

**POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**14/06/2022 at 6.00 pm**



**Present:** Councillor McLaren (Chair)  
Councillors Alyas, Barnes, Dean, Harrison, C. Phythian,  
Wilkinson and Williamson

Also in Attendance:

Councillor Mohon Ali	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Amanda Youlden	Youth and Skills Officer
Aaliyah Ahmed	Youth Council
Freya Jones	Youth Council
Chris Lewis	Lead Youth Worker
Guy Parker	Policy Manager
Mark Hardman	Constitutional Services

1           **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR 2022/23**

**RESOLVED** – That Councillor Clint Phythian be appointed Vice Chair of the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

2           **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

3           **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Williamson declared a personal interest in agenda item 7 (Participation of Young People aged 16-18 in Education, Employment or Training (EET)), insofar as consideration of the item included reference to Positive Steps, as a Council appointee to the Positive Steps Board.

4           **URGENT BUSINESS**

No items of urgent business were considered.

5           **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions had been submitted for consideration at this meeting of the Committee.

6           **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022 be approved as a correct record.

7           **PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 16-18 IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (EET)**

The Committee were updated on current participation and NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) rates, alongside a summary of activities both undertaken and planned for the future to ensure that the Council was shaping and influencing opportunities where possible for Oldham's 16-18 year olds. Further to the submitted report, the Committee was advised of the proposed development of a Post-16 Partnership and Strategy, to which all providers of services to support young

people into EET, and other interested stakeholders, would be invited to participate and contribute.



The Council continued to fulfil its duties around encouraging, enabling and assisting young people to participate in education or training and tracking those aged 16 and 17 through the commissioning of the targeted support offer delivered by Positive Steps, this included some dedicated resource for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the Children Looked After (CLA) cohort. The effects of the pandemic on young people had been well reported, with concerns still in place about the effects on their education and wellbeing and the implications of their missing out on social and learning skills. These issues, alongside young people's own concerns about the future, all affected levels of engagement and motivation.

The approach across partners in Oldham was to ensure that young people can access the advice and support they require and that opportunities are made available to engage with young people to hear their voices and respond as best as possible. In discussion, a reported shared concern across providers related to behaviours arising from maturity issues resulting from pandemic lockdowns and showing itself through low level disruptions to engagement with education or training was noted.

It was reported that currently 94.4% of Year 12s were participating in some form of EET, this rate being consistent in the past 12 months despite the additional challenges brought by the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic had been disproportionate on CLA and Care Leavers and the struggle to re-engage and re-adjust to in person participation had required a higher level of support. The NEET rate was reported at 3.25% and had been relatively steady over the past 12 months. At January 2022, 205 young people were recorded as NEET, with 191 actively seeking EET opportunities; some of these had been waiting for Covid restrictions to be lifted while others with health issue were a little further away from EET.

The following specific issues highlighted by Committee members were considered –

- With regard to targeted, localised focus on particular areas, it was reported that that a commissioned service knows where higher levels of those NEET are and that attention could thereby be focussed. The Cabinet Member suggested that, when formed, the Partnership could look more closely at interventions in particular areas;
- The success of the Stepping into the NHS scheme was noted, but it was confirmed that the funding secured locally to provide this scheme would end later in the year. It was noted that the Northern Care Alliance was considering options as to how to mainstream this provision;

- It was confirmed that a Network currently covered all the organisations providing support to young people to engage and obtain skills for EET through which updates, problem solving and good practice was shared. It was through this Network that the above mentioned behaviours issue had been highlighted. It was hoped to develop the Network into the more formal Partnership arrangement.

In noting the submitted data, it was queried whether there was more detail available to demonstrate progress and the passage of those who were NEET into, for example, college or apprenticeship. It was confirmed that Case Studies could be provided to demonstrate this.

**RESOLVED** that -

1. the current landscape and experiences of 16-18 year olds which is impacting on their participation in education, employment or training be noted;
2. a further report be submitted to the Committee in early 2023 providing updates on rates of participation and of those not in education, employment or training, the development of the proposed Partnership and Strategy, and further matters considered by the Committee, alongside individual Case Studies showing the pathways of individuals into education, employment or training.

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**THE DIGITAL SECTOR: WORKSHOP TO REVIEW APPRENTICESHIPS ACROSS OLDHAM AND THE OFFERING OF DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIPS BY THE COUNCIL - OUTCOMES**

Further to Minute 7 of the meeting of the Committee held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022, the Committee received a report detailing outcomes from the workshop proposed by the Committee involving the Youth Council and relevant Officers to address issues relating to the development of the digital sector in the town, the review of apprenticeships across Oldham, and the offering of digital apprenticeships by the Council, as raised in a Youth Council Motion to Council.

