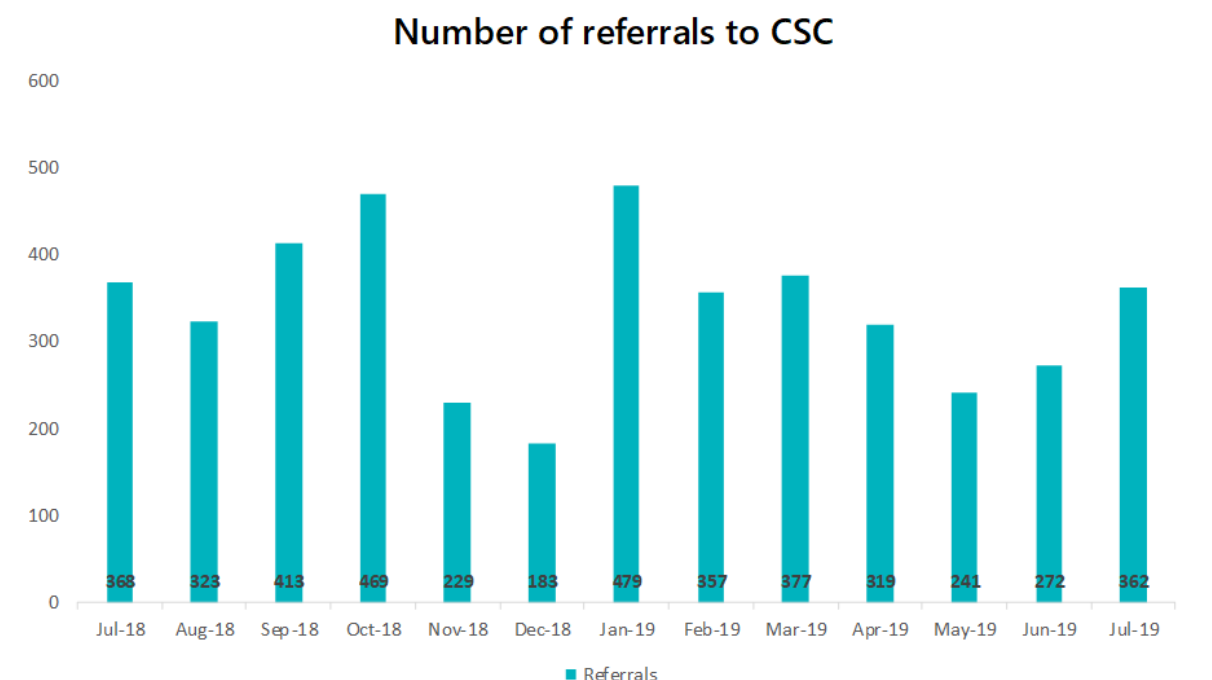
5.6 The below table demonstrates the summary of actions and their ratings. These ratings relate to the initial startup works being undertaken across Children’s Social Care to improve practice. The Improvement Plan is attached with this report as Appendix 2.

Plan Area	Rated Green	Rated Amber	Rated Red
Standards of Practice	0	6	0
Practice Improvement	1	8	1
Learning and Development	0	3	0
Quality Assurance	0	5	1
Total	1	22	2

