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**Report to COUNCIL 13 December 2023**

## **Children and Young People Portfolio Update**



### **Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor Mushtaq, Deputy Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

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This report provides an update on the main activity since the last Council meeting relating to portfolio responsibilities.

### **Children's Safeguarding**

The Duty and Advice (MASH) front door continues to deliver efficient, timely and targeted screening and response despite high contact and referral rates. Data shows a consistent referral conversion rate, with a notable increase in Early Help referrals in October 2023. The Assessment and Intervention service are supporting 1183 children who have been identified as 'in need' of support and services (under Section 17 Children Act), or 'at risk of significant harm' (section 47 Children Act).

The Complex Safeguarding Hub has managed 98 referrals, with 55 concerning sexual exploitation, since April. As part of the prevention work, over 3000 school children have benefited from safeguarding training, while the biannual action weeks enhanced community engagement. There are 65 young people receiving support and intervention from the Complex Safeguarding team.

The safeguarding and care planning service is responsible for the initiation and progression of applications to the court where the LA have assessed the children as requiring legal intervention. There are 117 children in care proceedings. Pre-proceedings is a system used when the test for legal intervention has been met, but it is felt a period of further assessment would assist both the LA and the courts to determine whether the children can safely remain in the care of their parents and/or extended family. The service is supporting 82 children through this system.

### **Children Looked After**

In Oldham, the rate of children looked after is relatively stable at 93 per 10,000, slightly below regional and comparative local authority averages. Placement stability is a key indicator of outcomes. A challenging placement market has made stability difficult to achieve for some young people and too many are in residential placements when we would want them to be placed in foster homes. Despite these challenges children with three or more placements in the last 12 months are comparable with the northwest and England average. Since 1st January 2023 we have supported 32 children to achieve legal permanence at home with their parents through our focused work to discharge care orders for children placed with their parents, contributing significantly to our overall children looked after numbers remaining stable.

### **Fostering and Adoption**

Oldham's fostering service has 293 children in internal foster care, with an additional 51 in independent foster homes. We are continually working on recruiting new carers and have bold targets against this. We have registered six new mainstream households and eleven new connected / kinship carers so far this financial year. Over 70 children are being tracked through adoption, including those under Public Law Outline. Seven children are awaiting Placement Orders. There are 15 children on Placement Orders, with all but one linked to potential adopters and making progress. 16 adoptions have been finalised since April 2023, and 8 more are expected to conclude by December.

### **Care Leavers**

Oldham ensures a smooth transition for care leavers at 18 by allocating Personal Advisers at 17 and collaborating with Housing services for post-18 accommodation options. Support is provided to Care Leavers not in education, employment, or training and the service offers to be guarantor for young people wishing to rent privately, however, there is an affordability issue in that privately rented properties at an affordable price are not available for young people and there is collaboration taking place with housing associations to identify direct matches for young people.

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## **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**

Oldham is supporting 47 young people aged between 14 and 19 years old who continue to seek settled refugee status in the UK, having presented as unaccompanied minors. The council is focused on providing suitable accommodation until settled status is resolved, working with housing partners to identify viable options. While some costs are recoupable, this does not cover the total outlay when considering placement and miscellaneous costs.

## **Social Work Academy**

The local adoption of the GM Pledge which went live on 1 November 2023 will standardise agency social worker employment, aiming to cut costs and improve retention. Marketing efforts have yielded a significant increase in job applications, with an ongoing campaign to position Oldham as an employer of choice. Recruitment initiatives include active participation in recruitment events and a dedicated microsite.

## **Early Help**

Targeted Early Help teams are supporting 576 families with 1,228 children and achieving successful outcomes for 80-90% of families for most issues at case closure and 75% of families close with all issues resolved, with housing and unemployment among the issues most difficult to resolve. The two Family Centre's facilitate over 150 family time sessions per week for children with their birth families, and in addition support over 850 sessions per year on a less frequent basis e.g. during school holidays.

## **Early Years**

We wish to consult on proposals to increase, improve and better coordinate our early family support offer to best suit the needs of Oldham families. This will include the refurbishment of seven 'Family Hubs' across the borough, the delivery of services for families with children from a wide range of facilities within communities, and the delivery of a comprehensive outreach and digital offer. To reshape our services to meet the changing needs of Oldham's families we need to reconsider the formal designation of those children's centres which are currently underused or unused, not fit for purpose, or in need of significant investment. The planned consultation, which will take place in December and January, will seek views on our plans to invest in Family Hubs, which buildings and locations we should use to deliver services for families, and the de-designation of some of our current designated children's centres.

## **Youth Services**

The Youth Service continue to deliver a comprehensive range of youth work programmes and activities, building on the district-based youth work offer of at least 40 sessions per week. The service continues to support key events across Oldham, such as the big bang Bonfire working which received positive feedback from police and partners about the benefits of having the youth service to support. The service has been part of a successful partnership approach to addressing ASB and youth violence concerns around the King Street tram stop. Key issues are meeting demand for youth services across the districts.

Oldham's Members of Youth Parliament attended the annual UKYP sitting in the House of Commons in November to debate the priority campaign – Food for Learning. Both our Oldham MYPS spoke in the commons to the debate and represented Oldham's young people brilliantly.

We delivered a successful October universal holiday offer for children and young people ages 5 – 16 providing free activities and food for 570 children and young people.

The Outdoor and Environmental Education service is on target to deliver activity to over 8000 Oldham young people. The service has recently been granted High Peak National Park ambassador Centre status and has retained the Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Mark. During October half term the service piloted delivery of family-based sessions as part of the universal holiday activities, these were a great success, and the service is planning to repeat this family-based offer for the winter holiday period.

We have been successful in a capital grant application from the youth investment fund – we have secured £165,000 to fund the replacement of the stone slate roof at the Castleshaw centre. This is a much-needed capital investment to replace the roof that has fallen into disrepair.

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**Recommendations:** Council is requested to note the report.