The workshop had been delivered on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022 comprising presentations from the Get Oldham Working Team and the Workforce Development Team which were followed by a feedback session considering whether the Youth Council's original question had been answered; whether more information was required; and reflecting on the barriers to young people taking up the offers outlined in the presentations. Overall, the majority were satisfied with the response, but there were some who felt that whilst an overview of the issue had been provided, there was a lack of scrutiny on the work to date. The range of responses regarding further information were diverse but had one defining theme - most of the responses were questions that could and should be answered by quality careers education and careers advice from suitably qualified careers advisors in schools.

A common feeling was that young people felt they were unable to make an informed decision about apprenticeships, T-levels or other work-based pathways for several reasons, including a lack of information/awareness while in school, particularly around T-levels and the pathways available before young people took subject options; pressure from parents to pursue an academic route; peer/parent influence such that pathways other than A-levels were an inferior option; and confusion around qualification levels and if certain qualifications met entry requirements for Higher Education. A lack of inclusivity for those with SEND and how they accessed the pathways was further highlighted.

Members noted the views that careers advice in schools and at post-16 was not adequate, further noting that the statutory duty for providing careers education and advice lay with schools. There was a concern that budget pressures might be impacting on careers provision and the need to raise this issue directly with schools was recognised. The identified need to focus on pupils with SEND was noted and the proposed approach welcomed. Comments regarding the level of awareness of T-levels and their equivalence to other qualifications were noted, and comment made as to the need to for approaches to counter peer and parent pressure for more academic courses when T-levels maybe a better option for individual pupils.

In noting the views regarding the provision of careers advice, Members queried the scope for the Council to provide a centralised careers advice event, similar to jobs fair-type events held in the Queen Elizabeth Hall, where young people could be provided an opportunity to talk to education and training providers and employers as to options open to them, and to which secondary schools would be invited to send pupils in the appropriate age group(s). It was acknowledged that there would be a cost in providing such an event and that relevant Services would need to look to their budgets.

The Portfolio Holder undertook to further consider the delivery of a careers advice event at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the provision of digital advice, supported the proposed development of a Partnership arrangement, and advised on his intention to meet with the chief executive to discuss the expansion of apprenticeship opportunities within the council such that the Council could act as a role model for other employers.

**RESOLVED** – that

1. the delivery of a careers session to Barrier Breakers (a Youth Service run group for young people with SEND) in conjunction with Newbridge Academy Group and Positive Steps to directly respond to the highlighted inclusivity issues for pupils with SEND be supported;
2. the findings arising from the workshop be shared with the Director of Education, the wider Education Leadership Team, Oldham Learning and OASHP (Oldham and Secondary Heads/Principals) for discussion;

3. Get Oldham Working and Workforce Development arrange to review with the Youth Council their comments regarding the scrutiny issue raised in respect of their presentations;
4. the provision of a careers advice event by the Council be supported and recommended by this Committee to Officers for consideration.

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## **YOUTH COUNCIL AND THE MAKE YOUR MARK BALLOT**

The Committee received a presentation from Youth Council representatives advising of the results of the most recent Make Your Mark ballot. Every year the United Kingdom Youth Parliament holds a UK-wide ballot where all young people aged 11–18 years can vote on what they feel is important in their lives and what they think Members of the Youth Parliament should campaign on for in the year ahead. Oldham Youth Council co-ordinates the vote across the Oldham Borough. Due to Covid the 2021 ballot had been delayed until February 2022 meaning there was no Make Your Mark ballot in 2021. Participation in the ballot for national issues was a 42% turnout, with the local issues ballot being 41.8% turnout, the reduced turnout resulting from a small number of votes cast via the national Youth Parliament website which did not include local options. It was noted that turnout was higher than the average ward turnout at the recent local elections.

The ballot identified seven National Topics and, following consultation with local young people and discussion at the Oldham Youth Council on these topics and others raised locally, a list of ten Local Topics for consideration were determined.

From the identified national and local issues, specific attention was drawn to Oldham's top three National issues of –

1. Jobs, Money, Homes and Opportunities (for example, more training and apprenticeships, ending homelessness);
2. Poverty (for example, ending child poverty); and
3. Education and Learning (for example, improved climate education, free university, better mental health education)

and to the top three Local issues of

1. Tackle racism and xenophobia by celebrating diversity and educating Oldham residents;
2. Tackle street harassment, including sexual harassment on the streets and public transport; and
3. Cheaper and Safer public transport.

