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# Oldham Council's Looked After Children Commissioning and Sufficiency Strategy 2016-19

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**REVIEW DUE OCTOBER 2016**

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## 1) Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out how Oldham Council will meet the placement needs of current and future children in care and care leavers and improve their outcomes in light of our understanding of their needs and current provision.

The term 'looked after children' in the Children Act 1989 refers to all children and young people being looked after by a local authority, namely:

- those subject to care orders or interim care orders (under sections 31 and 38 of the 1989 Act);
- those children who have been placed, or are authorised to be placed, with prospective adopters by a local authority (section 18(3) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002);
- those who are voluntarily accommodated under section 20 of the 1989 Act, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (where children are accommodated under this provision, parental responsibility remains with the parents); and
- those who are subject to court orders with residence requirements (e.g. secure remand or remand to local authority accommodation), in accordance with section 21 of the 1989 Act.

This strategy addresses the needs of children and young people from birth to the age of 21, (or 25 where children's services continue to have statutory responsibility) including children and young people with disabilities who are, or who may be, accommodated by Oldham Council. It meets the requirements of the sufficiency duty by collating needs and resource information and market analysis but also describes what needs to happen in relation to work with children in care or children at risk of coming into care.

The strategy is set within the context of national policy, legislation and guidance; Local Authorities are required to take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children in care within their local area. In 2010, the Statutory Guidance for the Sufficiency Duty was introduced. This guidance is explicit in placing a duty on Local Authorities to act strategically to address gaps in provision by ensuring that they include, in relevant commissioning strategies, their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty.

The Children Act 2008 defines Sufficiency as *"a whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative work to help support children and their families where possible, as well as providing better services for children if they do become looked after. For those who are looked after, Local Authorities and their Children's Trust partners should seek to secure a number of providers and a range of services, with the aim of meeting the wide-ranging needs of looked after children and young people within their local area."*

However, the scope is not restricted to just making good quality placements; the intention is to co-ordinate the range of activity across all public services, including a clear focus on supporting families to stay together, wherever it is safe to do so, thus minimising the need for children to come into care, or supporting their timely return to their families.

## Sufficiency - Key Messages about Oldham's Position

- Current demand across the system appears to be stabilising but remains unpredictable
- We are comparatively low spenders (social care and LAC) which does not appear to impact on Oldham's standard of service provision and ultimately outcomes for looked after children and care leavers
- We are comparatively high placers for adoption
- We have a high ratio of in house foster care placements to IFA's
- Placement stability is a priority for us
- We appear to have a much higher % of LAC living with parents than comparators
- Following the Ofsted inspection which took place in May and June 2015, the overall judgement of Children's Services in Oldham was that we require improvement to be 'Good'. There are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. However, we have been assessed as not yet delivering good practice and help for children, young people and their families. It is Ofsted's expectation that all children and young people receive the help, care and protection that will ensure their safety and help prepare them for adult life.

## 2) National Context

There have been significant improvements to the care system in recent years and successive governments have made improving care a priority, but the system still fails some of our most vulnerable children with too many having poor experiences during their time in or after they leave care; outcomes for children and young people in care nationally have not improved sufficiently and there remains a significant gap between the quality of their lives and those of all children.

*"For many children care does work. Yet there is still considerable room for improvement, and more importantly, this improvement is eminently attainable."<sup>1</sup>*

- Martin Narey (former Barnardo's Chief Executive 2005-2011)

Nationally 69,540 children were looked after on 31 March 2015 in England relying on the state for part or all of their upbringing. This is an increase on the previous year and current trends show no sign of this increase abating.

Reductions in the level of funding for Local Authorities over recent years with more planned for 2015-18 means that the focus on efficiency and value for money must be stronger than ever before. The challenge for Children's Services will be to improve on service quality, placement choice and outcomes for service users whilst driving down costs. As David Cameron announces the governments drive to improve outcomes for looked after children, he identified children's services as a "standout area" for reform, and government will adopt a "smarter" approach to public services, running the state more like a business. The Children's Service's Development

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<sup>1</sup> IN LOCO PARENTIS, Demos 2010,

Group (CSDG), an alliance of private and independent providers, recognises that with the forthcoming Spending Review, where local authorities are expected to be put under even greater financial pressures, it is imperative that local leaders harness the expertise and investment that is available across a range of providers to provide positive outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

### 3) Local Context - Performance

Regionally the North West has the highest LAC regional population in England and has seen a significant increase of 1,150 LAC between 2011 and 2015; this represents an increase in the LAC rate per 10,000 from 76 per 10,000 (2011) to 82 per 10,000 (2015), which is now the joint third highest rate in England. In comparison between 2011–15 Oldham's numbers of children in care increased from 335 to 390, which is in line with statistical and regional neighbours but in the last 12 months this has stabilised and at the end of March 2015 stood at 389. Oldham's LAC rate is 68.1 per 10,000 (2015), which indicates that Oldham is still performing well against North West authorities who at the end of 2015 had 82 per 10,000 children in care.

The majority of Oldham's children in care are in foster placements and a key feature of Oldham's approach continues to be the building of a strong in-house fostering resource thereby limiting the number of more expensive independent sector placements (IFAs). Improvements have also been made in Adoption performance utilising the Government's Adoption Reform Grant.

In keeping with the national context, despite a commitment to drive forward outcomes for Looked After Children, and notwithstanding Oldham's strong performance in keeping LAC numbers relatively low, the disparity between the achievements of looked after children and their peers remains unacceptably wide. Although there have been some improvements in recent years across Oldham, these have not gone far or fast enough. To this end, this strategy seeks to maintain a long-term approach to planning and commissioning services for Looked After Children and to ensure this commitment is shared and driven through by all partners across Oldham.

### 4) Local Strategic Context

Oldham's Corporate Parenting Strategy (2014-16), reflects the aims and ambitions of Oldham Council and its partners to significantly improve the life chances of looked after children. This strategy recognises that the key to improving outcomes for every looked after child and young person in Oldham is through a whole-system commitment to corporate parenting, raising the profile of looked after children within the Council and with all partners including health, housing, leisure services, schools and colleges. This partnership approach is even more critical in times of austerity as the ability of any single agency to deliver these aims is impaired.

Oldham's commitment to looked after children and young people is also articulated in Oldham's Pledge to looked after children and young people, which sets a clear benchmark for the minimum standards of services for looked after children and young people. This Pledge is regularly reviewed and the Council and its partners performance against it is scrutinised regularly by Oldham's Children In Care Council and Corporate Parenting Panel.

The development and delivery of this strategy is underpinned by the following Vision and set of principles:

## i. Vision

“All children and young people in Oldham have an equal opportunity to thrive within their families and communities; and those at risk of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement are protected and supported, particularly at times of need and transition”

## ii. Principles

- to strive for excellence;
- to embed a focus on early intervention and prevention into the routine delivery of all services to children, young people and families;
- to safeguard and protect vulnerable children within a framework of universal services to improve the well being of every child;
- to narrow the gap in outcomes between the most vulnerable children and their peers;
- to stretch the most able;
- to consult, listen to and hear the voices of children, young people and families and provide them with opportunities to participate in decision-making;
- to use evidence on outcomes for service users as the basis for improving standards and targeting resources;
- to commission or deliver the right services in the right place at the right time for all children, young people and families;
- to promote interaction between children and families from different backgrounds; and
- to deliver excellent, integrated working across services through investing in a skilled, well trained and valued children’s workforce.

Partners need to ensure that:

- services are joined up and clearly focused on providing timely and effective support;
- families are given personalised and effective assistance to help themselves and their children;
- neighbourhoods are used as the basis for cohesive interventions built around the family; and
- the resources and support of early year’s provision and schools must be clearly focused to maximise their benefits for vulnerable children.

## iii. Commissioning Intentions

Oldham has identified the following six key commissioning intentions to drive forward its work with children in care from 2014-18:

1. Ensure sufficiency of placement provision that balances quality and cost effectiveness and is matched to individual need.
2. Ensure all children and young people in care get an education that allows them to be independent, autonomous and have choices
3. Ensure all children and young people in care are healthy and make positive life choices
4. Ensure that all children and young people in care feel safe and that their well-being is safeguarded
5. Ensure the journey through care is stable and well planned, with excellent transition and after care support
6. Ensure our Looked After Children have a voice

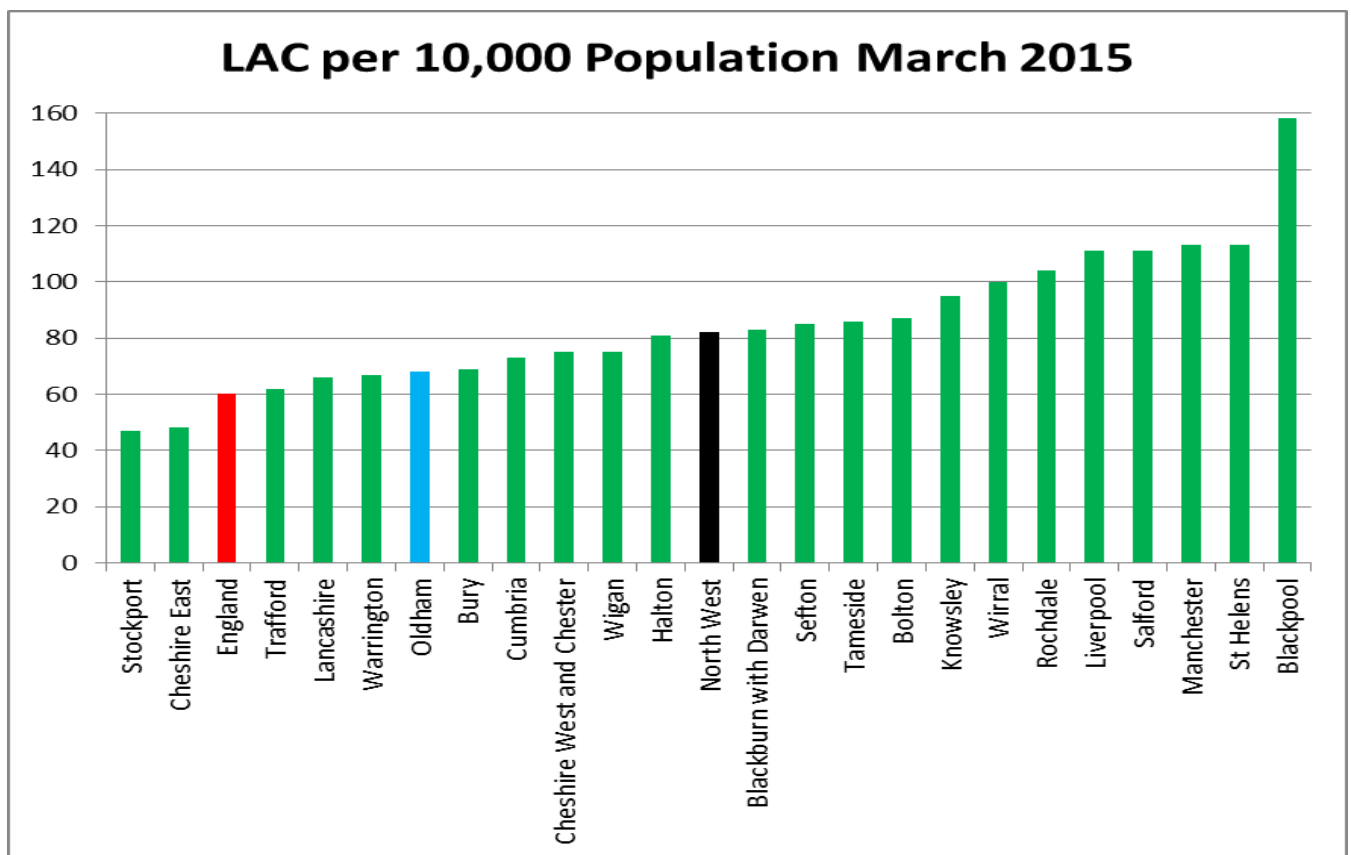
## 5) What Is Known About the Demographics of Looked After Children & Young People in Oldham?

As at the end of March 2015, there were 389 children looked after by Oldham Council. This equates to a rate of 68 per 10,000 of the under 18 population. This represents a slight decrease in the last year. This has remained stable in the UK in the last year.

Oldham continues to have fewer looked after children than statistical neighbours; the table below indicates Oldham's relative position in comparison with North West authorities, although this only covers the period up to 2013. Comparisons for 2014 are not yet available but the indications are that there is a general trend of increasing numbers.

