

Report to CABINET

Opportunity Area Grant, Year 5, 2021-2022

Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Officer Contact: Gerard Jones, Managing Director of Children and Young People (DSC).

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Reason for Decision

The purpose of this report is to seek formal approval for the receipt of section 31 grant funding to resource the Opportunity Area programme, to agree that the grant payments will be ring-fenced locally to the Opportunity Area programme and to note and endorse the recommended spending priorities identified in the Opportunity Area Plan.

Authorisation is also sought to delegate authority to agree all spending decisions related to the Opportunity Areas programme to the Director of Education, Skills and Early Years, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Director of Finance, noting the role of the Opportunity Area Partnership Board in this process.

Executive Summary

Oldham is one of twelve Opportunity Areas identified by the Department for Education (DfE), that have over the first 4 years of the programme received £90 million to boost opportunities for young people in these communities. The purpose of Opportunity Areas is improving social mobility, using education as a key driver to achieve this.

Oldham Opportunity Area has received approaching £8 million in funding from DfE in the first 4 years of the programme. In May 2021 the Minister confirmed that a further £1,339,000 will be available to the Oldham for year 5 of the programme Sept 21- Aug 22. The Oldham Opportunity Area year 5 plan details the spending priorities identified for Oldham for this period. This plan also includes an additional £300,000 grant for the Early Identification of Autism project, and therefore projected expenditure within the plan totals £1.639m. It is important to note that in order to deliver the planned programme, some of the grant resource may be spent directly by the DfE rather than the Council. Therefore, although Oldham will benefit from the full £1.639m, the Council will receive grant net of expenditure directly incurred by the DfE.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Members confirm the passporting of Opportunity Area grant received by the Council up to the value of £1.339m for the Year 5 programme and a supplementary grant of up to an additional £300,000 for the Early Identification of Autism project
- Endorse the spending priorities, and targets identified in the Opportunity Area Year 5 Plan for planned expenditure of up to a total of £1.639m.
- Authority to make all spending decisions relating to the Opportunity Area (including key decisions) be delegated to the Director of Education, Skills and Early Years, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Director of Finance.
- Authority be delegated to the Director of Education, Skills and Early years to award contracts stemming from a compliant procurement process and authority be delegated to the Director of Legal Services to sign/seal such contracts and any necessary incidental and/or ancillary documents.

Opportunity Area Grant, Year 5, 2021-2022

1 Background

- 1.1 Oldham is one of twelve Opportunity Areas identified by the Department for Education (DfE), that have over the first 4 years of the programme received £90 million to boost opportunities for young people in these communities. The purpose of Opportunity Areas is improving social mobility, using education as a key driver to achieve this.
- 1.2 Oldham Opportunity Area (OA) has received approaching £8 million in funding from DfE in the first 4 years of the programme. It has received additional investment in national programmes such as Essential Life Skills and schools/settings have received preferential access to national programmes such as National Professional Qualifications. The Oldham OA Partnership Board brings together local school and council leaders, businesses and community organisations with an understanding of the area and a commitment to making Oldham a better place to learn and achieve. Decisions about investments based upon the priorities and activities outlined in the plan are determined by the Partnership Board in consultations with key stakeholders.
- 1.3 In May 2021 the Minister confirmed that a further £1,339,000 will be available to the Oldham OA for year 5 of the programme Sept 21- Aug 22. A condition of funding is to ensure that the lessons we have learned, and the successful projects delivered in Opportunity Areas, are utilised to support other 'left behind' areas, as has begun with the 'twinning,' programme in year 4.
- 1.4 As before, this funding is intended to be channelled through the local authority, using payments under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. DfE are proposing to do this in two payments – a first one in autumn 2021, and a second and final payment in spring 2022. The Minister's priorities for year 5 of the programme includes:
- building in sustainability in order to secure long-term local improvements;
 - increasing twinning activity; and
 - working to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 and support the area's recovery.
- 1.5 The year 5 plan is designed to support Oldham's Early Years Partnership Strategy and Oldham's Education Recovery Priorities. The year 5 plan covers 5 themes;
- Early years
 - School standards and wellbeing
 - Beyond the school gate
 - Twinning to share learning between OAs and to other Local Authorities
 - Working with other government departments.
- 1.6 We will maintain a strong focus on raising attainment for all, whilst also ensuring we can narrow the gap in outcomes and opportunities for the most disadvantaged. We will do this by continuing to build the capacity in the borough through upskilling teachers and Early Years professionals, and by developing a holistic approach which engages with the range of organisations and actors which influence social mobility, including parents and Oldham's thriving third sector.

