

Report to CABINET

Funding and Recruitment of Key Roles to Strengthen Early Identification and Preventative Support through the Best Start in Life Programme

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Reason for Decision

Oldham is committed to ensuring that every child grows up healthy, happy and ready to learn, supported by services that give families the right help at the right time. This ambition is reflected within Oldham's Best Start in Life Strategy and Corporate Plan priorities around prevention, reducing inequalities and delivering healthier, happier lives.

The Department for Education has awarded Oldham an additional ringfenced Children with Additional Needs allocation of £1,756,100 across the period 2026-2029. The report seeks to comply with DfE grant conditions, mobilise delivery at pace and strengthen support for babies and young children with emerging additional needs. The proposal provides the workforce capacity required to improve early identification, intervention, inclusion and school readiness outcomes whilst ensuring effective governance and oversight of the funding allocation. A full breakdown of Oldham's funding allocation can be found in Appendix B of this report.

Failure to implement the proposal risks under-delivery of grant requirements, reduced impact from the investment and missed opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Accept the additional £1,756,100 Children with Additional Needs allocation awarded to Oldham by the DfE through the Best Start in Life programme.
- Approve the creation and recruitment of 1 Integrated Team Manager post (Grade 10), 5 Early Years Quality Practitioner posts (Grade 5) and 7 Best Start Inclusion Practitioner posts (Grade 5) funded through the Children with Additional Needs allocation to 31 March 2029.
- To delegate authority for the allocation of the remaining funding to the Executive Director Children and Young People, in consultation with the Director of Finance.

1 Background

1.1 Oldham is committed to ensuring that every child grows up healthy, happy and ready to learn, supported by services that give families the right help at the right time. This ambition is reflected within Oldham's Best Start in Life Strategy and Corporate Plan priorities around prevention, reducing inequalities and delivering healthier, happier lives. Oldham's Best Start in Life Strategy, as approved by Cabinet in February 2026, can be accessed through Appendix A of this report.

1.2 Programme Investment

Following Cabinet approval of Oldham's Best Start in Life, Family Hubs and Healthy Babies allocation in February 2026, the Department for Education subsequently awarded Oldham an additional ringfenced Children with Additional Needs allocation of £1,756,100 across the period 2026-2029.

The funding allocation is as follows:

Financial Year	Allocation
2026/27	£418,100
2027/28	£669,000
2028/29	£669,000
Total	£1,756,100

The funding is ringfenced and must be used in accordance with DfE grant conditions to support delivery of the Children with Additional Needs workstream.

1.3 Contribution to Corporate Priorities

The proposal will contribute directly to Oldham's Corporate Plan by:

- Supporting healthier, happier lives through improved child development and school readiness.
- Reducing inequalities through earlier support for children and families experiencing disadvantage.
- Strengthening prevention and early intervention across Family Hubs and the wider early years system.
- Building workforce capability and system capacity to improve outcomes for children with emerging additional needs.

1.4 National and Local Priorities

- The Department for Education's Best Start in Life programme.
- Oldham's Best Start in Life Strategy and Delivery Plan.
- Family Hubs and Start for Life priorities.
- The Families First Partnership programme.
- Emerging SEND reforms and the development of preventative, community-based support models.
- Oldham's ambition to improve Good Level of Development outcomes and school readiness by 2028.

2 Current Position

2.1 National guidance requires local authorities to use the Children with Additional Needs funding to strengthen early identification, intervention and inclusion support for babies and young children with additional needs.

2.2 While Oldham has strong Family Hub and Early Years provision, partners have identified opportunities to strengthen:

- Early identification of developmental concerns.
- Inclusive practice across Family Hubs and early years settings.
- Workforce capability.
- Support for children with emerging SEND.
- School readiness outcomes.
- Integration between Family Hubs, Early Years, SEND and health services.

2.3 To address these priorities, Oldham proposes an integrated workforce model consisting of:

Best Start Inclusion Practitioners

Seven Best Start Inclusion Practitioners to be embedded within Family Hubs to deliver targeted interventions for babies and young children with emerging developmental, social, emotional, communication and inclusion needs. The roles will provide early

intervention support, work directly with families and strengthen pathways into universal and specialist support. The recruitment of a minimum of seven Best Start Inclusion Practitioners is a mandatory requirement set by the Department for Education (DfE) and forms a condition of Oldham's acceptance of the ringfenced Children with Additional Needs funding.

Early Years Quality Practitioners

Five district-based Early Years Quality Practitioners to work across schools, private, voluntary and independent settings, childminders and Family Hubs to improve quality of provision, workforce capability, early identification and school readiness. The roles will provide coaching, modelling, workforce development and quality improvement support across the borough.

Integrated Team Manager

A dedicated Integrated Team Manager to provide strategic leadership and operational management across the Children with Additional Needs workforce. The role will oversee performance, quality assurance, partnership working and implementation of Early Years, Family Hubs and SEND priorities. The post will ensure a coordinated borough-wide approach and maximise the impact of the practitioner workforce.