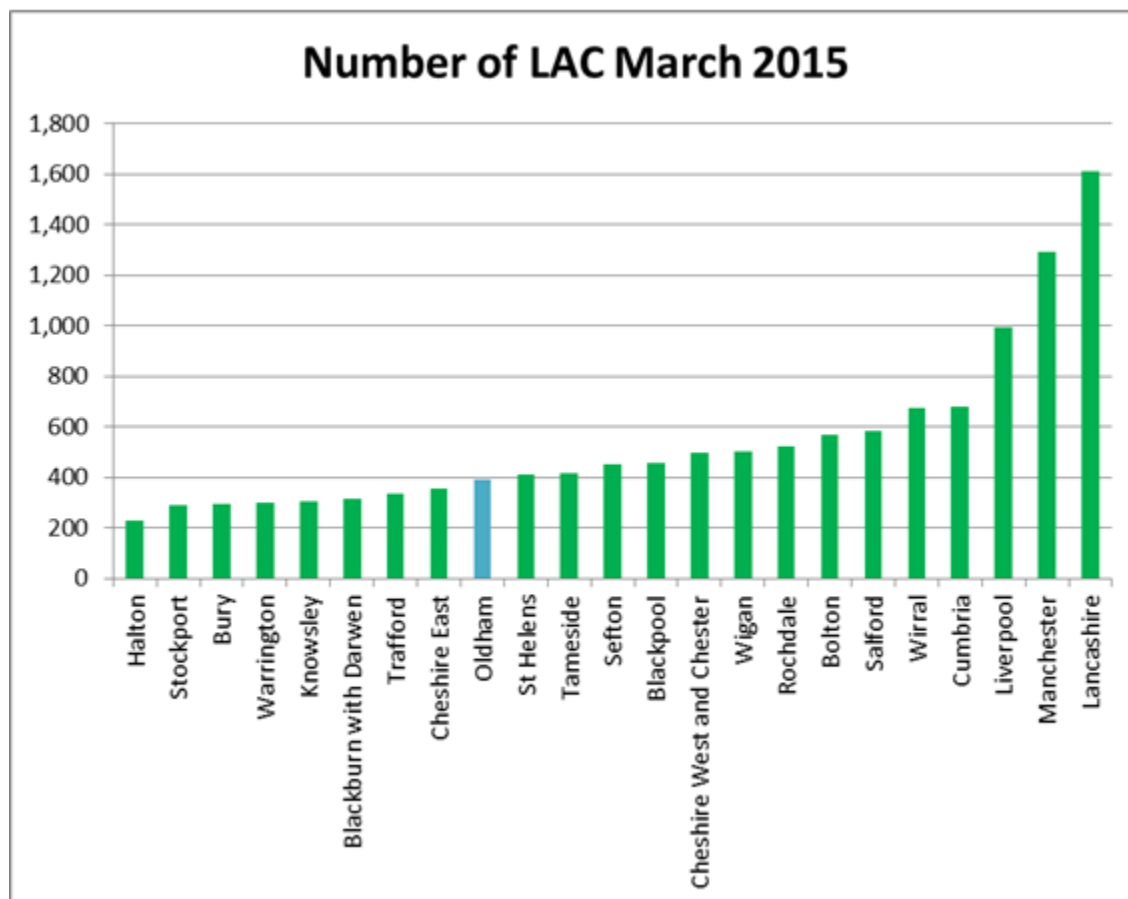
This has been achieved through good preventative strategies, robust decisions on children's entry into care, good planning and review processes and a dedicated project to ensure discharge of care orders.

**Table 1 - LAC per 10,000 in the North West local authorities at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015<sup>2</sup>**



<sup>2</sup> Source: SSSA903 2014-15

**Table 2 - Number of LAC in 2013 by North West local authorities at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015**



Source: SSSA903 2014-15

**Numbers of Looked After Children**

<b>Oldham MBC</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>30/9/15</b>
Children looked after at 31st March	325	350	335	325	350	399	389	393
Children ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31st March	130	110	150	140	130	150	180	178



<b>TABLE 4 PLACEMENT TYPE</b>	<b>22nd Oct 2012</b>	<b>29th Oct 2013</b>	<b>30th Sept 2014</b>	<b>30th Sept 2015</b>	<b>25th Nov 2015</b>
Children Placed for Adoption	20	22	24	15	17
Children Placed in Foster Care with Relatives / Friends	21	26	27	44	43
Children Placed in Foster Care with Mainstream Foster Carers	167	190	193	208	211
Children Placed with Independent Fostering Agency Carers (IFAs)	33	31	36	43	38
Children Placed in Residential Care (In Borough)	26	27	21	22	20
Children Placed in Residential Care (Out of Borough)	14	15	15	6	6
Children Placed with Parents	40	42	53	39	46 inc Interim co
Children Placed in other Accommodation (e.g Secure or in Hospital)	2	0	4	9	12
Young People in Lodgings / Independent Living Accommodation	1	5	11	4	6
Children in School Residential Placements	3	2	2	2	2
Total Number of Looked after Children (excluding those receiving Respite Care)	327	360	386	392	401
Children Accommodated under a Series of Short-Term Breaks (Respite)	6	5	6	6	

This data indicates that the increase in numbers of looked after children since 2013/14 have largely been accommodated with in-house foster carers, which is generally the best option both in terms of outcomes and financially.

### **Gender & Age of Looked After Children**

Whilst there is a fairly even gender split of Looked After children, analysis of Looked After Children population age range as at 31st March 2014 showed that it is towards the older end of the scale where we have more children looked after. Local anecdotal evidence suggests that older children are also presenting with greater complexity of need than was previously the case.

### **Category of Need for Looked After Children**

Of all the children who are looked after in Oldham, the majority are taken in care due to abuse, neglect or being perceived to be at risk of abuse and neglect. Other areas of concern include concerns for the child's welfare, parent's health preventing them from caring for the child or the child at risk from their own behaviour.

## Volume of Work & Activity

Over the last 12 months there has been a rise in the number of children subject to a child protection plan. This is part due to a number of new plans beginning, but also because some child protection plans have been in place for some length of time. We are aware of the risks of some of these arrangements breaking down, and understand the potential impact on our looked after children numbers. Oldham is addressing this by planning around children on the edge of care and targeting work with families in partnership with early years, family support, early help colleagues and the effective use of the Adolescent Support Unit.

Also recognised and being addressed are those children on care orders placed at home with parents or another person with parental responsibility. Discharges of care orders for some of those children are being pursued, this amounts to just less than 10% of our looked after children cohort.

**Table 5 - Children's Social Care Activity Rates per 0-17 population**

<b>Oldham MBC</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>30/09/15</b>
1.1 Referrals during the period (per 10,000)	344.7	373.5	376.4	448.4
1.3 Children subject to CP Plan at period end (per 10,000)	51.9	58.8	56.5	66.4
1.5 Children Looked After at period end (per 10,000)	61.0	69	68	68.1

Since 2012/2013 the rate of referrals has increased year on year, with the biggest increase being felt during this year (since April 2015). In line with the increase in referrals the number of children with a child protection plan at the end of period has also increased. The rate of looked after children has remained fairly stable since 2013/2014.

This also demonstrates that Oldham's ambition to reduce the overall levels of demand by retaining more children at the level of universal services through an effective 'Early Help' offer remains a long term plan with little sign or prospect at this early stage of reducing the level of demand for high-end, expensive services. Therefore any prospect of the focused Early Help offer reducing the need for investment in specialist services remains distant and the Council needs to ensure it employs a wide range of approaches to reducing costs other than reducing demand including through driving down the cost of specialist services and providing lower cost alternatives to some of the high cost residential provision.

## 6) What is known about the placements of looked after children and young people and care leavers?

### i. Placement Options

Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of looked after children is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to better outcomes for looked after children and families. In securing accommodation, the child's best interests remain at the forefront of all local decisions, in line with the principles and objectives set out in Oldham's Placement Plan / Policy.

Locally, there are a range of different types of accommodation options available to looked after children (including those on the edge of care) and care leavers and these will normally be considered in the sequential order outlined at Appendix C. However, a review of all residential provision, including semi-independent units is currently underway to ensure there is an appropriate and effective placement offer that meets the needs of young people but also ensures that as a local authority we are working in a sufficient manner that recognises budget pressures whilst still having a duty of care.

A key feature of Oldham's approach in recent years has been to build a strong in-house fostering resource thereby limiting the number of more expensive independent sector placements (IFAs), and this policy is reflected in the overall figures (Tables 5 & 6 below). The average cost of an in-house foster placement is £448 per week compared to the average cost of an independent fostering placement of £825.48 per week. As the data in Tables 3 and 5 indicates this preference has been sustained in placement decisions in the face of increased demand, which is a testament to the success of Oldham's Fostering Service in recruiting carers to meet the need of the Borough's children in care. There is currently investment in concurrent placements which are included in Oldham's IFA numbers (currently one concurrent placement). This is an excellent scheme where children placed for adoption don't have the experience many placement moves.

## ii. Placement Activity

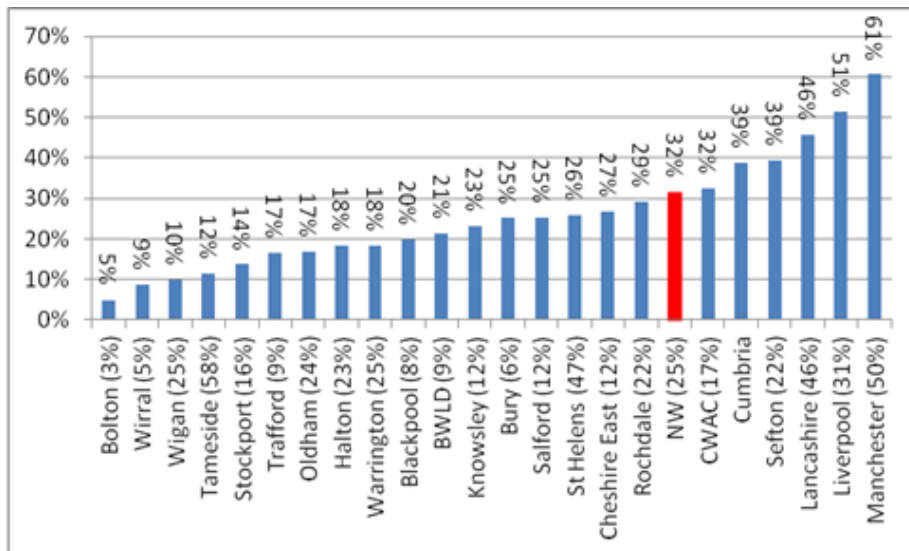
The table below provides a snapshot of placement activity comparing the position at the end of April 2014 with the position as at September 2015. This picture demonstrates an increase in in house provision, in line with the Council's policy of continuing to recruit in-house foster carers as the main placement type for its children in care with an increase from 50.63% of placements in April 2014 to 53.06% in September 2015, and a decline in residential homes use, in house and out of borough. Adoption activity is slightly decreasing this year and this relates to courts being robust in ensuring all family options have been fully explored which has ultimately led to a small decrease in children having a plan for adoption.

**Table 6: Placement Type**

		Nos. of Looked After Children			
		April 2014		Sept 2015	
		No.	%	No.	%
Residential Care	In-house residential homes	26	6.52%	22	5.61%
	Out of borough residential homes	18	4.51%	6	1.53%
	Secure accommodation	1	0.25%	6	1.53%
	Residential schools – Out of borough	2	0.50%	2	0.51%
	In-patient mental health provision		0.00%		0.00%
Foster Care	With relatives/ friends – in and out of borough	35	8.77%	44	11.22 %
	In house foster care – in and out of borough	202	50.63%	208	53.06 %
	Independent Fostering Agencies	32	8.02%	43	10.97 %
Adoption	Placed for adoption	26	6.52%	15	3.83%
Community Placements	Supported accommodation/ lodgings	5	1.25%	1	0.26%
	Hostels		0.00%		
	Semi-independence units	2	0.50%	3	0.76%
	Emergency provision (women’s refuge)		0.00%		0.00%
	Own tenancies		0.00%		0.00%
	Miscellaneous (i.e. vacation accommodation, armed services, adult placements etc)		0.00%	1	0.26%
	Custody		0.00%		0.00%
	Bed and breakfast		0.00%		0.00%
	Homeless		0.00%		0.00%
	Placed with parents	48	12.03%	39	9.95%
	Family / friends	2	0.50%		0.00%
Hospital	Hospital		0.00%	2	0.51%
Total		399		392	

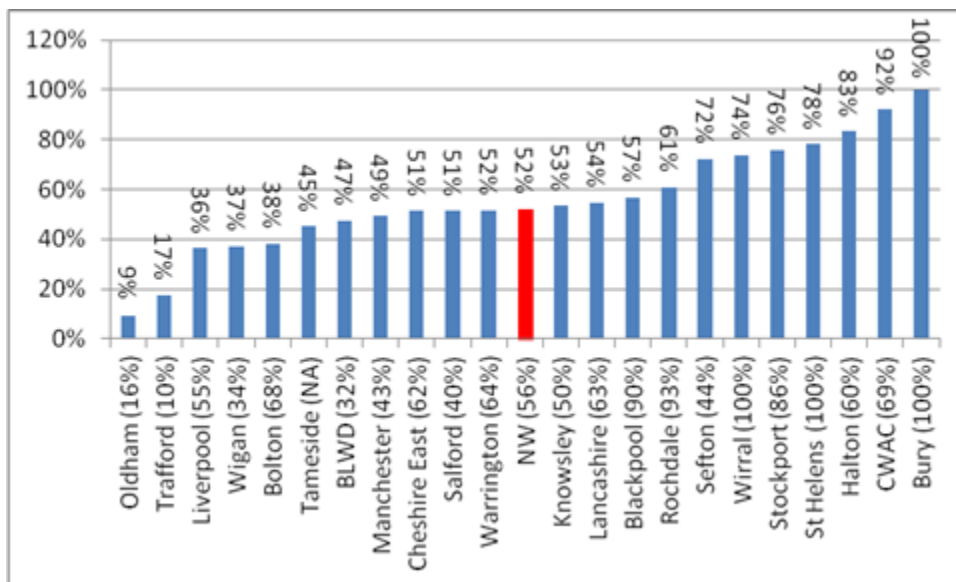
The following table makes the comparison with other North West authorities and demonstrates Oldham's comparatively low proportion of external placements.