The Youth Council's Make Your Mark report had made recommendations, with campaigns having started on some issues while looking to take Motions to full Council on others. It was noted that ballot results were interesting as for the first time Oldham's results differed from rest of the UK. While the UK voted Health and Wellbeing as top, Oldham chose Jobs, Money and Opportunities, Poverty, and Education and Learning as more important. In response, the Youth Council was recommending that organisations providing opportunities for young people's futures should look at how they inform young people of what they do. Opportunities around jobs and training

had been at the top of the Make Your Mark issues since 2020, the past two campaigns also showing concerns around money, including paying for university, access to training and jobs and the wider aspects of poverty. There was considered to be several potential reasons for this, including a lack of awareness of what support is out there and media stories around the rise in the cost of living. The Youth Council was looking at running some research to dive deeper into why young people chose these issues and indicated that they would like to continue working with the Committee to investigate these issues for 2022.

The Committee asked Youth Council representatives for views as to why the national and local priorities had varied on this occasion. It was suggested that the level of deprivation in Oldham, linked to reductions in funding and difficulties in finding jobs may have contributed to this. Members noted that the Council needed to work with young people to better understand why they felt these were the most important issues, the Council needing to react to the concerns and put things in place. It was also noted that issues raised during the recent local elections included concerns about, for example, potholes, which while of concern to older residents did not appear to be a priority concern for younger people.

The Chair noted a need to identify a best way forward on each issue, for example those which might be pursued through a motion to Council or, alternatively those which needed a deeper dive, possibly via a workshop session. The Committee was advised that racism and xenophobia had been determined as an issue for submission to the next Council meeting, while Youth Council representatives were looking to more specific detail on why Jobs, Money and Opportunities issue was selected locally.

**RESOLVED** – that the Chair hold further discussions with the Youth Council and Officers to identify how best to progress consideration of the identified priority topics.

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## **OLDHAM PLAN AND CORPORATE PLAN**

The views and insights of the Committee to inform further development of a new Oldham Plan and a new Corporate Plan were sought, prior to the submission of the Plans to the Full Council later in the year.

The current Oldham Plan ran from 2017 to 2022 and provided an action statement for the Oldham Partnership, setting the Borough's overarching goals and activities, enablers, and short to medium-term outcomes. As the Plan was due to expire, a new long-term vision was being developed to give the Oldham Partnership a shared sense of direction for the years ahead. The Council's last Corporate Plan had run from 2017 to 2020 and established the Council's values and behaviours, and the co-operative approach to working with residents. This Plan expired at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic at which point it was decided that it would be more appropriate to produce a Covid Recovery Strategy as a roadmap to supporting residents

in response to the pandemic. This Covid Recovery Strategy was due to expire later in the year.



**Oldham**  
Council

The extensive consultation and engagement with residents, councillors, senior teams at a range of Oldham partners, and with Council staff was advised. The new Plans were being developed in parallel to ensure that the Council's priorities over the next two years aligned as well as possible with the Partnership's broader vision for the future. The Committee noted that the draft Plans as presented would be subject to substantial amendment before final approval, the draft Oldham Plan returning to partners for further consideration and revision while the Corporate Plan, having been considered at a departmental level would be reviewed again by the Cabinet before being presented at full Council.

In consideration of the draft Plans, the Committee considered the following matters -

**Place Based Working** – a Member suggested there was not enough focus on place-based working in the Plans, considering how to get services into neighbourhoods and how to reach residents. It was further suggested that the recent redrafting of area boundaries had not worked. It was noted that residents' requests for neighbourhood services was backed up by a reported generally expressed view that fewer but local services would be preferred over a broader range of services in the town centre.

**Health Inequalities** – a Member suggested that Public Health needed emphasising in the Plans, given the variances from one area to another, the impacts of austerity in Oldham and the reductions in dedicated Public Health staffing over time.

**Addressing inequalities** – a Member highlighted difficult decisions to be made, noting that to reduce inequalities might need more investment in certain areas over others which might not be appreciated in those areas receiving less support. The Committee was advised this issue would be further considered, noting that under the Oldham Plan's 'uplifting every resident' approach different areas may have differing priorities to address than others.

**Civic pride** – Noting references to pride in the draft Plans, a Member suggested that people wanted to be proud but did not feel proud. The Committee was advised that consultations indicated there was a core pride theme but a feeling that such pride had been shaken, and further noted that while people liked their local centres such as Royton or Uppermill, this was not replicated with Oldham town centre.

