



**The
Children's
Society**

Children's lives in Oldham

A report by The Children's Society

Autumn 2017

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67%

of children in poverty live

in households where at

least one parent is in work

Introduction

There are 58,802¹ children living in Oldham. 1,877² are classified as 'children in need' at 31st March 2016. This report sets out recommendations on the steps you can take to help children and young people in your area.

The Children's Society focuses on breaking the cycle of disadvantage in children's lives and helping them succeed. We are a national charity with a local focus, running services across the country, and working with national and local politicians to change the law and improve policy and practice to protect children.

We know that children rarely face difficulties in just one area of their lives. Children may simultaneously be at risk of harm, lack the material resources they need for a decent standard of living, and face challenges to their mental health and well-being. Where these problems exist at the same time, they can compound each other. This is why The Children's Society works to address the multiple disadvantages children can face.

We know that work like this is best done in collaboration, which is why we have already worked with many local authorities to implement a wide range of measures to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children. Some of the recommendations contained within this report might therefore already be in place in your local area. If this is the case, thank you!

If we can support you to introduce any of the recommendations in this pack, please contact us. And if you adopt any of these measures, please do let us know so that we can share the good news with our supporters in your area.

We look forward to working with you in the year ahead as a champion for vulnerable children in Oldham. If you would like to discuss any of these issues with us, please contact our Senior Public Affairs Officer, **Tom Redfearn**, at thomas.redfearn@childrenssociety.org.uk or call **020 7841 4573**.

Yours faithfully



Matthew Reed
Chief Executive,
The Children's Society



Protecting children who go missing

In 2015/16, police forces across England and Wales recorded 60,742 children and young people going missing, with 148,050 individual incidents. This shows many children are going missing repeatedly, with children in care being particularly at risk.

According to Greater Manchester Police, there were 16,457 incidents of children under 18 going missing in 2015/16.³ Going missing is a sign that something is wrong in a child's life. They may be running away from neglect at home, and there is a risk that they may be hurt or exploited whilst missing. It is vital that all children who go missing receive an independent Return Home Interview (RHI) to find out why they have gone missing and ensure they receive the services they need to prevent them going missing in the future.

We know that looked-after children are more likely to go missing repeatedly than children who grow up in a family home. In 2016, 55 children looked after by Oldham went missing a total of 545 times.⁴

Sometimes children may need to be placed in areas outside of their home council area for their own safety, but we also know that those children are often more at risk

of going missing. It is crucial that agencies responsible for safeguarding children share key risk assessments with relevant partners to prevent children from going missing in the first place, and to ensure they are quickly found and supported if they do go missing.

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Recommendations

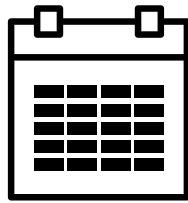
- When placing a child outside of their local area, councils should share relevant information about risks to, and vulnerabilities of, the child with local police forces.
- Councils should make sure children placed out of area who go missing are able to access return home interviews, and should collect data on this.

Mental health and well-being

It is a symptom of the pressures of modern childhood that 1 in 10 children in the UK have a mental health disorder. Based on this latest prevalence survey we estimate that there would be 7,746 young people aged between 5 and 16 with a clinically diagnosed mental health issue in Oldham.

For over a decade The Children's Society and the University of York have run a groundbreaking research programme into children's well-being. Our findings have shown that England ranked last out of 15 countries surveyed for an international sample for happiness with appearance, and had the most pronounced gender differences of all participating countries. Girls are becoming increasingly unhappy with their lives overall, and especially with their appearance. The proportion of 10 to 15 year old girls who are unhappy with their life as a whole has risen from 11% to 14% in just five years, while the situation for boys has remained unchanged at around 11%.

For too many children, thresholds for clinical interventions for their local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are too high. For those who do meet the thresholds, many are left waiting an average of 94 days from referral to first treatment appointment.⁵



94 days

There can also be a range of reasons why young people fail to attend their appointments. Missed health appointments can be seen as an indicator of neglect or wider complex issues, or safeguarding risks present in a young person's life such as repeatedly running away from home or care. In the most extreme circumstances, missed appointments can contribute to the deterioration of a young person's overall health or can lead to tragic outcomes. Missing appointments has been identified as a recurring feature in many Serious Case Reviews.

Recommendations

- Commissioners of mental health services should consider ways to decrease Did Not Attend rates. This may include offering flexible appointment bookings, and giving young people the option to choose a suitable appointment time and location.
- Local CAMHS guidelines on vulnerable young people who miss appointments should ensure they are always appropriately risk-assessed and followed up.

Care leavers and their transition to adulthood

Last year, there were approximately 190⁶ young people under the age of 25 who had left the care of Oldham council.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new requirement on all councils to publish a new Care Leaver Offer. This offer outlines the legal entitlements care leavers have, as well as the wider support that is available to them locally. Other changes in the Act include extending the age that care leavers are entitled to a Personal Adviser from 21 to 25.