Percentage of IFA placements on the 31/3/2014 (brackets showing figures in 2012)



Source: Ofsted data set and 903 return 2014

Percentage of residential placements with the private and voluntary sector.



Source: 903 and PNW Census 2014

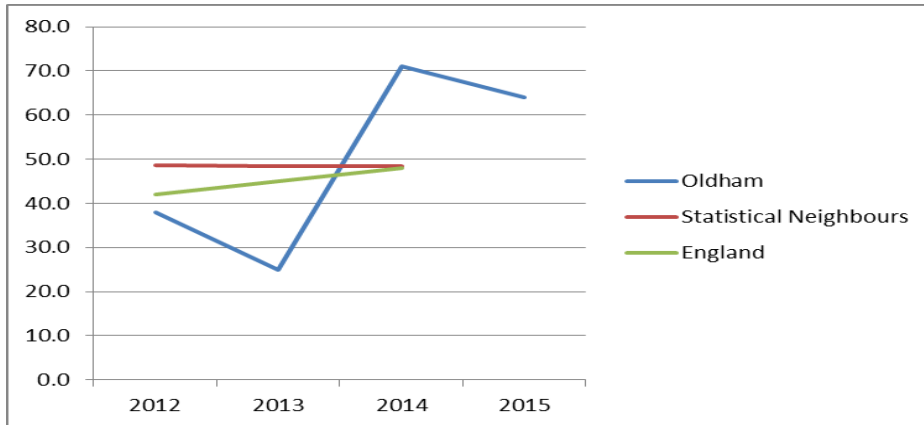
## 7) What is known about the outcomes of looked after children in Oldham?

Based on the feedback and overall outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection, findings have shown the following:

### *Highlights*

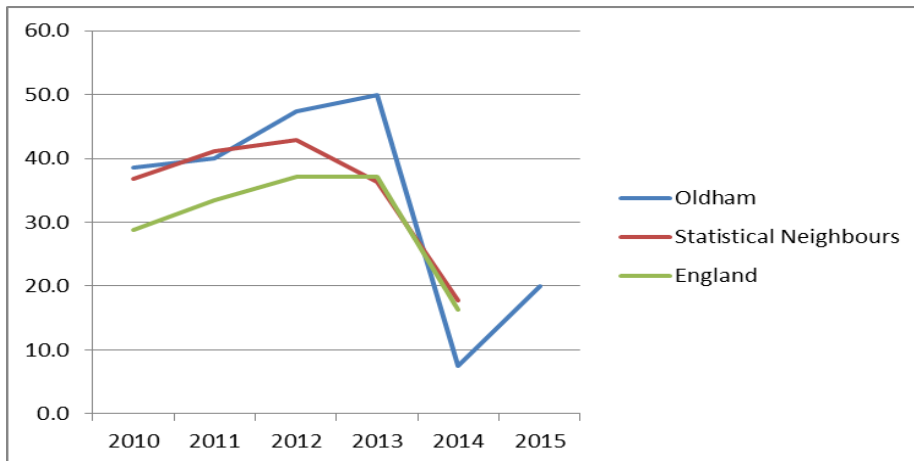
- Intervention is timely, with risks identified and responded to appropriately. Children become looked after when they need to.
- Children looked after and care leavers receive good support from their corporate parents in terms of the stability and quality of where they live, and access to health and leisure services.
- The majority of children looked after have good assessments of their needs which are updated regularly and inform planning.
- There is a good range of placements and most children are placed close to home, with brothers and sisters, and do not move unnecessarily. Children looked after are cared for well by foster carers and other carers.
- Placements meet needs and have a positive impact in most cases. There is a shortfall in choice for the older age group and this is an area we are addressing in the 1:1 scheme and those with complex needs.
- Children who need an adoptive family have their needs met very well. Recruitment processes are successful, and there is good post adoption support provided.
- Children's health needs are met promptly. A dedicated CAMHS resource shows a positive impact. Local mental health services are effectively meeting children's needs.
- Oldham has a lower percentage of looked after children subject to a conviction, final warning or reprimand than both statistical neighbours and the national average - 5.9% in 2014/15
- The Virtual School has a good overview of the progress of children looked after and care leavers, and there is a sound understanding of improvements required to reduce the gap. PEPs require more robust review and oversight of use of Pupil Premium. How does this fair with what Ofsted have said?

**2015 LAC achieving Level 4 in English, Writing and Maths**

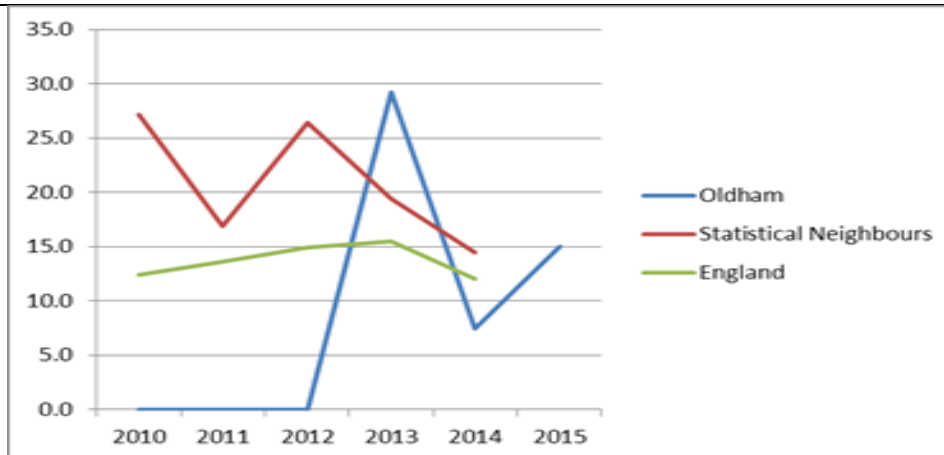


In 2015, the gap between Oldham Looked After Children and 'All' Oldham children achieving 5 GCSE A\*-C including English and Maths has slightly narrowed, by 8%, to 37.3%

**2015 LAC achieving 5 GCSE A\*-C**



**2015 LAC achieving 5 A\*-C including English and Maths**



- Given the high levels of Looked After Children with SEN the DfE considers that comparing looked after children attainment to the general population isn't an entirely fair comparison. The DfE intend to compare attainment for looked after children with a SEN with attainment for all children with a SEN, and attainment for looked after children without a SEN, with attainment for all children without a SEN, to get a true measure of the gap between looked after children and non-looked after children.
- Oldham has seen a reduction in the percentage of sessions lost due to absence for looked after children who have been looked after continuously for 12 months from 5.9% in 2009 to 3.0% in 2014 (latest available); better performance than statistical neighbours and the national averages in this area
- Oldham a lower percentage of looked after children with at least one fixed term exclusion than the national average. For the academic year 2012-2013, Oldham's rate was 3.9% in 2013 (latest available)
- There is a well-established system to ensure the local authority is notified when a child goes missing and strategy meeting are taking place when triggers are identified and concerns increased. Return interviews following young people going missing from home are being carried out and a system is being developed to enable feedback to be captured and used to further safeguard in the future.
- Care leavers are positive about the support they receive and have good relationships with their support workers. Oldham has successfully increased the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation from 87.5% in 2009/10 to 92.9% in 2010/11 95.0% in 2014/15
- 66% of care leavers now in education, employment and training which is an increase from April when figures were 55%. Furthermore Oldham has 11 care leavers at university which is an increase that has doubled from the previous year of 5 in 2014
- Multi-agency work is positive with effective communication and joint working
- Reviews are timely and take good account of the views of children and young people.



- Oldham's has a strong track record of engaging and involving looked after children in the planning, review and assessment of services and in shaping decisions that impact upon their lives. The Children In Care Council is active and its members are influential participants in the Corporate Parenting

## *Challenges*

Following the recent Ofsted inspection there were a number of recommendations to ensure the quality of our services to looked after children and care leavers are improved and reach a future judgement 'Good'.

- Performance management systems must enable staff and managers, and in particular those with responsibility for care leavers, to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their service so appropriate and necessary action is then taken.
- Ensure that independent reviewing officers (IROs) robustly challenge plans for children where there is drift and gather the views of children and young people prior to statutory meetings
- Auditing of children's cases should ensure that all shortfalls in practice are identified, addressed, and checked to ensure compliance
- Ensure all social workers benefit from good management oversight and supervision that provides direction, is well recorded, enables reflective practice which then improves quality and consistency of practice
- Ensure that all care leavers have full information about the entitlements they can expect from their corporate parents in addition to the more generic guidance currently available
- Despite performance recently improving, Oldham still has a significantly lower number of care leavers in employment, education or training compared to both statistical neighbours and national averages. Recent investment has improved Oldham's position however this remains a challenge. Oldham's corporate 'Pledge' to employment opportunities within the Council is currently being developed.
- The educational attainment of Oldham's looked after children population is still considerably lower than the average attainment of all children, as well as below statistical neighbours and national averages. Oldham recognises this disparity and is seeking to narrow the gap as a priority
- Ensure that the pupil premium is used to best effect by schools to enhance children's and young people's learning and ensure that schools inside and outside the borough monitor its impact

- Actions taken in relation to concerns about adults who work with children must be fully recorded so respective responsibilities and tasks are clear
- Track all children's cases through legal proceedings from the pre-proceedings stage to the making of final orders to ensure that drift and delay are avoided for looked after children
- Strengthen transition planning for disabled care leavers and other young people with complex needs so that they receive all the services they are entitled to, including support from the aftercare service

Appendix D sets out the wide range of services that are in place across Oldham to provide targeted support to looked after children and care leavers and their parents/ carers, all working to a common aim of improving the life chances of this cohort of vulnerable young people.

## 8) Review of Sufficiency, Placement Decisions and Processes

In February 2014 a review of all high cost and IFA placements was carried out by a Panel. This analysis raised questions about how Oldham currently makes placement decisions, purchases placements and around the availability of in-house services. This review has led to a review of placement choice and the development of the Adolescent Support Unit to support those on the edge of care and prevent those children and young people coming into the care system.

## 9) What is known about the views/ experiences of looked after children and young people in Oldham?

Meeting the needs of looked after children means listening to, and where possible, responding to their views. Oldham has a strong track record of actively engaging young people in shaping local services with a wide range of meaningful engagement mechanisms in place, as illustrated as Appendix E.

The Children in Care Council are regularly consulted on and involved in the development of Council and key partner agency services. The CICC also ensure that they make every effort to engage, involve and gather the views of a wider number of looked after children and care leavers to ensure a representative view across all ages, placements and experiences. Over the past twelve months, they have shared their views on education, family contact, leaving care services, health and well-being, including emotional and physical health, and foster care and placement moves. Therefore, key areas for development emerging include:

- raising awareness and increase understanding amongst school staff of the needs of looked after children;
- ensuring young people presenting with significant challenging behaviour in education settings are supported and have their full education needs met:

- continuing to address the issue of child sexual exploitation in Oldham;
- Supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers
- ensure suitable access to services that can provide emotional help and support
- ensuring that the views of young people are at the centre of placement decisions and they are kept informed throughout the placement process;
- increasing placement choices and support for young people presenting with challenging behaviour; and
- improving foster carers understanding and ability to deal with challenging young people.
- Ensuring that each child's memories and historical journey of their time in care is captured and accessible for young people
- To ensure that Care Leavers attendance at college is not affected due to attending meetings.
- To develop care leavers skills in interview techniques in preparation for work and continue to offer work placements and employment for care leavers.
- Ensuring young people are supported and encouraged to engage effectively in their well and safe interviews.
- Raising young people's awareness and understanding of entitlements

An example of the key improvements, where children and young people, via the Children In Care Council and through their involvement in the PLEDGE review, have contributed to and effected changes over the last year include:

- Sibling contact with a focus during adoption proceedings.
- Raising care leavers awareness and understanding of entitlements

Having in place effective complaints and representation procedures is one of the key ways we can ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard, and that they are able to contribute to the process of identifying improvements needed to the way in which our services are delivered. Likewise Oldham's externally commissioned Children's Rights, Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service has a robust process in place to ensure that children and young people age 15 to 18 years, residing in residential care, foster care, or who are cared for by extended family or friends are supported to contribute their views, wishes and feelings and have opportunity to be a part of the decision making process's that effect their lives.

