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**Report to COUNCIL – 18<sup>th</sup> December 2024**



**Oldham**  
Council

## **Portfolio Report**

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Shaid Mushtaq, 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 activities.

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

Children's Social Care and Early Help services are providing support to 3,574 children and young people across early help, children in need, child protection, children looked after and care leavers (28/11/2024).

Following the ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) in Children's Services in May 2024 in which the service was rated Good in all areas, the Achieving Excellence strategy and improvement plan has been launched.

As we reach the end of 2024, I want to reflect on the incredible work undertaken this year across children and young people services. Oldham's children, young people, and families rely on us during their most challenging times, and I am immensely proud of the dedication and care shown by all those who make a difference every single day.

Oldham has seen significant progress in the way we support vulnerable children and young people. Our work in children's social care and early help continues to improve outcomes and strengthen services. The reduction in our use of agency social workers, from 44.7% in October 2023 to 26.4% in October 2024, is a testament to our efforts to build a stable, skilled workforce. This has been achieved through innovative recruitment campaigns, a strong focus on workforce learning and development, and a growing reputation as an employer of choice in Greater Manchester. The 'Grow Our Own' workforce model continues to exceed targets, reducing our use of agency social workers, which is being expanded to focus on career pathways in residential services as we grow our internal children's home provision.

In our Duty and Advice service, we've handled an average of 465 contacts each week over the last four weeks, maintaining timely and effective support. The improvements in our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) have strengthened relationships across agencies, enabling more effective safeguarding responses. The Complex Safeguarding Hub provided training sessions on criminal exploitation and serious youth violence in schools, facilitated by Kingsland Academy and Co-Op Academy, with delivery from individuals with lived experience which were well received by students and staff.

The Assessment and Intervention service is supporting 1,013 plans, maintaining a positive step down of cases into lower-level services over recent months. 979 children and young people are being supported or assessed as children in need, 24 are under child protection planning or pre-proceedings, and 10 have recently become looked after. Staff stability is improving, and permanent recruitment remains a priority.

The Safeguarding and Care Planning service continues to support 902 plans. Six weekly reviews ensure those children subject to pre-proceedings do not experience delay. We continue to support 209 children who are looked after with our key focus on supporting children in Kinship Care arrangements where possible.

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In October, Research in Practice delivered a series of workshops for Child Safeguarding Partnerships across the country on the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) process, which was well attended by the Oldham Children Safeguarding Partnership. OSCP received positive feedback from the National Panel on two recently submitted Rapid Reviews that highlighted good quality and strong analysis identifying key learning for the Partnership.

For children in care and care leavers, we have continued to provide safe, stable placements and support as they transition into adulthood. The number of children in care at 620 is an increase of ten since the last report. Of these 310 are placed in internal foster care, highlighting strong internal provision.

I want to recognise the work of the children's commissioning and transformation teams who have worked creatively to address placement sufficiency demand pressures. The introduction of bespoke accommodation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people has ensured their needs are met while contributing to placement cost reductions, 12 young people have been successfully matched to new over-18s accommodation. The refurbishment of Royton children's home has started, and the new children's home in St James is progressing to refurbishment stage.

In November, children in care took part in various activities for a 'Take Over' event. This included taking over the role of Head of Youth Service for a day, attending and leading meetings in Education and a full day of visiting senior officers and members at council offices. The goal was to demonstrate the council services to the young people and showcase the variety of employment options available to them when they reach that age.

The After Care service actively engaged in Care Leavers Week held w/c 28th October with a full week of activities including an adventure walk up Hartshead Pike, held a friendly competitive football match against Manchester's Care Leavers and revisited their 'Positivi-tree' in Alexandra Park launched last year.

Our Early Help teams have played a vital role in working with families before issues escalate. The number of children open to targeted early help has remained around 1,050, with consistent practice that reflects the strength of our early intervention work. Re-referral rates for early help have been maintained at approximately 15% of cases within six months of closure.

The Early Years service has continued to provide high quality support to childcare settings, with all childminders and group childcare settings in Oldham rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. This achievement is a remarkable testament to the quality of care and early education provided in the early years sector. Two of Oldham's early years settings have recently been highlighted in the GMCA campaign for promoting careers in the sector.

The Youth Service has delivered over 25 youth work sessions borough-wide and introduced new provisions in Limeside and Werneth. Our October half-term programme included engaging activities such as a Liverpool FC tournament, Black History workshops, and museum visits, further enriching the experiences of our young people. During Hate Crime Awareness Week, our young people delivered the Uniting People Conference, challenging hate and discrimination across Oldham schools. The GMP Youth Scrutiny Panel welcomed new members and elected two Co-Chairs, showcasing the continued drive in youth voice and participation.

As we celebrate these achievements, I also acknowledge the challenges we continue to face with high demand for services, both locally and nationally. I welcome the government's recent announcement of children's social care reform in Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive, which marks a significant shift towards strengthening early intervention and prevention, workforce stability and placement sufficiency challenges, all of which are key priorities in the children's social care and early help Achieving Excellence strategy, as we continue to deliver improved outcomes for the children, young people, and families of Oldham.

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