Table 1- Areas of plan mapped to RAG Rating - Month 1 August 2019

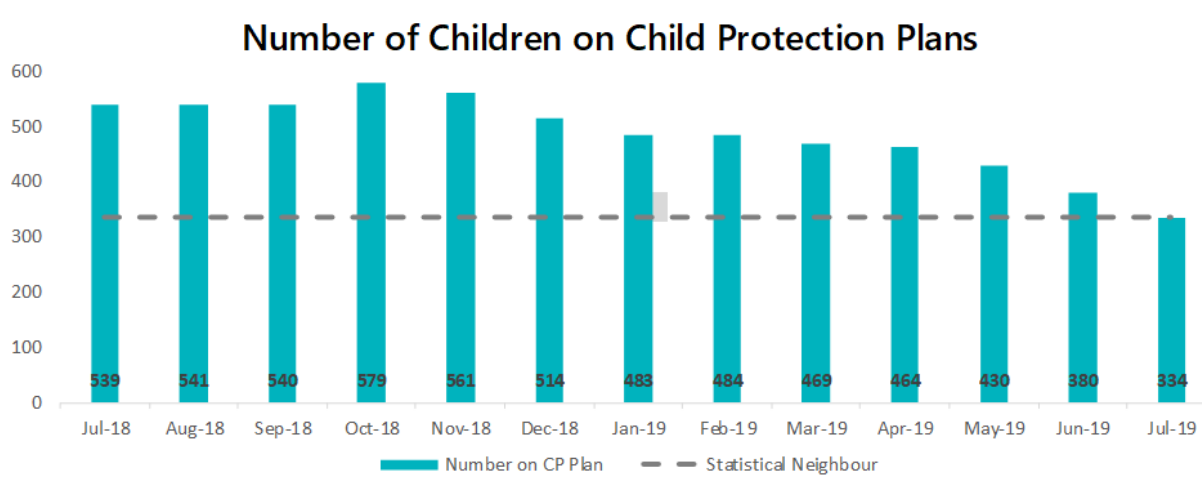
6.0 Children’s Social Care Demand

6.1 There has been a decrease in demand experienced across a range of key profile areas. This is the direct opposite to last year’s report to Overview and Scrutiny, which showed increased demand across our key indicators. This is due to increased management oversight and supervision from the management team. The following data illustrates the full extent of the improvement across the past year:

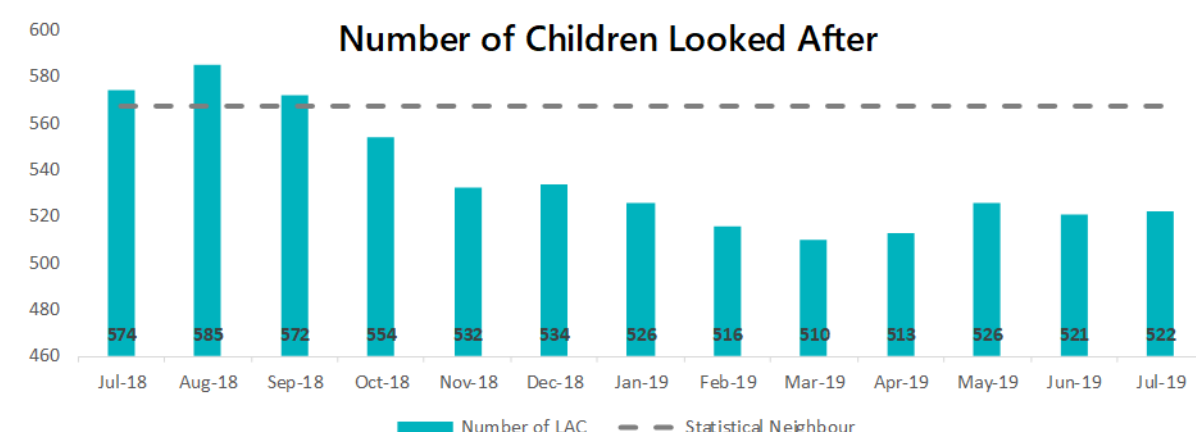


6.2 The rate of referrals for social work assessment has decreased overall over the last 12 months. 366 referrals on average each month have been made to