Some examples of the key improvement areas where children and young people through their representations, feedback and complaints have contributed to and effected changes over the last year include:

- Some improvements to practice to ensure greater emphasis placed on the views of young people during placement decisions.
- Increased support provided to help young people understand the reasons why they are being looked after.
- Ensuring that during all planning meetings there is an interpreter available for young people who need this service
- Work ongoing to remove barriers and ensure full participation, equality of access to advocacy, support services and the complaint process for those children with a disability or complex needs.
- Provision of alternate communication aids as appropriate.

- Joint working protocols in place to help ensure that where something has gone wrong or is not working for a child or young person, that this is sorted out quickly and positively at local level and with the need to invoke the formal complaints process used as a vehicle of last resort.
- Improvement to the process of social worker allocation to help provide greater consistency, and encourage more positive and trusting relationships to develop.

## 10) What is known about the key service challenges?

Desk-top analysis and consideration of service feedback on the current pattern of placement provision shows that for Oldham to have a sufficient number of accommodation providers in the area and a range of accommodation capable of meeting different needs (i.e. meeting the sufficiency duty), there is a need to respond to the following key service challenges:

<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>Local response to date:</b>
<p><b>FOSTERING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Authorities must have a Staying Put policy to ensure arrangements are in place that can enable a young person's foster care placement to be extended beyond their 18th birthday. Staying Put will enable young people to experience a transition from care to independence and adulthood that is similar to that which most young people experience, is based on need and not on age alone.</li> </ul> <p>Nationally the Government have provided a Staying Put allocation of £40 million over three years. There are financial implications of this including the impact it may have on availability of foster placements for children in care, as capacity is absorbed by care leavers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment of Specialist Foster carers to provide placements for children with challenging and complex behaviour currently in residential provision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Staying Put policy is operational. We currently have 5 young people in place and 2 in transition. 4 of these 7 placements have impacted on the carer's immediate ability to take further placements. However, all Staying Put carers can be reviewed to take additional placements although it is likely only younger children can be placed. In terms of sufficiency, it is also likely that these 4 young people would have required another form of accommodation/arrangement and that the staying put arrangement is cost effective.</li> <li>• The One2One Fostering Scheme (specialist) has been established and we have 4 approved carers to meet the needs of children with exceptional needs</li> <li>• Oldham has approved 16 foster carers, (1.4.14 – 31.3.15) one more than last year. However, in the past 6 months (1.4.15 – 30.09.15) we have approved 14 families, 3 mainstream and 11 relatives. The long term merits of this significant increase in placing with relatives is difficult</li> </ul>

<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>Local response to date:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a package of training and provision to ensure these carers are properly supported and that placements can be sustained.</li>   <li>• Continue to recruit new foster carers from all sections of the community in order to meet local needs and increase placement choice for children and young people in recognition of reduced need for in house residential placements</li>   <li>• Maintaining the high level of in-house fostering provision in order to minimise reliance on out of borough placements;</li> </ul>	<p>to predict however, these are clearly cost effective placements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the past 12-18 months the training package to foster carers has been enhanced in terms of flexibility and frequency of core training. A web based calendar is available to assist planning and our offer has improved to include strategies in managing teenage behaviour, de-escalation and enhancing the depth of child development training. We have also established a rolling 16 week course on Nurturing Attachments to promote placement stability.</li>   <li>• A review of placement choice has taken place leading to consideration of reducing the portfolio of homes by one</li>   <li>• On 30. 09.15 there were 253 (from 235 on 31.03.14) children placed with Oldham Foster Carers.</li>   <li>• There were 149 (from 148 on 31.03.14) approved carers of which 34 (from 19 on 31.03.2014) were connected people, and 1 is a 'Multi-link' foster carer</li> </ul>
<p><b>ADOPTION</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in interagency fees to level the playing field between Local Authorities and agencies – Oldham (due to its size and demographics) is likely to be a net loser through this change. Estimated impact £285k increase in the cost of securing the 19 to 20 local authority places required in any one year.</li>   <li>• Inter- agency fee funding: government scheme</li> </ul>	<p>The Adoption Reform Grant has helped, in recent years, to offset the increases in inter agency fees</p> <p>The government have introduced a scheme to increase the pool of adopters for harder to place children, effective from 8/7/15 to 31/7/16. They will reimburse the interagency fee for children who fall into the schemes definition of harder to place children. So far three children have been placed where we can reclaim the fee and a further three have</p>

<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>Local response to date:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering to adopt: Concurrent planning.</li>   <li>• Independent reviewing officer for children with a plan of adoption.</li>   <li>• Adoption Support Fund</li>   <li>• Joint adoption Panel with Rochdale</li>   <li>• Regional Service</li> </ul>	<p>been identified as qualifying.</p> <p>The concurrent planning scheme which has been commissioned along with other authorities in the region is now up and running. We have placed three children through this scheme which means they have experienced less moves and have potentially lived with their permanent families since entering care.</p> <p>The Adoption Reform grant has financed a dedicated IRO post for children with a plan of adoption for a further 12 months from April 15 to end of March 16.</p> <p>The government introduced the adoption support fund in May 2015 to pay for therapeutic support for children who need it, post adoption. Oldham have made 5 successful claims to the fund so far, purchasing services from £7000 to £1200.</p> <p>As part of the shared service agenda , a joint adoption panel has now been established with Rochdale, the aim to improve timeliness by having additional panels to consider adoption cases. This was part of a wider agenda to share the adoption service however this is now under review due to the regionalisation programme</p> <p>The government have offered financial incentives for adoption services to combine on a regional basis to deliver adoption services. The aim is to improve timeliness for children with a plan of adoption by combining resources. Oldham is part of a regional bid with Bolton, Blackburn, Bury , Rochdale and Tameside which has just been agreed by the government. The detail of this bid will be developed over the coming months. The regional service should be established next year.</p>

<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>Local response to date:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspection and performance</li> </ul>	<p>The recent inspection judged the adoption service to be good. Performance as defined by the government scorecard is seen to be on a steady upward trend. However it was recognised that recent success in placing children who have waited over 12 months for an adoptive family will impact negatively on our timeliness. However the act the children have been placed was still seen as positive.</p> <p>Adoption Service as on the 31st March 2015 had achieved the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 33 children placed for adoption (an all-time high)</li> <li>• 22 approved households (again an all-time high)</li> </ul> <p>We currently have 27 children with an adoption plan . Nationally figures of children waiting for adoptive families has fallen which means that Oldham adopters are waiting longer for placement.</p> <p>.</p>
<p><b>COMMUNITY PLACEMENTS</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported accommodation provision, particularly for those with chaotic and difficult behaviour e.g. those leaving custody</li> <li>• Dealing with insufficient semi-independence accommodation provision for a small number of complex young people.</li> <li>• Managing the challenges of funding reductions for After Care and projects aimed at supporting young person's homelessness</li> <li>• Commissioning supported accommodation for new approach to prevention which should reduce the number of adolescents coming into care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recent remodelling has re-aligned resources in the After Care Service Emergency beds are now available in Supported Accommodation thus reducing risk and funding on Bed &amp; Breakfast provision</li> <li>• A review of placement options for care leavers is taking place.</li> <li>• The reduction in residential bed use and 'Staying Put' is likely to lead to a decrease in demand for supported accommodation and to consider moving to a model of less fixed provision</li> </ul>

<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>Local response to date:</b>
<b>RESIDENTIAL CARE</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realising savings already proposed for Oldham’s placement budget (currently overspent)</li> <li>• Further reduce the numbers of children placed out of borough, as this is both expensive and does not promote good outcomes for children in care.</li> <li>• Review the current picture regarding placement decisions in light of the development of the 1-1 fostering offer and to review current residential provision to accommodate demand and need.</li> <li>• 2014-15 reduction of placements in to Residential care resulting in the closure of 1 children’s home and conversion to the Adolescent Support Unit</li> <li>• 2015-16 further decrease in residential provision with proposals of the closure of 1 x 5 bed children’s home and the commissioning of the remaining homes ( including Supported Accommodation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2015 Opening of the ASU working with Young people on the “Edge Of Care”</li> <li>• Oldham has put in place robust arrangements to ensure that both internal and externally commissioned services are monitored on a continuous basis to the highest standards.</li> <li>• Oldham has adapted to all changing regulatory legislation to ensure compliance and improve inspection outcomes; 1 home currently has Outstanding status 1 home has Good status and 1 home requires improvement whilst our commissioned homes retained a Good status</li> <li>• An appraisal process for all internal staff and accrediting externally commissioned providers has been implemented to ensure that performance management processes are sufficiently appropriate</li> <li>• Oldham continues to participate in collaborative procurement initiatives which ensure best value</li> </ul>

## 11) What is known about the use of resources?

In keeping with all areas of public spending, Oldham’s Looked After Children (LAC) budget has faced significant reductions in the last few years. In recent years there have been significant reductions to the budgets for Children’s Safeguarding. These have been achieved through a number of measures, as follows:

- **Savings in 2013/14 – delivering £ 1.07 million budget efficiency**
  - Increasing beds in in-house children’s homes
  - Rationalising management infrastructure and reducing specialist family support



- Reductions to external placement budget
- **Savings in 2014/15 – delivering £0.83 million budget efficiency**
  - Developing Alternative Delivery Models for a number of directly delivered services and reducing costs within in house provision;
    - Children’s Rights, Engagement and Development activity.
    - After Care and Family Placement Functions
    - Efficiencies from in house provision including residential accommodation
  - Reducing the direct cost to the Council in the following ways
    - Alternative Funding for the Life Chances Team
    - Reductions to Placement Budget spend
- **Savings in 2015/16 – delivering £1.26 million budget efficiency**
  - Delaying the entry / accelerating the exit of children and young people into/out of the social care system.
  - Reducing the cost of children and young people being supported by the social care system and reducing the cost of the system itself.
  - Within the context of the SEND reforms, revising the offer and funding arrangements for children with disabilities and special educational needs.
- **Savings approach for 2016/17 – proposing to deliver £1.3 million budget efficiency**
  - Managing current demand including the redesign of community support services and residential provision along with an improved local offer of one 2 one fostering services.
  - Reduction of future demand through the introduction of an Adolescent Support Unit and the efficient delivery of Edge of Care services.

**Table 7 – 2015/16 Budget – Children’s Safeguarding**

The budget available to the Children’s Safeguarding directorate for the 2015/16 financial year is as follows:

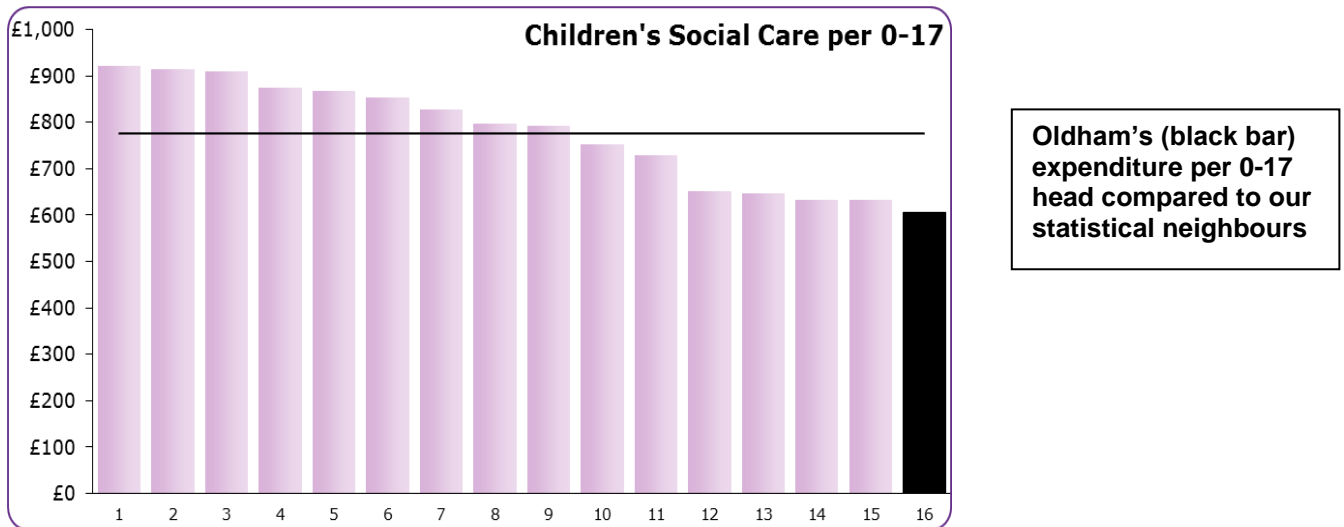
Service Area	Gross £	Income £	Net £
Children in Care	17,356,440	(1,570,640)	15,785,800
Children’s Safeguarding	2,056,120	(427,240)	1,628,880
Fieldwork & Family Support	5,103,990	0	5,103,990
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24,516,550</b>	<b>(1,997,880)</b>	<b>22,518,670</b>

*Note: This is net of the delivered savings detailed on the previous page but does not include the proposed savings from 2016/17 onwards.*

**Benchmarked Expenditure**

The Authority subscribes to an annual benchmarking report provided by CIPFA (The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy), which collates a combination of statutory Section 251 data returns and national population figures to provide a spend per head figure for Social Care compared with statistical comparator authorities.

