

## Report to COUNCIL

# Children's Services update

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Eddie Moores, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

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### Purpose of the Report

This report provides Council with an update on the recent Ofsted Focused Visit and progress in relation to Children's Social Care improvement plans.

### Executive Summary

- The Children and Young People Services response to Covid-19 was found to be good because the #TeamOldham response has been good. It's a whole system judgement
- We have made good progress on our improvement journey and the response to Covid-19 had accelerated progress not delayed it
- The 2020 Self-Assessment of our services submitted to Ofsted was well founded – our priorities were the right ones there were no surprises in their findings
- The Ofsted Inspection Framework for the visit was an exhausting and intensive 3-week programme. It put the service under extreme pressure
- We should not be complacent, we still have much to do, but we should assert our strong performance in Greater Manchester and the North West and be proud of our achievements

### Recommendations

It is recommended that Council note the report and progress to date.

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## Children's Services update

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2018, the Council approved the investment of £12m across three years to strengthen the management across Children's Social Care and provide the required numbers of Social Work Practitioners needed to provide a good service as part of a new Target Operating Model.
- 1.2 Following the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) by Ofsted in January 2019, Children's Social Care embarked on an improvement journey to create the right culture and environment for improving the quality of practice; and providing the required leadership and resources to ensure that this happens.
- 1.3 As we embarked upon the second year of our improvement journey, our key focus was upon improving the quality of social work practice. The recruitment programme, establishing a new Senior Management Team and expanding both social work and management capacity, as well as providing a bespoke office environment for Children's Social Care teams has been implemented. This investment has enabled the reduction of caseloads and increased capacity for management oversight, and we believe we now have in place the right foundations to enable us to get to 'Good'
- 1.4 In March 2020, as the nation was faced with a global pandemic and national Public Health emergency the impact on Children's Social Care has been significant as statutory Social Work services continued to be delivered in more creative ways in line with national guidance and local restrictions. This required a whole system partnership response. (See section 4).
- 1.5 During the pandemic we have refreshed our service improvement plan and self-assessment which accurately reflects where we are in our improvement journey. This formed a solid basis for the Ofsted Focused Visit on 13-15 October and Annual Conversation on 2 November.

### 2 Ofsted Focused Visit October 2020

- 2.1 From 13-15 October 2020 Ofsted conducted a focused visit in Oldham based on how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic.
- 2.2 The visit focused on three key areas in line with the revised Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework with a focus on Covid-19 response and quality of decision making:
  - Help and Protection - Front door, the progress of children subject to plans, step up & step down between Social Care and Early Help
  - Children in Care & Care Leavers - Edge of care/pre-proceedings, physical and mental health contact with families, placement decisions
  - Impact of Leaders - quality assurance and 'line of sight', management and workforce capacity, effectiveness of multi-agency working

### 3 Focused Visit findings

- 3.1 The majority of findings are overwhelmingly positive, and no immediate priority actions were identified. Inspectors recognised that we have maintained a sharp focus on

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improvement priorities during the last six months and that this has increased the pace of improvement and had a positive impact on workforce culture since the last inspection.

### 3.2 **Keeping children and young people safe through Covid-19:**

- Social Work Services continued to see children throughout lockdown despite an increase in demand
- Red, Amber Green (RAG) rating system used to prioritise frequency of contacts and face to face visits
- MASH identified key thematic issues such as domestic abuse and injuries to very young children
- Strong multi-agency response to analyse risk and plan responses
- Strategic partnerships used to evaluate and plan responses, including increased face to face activity for universal and early help services

### 3.3 **Help and Protection, Children in Care and Care Leavers:**

#### Strengths

- Visits to children are purposeful and relationships with Social Workers are strong
- Complex safeguarding maximises partner information and good understanding and response to children and young people at risk
- Clear evidence of management oversight
- Decision making is good
- Some children with complex needs are very well supported through multi-agency working
- Children's views are evidenced in assessment and creative wishes and feelings work undertaken
- MASH - good partnership engagement
- High risk / CIN recognised, understood with quick responses
- Foster Carers are supported including good Covid-19 response work with Healthy Young Minds
- PPE readily available

#### Areas for Development

- Partner attendance at key decision-making meetings
- Recording of rationale for next steps in strategy meetings
- Quality of oversight and challenge from child protection chairs, including when children step down from child protection plans

### 3.4 **Leadership and Management:**

#### Strengths

- Senior leaders have worked tirelessly with pace and urgency to maintain services and respond to need and improve outcomes for children and families
- Social Workers are happy and settled
- Support to staff is good
- There is a sound focus on 'getting the basics right' and leaders are ambitious to improve
- Close collaboration with partners
- Sharp focus on families in crisis
- Clear line of sight in place to support improvements in the quality of practice
- Practice standards set clear expectations
- Regular supervision is welcomed
- Schools and Healthy Young Minds work with Children's Social Care to ensure support is flexible and accessible
- Services are responsive and collaborative
- We know ourselves well and what needs improvement

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#### Areas for Development

- Caseloads are sometimes too high although Social Workers report they are manageable
- Quality of supervision varies but is improving
- There is more to do on key areas to build consistency

### 3.5 **Education:**

#### Strengths

- School leaders – partnership is strong and positive
- Attendance - Oldham actively encouraged pupils to attend throughout Covid-19 and is a priority
- Strong Virtual School response, working closely with other LAs, partners and Children's Social Care to ensure the protection of children including Children Looked After out of area
- Appropriate monitoring is in place with RAG rating EPEP system and challenge from the Council
- Part Time timetables reviewed quickly
- Elective Home Education (EHE) – Oldham has a transparent and suitable process for tracking
- The council places pupil's emotional wellbeing high on the agenda