2.4 Sustainability of the Proposed Workforce

Whilst there is a potential risk of redundancy and associated costs at the end of the funding period, this risk is considered manageable. The Integrated Team Manager post will be funded through Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) resources and supports an ongoing area of service delivery.

It should be noted that the Government has indicated its intention to consult on future arrangements for funding local authority early years responsibilities. Whilst funding for these functions is expected to continue, the Council will keep the outcome of any consultation and implications for future funding arrangements under review.

The remaining practitioner posts will be funded through the time-limited Children with Additional Needs allocation and will be established on a fixed-term basis until 31 March 2029. Prior to the end of the funding period, workforce and financial planning will be undertaken to review ongoing service requirements, future funding opportunities and redeployment options. The Council has considerable experience of managing externally funded programmes through fixed-term appointments, with employees typically securing alternative roles before funding periods conclude.

Given the strategic importance of these roles in supporting early identification, inclusion and school readiness outcomes, any future decision regarding continuation of the posts beyond March 2029 will be considered through the Council's normal budget-setting process. Should funding not be extended and no suitable alternative funding source be identified, any resulting workforce implications will be managed in accordance with the Council's established policies and procedures.

Together, these roles will create additional capacity to deliver DfE expectations, support earlier identification of children with emerging additional needs, strengthen inclusion across Family Hubs and early years settings, and improve developmental outcomes and school readiness across Oldham.

3 Options / Alternatives

3.1 Option One

Approve acceptance of the Children with Additional Needs allocation, recruitment to the proposed posts and delegate authority for allocation of the remaining funding to the Executive Director of Children and Young People, in consultation with the Director of Finance.

3.2 Option Two

Do not approve acceptance of the funding, creation of the posts or delegated authority arrangements.

4 Preferred Option

4.1 Option One is the preferred option.

This option enables Oldham to comply with DfE grant conditions, mobilise delivery at pace and strengthen support for babies and young children with emerging additional needs. It provides the workforce capacity required to improve early identification, intervention, inclusion and school readiness outcomes whilst ensuring effective governance and oversight of the funding allocation.

Failure to implement the proposal risks under-delivery of grant requirements, reduced impact from the investment and missed opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families.

5 Consultation

5.1 Development of Oldham's Best Start in Life Programme is overseen through established multi-agency governance arrangements, including the Best Start in Life and Family Hubs Board and Family Hubs partnership structures. The proposed workforce model has been developed with input from Early Years, Family Hubs, SEND, education, health and children's services partners and reflects priorities identified through the Children with Additional Needs workstream

6 Financial Implications

6.1 The report seeks approval to accept an additional £1,756,100 Children with Additional Needs allocation from the Department for Education covering the financial years 2026/27 to 2028/29.

- 6.2 The Department for Education (DfE) has awarded Oldham Council a ringfenced Children with Additional Needs (CAN) allocation of **£1,756,100** as part of the Best Start in Life Programme for the period **2026/27 to 2028/29**. Accordingly, the funding must be used in accordance with DfE grant conditions to support delivery of the Children with Additional Needs workstream. The funding profile is as per the table below:

Financial Year	Funding Allocation
2026/27	£418,100
2027/28	£669,000
2028/29	£669,000
Total	£1,756,100

- 6.3 The report seeks approval to establish **13.0 FTE fixed-term posts** to support delivery of the programme, comprising 1x Integrated Team Manager (Grade 10), 5 x Early Years Quality Practitioners (Grade 5) and 7 x Best Start Inclusion Practitioners (Grade 5). The Integrated Team Manager post will be funded from the Early Years DSG budget. The remaining posts will be funded from the CAN allocation. Costs shown below include employer on-costs and estimated annual pay inflation. No additional General Fund resources are required.

Post	Grade	SCP	FTE	2026/27 (£)	2027/28 (£)	2028/29 (£)	Total
Early Years Quality Practitioners	Grade 5	23	5	74,883	232,100	239,700	546,683
Best Start Inclusion Practitioners	Grade 5	23	7	104,837	324,940	335,580	765,357
Integrated Team Manager	Grade 10	43	1	23,703	73,450	75,880	173,033
Total			13	203,423	630,490	651,160	1,485,073

The staffing costs included within the 2026/27 financial year are based on an assumed implementation date of **1 December 2026** and are therefore calculated on a **pro-rata basis** for the period to 31 March 2027. The costs for 2027/28 and 2028/29 reflect a full-year establishment. Actual expenditure in 2026/27 will be dependent upon recruitment timelines and appointment dates; however, any underspend arising from delays in recruitment will remain within the Children with Additional Needs programme and be utilised to support delivery of the workstream in accordance with Department for Education grant conditions