The table confirms Oldham's commitment to providing Social Care services that are value for money in a period of rising demand and the performance figures earlier in this report cement our opinion that this low per head spend is not adversely affecting service delivery.



<b>Commissioning Intention</b>	<b>Key Objectives 2014-18</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Progress to date</b>
<p>1. Ensure sufficiency of placement provision that balances quality and cost effectiveness and is matched to individual need.</p>	<p>a) Review functioning and use of the Provider Panel to ensure robust scrutiny and challenge of placement decisions thereby making residential placements for fewer children</p> <p>b) Collaborate with other LA's (potentially Calderdale and Yorkshire) to develop a memorandum of understanding whereby we use each other's residential provision to provide placements where necessary away from Oldham but as close to home as possible minimising the logistical impact of managing these placements.</p> <p>c) Continue to recruit specialist foster carers to create a scheme that supports children with more challenging needs, thus minimising high cost residential placements</p> <p>d) To reduce provision to one residential unit and review full future residential provision currently in place</p> <p>e) Review current allocation of semi-independent accommodation and consider future options for external commissioning.</p> <p>f) Develop and further expand Oldham's Short Breaks fostering scheme to provide a wider range of options for children with disabilities and complex needs, thereby providing a more cost</p>	<p>For children and young people in care we need to make sure we have the right range of placements which promote positive experiences whatever their needs.</p> <p>At present we do not have the right mix of placements available in Oldham to meet every type of need, which means that some children still have placements a long way from their home and community.</p> <p>We also need our range of placements to be good value for money and affordable within the budget available. This is the rationale for developing a broader mix of provision including Specialist Foster Care and a wider range of Short Breaks provision to ensure the most cost effective options that also provide the best outcomes for children are available to every child coming into the care system.</p>	<p>a) COMPLETED</p> <p>b) Stood down due to placement choice review</p> <p>c) Continue to recruit specialist foster carers. Currently four carers approved for the scheme and have children placed and two carers pending assessment.</p> <p>d) Review underway</p> <p>e) Review underway</p> <p>f) Developments ongoing</p>

	<p>effective alternative to Netherhey Street Short Breaks provision</p> <p>g) Embed the collaborative arrangements with neighbouring authority, Rochdale, for the shared residential service providing specialist Short Breaks placements for children with complex and additional needs.</p> <p>h) Continue to actively pursue recruitment of in-house foster carers and increase the capacity of in-house fostering</p> <p>i) Continue to actively pursue recruitment of adopters in order to income generate to help balance the increased cost of interagency fees and to increase capacity to purchase appropriate adoptive placements for Oldham's looked after children</p> <p>j) Engage with partners in collaborative work and development of innovative practice around adoption, residential care, fostering, 16+ provision, and multi treatment foster care to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of these services</p> <p>k) Continue engagement with Adoption 22 to support placement of children across the NW</p> <p>l) Ensure appropriate measures are in place to ensure the quality and suitability of accommodation through contract monitoring, Regulation 44 visits, ongoing training and development for in-house foster</p>		<p>g) Shared service with Rochdale fully operational in December 2015</p> <p>h) Completed</p> <p>i) Completed</p> <p>j) Completed</p> <p>k) Completed</p> <p>l) Completed</p>
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	<p>carers, etc.</p> <p>m) Performance management systems must ensure enable staff and managers to understand the strengths and weakness of their service so remedial action can be taken promptly and can demonstrate identified needs are being met by services currently provided.</p>		<p>m) Partly achieved and work remains on going</p>
<p>2. Ensure all children and young people in care get an education that allows them to be independent, autonomous and have choices</p>	<p>a) Ensure adequate educational provision exists to support the proposed Specialist Foster Care Scheme to support placement stability</p> <p>b) Challenge and support schools to ensure high quality of assigned teaching and learning for Looked After Children</p> <p>c) Ensure effective interpretation and analysis of individual and collective data that leads to targeted interventions</p> <p>d) Improve joint working between social care and schools by ensuring that the education needs of all Looked After Children are coordinated through a single plan and that this is regularly reviewed</p> <p>e) Ensure looked after children receive they support they need to attend school regularly</p> <p>f) Coordinate service delivery to ensure looked after children do not need to be excluded from school</p>	<p>Providing and maintaining the right education offer (including early years provision) is a crucial element of Oldham's strategy for looked after children. If children in care are to achieve their full potential, we need to find them the right education setting, give them high priority in admission procedures, take action to reduce absences and exclusions and support them to achieve levels of attainment and progress that match their peers subject to age, aptitude, ability and any special educational needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic education place planning</li> <li>• Personal Education Plans (PEPs) which are part of the statutory care Plan, are reviewed and quality assured termly. Pupil Premium Plus for looked after children must be requested to support the targets in the PEP. Interventions and outcomes are tracked and monitored so that appropriate challenge to schools can be made if necessary.</li> <li>• Welfare Call is commissioned to track attendance and exclusions of looked after children. School attendance officers provide initial support to ensure good attendance.</li> <li>• Life Chances Team (education Support Workers) provide targeted support for looked after</li> </ul>

	<p>g) Ensure clear access routes to impartial advice, information and guidance and targeted youth support to enable young people leaving care to remain in education, training or employment</p> <p>h) Ensure that the pupil premium is used to the best effect by schools to enhance children's and young people's learning and ensure that schools inside and outside the borough monitor its impact</p>		<p>children at risk of disengagement from learning or losing their school place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All schools provide impartial advice, information and guidance (statutory) and Positive Steps are commissioned to provide targeted work. Their contact with looked after children is recorded in individual PEPS</li> </ul>
<p>3. Ensure all children and young people in care are healthy and make positive life choices</p>	<p>a) Improve local intelligence base on the health needs and outcomes of looked after children and care leavers</p> <p>b) Identify and remove barriers for young people to access health services and improve co-ordination between professional to ensure clear pathways of care</p> <p>c) Ensure children and young people have any need for additional emotional support recognised and addressed, and have the knowledge and skills to achieve emotional stability, resilience and self-confidence.</p> <p>d) Raise awareness and support healthy lifestyle choices, particularly in relation to sexual activity, alcohol and drug use</p> <p>e) Ensure opportunities to take part in active and positive recreation</p> <p>f) Reduce looked after children and care leavers involvement with criminality</p>	<p>If looked after children and care leavers are to thrive, we need to maintain a clear focus on providing targeted interventions that promote physical and emotional health and well-being. We need to make sure all children and young people in care are empowered to make their own well informed healthy choices, and are able to access and enjoy all manners of leisure activities. Promoting and building the self-esteem and resilience in all children being looked after is essential if they are to take control of their lives and make a positive contribution to where they live and go to school - both now and in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SDQ and Placement Stability report presented to CP Panel</li> <li>Monthly monitoring of compliance with looked after children's health assessments completed within timescales.</li> <li>Rolling programme of audit looking at compliance with LAC processes and quality of LAC health assessments.</li> <li>Specialist Nurse attendance at LAC health forum event to engage with children, young people and care leavers to establish their views on new care leaver passport.</li> <li>Development of care leaver passport in partnership with Children's Services with the aim of reducing barriers to health for care leavers.</li> <li>LAC children, young people and</li> </ul>

	and the Criminal Justice System		<p>care leavers continue to access the Positive Step's Health Team on a drop-in basis up to the age of 21 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDQ's are used holistically as part of LAC health assessments to establish any emotional health needs.</li> <li>• Specialist Nurse attendance at monthly life chances meeting, where LAC with SDQ over 17 are discussed.</li> <li>• Sexual health, healthy lifestyle, drugs and alcohol use are all part of the LAC health assessment as age appropriate and done on an individualised basis.</li> <li>• Specialist Nurse is based alongside Brook and OASIS and is able to share information as appropriate and when required for safeguarding purposes.</li> <li>• Specialist Nurse is based with and works in partnership with the Advanced Nurse Practitioner who assesses the health needs of young people involved with YOT.</li> <li>• The Empowerment and participation team worked with the children in care council to</li> </ul>
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			<p>hold a health consultation event in November 2016. The event looked at raising awareness of health and wellbeing services as well as focusing on the views of looked after children and care leavers in terms of their identified health priorities. This will be documented in a consultation report and disseminated to the CP board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Empowerment and Participation team have negotiated that all Looked after children and Care Leavers can sign up for a free Oldham Community Leisure Active Card and MAHDLO membership. This has been rolled out through the Fostering team and visits to Residential homes.</li> <li>• The ongoing collation of all information for Looked after children and Care leavers on the CICC webpage around entitlements, health and wellbeing services, involvement/participation and consultation.</li> <li>• Following on from the health consultation the children in care council are using funding from the Kerrching scheme to devise a health passport and health information resource for care</li> </ul>
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			<p>leavers and looked after young people that will contain information to develop healthy lifestyle as well as information about health and wellbeing services available in Oldham.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment and participation team are co-ordinating the roll out of mental health training for front line professionals including representation from social care. The young minds training sessions were commissioned by the youth council using funding secured from the CCG.</li> <li>• Empowerment and participation team with all 3 youth voice groups are working closely with mental health service providers to ensure the voice of young people is influencing service delivery. This has included meeting with professionals from CAMHS, being involved in recruitment and selection of new CAMHS staff, meeting with professionals from other mental health providers and feeding into consultations and focus groups that report into the emotional health and wellbeing board</li> </ul>
4. Ensure that all children and young people	a) Ensure children in care have easy access to a trusted adult who will advocate for them in issues that affect	Every child has the right to feel safe and protected and this is an essential pre-requisite if they are to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small number of care leavers are assisting in the design and delivery of services for young</li> </ul>

<p>in care feel safe and that their well-being is safeguarded</p>	<p>their lives.</p> <p>b) Ensure that if children &amp; young people in care have concerns these are responded to quickly and appropriately</p> <p>c) Ensure children and young people exhibiting signs of being exploited have these signs recognised and investigated to addresses the causes.</p> <p>d) Ensure young people develop the knowledge, skills, self-confidence and self-awareness to recognise exploitative behaviour and to protect them from it.</p>	<p>thrive in other aspects of their lives. We need to ensure that children's well-being is paramount regardless of the nature of their placement and that they feel safe at all times.</p> <p>Every child is entitled to an advocate</p>	<p>people involved in or at risk of child sexual exploitation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's complaints are responded to within the legislative framework and timescales required</li> <li>• Advocates are available through the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service, currently provided by The Children's Society</li> <li>• The Pheonix Team is responsible for gathering intelligence and supporting those who exhibit signs of being exploited</li> <li>• A play is being toured around all secondary schools in Oldham, to ensure that young people are aware of CSE and have an opportunity to develop their understanding and how to recognise and manage and protect themselves from this.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Ensure the journey through care is stable and well planned, with excellent transition and after care support</p>	<p>a) Limit the number of moves experienced by looked after children and young people once they are in the care system, whilst recognising that unsuitable placements should not be maintained</p> <p>b) Ensure children in care receive information about their placement in advance</p>	<p>Minimising placement change will: minimise child trauma; lessen child attachment, behaviour and mental health disorders; decrease school changes and increase academic achievement; maximise continuity in services, decrease foster parent stress, and reduce overall costs; and increase the likelihood that a child will establish a healthy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placement stability reports are being produced and scrutinized and an action plan to ensure placement stability remains a priority and is closely monitored.</li> <li>• Looked after children receive information regarding their future placement in advance if a planned placement.</li> </ul>

	<p>c) Monitor and eliminate drift in care planning</p> <p>d) Support to transitions to independence as children reach the end of their care journey</p> <p>e) Develop a cross sector workforce strategy that ensures recruitment, retention and training of a professional, high calibre workforce</p>	<p>attachment with a caring adult</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for transitions is ongoing and is currently being developed for the children with disabilities and complex needs as identified in the recent Ofsted inspection.</li> <li>• A retention package has been agreed with the CSC workforce in December 2015 which will ensure that the current workforce will remain stable and in place for the next twelve months, at which point a second package will be put in place to further strengthen the stability of the workforce. This will become part of a wider strategy which will be developed in 2016.</li> </ul>
<p>Ensure our Looked After Children have a voice</p>	<p>a) Maintain informal and formal mechanisms that allow looked after children and care leavers to contribute to the development and improvement of services</p> <p>b) Maintain a forum where Corporate Parents are accountable to looked after children</p> <p>c) Involve looked after children and care leavers in appropriate recruitment and induction processes</p> <p>d) Maximise the opportunities for looked after children to contribute to their reviews and meetings about their care</p> <p>e) Actively respond to complaints and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for children's views is enshrined in the Children Act (DoH, 1989), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1999).</li> <li>• Vulnerable children should be given equal choice and involvement in decisions related to their placement and care.</li> <li>• Their feedback is a key indicator to assist in monitoring and improving the quality, impact and accountability of the services.</li> <li>• Eliciting looked-after children's</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Children In Care Council continues to be facilitated by the Empowerment and Participation Team</li> <li>• Representatives from the CICC continue to attend and engage effectively in the agenda of the CP Panel</li> <li>• A number of looked after children and care leavers attended and engaged fully in the Corporate Parenting Conference</li> <li>• A number of looked after children have shared their views on a regional and</li> </ul>

	<p>representation and demonstrate the impact on service improvement</p>	<p>views is particularly important because of the nature and complexity of their difficulties. Their experience of being heard and understood provides the foundation for developing trust and healthy attachments.</p>	<p>national level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oldham has led on the development and organisation of a NW regional CICC event has taken place and identified priority issues that young people want to discuss further.</li> <li>• The Children's Special Interest Group continues to monitor issues raised by looked after children and care leavers, via complaints, Children's Right's Service, and within the statutory review process identifies trends, and ensures the voice of the child is fed into service design and delivery.</li> </ul>
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## **12) Implementation**

Implementation of the above commissioning intentions will be overseen by the 'Savings Through Transformation in Children's Social Care and Disability Services' Project Board, which is oversees the broader efficiency programme for 2015-17.