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- 1.7 We will ensure that schools and settings are able to capitalise on the national response to education recovery. We will also align our activity to the local approach to education recovery, which seeks to ensure that a return to pre-pandemic performance is understood as an insufficient response to the challenges, and that COVID-19 recovery must be a mechanism for Oldham to continue to pursue longer term improvement. We will use the investment to date in digital and remote learning as a driver of system change and will work with local leaders to use the network of digital champions, the support for digital strategy and the development of pedagogy to drive ongoing improvement, particularly for the most disadvantaged.
 - 1.8 We will continue our investment in the wellbeing of children and young people, by embedding the Whole School Approach to mental health as a key enabler of educational improvement. We will also develop our high quality practice in early years settings and continue our support for the wellbeing of education staff, including senior leaders and.
 - 1.9 The OA will also continue its investment in supporting strategic change; this will allow the OA's investment in year 5 to be clearly situated within an infrastructure which provides a legacy for OA activity, while also creating strong foundations for ongoing improvement post-OA.
 - 1.10 Each of the OA plans has been scrutinised by a Challenge Panel made up of Sir Alan Wood CBE, representing the Education Recovery Commissioner, plus relevant Education Endowment Foundation regional lead for each area and the Opportunity Area Senior Responsible Owner. Crucial to success in year 5 will be a forensic diagnosis of the remaining challenges for each OA and using lessons learned to tackle them effectively.

2 **Current Position – Summary of progress to date**

- 2.1 The OA has invested in the development of the Early Years strategy which was published in September 2020. It has created a renewed impetus and focus on the importance of Early Years which we believe will achieve improved outcomes, a reduction in inequalities and a platform for sustainable system change after the OA. Oldham has seen steady increases in the percentage of pupils achieving a good level of development from 63.6% in the 2016-2017 baseline year (second lowest in England) to 68.1% in 2018-19. There was a 5.2 percentage point increase from the baseline year 2016-2017 to 2018-2019 for disadvantaged children, against 4.4 percentage point increase for non-disadvantaged.
- 2.2 This progress was underpinned by OA supported programmes such as Making it Real, an award-winning programme that works with parents and practitioners to support children's early literacy and development. By 2018-19, the target wards in Oldham had seen an average increase of 6.7ppts in the percentage of children achieving a good level of development from the 2016-17 baseline.
- 2.3 Alongside this, 85% of primary schools and Early Years settings in Oldham (153 sites) now have Language Champions, trained by the OA-funded Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) team, meaning that the Oldham workforce are more confident in supporting SLC needs and are able to demonstrate improved practice. COVID-19 and its impact on the education sector has put at risk these gains: significantly less children are on track to achieve a good level of development (GLD) in 2021, compared to at the same point last year. This underpins the need to maintain funding levels in this area to aid recovery and to continue to improve children's outcomes.
- 2.4 Oldham Learning is the system-led school improvement body, set up through the OA during years 3 and 4 in partnership with Oldham Council. It is led by local school system leaders and supported by Oldham Council, the OA, the Regional Schools Commissioner's

office and local dioceses. All the schools in Oldham are members and this important partnership will deliver sustainability in both system and behaviour change. During year 4, Oldham Learning has been the delivery mechanism for carrying forward or introducing OA interventions in: English/literacy; mathematics; digital learning; teacher development; curriculum leadership, and system leadership.

