
Report to COUNCIL – 6th November 2024

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 activities.

Children's Social Work

Our Duty and Advice Service has seen an increase in contacts into the service, averaging 491 per week as schools have resumed, although the conversion rate to referrals (Threshold met for statutory intervention) remains steady at 17%. We have strengthened our partnership with Greater Manchester Police's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub by delivering targeted training on thresholds and referral processes, with plans to extend this training to other key partners. Meanwhile, our Complex Safeguarding Hub is supporting 42 young people at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation, with a wider Greater Manchester 'Week of Action' having taken place in October to promote and raise awareness in schools.

The Assessment and Intervention service is supporting 1,088 children. Following assessment, intervention and support the service will aim to step cases to Targeted Early Help and/or universal services where appropriate and safe to do so. We are rotating duty teams into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub to further enhance collaborative working. The Safeguarding and Care Planning service is supporting 868 children, including 224 on Child-in-Need plans and 420 on Child Protection plans. With a reduction in pre-proceedings cases from 98 to 59 since the start of the year and a complete team of permanent managers in place, we are ensuring consistent and timely decision making.

Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP)

During September, the Partnership conducted a series of reviews and workshops focused on enhancing our multi-agency approach to safeguarding. A Performance Subgroup meeting took place to evaluate key data from the first quarter, where partners discussed what is working well and identified areas for further improvement. This proactive approach enables us to strengthen our collective safeguarding responsibilities and respond effectively to emerging trends.

To support ongoing professional development, OSCP has hosted training sessions for partners on the implementation of the National 'Right Care Right Person' initiative, launched on 30th September. This initiative aims to streamline police involvement in safeguarding matters, improving the effectiveness and appropriateness of responses across services.

Children Looked After and Care Leavers (including Fostering and Adoption)

I am pleased to share our Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) has been inspected by Ofsted and retained its 'Good' grading, further demonstrating our commitment to ensuring high quality support and care for vulnerable young people.

There are a total of 610 children in our care, with 307 in internal foster placements, reflecting our strong internal provision. While all internal placements are occupied, we have reduced external residential placements from 64 to 62 and increased semi-independent accommodation to 90 to meet the needs of young people transitioning to independence.

In partnership with Housing Services, we have introduced a "direct match" approach for care leavers over 18 and commissioned tailored support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (USAC). Additionally, the Mockingbird project recently launched its second Hub at Mahdlo, strengthening support networks for foster families. The After Care service is supporting 386 young people aged 16 to 25 under our leaving care offer. The aged 18-21 care leaver cohort not in education, employment, or training (NEET) remains a priority. To address this, we are working with partners to create apprenticeship opportunities and targeted support, a plan that has been positively received by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Social Work Workforce

We have successfully reduced the number of off-contract agency staff within Children's Social Care, ensuring all are within the Greater Manchester pay cap. The overall agency percentage of the Social Work workforce has reduced to 26.9% in Quarter 2 from 49% in the same period in 2023. We are actively recruiting through fortnightly interviews and have introduced 'stay interviews' to improve retention, initially targeting staff who have been with us for two to three years. Alongside this, leaders are focused on maintaining a supportive and positive working culture.

The Children's Social Work Academy continues to be recognised as best practice, supporting other Local Authorities and playing a key role in our 'Grow Our Own' strategy. We have renewed our partnership with Frontline, enabling us to welcome 15 new student social workers, reinforcing our commitment to building a sustainable and skilled workforce of the future.

Early Help

Early Help teams are supporting 1,050 children and young people through targeted interventions and have positively reduce re-referrals into children's social care. To meet Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) targets, an improvement plan is focusing on increasing outcome success rates and expanding claims to include Child in Need work and school-led activities. Planning is also underway to remodel and integrate Early Help, Family Hubs, and Early Years teams into community based earlier support services. Despite high demand on the Domestic Abuse team, actions are in place to improve timeliness for high-risk cases, aiming to build a more co-ordinated family support system.

Early Years

Good progress has been made in delivering the Early Education and Childcare Programme for 2024/25, with the percentage of eligible children taking up the disadvantaged 2-year-old entitlement in Oldham at 82%, above the national average of 75%. For the 3 and 4-year-old entitlement, take-up is at 90.8% for summer term 2023/24. The transition of Family Hub services to Failsworth Town Hall is complete. A new antenatal and postnatal education programme has launched in October, addressing a key gap in support for expectant parents.

Youth Services

The Youth Service is delivering approximately 25 sessions per week across the borough, including universal district work, targeted interventions to reduce youth violence, and school-based support. Despite current vacancies, the team has maintained a comprehensive offer, and collaboration is underway with Family Hubs to explore expanding the youth offer. Recent highlights include successful delivery of outdoor education programmes and youth voice initiatives, such as the co-hosting of regional events focused on youth safety and policing. Planning is also underway for the winter Holiday Activity and Food Programme, which aims to provide enriching activities for young people over the Christmas period.

Children's Commissioning and Transformation Programme

The children's commissioning team are working closely with local placement providers to enhance the availability of local fostering, semi-independent and independent living accommodation, successfully creating 17 new semi-independent placements and 12 new over-18s placements. In partnership with GMCA's Project Skyline, regional capacity in children's homes is being increased, with new properties under evaluation. The transformation programme is progressing, with refurbishment work on one of the three new children's home set to begin in November, and additional projects underway to expand residential capacity and integrate family help services.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.