- 6.4 The total staffing commitment over the life of the programme is **£1,485,073**, of which **£1,312,040** will be funded from the Children with Additional Needs grant and **£173,033** will be funded from Early Years DSG resources. As the total CAN allocation is **£1,756,100**, this will leave approximately **£444,060** available to support the wider objectives of the Children with Additional Needs workstream, subject to ongoing programme requirements and compliance with DfE grant conditions.
- 6.5 In accordance with the final recommendation, delegated authority is sought for the Executive Director of Children and Young People, in consultation with the Director of Finance, to determine the detailed allocation of the remaining funding in line with programme priorities and DfE grant conditions.
- 6.6 As the CAN funding is time-limited and the posts are being established on a fixed-term basis aligned to the grant period, the financial risk to the Council is limited. However, should the funding cease, reduce or not be extended beyond 31 March 2029, any decision to retain the posts would require identification of alternative funding sources. If no alternative funding is available, redundancy and associated termination costs may arise, and cannot be funded by the grant and would therefore need to be met by the service in accordance with the Council's established policies and procedures.
- 6.7 Notwithstanding, the proposal is financially sustainable within the current funding arrangements, with the Integrated Team Manager post funded from Early Years DSG resources and the remaining posts funded from the CAN grant allocation. The principal ongoing financial risk relates to future changes in Early Years DSG funding levels. Should DSG allocations reduce significantly, the affordability of the DSG-funded post would be reviewed through the Council's established budget-setting and workforce planning processes, with any resulting staffing implications managed in accordance with Council policies and procedures.



Beststart.familyhubs
Funding letter.pdf

Vicki Hayes – Senior Accountant 3/9/26

7 Legal and Procurement Implications

- 7.1 There is no legal impediment to this proposal provided the Service complies with the Council's Recruitment and Selection Policy and that at the end of the cycle the Service in conjunction with HR manage appropriately the ending of any Fixed Term Contract.

8 Procurement Implications

- 8.1 There are no procurement implications with accepting money into the council.
- 8.2 There are no procurement implications if the staff team are employed directly by the council, either permanently or on fixed term contracts. If however interim staff are used then the CPRs will apply and CPU will need to be contacted.
- 8.3 Delegated Authority does not override the CPRs, so any commitment of spend, whether via delegated authority or not, will still need to be compliant with the CPRs, and CPU will need to be consulted on a case-by-case basis if spend is going to a supplier, and a DDR likely needed to capture comments for these instances.
James England – Procurement Manager

9 HR Implications

- 9.1 The proposed acceptance of the Children with Additional Needs (CAN) funding and the creation of 13 fixed-term posts will have a number of workforce implications.

The funding provides an opportunity to increase workforce capacity and capability across Early Years, Family Hubs and SEND services, enabling the Council to strengthen early intervention, inclusion and support for children with emerging additional needs. The proposed establishment of one Integrated Team Manager (Grade 10), five Early Years Quality Practitioners (Grade 5) and seven Best Start Inclusion Practitioners (Grade 5) will create additional staffing capacity to deliver the objectives of the Best Start in Life programme and support the Council's preventative approach.

As the funding is ringfenced and time limited until 31 March 2029, all posts should be established on a fixed-term basis linked to the duration of the grant funding. Employees appointed to these roles should be made aware at the point of appointment that the posts are dependent on external funding and may cease when the funding period ends unless alternative funding is identified. Due to the nature of the posts being fixed term, the service are to be mindful of the possibility of redundancy payments at the end of the contracts.

Recruitment to the new posts will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Recruitment and Selection Policy and procedures. Consideration should be given to any suitable employees within the Council who may be at risk of redundancy or

eligible for redeployment at the time recruitment takes place. Any appointments will be subject to the appropriate pre-employment checks.

The creation of the new workforce will require management capacity, induction, supervision, performance management and ongoing professional development arrangements. The proposed Integrated Team Manager role will provide operational leadership and oversight of the practitioner workforce, helping to ensure effective deployment, quality assurance and performance management.

The proposals are not expected to have any adverse impact on existing employees and do not require consultation under organisational change procedures. However, should the funding cease or not be extended beyond March 2029, workforce implications will need to be considered at that time, including redeployment opportunities and any potential redundancy liabilities in accordance with the Council's policies and employment legislation.

Subject to confirmation that the full employment costs, including salary, on-costs, training and any associated employment liabilities, can be met from the approved grant allocation, HR has no objections to the recommendations contained within this report.

N.Needham – Workforce Business Partner – 04.09.2026

10 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People

- 10.1 The proposal is expected to have a positive impact on children and families across Oldham. The full Equality Impact Assessment is available in Appendix C.

11 Key Decision

- 11.1 Yes

12 Key Decision Reference

- 12.1 CYP-12-26

13 Background Papers

- 13.1 The following is a list of background papers on which this report is based in accordance with the requirements of Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972. It does not include documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information as defined by the Act:

None

14 Appendices

14.1 Appendix A: Oldham Best Start in Life Strategic and Operational Plan



Cabinet report Best
Start in Life Strategy

14.2 Appendix B: Confirmation of Oldham Best Start in Life Funding Arrangements



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14.3 Appendix C: Equality Impact Assessment for Children and Young People



BSiL - Equality
Impact Assessment.c