- 2.5 One area where progress has been marked is in the development of teaching staff in systematic synthetic phonics: in 2018, Oldham's phonics performance was the second lowest in the country, with 77% of children achieving the expected standard at the end of year 1 compared to 82% nationally. Following an investment in training and implementation in a targeted group of schools, 2019 data showed that Oldham's phonics performance improved to 79%, with outcomes for FSM children in Oldham outperforming the national figures.
- 2.6 We will continue to deliver programmes through Oldham Learning in year 5, underpinned by a shared needs analysis and capitalising on the strong system engagement. We are tapering our financial support in year 5, as part of a planned approach to moving Oldham Learning into a self-sustaining model, post-OA.
- 2.7 Progress in supporting the emotional health and mental wellbeing has also been substantial, with 99% of Oldham schools having a named Mental Health lead and 86% of Oldham schools having introduced mental health plans. Where pupils require mental health support which goes beyond universal provision but does not meet service thresholds for CAMHS, schools are now sourcing additional mental health support through the Brokerage Service, with 70% of Oldham schools utilising this approach to date. The OA has also invested in support to education staff (including senior leaders) through the Staff Supervision project, which has been further extended in response to the pandemic.
- 2.8 We have also delivered additional activity in year 4 which has been developed in response to the local needs arising from the pandemic. We are enhancing the Holiday Activities and Food funding by supporting the development of a sustainable model to improve delivery in the future and extend the offer to Early Years and Post 16 helping to tackle the impact of food poverty on educational outcomes. We have also funded activity to support those leaving secondary education in summer 2021, through careers and work experience within the health sector (in partnership with the Northern Care Alliance and Royal Oldham Hospital), plus programmes in entrepreneurship, digital skills and readiness for employment.

3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 Option 1: Approve the receipt of the OA Grant for year 5 by members noting and endorsing the spending priorities, and targets identified in the OA Year 5 Plan. The OA will continue to work in partnership with Oldham Council to strengthen the education system with a focus on improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils. It will build on previous successes, share lessons learnt, investing at a project level and to promote strategic change by supporting the Early Years Partnership Strategy and Oldham's Education Recovery Priorities.
- 3.2 Option 2: Do nothing. The OA programme will cease at the end of August 2021. This will result in reduced funding to improve educational programmes across Early Years, Oldham Learning, Mental Health, the Youth Ambassador programme and Post 16.

4 Preferred Option

4.1 Option 1:

- Members confirm the passporting of Opportunity Area grant received by the Council up to the value of £1.339m for the Year 5 programme and a supplementary grant of up to an additional £300,000 for the Early Identification of Autism project
- Endorse the spending priorities, and targets identified in the Opportunity Area Year 5 Plan for planned expenditure of up to a total of £1.639m.
- Authority to make all spending decisions relating to the Opportunity Area (including key decisions) be delegated to the Director of Education, Skills and Early Years, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Director of Finance.
- Authority be delegated to the Director of Education, Skills and Early years to award contracts stemming from a compliant procurement process and authority be delegated to the Director of Legal Services to sign/seal such contracts and any necessary incidental and/or ancillary documents.

5 Consultation

5.1 The year 5 plan was developed through consultation with the Oldham OA Partnership Board over a series of sessions focusing on an assessment of need and the impact of the programme to date. Activities under the agreed priorities were then developed in consultation with Oldham Council Officers.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 Oldham Opportunity Area (OA) has received £7.787m in funding from DfE in years 1-4 of the Programme. It has also received £2.481m additional investment in national programmes such as Essential Life Skills.

6.2 The Year 5 Opportunity Area grant of £1.339m is awarded as an unringfenced grant in line with the previous 4 rounds. The Council has however, chosen to passport the grant for the four previous rounds in full and that practice will be sustained for the Year 5 grant. The grant received will therefore be allocated to the Education, Skills and Early Years Directorate and more specifically to Opportunity Area schemes, as set out in Appendix 1.