**Oldham town centre** – several issues related to the town centre as referenced in the draft Oldham Plan were considered. A Member commented on the current market and markets being at the heart of a city/town centre, and queried how businesses and people could be attracted back to the town centre. The

Committee was advised that while the aspiration for the new market was to provide an effective space for businesses to operate from compared to the current market which was passed its design life, when asked about shopping and leisure there were consultation responses indicating preference for on-line shopping and town centre bars and restaurants. While this was not for everyone, it showed a clear shift to online and out of town shopping that was unlikely to be reversed.

The Committee considered how to attract people to the town centre and what could make it different to other locations. It was noted that Oldham could not compete with regional centres like Manchester, but that venues like the Coliseum presented different types of show to those in Manchester, and that Oldham might be attractive to the creative industries on a cost basis. A Member commented that the ambitions of regeneration projects like the Heritage Centre, leisure walls, Spindles and Town Square appeared to have been overlooked by many. The implications of trams running through to Manchester were noted by a Member, and comment made that there were no attractions where trams stopped and no signage to the town centre. In this regard it was advised that funding for signage and the street scene had been secured and that while partners have considered concerns about safety to be as much about perception as reality, it was acknowledged that street lighting, open pathways etc were important.

A query was raised as to the numbers of First Choice Homes customers interviewed in the consultation and this would be advised. In response to a further query, discussions held with other local authorities, or reference to other similar Plans, in development of the Oldham Plans documents were advised.

The importance of communicating the Plans to residents to ensure that they were understood was stressed by a Member: the best Plans would be worthless unless the changes contained in those Plans was communicated. The Committee was also advised that the language in the Plans would be revised to remove jargon and technical terms. The suggested enhancement of the Oldham Partnership was welcomed as having good partnership arrangements would better deliver the Oldham Plan.

The Chair noted that the Committee appeared to be broadly supportive of the direction of travel in respect of the Plans but that it was difficult to do justice to them in one Committee session, suggesting that a workshop might be held on key themes with partners. With the intention to seek as many views of Councillors as possible, and the comments made concerning place based working and neighbourhoods, it was proposed that the drafts could be submitted to the District Forums for discussion. It was further noted that the Poverty Truth Commission was due to report and may identify themes which could be of significance for the Plans, while it was suggested there was not much content in the drafts related to the voluntary sector. Given the current financial position, it may be that the

voluntary sector might be able to access funds the public sector could not. The need for Members to engage positively and to not express negative views about Oldham was noted, but there was a communications issue to address to counter negative views.

The submitted report had asked questions of the role overview and scrutiny could play, and task and finish group around themes had already been suggested. The Chair further advised he was to meet with the Deputy Chief Executive to discuss place-based working, with a task and finish group already having been a suggested means of progressing this issue.

**RESOLVED** – that

1. the considerations of the Committee be forwarded for consideration in the development of the draft Oldham Plan and draft Corporate Plan;
2. it be recommended that the draft Plans be considered at District Forum meetings;
3. further inputs of the Committee into the development of the draft Plans be considered by the Chair in consultation with the relevant Officers.

11 **POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22 - OUTTURN**

The Committee received the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee outturn work programme for 2021/22 submission of which represented the formal conclusion of the 2021/22 work programme and complemented the submission to Council of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.

**RESOLVED** – that the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee outturn work programme for 2021/22 be noted.

12 **KEY DECISION NOTICE**

The Committee reviewed the Key Decision Notice which provided an opportunity for the identification of items of policy or service development, not otherwise listed on the Committee work programme, that could be included on the Committee work programme.

**RESOLVED** – that the report and the Key Decision Notice be noted.

13 **POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23**

The Committee was invited to review the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2022/23. The drafted work programme included a number of potential items and the Committee was asked to determine whether or not they wished to pursue these going forward.

The Chair noted that an update on the Creating a Better Place programme was scheduled for consideration at the next meeting and advised that the Committee had previously been unable to take up an offer of a tour of locations included in the programme

due to a lack of numbers. He proposed that further efforts should be made to schedule such a tour. The Committee was also reminded that a tour of the Northern Roots site had been proposed and suggested the Committee may also wish to pursue this.



**RESOLVED** – that

1. the submitted Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2022/23 be noted;
2. further efforts be made to arrange a tour of locations included in the Creating a Better Place programme;
3. arrangements be made for a Committee visit to the Northern Roots site;
4. a workshop with Greater Manchester Police be arranged as proposed at Minute 6 of the Committee meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022;
5. appropriate items relating to the Green New Deal and related issues and to the Selective Licensing of Private Rented properties Scheme be included on the Committee Work Programme.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.15 pm