



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.

Key Achievements for 2025/26

Major Workforce Stabilisation

- Agency social worker rate cut from 29.4% to 13.9%, and turnover reduced significantly — improving consistency and quality of support.

Strong Safeguarding Performance & Positive Ofsted Visit

- Successful Ofsted Focused Visit confirming timely, high-quality safeguarding practice and effective MASH operations.
- Complex Safeguarding Hub led major operations (including Operation Sherwood) with extensive multi-agency work and VR-based exploitation education.

Improved Outcomes for Children in Care & Care Leavers

- Strong internal fostering and kinship provision; expansion of Mockingbird hubs.
- 53–54% of care leavers aged 18–21 now in education, employment or training — a consistently improving trend.
- National recognition including 2nd place at Coram Voice awards.

Strengthened Early Help & Family Hubs

- Stable early help caseloads (850–1,100) with faster assessments and reduced re-referral rates.
- Family Hubs and Domestic Abuse services expanded reach and increased timely support.

High-Performing Early Years Sector

- 96–100% of Early Years settings rated Good or Outstanding, including all childminders.
- Best Start in Life strategy developed and rollout of national Free Breakfast Clubs expanded to 12 schools.

Expanded Youth Engagement & Holiday Activity Programme

- Extensive targeted and open-access youth work, plus successful programmes like Beyond the Armour and Listen to the Earth.
- HAF delivered thousands of places including 3,166 children supported during Winter HAF and with over 20,000+ meals served over Summer.
- Outdoor education service achieved Outstanding and expanded capacity with new minibuses.

1. Children's Social Work

Children's Social Care and Early Help are providing support to 3,729 Children and Young People through a range of plans including, 951 early help, 1,498 children in need, 391 child protection, 625 children looked after and 479 care leavers (As at 02/02/2026).

Demand into our Duty and Advice service has increased, with an average of 410 contacts per week and a 20% referral conversion rate, reflecting increased complexity but continued strong partnership triage and signposting.

The Complex Safeguarding Hub is supporting 67 children, with 45% at risk of or experiencing child sexual exploitation and 55% at risk of or experiencing child criminal exploitation. Police colleagues are managing 118 live crimes and 14 active operations, including those involving non-recent child sexual exploitation and online harm. The team continues to lead innovative practice, including the use of Virtual Reality (VR)-based education programmes in schools to support learning on risks such as knife crime and exploitation.

2. Workforce Stability

Stabilising our workforce remains a central priority, and I'm pleased to report progress is strong. At the end of Quarter 3, the rate of agency social workers had reduced to 13.9%, a significant improvement from the same period last year (29.4%), with conversion of agency workers into permanent posts continuing positively. Our turnover rate has also reduced to 13.5% from 19.7% in the same period last year, contributing to greater consistency of relationships for children and families. Average caseloads stand at 17.1, enabling practitioners to deliver quality and depth of direct work with children and families.

3. Supporting Children in Care and Strengthening Corporate Parenting

The number of children in care has risen to 625, prompting a systemwide reflective review to ensure the right services are in place at the right time for families.

The fostering recruitment initiative, "Stepping Forward Fostering", has attracted significant local and regional media attention, including from Capital Radio and Granada. This is contributing to increased enquiries and supports our strategy to grow internal fostering capacity.

Internal fostering remains well utilised, with 333 children placed in internal fostering and 142 children in kinship arrangements, reflecting progress in family-based care and a growing emphasis on supporting extended family networks.

A new initiative that I'm proud of is providing bespoke 'welcome into our care' packages for every child who becomes looked after. These packages recognise the emotional impact of entering care and help ensure children feel valued, safe, and welcomed. They also support carers with the practical items needed during the first few days of placement and are aligned with our trauma-informed approach.

4. Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership

The Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP) continues to drive high-quality multi-agency learning and improvement.

Eight serious incident notifications have been received since April 2025, with Rapid Reviews leading to timely learning and practice changes. The Partnership is also contributing to the development of the Greater Manchester Child Sexual Abuse Strategy, focusing on improving joint investigation and reducing reliance on children needing to disclose abuse.

The Partnership continues to strengthen safeguarding culture across education settings, with training described by schools as accessible, practical, and impactful.

5. Family Help

Targeted Early Help continues to work with just under 1,100 children, although demand remains high, improvements have been made in completing timely assessments, and integrated district-based models are showing early positive feedback.

Our Family Hubs continue to engage families through Winter Warmer events, digital resources, and community outreach, with 247 families benefiting from recent events.

6. Early Years

A new Ofsted inspection framework is in place but under the previous criteria, 100% of childminders and 95% of PVI settings were rated Good or Outstanding. To date, three settings

have been inspected under the new framework with all either meeting or exceeding expected standards. Take up of early years places in Oldham continues to be strong.

Our Best Start in Life strategy, presented at Cabinet last month, stresses our commitment to ensuring that every child has the strongest possible start in life. Through our Best Start Family Hubs and many support programmes, we will ensure that our children receive the right support at the right time.

The national Free Breakfast Clubs Programme will move into Phase Two in April 2026. I am pleased to advise that, as part of this expansion, five additional Oldham schools have been selected to join, bringing the total number of participating schools in Oldham to 12.

7. Youth Service

The Youth Service continues to deliver a wide range of open-access, targeted, and detached youth work. Young people participating in the immersive Listen to the Earth – Holocaust Education Project have returned as youth leaders, contributing powerfully to Holocaust Memorial Day and community dialogue.

The service achieved an Outstanding outcome in its recent Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) inspection and has expanded its transport capacity with two new minibuses, including a fully accessible vehicle.

Winter HAF provision supported 3,166 children, with 6,758 attendances across winter sessions. Planning is underway for Easter delivery.

8. Summary

Across Children and Young People Services, notable achievements continue to be made despite sustained high demand.

The dedication of our workforce, carers, partners, and community organisations continues to ensure Oldham's children and young people are safe, supported, and able to thrive.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.