6.3 Although unringfenced, there is a requirement for the Council to use the grant to ensure that the lessons learned from the wider programme are applied to the Year 5 initiatives. The allocation of grant has been determined based on the needs identified within the updated delivery plan and includes an allocation of:

- £0.095m for work on twinning; and
- £0.080m to support work that will develop new projects in collaboration with other Government departments.

6.4 In addition to the £1.339m Opportunity Area grant, the Council has been awarded an additional sum of £0.300m for the Early Identification of Autism project and this therefore brings total planned expenditure to £1.639m.

6.5 In order to deliver the planned programme, some of the grant resource may be spent directly by the DfE rather than the Council. Therefore, although Oldham will benefit from the full £1.639m, the Council will receive grant net of expenditure directly incurred by the DfE.

6.6 At 31 March 2021 there was a balance of £1.093m of the year 4 funding allocation remaining unspent, which has been carried forward into 2021/22. This is fully committed and will be spent within the required timescale of 31 August 2021. As the Year 5 funding spans two financial years, any resources that are not used at the end of March 2022, will be rolled forward in a reserve for use in 2022/23.

6.7 It is currently expected that all Opportunity Area related expenditure will be met from the grant available and there will be no call on the Council's general fund resources.

6.8 Specific initiatives will be reported in line with Council procedures as they are developed.

(Vicki Hayes)

7 **Legal Services Comments**

7.1 The contents of this report are noted. It is understood that individual delegated reports will be prepared and agreed for every contractual arrangement to be entered into using the grant monies received. It is also understood that the identity of successful providers is not currently known at this moment in time but will be appointed via fully compliant procurement processes. Contractual documentation will be required for every arrangement to be entered into by the Council with any successful provider. Legal is currently waiting to be instructed by the Opportunity Area Team around historic documentation in place relating to the Opportunity Area. Sukie Kaur

8. **Co-operative Agenda**

8.1 The extension of the Opportunity Area funding will enable further capacity and skill-building within the teaching and Early Years professions and support the continued development of a holistic approach - one which engages a range of organisations and actors influencing social mobility, including parents and Oldham's thriving third sector. In this respect the proposals align with and take forward Oldham's Co-operative agenda. (Jonathan Downs – Corporate Policy Lead).

9 **Human Resources Comments**

9.1 The extension to these arrangements could have implications on the contractual status of employees that are engaged specifically on this programme of work. Human Resources will work with the Programme Director and Service Leads from Education and Early Years to determine any impacts and these will be managed in line with the appropriate policies and procedures.

Emma Gilmartin, Strategic HR Business Partner

10 **Risk Assessments**

10.1 Early engagement should be made with procurement to ensure that the Contract Procedure Rules are followed to minimise any risks around contract management.

There are risks that the priorities may require further resource than the £1.339 million grant provided as there is already an additional £300k identified for the Early Identification of Autism project. The costs will need to be monitored. Vicki Gallacher

11 **IT Implications**

11.1 None

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- 12 **Property Implications**
- 12.1 None
- 13 **Procurement Implications**
- 13.1 Commercial Procurement Unit accepts the rationale to Procure Services compliantly. The commercial procurement also recommends the following actions:
- a. A clear KPI's must be agreed with the provider and the commissioning team manages and monitors KPI's.
 - b. A contract variation document must be agreed and includes full financial information such as rates we pay i.e. per hourly or daily; not just the financial envelope.
 - c. Set up a working group involving Procurement team to develop Specifications.
 - d. Ensure appropriate consultation is undertaken at pre-procurement stage with the provider market. (Mohammad Sharif 15.06.2021)
- 14 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**
- 14.1 None
- 15 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**
- 15.1 None
- 16 **Implications for Children and Young People**
- 16.1 The OA Programme will directly benefit children and young people with a specific focus on those with greatest disadvantage.
- 17 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**
- 17.1 No
- 18 **Key Decision**
- 18.1 Yes
- 19 **Key Decision Reference**
- 19.1 KDD reference ED-04-21
- 20 **Background Papers**
- 20.1 None
- 21 **Appendices**
- 21.1 Opportunity Area Year 5 Delivery Plan – Overview