## **13) Market Management**

Oldham Council operates a mixed economy, providing fostering and residential care from its in-house provision, as well as commissioning placements from external providers, on a needs-led basis.

Oldham Council participates in the Placements Northwest collaborative programme, which serves twenty two authorities within the northwest region and provides valuable database information on providers as well as support with market management, quality checks, cost control and collaborative working. Oldham utilises the contract frameworks developed through Placements Northwest.

As part of the AGMA wide collaboration initiative, Oldham is working with partners to achieve further efficiencies from placement activity including a focus on after care supported accommodation and 'step down' or specialist foster care.

## **14) Performance Management and Quality Assurance**

Oldham's Corporate Parenting Panel will be the multi-agency body that will monitor implementation of this commissioning strategy and associated action plan. The priority activities will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Panel and will also be subject to annual review to ensure it is responsive to changes at a national and a local level. The Corporate Parenting Panel will also report its progress on improving outcomes to the Children's Trust Board on an annual basis.

The Children's Integrated Commissioning Group will maintain responsibility for the oversight of all commissioning activity involving partner agencies and this strategy forms part of the wider integrated commissioning approach.

## **15) Equality and Diversity**

In order to determine if this strategy will have any adverse impact on the lives of Looked After Children (including those on the edge of care) and Care Leavers across the range of equality dimensions, this strategy has been subject to an equalities impact assessment and it will be reviewed annually to determine if any steps are required to address negative outcomes.

## 16) Appendices

### i. Appendix A – Overview of Key Legislation and Statutory Guidance

#### ***Key Legislation***

The **Children Act 1989** is the primary legislation which sets out local authority responsibility to children in need including looked after children. Section 22 imposes a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child they look after. The **Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000** extended the responsibility of the local authority to young people leaving care, requiring them to plan the young person's transition to adulthood and provide on going advice and assistance until at least the age of 21.

The **Children Act (2004)** set out the direction for a major programme of change, which placed a duty on named agencies both to cooperate with the local authority and to ensure they take account of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in fulfilling their own functions. These are the statutory partners who are required to work alongside the Local Authority and include the Health Services, the Police, schools, youth offending teams and the voluntary sector. There are also other partners who do not have a statutory duty to co-operate with us but with whom we will need to engage and encourage partnership working in order to ensure delivery of the required outcomes.

The **Children and Young Person's Act 2008** requires local authorities to take steps to secure sufficient suitable accommodation for looked after children within their area which meets their needs. It also strengthens the care planning process and the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer in monitoring the plan, of which the child's health and education plans are essential components.

The **Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012** has introduced a single remand order for children and young people under the age of 18 who are refused bail, which will mean that they will become looked after for the duration of their remand, and may mean they are entitled to leaving care services.

The **Children & Families Act 2014** is wide ranging legislation including significant reforms that reshape and accelerate the adoption system, giving children in care the choice to stay with their foster families until they turn 21 ("Staying Put"), changes to children's residential care to make sure homes are safe and secure, fundamental reforms to the Special Educational Needs system.

## **Statutory Guidance**

The legislative framework is supported by statutory guidance that described roles and responsibilities in more detail. Statutory guidance should be adhered to.

**Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked After Children** placed a statutory requirement of PCTs to analyse the health needs of looked after children, plan and commission services, and monitor and review effectiveness. Although PCTs have been replaced by Clinical Commissioning Groups, the government's 'mandate' to the NHS Commissioning Board for 2013 – 2015 states:

*“We expect to see the NHS, working together with schools and children’s social services, supporting and safeguarding vulnerable, looked after and adoptive children, through a more joined up approach to addressing their needs.”*

**Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities** confirmed the duty to actively support looked after children’s education, including the priority given to school admissions, restriction on the use of school exclusion and the introduction of personal education allowances to purchase tailored support.

The **Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulation and Guidance** clarify the expectations of care planning and review for looked after children and strengthen the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer to challenge when identified needs are not being met.

**The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers** provides detail as to how care leavers should be provided with comprehensive personal support so they achieve their potential as they make their transition to adulthood. It includes the need for care leavers to be living in suitable accommodation and receiving support to continue in education or training and to find employment

**Statutory Guidance: Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children** requires local authorities to develop a plan to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area and which meets needs, ensuring there is a diverse range of universal, targeted and specialist services working together.

**Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and the Lead member for Children’s Services.** These are both statutory and cover both social care and education. These individuals should provide strong political and professional leadership and ensure there is a clear line of accountability for children’s well being. They have particular responsibility for vulnerable groups, including looked after children and care leavers for whom they are corporate parents.

## ii. Appendix B - Overview of key local strategies, plans and policies

The key local strategies and plans that are aimed at driving forward improved outcomes for children and young people in care, leaving care or on the edge of care are set out below.

- ***Corporate Parenting Strategy 2014-16***

Oldham's Corporate Parent Strategy sets out the aims and ambitions of Oldham Council and its key partners to significantly improve the life chances of looked after children. This strategy identifies a set of key strategic objectives; sets how these will be realised through operational processes and how success will be monitored.

- ***Placement Policy – Looked After Children 2014***

This document outlines some of the principles, which underpin existing local working practices in respect of identifying placements for looked after children and young people

## iii. Appendix C – Description of current placement provision

Placements of children who are, or at risk of being looked after by the Council, and Care Leavers, will be offered in a variety of settings and will normally be considered following the sequential order outlined below:

### ***Placement with Family Members / Friends***

Initial consideration in all cases will be given to maintaining a child with parents, family members or friends in their local communities. Particular care needs to be taken however in arranging placements such as this as there is a need to ensure the safety and welfare of the child. Placements with family members / friends will also be properly assessed and supported by the Fostering Team at the same level as all foster carers. The legal status of the child must also be determined when considering this placement type to ensure compliance with the appropriate procedures.

In Oldham, we will attempt to keep all children within their family where this is appropriate using a variety of methods including Residence Orders, Special Guardianship Orders and encourage private fostering also where appropriate.

### ***Short Term Breaks (Respite Care)***

Residential short breaks for children with additional and complex needs is available for children aged 8 to 17 at Netherhey St children's home. The service offers overnight stays for up to 6 children per night as well as a short stay emergency/crisis intervention bed. From mid-December, Netherhey St will become the 'shared service' for Oldham and Rochdale with staff from the existing residential short break service in Rochdale joining colleagues at Netherhey St. This service will continue to provide up to six beds per night for children and families from Rochdale and Oldham and a seventh bed will be available for short term (up to ten days) emergency/crisis intervention.



## **Community Placements**

For some young people aged 16 and over it may be possible to identify appropriate community placements such as supported lodgings, hostels or supported independence. In such circumstances, every effort will be made to promote the safety and welfare of the young people concerned. Where they are deemed to be Care Leavers the After Care Team will also continue to support them until at least the age of 21 years or 25 if in higher education.

In Oldham, supported lodgings have proved to be a valuable resource for many young people. An After Care Supported Lodgings scheme was developed in 2000 and is run in conjunction with Housing Support (First Choice Homes). Although the numbers living in this type of lodging have been relatively small, the scheme has allowed a number of young people to be supported for longer and has also created another accommodation option for young people to move from being in the "Looked After" system. Young people have also been able to re-access these supported lodgings if they have moved on and the move has not been successful for them.

Floating support has equally provided a crucial element in helping young people in Oldham to live independently and maintain their tenancies. Many young people at 16 or 17 in care placements in Oldham are attracted by the idea of their own tenancy but in reality struggle with the reality of living independently even with a great deal of support. Some of these young people move too soon or in an unplanned way and ended up intentionally homeless with no other option but to live at friends or wherever else they can find.

Oldham's greatest pressure is currently on supported accommodation; that is for both semi-independent units and supported flats, as there are too few for the numbers of young people coming through the care system. This type of provision gives young people the option of trying to prepare for moving to their own tenancy by offering them a halfway stage and the chance to develop the skills with staff support in "training" flats before a final move to independence. In Oldham there are currently:

- a semi-independent unit (Suffolk Street), built in conjunction with Great Places Housing Group, which has five beds and an emergency bed;
- a semi-independent unit (Hawthorn Crescent), built in conjunction with Great Places Housing Group, which has four beds and an emergency bed.
- four supported accommodation flats, with semi-independent residential support workers for young people, and two flats can take a young parent with a baby (Ripponden Rd);
- three trainer flats at Clyde Street in conjunction with the Ripponden Road project that provides the same support with an office facility can be used for the development of independence skills and one to one work
- The Furze training flats have been replaced with 6 additional flats at Goddard Street with semi-independent unit support
- the Porter Street scheme run by the DePaul Trust providing an eight-bedded mixed sex unit for vulnerable young people aged 16-25; and
- a group of flats with a Community living worker offering some support (Keyring).
- Alternative accommodation can be within Staying Put arrangement for young people in foster care or supported lodgings.
- 

Overall Oldham has limited emergency provision. The After Care Service spends a disproportionate amount of time working with a small but chaotic group of young people who are evicted from accommodation, mainly due to their behaviour. These young people are usually not ready for independent living.

In Oldham:

- 'Nightstop' provides emergency accommodation for homeless young people aged 16-25 in an approved and trained volunteer's home for up to one night at a time. This accommodation provides a very short term, safe solution for young people who are homeless;
- Oldham Reconnect (Young Persons Mediation) is a preventative measure to attempt to avoid young people becoming homeless or resolving family issues quickly in an attempt to return a young person home and therefore avoid homelessness.
- In response to a duty on local authorities to provide vacation accommodation for care leavers at university or further education, this is often managed in Oldham by making links and supporting previous foster carers, or relatives or the young person having a 52 week accommodation at university. However, this needs to be a part of the Pathway Plan discussions. Alternatively, supported lodgings schemes can be used to provide lodgings for such young people during the vacation period and many young people wish to extend their vacation arrangements at university so they don't have to remove all their belongings.

### ***Parent and Child Placements***

In some cases it will be appropriate to place parents and children together. Such placements will be made where they are necessary to properly assess and / or develop parent's skills and relationship with the child before a decision can be made about how best to secure the long term welfare of the child. These will occur rarely.

### ***Adoption***

Some children will benefit from the long-term stability and security offered by Adoption. Adoption is a positive consideration for children where it is clear that a return to their birth family is either not available or where it has been determined that this is not in the interests of promoting their welfare. Adoption is generally accepted as a positive option where possible for looked after children.

Inter-agency fees are charged when adopters approved by one agency are matched with a child in the care of another. Historically Local Authorities were able to charge different fees to other Local Authorities than those paid to independent agencies, which provided a disincentive to using independent adoption agencies. In order to address this, the Children & Families Act 2014 required that all interagency fees be equalised. The size and demographics of the Borough, along with the need for anonymity in adoptive families, means Oldham's Adoption Service is unable to place children with Oldham adopters and is reliant on placing children with families from Adoption 22 and nationally and is likely to remain a net importer of Adopters (i.e. is unlikely to be able to match its need for adopters with an equal number recruited within the Borough). In order to alleviate this anticipated impact Oldham's Adoption Service has developed an Adoption Recruitment Strategy to ensure measures are in place to respond to and sustain the interest and motivation of prospective adopters.

## ***Foster Care***

The needs of most, but not all children can be best met in a family setting rather than an institutional setting. Foster Care can be provided on a short or long-term basis. Short-term foster care offers a positive option where a child's circumstances indicate that a return to their family is possible after a relatively short period of time, i.e. less than six months. Long-term foster care can offer some young people the stability and security they need where a return to their family is not available. Long-term foster care will normally be preferred to adoption where it is deemed to be in the child's best interests and where one or more of the following apply:

- where there are significant levels of contact with the child's birth family;
- where the child has expressed a clear desire not to be adopted, but wishes to remain in a foster placement long term; and
- where the relationship between the foster carer and the child is established and beneficial to the child but where the foster carers may not wish to become or be approved as adopters.
- In-house provision will be considered in the first instance. Where no suitable in-house provision is available then the independent sector may be approached, especially when there is specialist need.

During 2014-15, Oldham's Fostering Service achieved high levels of in borough placements and as of the 31st March 2015 there were 221 children placed with Oldham-approved foster carers. There were 149 approved carers of which 24 were connected people, 3 short breaks 'contract' carers supporting children with additional needs and 1 multi-link foster carers providing additional support for the most challenging children in the cohort.

