

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Shaid Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People

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

Children's Social Care and Early Help are supporting 3,548 children and young people through a range of plans, including 904 receiving early help, 1,391 children in need, 403 subject to child protection plans, 602 children looked after, and 379 care leavers (as of 10 November 2025).

I want to take the opportunity to recognise our practitioners that work with passion, dedication and advocacy to meet the needs of our children and young people with SEND, which inspectors highlighted as a strength during the Local Area SEND monitoring inspection in November. Thank you to you all.

Social Work Services

Our Duty and Advice service continues to manage high demand effectively, with an average of 428 contacts per week and a conversion rate to safeguarding referral of 19%. Year-on-year comparisons show a 10% reduction in contacts progressing to referral, reflecting improved early intervention.

The Complex Safeguarding Hub is supporting 61 open cases, with 43% linked to child sexual exploitation and 57% to child criminal exploitation. The Hub is actively involved in 135 ongoing police investigations and 12 operations, including cases of online grooming and historic abuse. Quarterly returns show that 44% of young people in the Hub have additional needs or SEND, aligning with GM averages.

Court work remains a pressure point with 70 cases before the Family Court. Workforce stability is improving, but this remains a key focus.

Safeguarding Partnership

The Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP) continues to drive improvement. In October, Child Sexual Abuse Practice Week engaged almost 400 practitioners in training and workshops, including survivor-led sessions that strengthened professional understanding and confidence.

Youth engagement remains strong. As part of White Ribbon Two Weeks of Action, students co-produced a teaching resource on healthy relationships, which will be shared across schools. A youth event titled *Me, Myself and I* explored themes of self-concept through drama, promoting peer-led learning.

Corporate Parenting

Internal fostering continues to perform well with 326 children looked after placed internally and 122 in kinship care. Our semi-independent accommodation is at 90% capacity, and two new internal children's homes are open enabling our young people to live closer to their communities and networks.

One of our children's homes has received their annual inspection from Ofsted. I am pleased to report that the provision has been graded Good in all areas.

November marked National Care Leavers Month, with events celebrating achievements and co-producing improvements to the Local Offer. Highlights include winning 2nd place at Coram Voice's national awards and launching the new co-produced pathway assessment, plan and review document. An event took place with First Choice Homes to launch their housing offer to Care Leavers. 54% of care leavers aged 18–21 are now in education, employment, or training—a positive upward trend.

Workforce

Workforce stability has improved. Turnover and agency rates have reduced, and we are fully compliant with new DfE agency rules. Our Assisted and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme for Newly Qualified Social Workers continues to receive positive feedback, and Skills for Care will undertake a quality assurance in December.

Families First Partnership Programme

The Families First Partnership Programme national reform will strengthen early intervention and prevention across Oldham. A recent engagement event in South district brought together 85 practitioners and leaders to co-design Integrated Family Help informed by local harm factor data. The progress so far in the programme has been highlighted by DfE and GM colleagues as an example of strong partnership working and collaborative design.

Family Help & Early Years

Early help caseloads rose following the return to schools at the start of the academic year. Despite this, assessment timeliness remains positive at 82%. Domestic abuse services have reduced high-risk caseloads and improved response times, with most clients allocated an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) within 48 hours.

I was pleased to attend the Best Start in Life event on 27 November with nearly 100 practitioners across Oldham to shape a shared plan to improve early years outcomes. A local Giving Children the Best Start in Life plan is being developed for submission to the DfE to outline Oldham's approach to improving the Good Level of Development.

Youth Services & Holiday Activities

Youth Services continue to deliver 45 sessions weekly. October highlights include the Beyond the Armour conference, led by young people exploring masculinity and mental health, and a packed half-term programme with creative workshops and sports activities. Detached teams remain active in addressing antisocial behaviour around King Street.

Oldham's Police Youth Scrutiny Panel celebrated its second anniversary. Over the past two years, the panel has become a model of best practice, inspiring other Greater Manchester boroughs to replicate Oldham's approach as part of GM Child-Centred Policing.

The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme ran for the first time during October half-term, delivering 24 camps and teenage gym passes despite tight timescales. Planning for winter provision is complete, ensuring families have access to activities during the festive period.

Outdoor education remains a strength, with investment in facilities and a new minibus secured through external funding. The Adventures Away from Home programme is now live, offering enriching experiences for young people facing barriers to participation.

Summary

Oldham's Children and Young People Portfolio continues to deliver vital services under sustained demand. We have seen progress in workforce stability, safeguarding practice, and care leaver outcomes, alongside innovative youth-led initiatives and expanded holiday provision. Challenges remain, particularly around court timeliness and placement sufficiency, but our commitment to improving outcomes is unwavering.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.