#### Areas for Development

- Children Missing Education (CME) – Risk Assessments would be beneficial to ensure immediate attention is targeted to vulnerable children who are CME for a long period of time
- Further analysis of trends in CME

The full letter is available at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80535>

3.6 The new Senior Management Team has reviewed Ofsted's recommendations and updated the Improvement Strategy and Action Plan for 2020-22 to ensure that the service remains focussed on the absolute fundamentals of social work practice and that we measure the impact and outcomes of our performance against these. To support this, we have put into place new Practice Standards to ensure that all practitioners and managers understand what is expected of them. Our Improvement Strategy and Action Plan is organised around seven priority areas of practice that identifies individual task and finish activities through which officers will track improvements within clearly defined governance arrangements. Progress against the improvement plan will be monitored through our Quality Improvement Group chaired by the Director of Social Care which reports into the Children's Assurance Board chaired by the Managing Director.

## 4 **Impact of Covid-19**

4.1 A Children's Services Covid-19 Partnership was established involving partners across Health, communities and commissioning, alongside Social Care, Early Help and Education senior leaders, to ensure that the needs of children, young people and families in Oldham were given priority focus. All partner agencies adapted to the new challenge and responded to the rapidly changing landscape and daily challenges.

4.2 A Vulnerable Children's Strategic Group was established with a key focus on the risk management of vulnerable children. The work of this group has played a huge part in bringing services together, sharing key information, establishing joint protocols for managing risks and coordinating support for families throughout the pandemic. Having senior officers around the table enabled effective decision making and solution focussed

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working, as well as providing a clear mechanism for reporting and dissemination across all key services.

- 4.3 All agencies worked hard to support the most vulnerable children back to School in September. This was a great achievement for the Oldham Partnership.
- 4.4 Across Children's Social Care all teams risk assessed and revised their working practice as a result of the impact of Covid-19. All children's cases were regularly reviewed, and RAG rated to assess the requirement of face to face visits and frequency.
- 4.5 To 3 December 2020, around 24,870 pupils have been affected by bubble closures
- Over 1,500 positive cases linked to schools (and more in Colleges)
  - 65% of these are pupils with 35% staff
  - Around 77 bubbles are currently closed across 40 schools
  - Around 660 bubbles are previously been closed
  - Over 740 bubbles have closed in total
  - Only 7 schools have not had a bubble closure
- 4.6 There has been a significant impact on poverty and deprivation
- 12 March-13 August, unemployment claimants in Oldham rose by 6,515 to a total of 13,985 claimants
  - Over the same period Oldham's monthly youth Claimant Count has increased by 136.5%, faster than GM (125.5%)
  - 9,882 food parcels have been required (6,193 adults and 3,689 children)
  - We've been supporting 10,600 shielding residents 50% of whom needed support
  - 500 shielding children and young people have been supported by texts, calls and food

## 5 Education

### 5.1 Keeping schools open and safe

- Preparation and Planning through advice and guidance from the Department for Public Health, risk assessments of schools and weekly review of risk and activity, regular communication with school leaders through virtual and email briefings
- Daily GM School Contact Tracing Cell - Led by a consultant in public health to identify issues, and to ensure consistency across GM
- Guidance for parents developed with Public Health England NW reassuring families on school attendance. Public health team working with the special schools, special school nursing and SEND staff to develop plans to support children and young people with complex health needs to return to school

### 5.2 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- Education and Health Care (EHC) Plans are robustly tracked for timeliness and quality
- The last monitoring visit from the Department for Education in July 2020 identified positive progress in outstanding areas and good plans to address these as schools returned to full opening in September 2020

### 5.3 Early Years Sufficiency

Recovery priorities for the sector in Oldham:

- Support the financial sustainability of the local childcare market, recognising that many settings may not be able to operate at full capacity, and parental demand may be reduced

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- Support the re-opening of childcare provision to ensure childcare is available as far as possible for parents who need it, when they need it, taking account of changing parental needs and preferences
  - Return uptake rates for the 2, 3 and 4 year old free early education entitlements (FEEE) to their pre-Covid-19 levels and beyond

What we've achieved:

- 87% of PVIs are open and delivering early education and childcare (23 Oct 2020)
- Attendance is increasing, on 20 October 2,355 children attending. Of these, 51 were children with a Social Worker (responses from 83% PVI settings)
- Strengthened advocacy role of key professionals in increasing uptake of the free entitlements
- Allocated £76k to settings to support Covid-19 social distancing requirements and recovery plans
- £34,199k allocated to fund alternative places until the end of the summer term

## 6 Next Steps

- 6.1 The strategic priorities across the Children and Young People directorate are:
- Implementing our revised Service Improvement Plan following the Focused Visit and establishing a 'Getting to Good' Board to drive improvement
  - Drive system leadership and improvement through the new Children's Alliance Board
  - Integration of children's health commissioning and provision to create fully integrated Children's Services in Oldham
  - Deliver corporate transformation programme to reduce budget pressures and increase service efficiencies, through service redesign focused on place based, integrated working
  - Establish Oldham Learning as a strategic vehicle for school improvement to transform educational outcomes
  - Develop the OA board to reflect the new challenges resulting from Covid-19 long term implications

## 7 Links to corporate outcomes

- 7.1 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:
- **An Inclusive Economy** where people and enterprise thrive
  - **Thriving Communities** where everyone is empowered to do their bit
  - **Co-operative Services** with people and social value at their heart

## 8 Conclusion

- 8.1 During this period under review we are very proud of our partnership response to Covid-19 in Oldham. This has involved taking a flexible and agile approach to deliver services for children, young people and families and identifying emerging opportunities for service improvements. We believe we have made good progress on our improvement journey despite the challenges of the pandemic which has been recognised by Ofsted.