With regard to externally commissioned fostering provision, Oldham Council participates in the Placements Northwest Fostering Contract, which has been implemented on behalf of the 23 North-West authorities and provides a tiered database of Independent Fostering Agencies, through which placements can be commissioned. Participation in this collaborative arrangement provides the Council with quality placements at value for money prices.

## ***Residential Homes***

Residential care can provide short term care and can also accommodate children and young people in an emergency. Whilst the options for rehabilitation are explored, residential care may also provide some young people with stability on a long term basis, where a family setting is not viable.

In Oldham, residential care is provided in a variety of settings, including two Oldham council run homes which accommodate 5 and 7 young people and also two externally commission homes accommodating 13 young people in total. Each home has its own Statement of Purpose which details the nature of the service it provides. Within the Oldham boundary there are also four private providers who also offer residential placements, which may be utilised by the Council on a spot purchase basis. However, it should be noted that two of these homes cater for specialist needs and consideration shall always be given to matching needs and capacity prior to making any placement.

### ***Residential Schools***

Where young people are experiencing serious difficulties with education or have specialist educational needs, it may also be necessary to consider an establishment offering residential education. When there is the need to turn to specialist independent provision, Oldham Council has a procedure that includes ensuring that the appropriate agencies are all involved and that 3 way funding is sought. This is sought by first applying to the Children's Provider Panel and then if necessary to the Complex Cases panel.

### ***Hospital / Hospice Care***

Some young people will require specialist hospital / hospice care where mental health issues exist. Where this is necessary every effort will be made to minimise disruption / distress to young people and clear multi-agency working arrangements are put in place.

### ***Secure Accommodation***

Secure accommodation can be provided for young people either as a result of a remand or sentence for an offence or on welfare grounds (i.e. where it is necessary for their own safety or the safety of others). In relation to welfare cases the Council will treat secure accommodation as a last resort and would avoid this wherever possible. Legal advice is sought on every occasion and placements are reviewed in line with national guidance.

## **iv. Appendix D – Description of current support service provision**

### ***Integrated Life Chances Team***

This is a multi-disciplinary team which offers a range of services to enhance outcomes for looked after children and young people. The team is made up of a number of staff from a variety of disciplines including Health, Education, Social Care and CAMHS. The team has regular meetings and where necessary adopts a team around the child approach to support the child's holistic needs. Support and advice is also offered to foster carers, residential homes and parents of looked after children. Training is also given to designated teachers and social workers around their responsibilities for looked after children which includes their roles in initiating and completing Personal Education Plans.

The team offers a variety of interventions aimed at raising attainment, keeping children engaged and building self-confidence. Over the last two years the Life Chances Team has organised 26 interventions ranging from one day events, 13 week courses and residential trips. Support is also offered on a 1:1 basis for targeted children to help with SATs and GCSE exams and support in their transition to secondary school.

### ***Looked After Children with Additional and Complex Needs***

There are a range of services available to support children with additional and complex needs / special educational needs / disabilities most of the local authority services these within the All Age Disability Service – the Children with Additional & Complex Needs Team comprising social workers and Family Support Workers who work closely with health colleagues providing support regarding nursing and behaviour management, psychology, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, paediatrics and support with mental health, autism, etc.

Alongside these services support is available in schools, early years settings and in family homes from teams supporting children / families with hearing and visual impairments; physical disability; specific learning disabilities; learning and behaviour issues; counselling needs; psychological support and early intervention.

## ***Education, Skills and Employment Support Services***

### **The Virtual School**

The Virtual School for Looked after Children in Oldham was set up following the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Ofsted inspection in 2012, and the subsequent peer review.

The virtual school has oversight of looked after children as if they were in a single school, liaising with the schools they actually attend, tracking their progress and supporting them to achieve as well as possible.

The virtual school is subject to inspection (as for any school) but under the Local Authority Single Inspection Framework. The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) is a document required by Ofsted during their inspection.

The Life Chances team provides the core operational support for LAC. The Team consists of a team manager and two Education Support Officers. They work directly with looked after children in the following ways:-

- Improving engagement and aspirations; promoting confidence and building self-esteem. The team help Y6 LAC to prepare for transition through team building and motivation activities. They take children on residential trips and run accredited activities in the Easter and summer holidays.
- Supporting transition - The team co-ordinate all the primary and secondary schools admissions and liaise with social workers, carers and schools admissions. They arrange visits to secondary schools with year 5 children and carers. The team co-ordinate Y6 meetings with new secondary schools and attended PEP meetings. They continue the transition programme for year 6 children in Y7 in their new secondary schools.
- Learning Support - The team plan and arrange interventions throughout the year. They commission a tutoring service to provide 1:1 tuition for children in year 5, 6, 10 and 11. As reading is often an area of learning difficulty the team sign up to and co-ordinated the Letterbox club which provided individual books and numeracy games each month (for 6 months) to approximately 50 looked after children. The team also commission alternative provision for the most difficult to engage young people. They bought and distributed laptops according to need. The VSH and Life Chances team monitor those on part time timetables to ensure that any child not engaged with full time education has a Pastoral Support Plan and are placed back in full time education as quickly as possible.
- Support examinations - The team liaise with all designated teachers and Exams officers to check year 11 entries for GCSEs. They collated GCSE predicted grades, check all

coursework is completed. They post out information on all year 11's to Headteachers, Designated Teachers and exams officers to get GCSE results on the day the results are released. They also collate predicted grades at KS2.

- Multi agency working - An essential role of the Life Chances Team is to work with a range of other services. They work with Positive Steps, Education Attendance Service, Youth Justice Service, CAMHS, Educational Psychology Service and Access. They liaise with the statutory assessment team and supported EHCP submissions. They provide support and advice to Oldham's children's homes and attend meetings and advocate for our children placed out of Authority. They provided support and advice and training to Social Workers, schools, carers, IROs and the fostering and adoption teams.
- Challenge, Support and mediation - The team challenged barriers to learning, access to education and possible exclusion from school.

### **The School Performance Service**

Focuses on ensuring local schools and governing bodies are aware of their responsibilities and understand the powerful role they can play in significantly improving the quality of life and educational experiences of looked after children. This service also takes the lead on providing schools and designated teachers with specific information about individual looked after children on the schools roll, as well as ensuring suitable training is available covering all aspects of the care system.

Working alongside the Life Chance Team and the Access Service, the Council's Behaviour and Attendance Manager ensures robust measures are in place across the Borough to promote positive behaviour and reduce exclusions. In the event that a looked after child is permanently excluded from school the Team ensures full-time alternative education is provided as soon as possible.

In terms of ensuring accessible, high quality, personalised and impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) is available, all looked after children are classed as 'priority' in schools, academies and colleges in Oldham which means they have access to individual IAG services based on their need.

Positive Steps (who are commissioned to provide IAG services in Oldham – formerly Connexions) has established Partnership Agreements with schools setting out the contributions of both parties. These are as follows:

<b><i>Positive Steps Contributions</i></b>	<b><i>School Contributions</i></b>
Attend LAC review meetings and PEP meetings where possible	Invite PA to LAC review meetings and PEP meetings where possible
Prioritise LAC for one to one interventions	Provide details of pupils who are LAC to PA

Meet with LAC designated teacher to review progress of LAC	LAC designated teacher to meet with PA to review progress of LAC
Complete and provide Career Guidance Information (CGI) documents to inform PEPs	Include information from Career Guidance Information (CGI) documents in PEPs

In terms of IAG provision for looked after children/ care leavers aged 16 to 19, they continue to be classed as a 'priority' group in every aspect, with access to a designated specialist Career Adviser who:

- provides a designated Career Adviser based at After Care to support the transition of Looked After young people (funded by Get Oldham Working)
- provides representation on the Care To Work planning group, linked to Oldham's Corporate Parenting Strategy;
- attends After Care weekly Team Meetings; and
- ensures a seamless transfer of support for Teenage Parents within the cohort

### ***Health Services***

In order to provide a structure for integrated working, a multi-agency service model including children's social care, a dedicated Looked After Children Psychologist from Oldham's specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Looked After Children Nurse has been developed. This model provides different modes and intensity of multi-agency input, dependent on a child/young person's needs (mainly training, preventative/resilience building group work, consultation, team around the child & individual work) to ensure structured, comprehensive, integrated and sustainable provision is available and meets the mental health and psychological needs of local Looked After Children.

These posts are not co-located but work closely with the Life Chances team to maintain a joined up service. They hold fortnightly consultation slots at the Southlink Centre and have also recently piloted an 18-week course for carers on attachment.

### ***Support for young people on the edge of care***

All young people who are experiencing challenges in their lives can access a range of support services to prevent family breakdown and their reception into the care system. Initially within the school setting, where concerns are identified pertaining to a young person, an Early Help Assessment will be undertaken and an early Help action plan developed to address identified needs. The early Help Assessment has been developed to identify issues in such a way as to shape the support to the young person to enable them to take control of those issues and learn how to deal with them themselves. This helps to reduce any growing dependency they may have on high level services.

This process would then utilise available services such as internal school support, Learning Mentors and possibly external support interventions such as CAMHs and Family Group Conferences to address the identified needs.

If a support package co-ordinated via the early help process is not successful in meeting the needs of the young person a referral for specific support from the Early help teams may be appropriate, alternatively should there be Child in Need or Child Protection concerns then a referral to Children's Social Care may be indicated. In such instances, the Children's

Assessment Team will undertake an Initial Assessment of the young person's needs. This assessment will usually be led by a social worker with a specialism in youth matters. The team also have family support workers available who are experienced in dealing with challenging behaviour. Services that are also available and may be used include:

- one to one support for the young person and/or their parents;
- referral to specialist services such as Connexions and the Messenger project.( a partnership approach to meeting the needs of young people at risk of sexual exploitation);
- completion of a Child in Need plan;
- completion of a Core Assessment (a more detailed assessment of a young person's needs);
- the calling of a child exploitation conference; and
- the calling of a Child Protection Conference.

### **Adolescent Support Unit**

In April 2015 Children's Services opened the ASU (Adolescent Support Unit) The home was developed is to provide short breaks and outreach services for children on the "edge of Care" it is designed as a positive and flexible service for children with significant emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Home aims to do this by working in open partnership with their families and partner agencies to offer purposeful and pre-planned out-reach and respite . The ASU provides an emergency bed from Friday to Sunday evening each week, the ASU offers a respite service on a planned basis for no more than three young people who live within the Oldham area (or for whom they may have responsibility) of either *sex\_and one* young person on an emergency basis with the age range for the provision being 11-17 years old. The use of a short break service should ensure that no adolescent is accommodated in a crisis.

Oldham and Tameside's Youth Offending services are involved in jointly delivering an MST (Multi Systemic Therapy) programme for children on the edge of care or custody.

Residential short breaks for children with additional and complex needs are available for children aged 8 to 17 at Netherhey St children's home. The service offers overnight stays for up to 6 children per night as well as a short stay emergency/crisis intervention bed. From mid-December, Netherhey St will become the 'shared service' for Oldham and Rochdale with staff from the existing residential short break service in Rochdale joining colleagues at Netherhey St. This service will continue to provide up to six beds per night for children and families from Rochdale and Oldham and a seventh bed will be available for short term (up to ten days) emergency/crisis intervention.

### **Youth Services**

Oldham provides a range of youth services and positive opportunities and activities for children, young people and families in the borough. We aim to increase life opportunities and improve standards of provision for children and young people.

Through Mahdlo Youth Zone it offers a range of universal and targeted opportunities and supports the development of positive activities across the Borough.

The Council's empowerment and participation youth work team work with the Youth Council, Children in Care Council and the Barrier Breaker group to nurture the youth voice and



involvement of young people in local democracy. They are experts in increasing the active involvement of young people in a range of decision making processes.

In addition the Council have a traded sports offer providing additional support to schools and communities.

Some specific examples of its targeted offer to Looked after Young People include: leisure activities including sports provision; holiday activities; youth work activity; leisure card scheme; study support - with Looked After Young People; Looked after young people being supported to become representatives on borough wide young people involvement groups including The Youth Council and MAHDLO young people's development group and being involved in the design of service developments.

### ***Positive Steps***

This commissioned service provides a range of targeted services to young people, including Oldham Youth Offending Service (YOS) and Oldham Alcohol and Substance Intervention Service (Oasis). The YOS provides targeted support for young people who have been convicted of an offence and receive either a community or custodial sentence and plans resettlement intervention around 4 key pathways:

- Education Training and Employment;
- Accommodation;
- Health;
- Substance Misuse / Mental Health

All young people are allocated to an individual case manager who has the ability to 'commission' bespoke packages of support to reflect young people's specific needs and in the case of looked after children, will often also reflect joint work with the social worker. The YOS expects all clients undertake some restorative work as part of their order and ensures that all young people are assessed for risk and vulnerability in order to provide protection for the individuals and for the public. The YOS also operates Youth Crime Prevention Programmes in conjunction with local partners to identify young people who are demonstrating behaviours linked to potential anti-social behaviour or crime. These programmes provide young people with a safe environment where they can learn new skills, take part in activities with others and get help with their education and information, advice and guidance. Positive role models - the workers and volunteer mentors - help to change young people's attitudes to education and crime. Referrals received for looked after children receive immediate priority within this programmes initial assessment tool, which ensures fast tracked access to the support available.