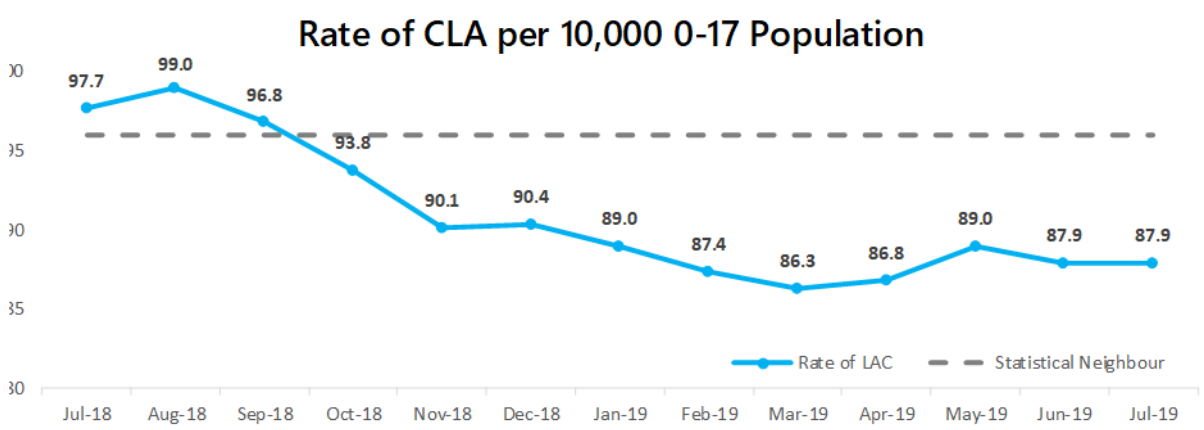
Children’s Social Care. In the last quarter the average number of referrals has dropped to 291 referrals per month.



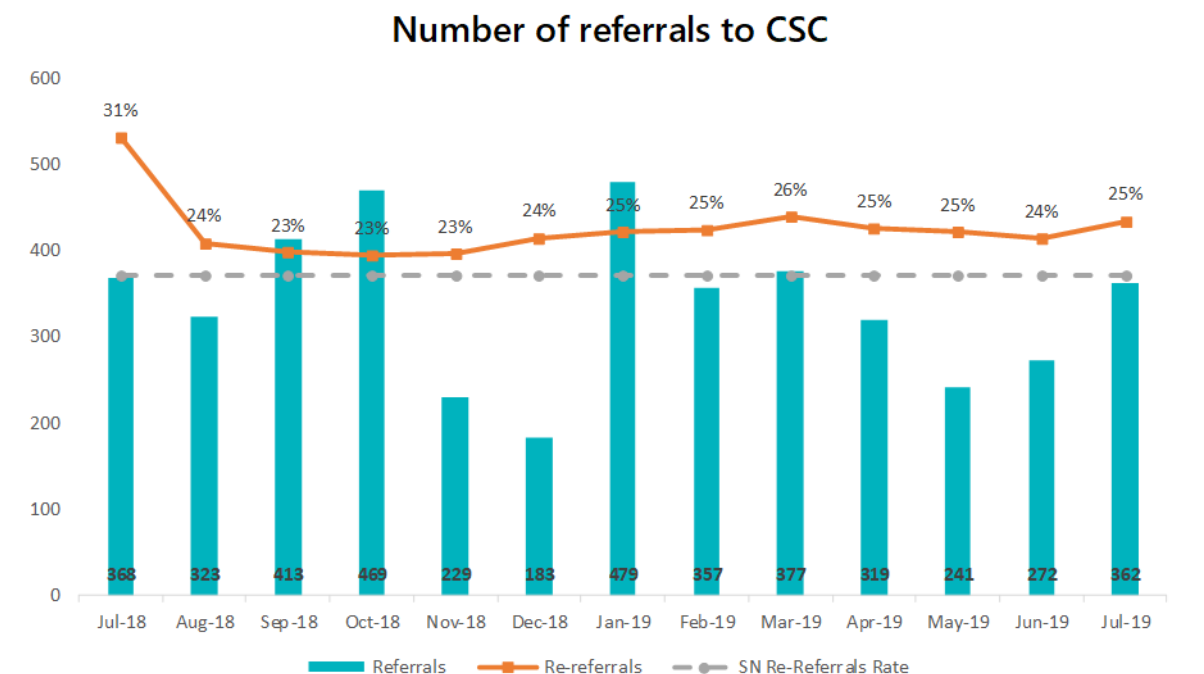
6.3 A significant rise in child protection plans (541 in August 2018) had been experienced in Children’s Social Care over the past 2 years. The level of children who were subject to Child Protection Plans far exceeded our statistical neighbours. This demand was creating substantial difficulty across Social Work Teams to manage their workloads. Since the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting in July 2018, the number of Children on a Protection Plan has fallen significantly due to improved management and oversight of cases. Our current numbers have fallen to slightly below Statistical Neighbour levels (334 in July 2019).



