

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Shaid 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.

Childrens' Social Care and Early Help are providing support to 4,178 children and young people (12 June 2024). Below are the latest updates from the services.

1. Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Childrens Services (ILACS)

The three-week children's services inspection in May 2024 provided external scrutiny on services for children and young people. The inspection recognised the significant progress and effectiveness of Oldham Children's Services for help and protection, children looked after, care leavers, and impact of leaders. The final report will be published by Ofsted on 12 July 2024. Some of the feedback received from children and young people during the inspection was:

"SWs like her are what kids like me need."

"The level of support is pitched perfectly for my individual needs."

"The stars awards help support and develop my confidence."

2. Childrens Safeguarding

The Duty and Advice service located in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub continues to receive a high number of contacts, averaging 407, with referrals to children's social care remaining around 22%. The updated operating procedures outline the expectations on partner agencies in relation to the support they offer to children and families prior to making a referring, that are not in relation to safeguarding concerns.

The Complex Safeguarding Hub is supporting 62 young people where there is evidence of sexual or criminal exploitation, of which 21% are diagnosed with additional needs. The team delivers interventions alongside Keeping Our Girls Safe and Catch 22, enabling earlier recognition of sexual exploitation and implementation of preventative work. Training and development across the partnership continues, alongside sessions to students and staff across various schools in Oldham.

The Assessment and Intervention Service are supporting 1,279 children assessed as children in need, 36 children are subject to child protection planning and progression into legal proceedings, and 14 children who have recently become looked after. This is an increase of 80 children since May 24. The Safeguarding and Care Planning Service are supporting 438 children subject to Child Protection Plans, 235 children subject to child in need and 205 Children Looked After.

3. Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership

The partnership met on 15 May and received an independent report on the Strategic Assessment of the Partnership against the new requirements outlined in Working Together 2023. The Neglect subgroup held a workshop with key partners to review progress against the strategy and action plan. All agencies agreed to undertake a mapping exercise and identify key priorities with support from Public Health.

4. Children Looked After (inc fostering and adoption)

There are 603 children in care. There are 305 children in internal foster placements, an increasing number over time. All other internal provision is fully occupied. There has been an increase in the number of children placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and external residential accommodation. The service held its annual celebration of children looked after, the Stars Awards on 23 June, where children's achievements were recognised at a ceremony and fun day.

There are 362 young people aged 16 – 25 eligible for the leaving care offer. 119 of these young people are aged under 18. There are 25 unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people aged under 18 being supported with their Home Office application, and a further 32 young people aged over 18 awaiting final outcome of their asylum application. The service is in touch with all young people, and those in suitable accommodation remains at 98%. We have seen improvements in the number of young people aged 18 and 19 in education, employment, or training. The service is working with a local construction company to develop opportunities for training and qualifications in building work.

5. Children’s Commissioning

Commissioners continue to work with new and existing placement providers based in Oldham to develop and enhance placements for Oldham children and young people in IFAs, residential and semi-independent provision. The offer is being enhanced for young people aged over 18 who are appealing Home Office decisions to remain and are without recourse to public funds during the process. We are exploring a pilot scheme in partnership with local provider, under the Placement Northwest Framework arrangements.

6. Early Help

The number of children open to targeted early help has reduced from to 1,150 since January 2024. Proactive work has led to significant reduction in children being re-referred to early help services and fewer children escalating into children’s social care in the six months following early help involvement. An important development has been a strengthened Early Help team within the MASH. This is helping to ensure that families are directed to the full range of early help support.

Other developments are the start of the improving attendance work with 10 secondary schools, with multi-agency attendance and inclusion meetings now taking place. The Domestic Abuse team have introduced a new model for providing support to victims after high-risk concerns have been addressed to prevent the recurrence or escalation of abuse.

7. Early Years

Delivery of evidence-based training courses has commenced across the Family Hub network including hubs, schools, Failsworth Town Hall, and Oldham Library. Families and professionals now are able to access a wide range of information, practical guidance and videos through the Essential Parent digital library which is on the Family Hub website which is reaching approximately 200-300 users per month.

8. Youth Service

The Youth Service continues to deliver at least 40 sessions per week across the district’s youth work, detached youth work and boroughwide youth work teams as well as supporting our young people to safely attend events across Oldham such as the Whit Friday Band Contest.

The Oldham Children and Young People Participation Framework is now live and offers a comprehensive, consistent approach to how we ensure the voices of children and young people in Oldham are shaping and influencing our work. Members of the Children in Care Council attended a training residential, developing their facilitation skills in preparation for co-delivering Total Respect training for professionals to ensure the voice of young people is embedded in the services they receive.

The Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF) Easter and May holiday activities included the development of a photography programme with the young people holding an exhibition of their work. The service also arranged a football tournament for young people at Boundary Park. The tournament was a fantastic example of cohesion work, bringing young people from a range of Oldham communities together in the spirit of building relationships, friendships, and teamwork.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.