PSO is also commissioned to deliver Oldham Alcohol and Substance Intervention Service (Oasis) which provides a tier 3 service to young people involved in problematic drug or alcohol use and ensures individual clinical and therapeutic care is provided to address identified needs. Oasis also undertakes specialist tier 2 work providing professionals and targeted groups of young people with specialist support and help around substance misuse issues, including targeted work in children's care homes and the Pupil Referral Unit. In terms of dedicated support for looked after children to make a successful transition to adult life, PSO also employs specialist Connexions Personal Advisers who work in the local community and have designated responsibilities for children and young people in care and leaving care. This includes providing

representation on Oldham's Care To Work planning group, attending After Care weekly Team Meetings, ensuring the seamless transfer of support for Teenage Parents within the cohort etc.

### ***After Care Team***

The After Care team in Oldham works with Looked After Children and Care Leavers from the age of sixteen years up to 21 years (or possibly 25 years for those who wish to access support for a return to education/ training) meeting statutory responsibilities. It provides a duty service to children in need from the age of sixteen to eighteen for those young people presenting as homeless or with child protection issues. This team manages the two semi-independence units and Supported Housing provision at Ripponden Road, Clyde Street and Goddard Street, in partnership with Great Places Housing that also provides Floating Support for young people with their own tenancies. The After Care team works in collaboration with Positive Steps Oldham/ Connexions to support young people with employment /education and training.

### ***Housing Services***

The prevention of homelessness amongst young people has been a long-standing priority for Oldham and the Council's Homeless Strategy sets out its commitment to meeting homeless need. A Practitioner Group meet regularly to monitor and oversee actions which relate to young people contained within Oldham's Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. At these meetings, practitioners also discuss every Care Leaver or Young Offenders needing to be housed to assess the most appropriate accommodation pathway. The Team Manager of Oldham's After Care Service is also a member of the One Point Board, which oversees the Housing Options Service delivered by First Choice Homes Oldham.

A joint housing protocol regarding young people aged 16 to 21 in Oldham has been produced to clarify statutory duties and establish a system that ensures a seamless service to vulnerable young people. This protocol aims to ensure the effective discharge of responsibilities between Oldham's After Care Service, Housing Service, First Choice Homes Oldham and Positive Steps Oldham to jointly address the diverse accommodation needs of young people leaving care, and support them to become responsible and successful tenants, thereby avoiding the need them to become homeless.

Oldham's Homelessness Strategy Team are equally now in the process of undertaking some joint work with Oldham's Supporting People team in respect of supported accommodation within Oldham, as there is a clear link to homelessness prevention. Part of this current work is around the MOPP (Move On Planned Protocol) which aims to support people moving out of supported accommodation promptly and ensure access to services is prioritised. Young people leaving care are identified as a priority group within this work. Young people leaving care (and owed a duty under the Children's Act 1989) are also identified as a priority group within the councils Allocations Scheme for accommodation generally which all social housing providers are expected to sign up to.

### ***Children's rights, independent advocacy and independent visitor services***

Oldham has commissioned an external organisation to provide the above services. Oldham Council has a responsibility to provide these services to all children and young people who are looked after in residential homes within the borough; looked after in residential homes outside of

the borough; in foster care within the borough; in foster care outside of the borough; placed with parents/relatives; placed with adopting parents prior to the making of the adoption order; and young people in custody who are subject of Care Orders.

The service aims to promote the rights of children and young people Looked After, through the provision of an independent rights, advocacy and independent visitors service, in accordance with the National Standards. The objectives in providing an independent Children's Rights, Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service are:

- to ensure that children and young people are supported to be heard and can contribute to decision making that affects their lives;
- to enable children and young people to gain access to services they are in need of and are entitled to;
- to ensure that children and young people are informed of their rights under the Children Act 1989 and 2004 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- to highlight issues of policy and practice to the various departments and agencies in Oldham, which provide services to children and young people;
- to provide advice and support to individual children and young people who require it in line with best practice and the Care Matters White Paper (June 2007).

### ***Participation and Engagement***

There is a Dedicated Participation Officer for Looked after Children and care leavers who works to ensure that children and young people in care and leaving care understand and are involved in the Corporate Parenting agenda, ensure that corporate parents understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities and that there is a continuous dialogue between them and children and young people in the care system. The Participation Officer is based in a dedicated Empowerment and Participation team who specialise in youth voice and in involving young people in decision making processes that affect their lives. The Participation Officer works closely with the corporate parenting manager to ensure the voice of young people is embedded in the Corporate parenting Strategy. Further detail is set out below in Appendix E.

### ***v. Appendix E – Description of Current Engagement and Participation Mechanisms***

Oldham is committed to ensuring children and young people and their parents/ carers have a strong voice in all matters that affect their lives, and that the voice of providers is heard in terms of their concerns, experiences and views. This includes asking them what works, what doesn't work and what could work better and involving them in the design, delivery and evaluation of services on an ongoing basis. Established groups and mechanisms driving this work forward include:

#### ***Children in Care Council***

The Children in Care Council meet weekly to enable looked after children and care leavers to come together to share their experiences of the care system, to identify good practice, identify gaps in provision and to participate in the decision making process with regards to services which affect them. Representatives from the Children in Care Council attend and present at the quarterly Corporate Parenting Panel to highlight their work plans, and be involved in decisions.

## ***The Youth Council***

The Youth Council are an elected group of young people who aim to represent the views of all young people in Oldham. The main aim is to give young people in Oldham a voice in all matters that affect their lives. They meet fortnightly to enable young people to work together on a wide variety of programmes and campaigns. They are enabled to be involved in key decisions, and have the right to present motions to Full Council on issues they feel are relevant and they have responsibility for the decision making process for the Youth Opportunity Fund, named Kerrching!

The Youth Council members are democratically elected but also have a number of places for co-opted Youth Council members for young people who are underrepresented.

## ***Barrier Breakers***

Barrier Breakers is the Youth Voice vehicle for young people with additional needs and disabilities. They meet weekly to discuss issues and to work on projects that are relevant to the group. They Work Closely with the All Age Disability team to ensure Young people's voices are shaping and influencing services for children and young people with disabilities and additional needs

***The Children in care council, Oldham Youth Council and Barrier Breakers make up the Oldham Youth Voice Family. They are all located within the Integrated Youth Service – Empowerment and Participation team, where they have specialist professional support. As well as working separately on their individual priorities they often work collaboratively on issues that affect all young people. They undertake joint training and work jointly on campaigns. All 3 youth voice vehicles link into participation work regionally and nationally as well as at a local level***

## ***The YOUTH VOICE website***

The youth voice Website has developed from the Oldham youth council Website and is now reflective of all 3 youth Voice Vehicles. It is dedicated to the work of the Youth council the Children in care council and the Barrier Breaker. The Website contains information about each group, what they are working on, key contacts as well as documents and Information for people regarding all aspects of Youth Voice work within Oldham. The site is directly populated with work from young people including Blogs and links to the social media threads used by the youth voice vehicles. In particular the Children in Care councils Pages are being developed to contain Key Information for all care leavers for example Care leavers entitlement information and sibling contact guides.

## ***Regional Children in Care Council Network***

In August 2015, Oldham hosted the first North West regional Children in Care Council conference. This saw the birth of a regional Network for CICC's and events will be held throughout the year to enable CICC's from across the North West to share ideas, concerns and to work collaboratively of issues that are of concern across the region. The work undertook regionally will also feed in to a national platform via the office of the Children's Commissioner and via the Who cares trust.

### ***Corporate Parenting Panel***

This panel is made up of various Service Directors and Heads of Service within Children's Services, key partner agencies such as Positive Steps, Health, Children's Rights Service and five elected members. The Panel is chaired by the Lead Member for Children's Services. The panel is responsible for scrutinising and challenging the performance and outcomes for looked after children and young people including close monitoring of the educational outcomes, ideas for development and improvement of provision and thus outcomes and monitors and reviews the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan, including appendices produced as a result of the Corporate Parenting Conference.

### ***Foster Care Forum***

Oldham Foster Care Forum was set up by fosters carers for foster carers and is now over three years old. The forum is a multi-disciplinary forum, with representatives across the partners who work with looked after children in foster care. At present the forum meets quarterly and is currently chaired by Glynis Williams, Head of Service, although we are currently in the process of appointing an Oldham Foster Carer to chair future forums.

Oldham Foster Care Forum works in partnership to ensure better ways of providing services to children and young people in foster care and to work together to improve the outcomes for the children and young people in our care. The forum will also support foster carers by improving networking and promoting the foster carers role whilst also developing and improving services. It will enable them to have a voice and to participate in service development and feedback.

### ***Resident Meetings (supported accommodation)***

Young people's meetings take place on a minimum monthly basis within the local authorities' residential children's homes in Oldham. These meetings enable young people to have a say about the general operation of the home but also offers an opportunity for young people to discuss and be consulted on things such as the weekly menu's, the décor of the house in which they are living, activities that will be planned, holidays, behaviour management and many other issues which affect the young people on a day to day basis.

### ***Complaints and Children's Rights Processes***

Oldham's Children's Services Complaints and Representations Officer works closely with other relevant professionals and providers to ensure that looked after children and young people are supported and offered independent advocacy support when they wish to make a complaint or representation. Support to access the complaints process is also offered as to parents and carers where this is appropriate. Service users are always advised of their right to seek advice from the Office of the Local Government Ombudsman. A children's interest group, made up of the Children's Complaints and Representations Officer, LADO, Children's Rights Officers, Corporate Parenting Manager and Children's Participation Officers, meet regularly to ensure that there is a coordinated approach to progressing issues raised by children and young people. Oldham places an emphasis on learning from Complaints and robust processes are in place to

ensure monitoring and action planning in respect of feedback from service user's complaints takes place on an ongoing basis. Children and young people are also given feedback on any action plans or service improvements that are made following their complaints and representations.

Oldham's externally commissioned Children's Rights, Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service equally has robust processes and mechanisms in place to ensure that children and young people aged 5-18 years residing in residential care, foster care or with extended family and friends are supported to be heard and have opportunities to contribute to decision making that affects their lives.

### ***Commissioning and Contract Management processes***

Where services are commissioned directly for young people, such as residential services and children's rights, it is the Council's policy to involve young people in the commissioning process. Young people are invited to participate in planning the service, the interview and presentation process and in the decision making to award the contract. Young people are also asked to participate in providing feedback in respect of the services they receive, as part of the on-going contract management and monitoring process. Feedback is essential to inform the future commissioning of services.

## **v. Appendix F – Description of current workforce development activity**

A wide range of courses specifically targeted at social workers, residential staff, foster carers, family support workers and multi agency colleagues in order to develop their skills and competence in supporting Looked after Children more effectively are currently in place, as outlined below:

### ***Total Respect***

The aim of this training is to promote communication with looked after children's and young people and the importance of their participation within local authorities. The training focuses on children's and young people's participation in individual care planning, making sure children and young people are taken seriously when they make complaints or allegations of abuse or poor practice and children's and young people's participation in local authority policy and service development. The training is delivered by young care leavers and young people who are still being cared for by the local authority, the Corporate Parenting manager, the Participation Officer and a member of the workforce development integrated children's team. The training is open to multi-agency professionals, from a strategic senior level to front line practitioners and local councillors. Participants are asked to produce a 'pledge' which will have a positive impact on practice with children looked after and care leavers. Participants are then required to attend a re-call session to assess how participants have implemented their pledge in practice and impact it has had.

### ***Preparation for Leaving Care***

The aim of this course is to clarify the duties laid out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 & The Children & Young Persons Act 2008 relating to care leavers. The course aims to assist participants to prepare young people for leaving care, in the context of today's society. The course contributes to providing a better service to young people leaving care. The course is available to a wide range of practitioners, to encourage collaborative working. It is mandatory for foster carers to attend this training in order to prepare young people to live independently and achieve their potential. Oldham care leavers co-facilitate the training with a social worker from the after care team and a member of the workforce development integrated children's team.

### ***Life Story Work with Children & Young People***

This training is targeted at social workers, residential workers, family support workers and foster carers. The session provides the theoretical, legislative and practical framework underpinning LSW and emphasises the importance of this intervention for the children and young person's identity formation and to understand their past, present and future.

### ***Developmental Needs of Children & Young People***

This training is mandatory for foster carers to ensure that they have an awareness of developmental milestones and to monitor whether the children & young people they care for are reaching their milestones appropriately. How to promote resilience in children & young people is discussed and the 'resilience matrix tool' is introduced to use in practice.

### ***Local Safeguarding Children Board Training***

The LSCB offer a comprehensive programme of training on a multi agency basis as outlined in the annual training calendar as does Oldham's Development Academy. Safer recruitment training is available on a cross sector basis for managers involved in the recruitment of staff.