6.4 At the previous Overview and Scrutiny meeting in 2018; the numbers of Children who are Looked After Children (574 at July 18) was above our above statistical neighbours. Since July 2018, a marked reduction in the numbers of Children who are Looked After has reduced to below statistical neighbour levels. The number has now stabilised at approximately 522/3 children who are looked after.



6.5 In keeping with the previous measure, the rate of children who are looked after has fallen per 10,000 of our population to below Statistical Neighbour levels across the past 12 months.



6.6 The number of re-referrals is still 3% higher than our statistical neighbours. A contributing factor is not making the right intervention first time in cases.

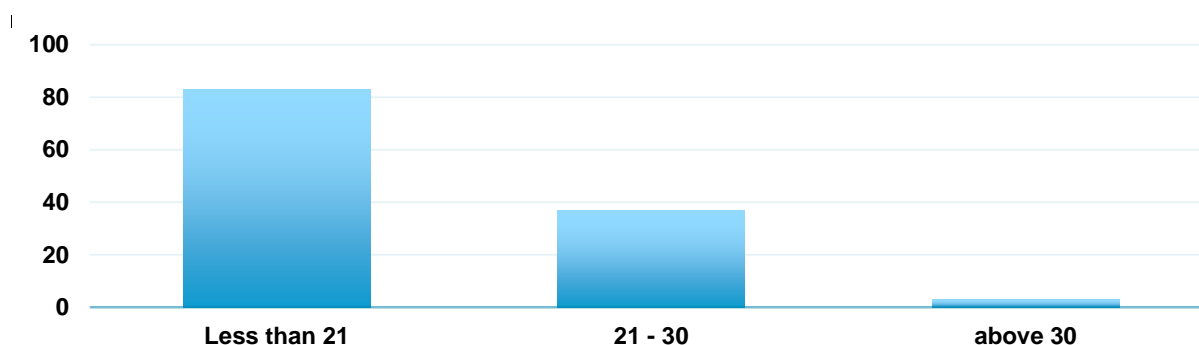
6.7 Work to develop our early help offer around schools is ongoing as discussed earlier in the report. The design work for our new model (Oldham Family Connect) is underway and the prototype will be delivered in early 2020. It is anticipated that the development of the model will help to reduce referrals to Social Work to bring our re-referrals to around or below statistical neighbours.

6.8 Due to improved management oversight, the conversion of agency social workers to permanent and the early impact of Transformation, demand is falling across

key performance measures.

7.0 Caseloads in Social Work

7.1 Caseloads have fallen substantially across Social Work Teams since the last report to Overview and Scrutiny in July 2018. The below table shows that of our Social Work staff the vast majority have a manageable caseload of less than 21 cases. The average caseload that a Social Worker has in Oldham currently is 17 cases.



7.2 The Local Authority has set a target, on average, of having 18 cases per social worker to give Social Workers a manageable caseload to improve the quality of social work. As of August 2019, this target is being met. This is a substantial reduction from the average of 21 cases per social worker last year. With the roll-out of the Structural Investment Plan and an increased number of Social Workers we aspire to meet the optimum number of 15 as identified in best practice guidance for Social Worker caseloads.

7.3 Presently 30% of social workers have a high caseload and 3% have a very high caseload (30+). This is a reduction from 50% of Social Workers having high caseloads and 18% having very high caseloads last year.

7.4 In addition front line managers have had their direct reports reduced to improve the management span of control to 7 in field work teams from up to 10 reports as per last year's report. We are improving the operating conditions for managers to achieve the consistent oversight and understanding of all the cases that their Social Workers are holding. This will allow our Social Workers to focus on improving the quality of practice and to improve outcomes for children. A commitment to rolling out reflective supervision remains an ongoing commitment to ensure improvements are made.

