



Oldham  
Council

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Report to COUNCIL March 2024

# Children and Young People Portfolio Report

## Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

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

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Children's Social Care and Early Help are providing support to 4,117 Children and Young People. Below are the latest updates from the services that have been delivered.

**Children's Safeguarding - Duty and Advice (MASH)** continue to experience high demand, averaging 539 contacts per week with an average of 18% progressing to statutory social work assessment. The team continue to work closely with partners to support early identification on early help. The Complex Safeguarding Hub is supporting 63 children and young people at risk of exploitation. The hub has delivered training to partners and raised awareness with school students in the borough about exploitation risks.

The Children's Assessment and Intervention service is supporting 1,209 children and families in need of help and protection. The Safeguarding and Care Planning service is managing cases of 857 children with 481 children subject to child protection planning, 168 children looked after, and 208 children being supported under child in need. The service is supporting 104 children through pre-proceedings and 158 children through care proceedings. Systems to track and review progression of all children and families subject to pre-proceedings are well embedded.

**Oldham Safeguarding Children's Partnership - The Partnership Development Day** occurred on 18<sup>th</sup> January where a presentation to partners outlined the main changes and broader travel of direction of the Social Care Reform agenda. Work is underway to develop a draft project and implementation plan as key changes need to be implemented by December 2024. During January, the Partnership did not receive notification of any serious child safeguarding incidents which would prompt referral to the National Panel. Therefore, the Partnership has 5 ongoing Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews at different stages in the 6-month production cycle, and a further 2 which have recently been finalised in Autumn 2023 and where the learning is being embedded / tested through action plans. A plan for the roll out of the Graded Care Profile 2 Training (assessment tool for identifying and measuring the risk of neglect) for practitioners across Children's Services and Northern Care Alliance in Spring 2024 has been committed to by the senior leaders across the partnership.

**Children Looked After (*inc fostering and adoption*)** - There are currently 593 children in care bringing us in line with statistical neighbours. Placement stability remains a key priority area to ensure children experience settled places to live and their plans are progressed to permanence.

There are 310 children in care living with internal foster carers, an indication of the increased demand and value our internal fostering provision is having. All other internal provision is fully occupied. There are 57 children in independent foster placements and 60 children in external residential care. The 2024/25 Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy is due for completion next month, and there is a launch event planned for our Mockingbird innovation programme that will further enhance our support services to children and foster carers.

**Care Leavers** - There are 356 young people aged 16 – 25 eligible for the leaving care offer. 130 of these young people are aged under 18. There are 32 unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people aged under 18 being supported with their Home Office application, and a further 19 young people aged over 18 still awaiting a final outcome of their asylum applications. The service is in touch with all young people and young people in suitable accommodation remains high at 98%. We have seen improvements in the number of young people aged 18 & 19 in education, employment, or training (56% and 52% respectively).

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However, the cohort of young people aged 20 has challenges and represents a cohort that impacts the EET numbers significantly. Close monitoring and collaboration with partners, including developmental initiatives with Oldham College, Get Oldham Working, Positive Steps, and the DWP, is ongoing.

**Social Work Workforce** - We continue to successfully recruit newly qualified social workers, apprentices, and Frontline students, but face challenges in attracting experienced professionals. We are working closely with our communications colleagues to identify solutions to this challenge as part of an internal communications plan for 2024-2025. The December 23 workforce information shows the children's social work turnover rate has reduced to 10.9%. We have 295.5 qualified social work staff employed across the service at all levels, 167 of these are permanent members of staff (56.5%). We have applied to the DfE to be a part of a Review, Testing, and Implementation Network for the National Workload Action Group and Valuing Social Work Project. This group aims to influence social work workload and practice conditions, enabling high-quality direct practice to effect positive change in children's lives.

**Early Help** - After a successful pilot in the autumn term, the multi-agency Early Help Panel has been rolled out borough wide. This aims to help families to access support from partners at an earlier stage, preventing referrals being needed to Targeted Early Help or Children's Social Care. The panels are being promoted to partners, particularly schools, in order to increase the numbers benefitting from this support.

Positive Steps have introduced a weekly families drop-in at Werneth and Freehold Community Centre to particularly improve engagement with the Pakistani community who are under-represented in Early Help. A grant has been provided by Great Places housing to establish further drop-ins at two of their community centres – Primrose Centre and Crossley Centre.

**Early Years** - The children's centres consultation ended on 26 January 2024 following a successful resident webinar on 24 January 2024. Refurbishment work at Stanley Road CC commenced 22 January 2024. Work on the other 3 Family Hub sites at Medlock Vale, Shaw and Spring Meadows will be completed by end of April 2024. A launch for Stanley Road will be planned for early March. There has been a significant increase in the number of families accessing services at Beever Family Hub. Data for November showed 689 attendances at activities.

Significant preparation is underway to implement the childcare expansion programme. Oldham has received notification of its allocation for 2024-2026 for both the 2,3 and 4-year-old expansion programme and wraparound programme. The preparation for the consultation on provider funding rates for the early education entitlement will occur in February 2024.

**Youth Services** - The Oldham Youth Service continues to deliver a diverse range of youth work interventions across the borough including youth voice work, schools-based work, detached youth work, district-based youth work, targeted interventions tackling youth violence, alongside a range of projects providing positive activities for young people at a universal level. The service has delivered 1342 sessions and engaged 2631 individual young people up to the end of Quarter 3.

On 4 January 2024, the Listen to the Earth programme took 24 young people from Oldham to Poland as part of a holocaust education programme. Also in January was the inaugural Youth Council meeting of the 2024 – 2026 term of office, with 39 new youth councillors taking up their role as democratically elected representatives of Oldham's young people. Delivery of the Adventures Away from Home programme (funded by the DCMS) has begun, this will enable us to provide fully funded residential and day visits for young people during the Jan – March term. The funding means we can provide 50 young people with an exciting and enriching residential experience and 150 young people with exciting day visits.

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