7.5 The demand for child protection and Looked After Children puts pressure on the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) caseloads, which are now above those recommended by statutory guidance (stated as 70 in the IRO Handbook). Children Looked After IRO's currently average 74 cases and child protection

Chairs average 77 cases. IROs play an important quality assurance role across the system as they independently oversee and challenge the progress of individual children’s cases to prevent drift and delay. This involves chairing Children Looked After reviews, visiting children to gain their wishes and feelings and escalating cases to senior managers where progress is not being made. The current workload pressures within this service undermines the IRO’s capacity to ensure rigorous oversight and challenge and waters down an important quality assurance safeguard across the system.

8.0 Financial Performance

8.1 Currently the directorate is managing its overspend position. The ongoing work through the financial recovery planning activity, the High Costs Placements activity, Workforce Planning and the roll out of the delivery model has reduced the potential overspend position from an initial £1,152k at the end of May to £471k at the end of June, as shown below.

2019/20 Month 3	Revised Budget £000	Forecast £000	Use of Reserves £000	Variance £000
Children in Care	24,681	24,886	-	205
Childrens Safeguarding	1,476	1,476	-	-
Fieldwork & Family Support	9,500	10,045	(279)	267
Children's Social Care Total	35,657	36,407	(279)	471

8.2 Work is ongoing to provide a balanced budget position and the financial position is stabilising across children’s social care. A significant improvement on the budgetary position has been obtained from an overspend position of £3.85m at the end of 18/19.

9.0 Conclusion

9.1 The challenges that were reported to Overview and Scrutiny in July 2018 are in the process of improving. Particular attention has been provided to reduce the numbers of children in care and the numbers of children who are subject to a child protection plan, where safe to do so. This is in part due to improved oversight and management action to improve practice operationally. There is a need to maintain caution on the reduction in demand until a full audit cycle is carried out to satisfy ourselves that our thresholds aren’t set too high. This process of auditing has just commenced and will be included in any future updates to Overview and Scrutiny.

9.2 The improvement in caseloads is significant and Social Workers are now being given manageable caseloads. This will ensure that a focus can be on the quality of social work. This is in tandem with reducing the management span of control for managers across Social Work Teams to allow them to focus on cases and to provide support and challenge to Social Workers.

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- 9.3 Oldham Council fully recognises the continuing requirement for improvement and there is full ownership over the delivery of the improvement plan to improve practice. The plan is in the early stages of being undertaken and activities to improve practice are in the process of being embedded. The key priorities over the next 18 months will be delivering the improvements outlined in the transformation plan.
- 9.4 The Council accept that in order for improvements to be sustainable then the transformation programme must provide the services with the right structures and tools to do the job to the best standards possible. The mobilisation of the new leadership and operational structures will provide the right resources to improve practice and provide the right capacity in key areas to consolidate and build on our improvements.
- 9.5 The financial position for Children’s Social Care is improving and there is a commitment to move to a balanced budgetary position for the financial year. This marks a substantial improvement on the overspend positions of the previous years report.
- 9.6 The Council are in the process of delivering new models to improve our services and Oldham Family Connect will help to manage referrals working with schools and early years settings to manage demand and reduce the numbers of re-referrals.

10.0 For the committee to note

- That Children’s Services implement the actions in the Improvement Plan and report to Overview and Scrutiny on a 6-monthly basis on progress.
- That the new operating model is recruited to ensure that gains that have been made are consolidated and built upon.
- That new models of practice are delivered to support the overall stability in Children’s Social Care.
- That an ongoing commitment to managing caseloads is maintained and through the increased capacity that caseloads do not rise to previous levels.
- That management spans of control remain at the current levels to allow managers to have better oversight of casework amongst social work practitioners.
- That work continues to move towards a balanced budget in year and that financial commitments are maintained where possible.