The Children's Society has worked with a range of young people who have experience of care and leaving care to make recommendations on what a Care Leaver Offer should include, look like and how it can be shared with eligible young people. If you would like more information on this piece of work, please contact us using the contact details at the end of this pack.

Care leavers often face heightened challenges and poorer outcomes during their journeys to independent adulthood. Our report *Claiming After Care* found that care

leavers were three times more likely to face a benefit sanction than their peers and five times more likely than the general population of adult claimants. They are less likely to challenge the sanction, but when they do are more likely to have it overturned.

Care leavers often struggle to manage their household bills, can find it difficult to take up opportunities such as apprenticeships (due in part to the low first year wage), and can face a delay in their first benefit payment under Universal Credit.

The Children's Society has been working with councils to introduce a council tax exemption for care leavers up until the age of 25. We are delighted that your council is leading the way on this and has already adopted this policy.

Recommendations

- Oldham should work with the local JobcentrePlus to broker an agreement to ensure care leavers do not have their benefits sanctioned before the Jobcentre advisor has discussed it with the young person's leaving care Personal Advisor.
- Care leavers in receipt of mental health support should be able to choose whether they wish to retain CAMHS support until the age of 25 rather than transition into adult mental health services before they are ready to do so.
- Where care leavers are offered an apprenticeship by the local council, they should be paid at least the National Living Wage from the first year of the apprenticeship rather than the first year apprenticeship rate. Oldham should also consider working with local businesses to encourage them to do the same.

Sexual offences against children and young people

Within the Greater Manchester Police area, there were a recorded 2,907 sexual offences committed against children and young people in 2016/17.⁷

In recent years, there has been an increased focus, both nationally and locally, on tackling sexual offences against children. A child or young person of any gender can become a victim of a sexual offence – yet many policies and activities around child sexual exploitation and abuse have traditionally been more focussed on girls.

There are commonalities in how the sexual abuse of children of both genders happens, such as vulnerable children being specifically targeted for grooming as a result of their vulnerability. But research also indicates that safeguarding professionals often overlook signs of a male child being at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.

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Of the 54,000 sexual offences against children under 18 recorded by police forces across the country in 2016, only 16% of those resulted in a charge, summons, community resolution or caution against the perpetrator. For those offences that did not result in action against the perpetrator, the most common reason – accounting for 27% of cases – was evidential difficulties due to the victim not supporting the police investigation.⁸

Recommendations

- Greater awareness of sexual abuse and exploitation of boys is needed within youth offending and social services, with clear referral pathways for support available for boys as victims of sexual abuse.
- Police and Crime Commissioners, Local Safeguarding Children Boards and local scrutiny committees should monitor offence rates against children of different ages in their areas and attrition rates in cases of sexual offences against children. This would help to better identify opportunities for preventative activity and effectively target the commissioning of support services for children, particularly as they are progressing through the criminal justice process.

Child poverty

There are more than 4 million children living in poverty in the UK, with estimates predicting this figure will rise to 5 million by 2020.⁹ Poverty reduces children's immediate well-being and their future life chances.

Living in poverty can be a driver of problem debt, and children living in families with problem debt are five times more likely to be at risk of having low well-being than those not facing difficulties with debt.¹⁰

For families living in poverty or experiencing a crisis, local welfare assistance schemes provide a vital safety net. The Children's Society campaigned successfully to guarantee that councils received central Government funding to ensure they are able to continue to provide this vital form of support. It is important that these schemes remain accessible and well-advertised to families and young people, including 16 and 17 year olds living independently.

Too many children are missing out on the opportunity to make the most of their education because they struggle to afford the costs of school life. For many families, the idea of a free

education is far from the reality. School-related costs make up a large portion of family budgets and parents told us that, on average, they spend £800 a year on school costs.¹¹

19,405 children
are living in
poverty in
Oldham

There are approximately 19,405 children in Oldham living in this situation, which equates to 33.0%. This compares to a UK average of 30%. We know that nationally approximately 67% of children living in poverty live in households where at least one adult is working.¹²

Recommendations

- Every local authority needs to have a welfare assistance scheme that is widely advertised, particularly in services accessed by children and families.
- Councils should develop a local support package that is accessible to low-income working families and can provide support for school uniform, school travel and school meal costs.

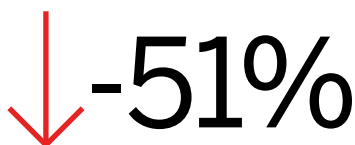
Children cut off from justice

Following the introduction of the Legal Aid, Punishment and Sentencing of Offenders Act (LASPO) 2012, unaccompanied and separated migrant children were removed from the scope of legal aid unless their claim was for asylum or they had been identified as a victim of trafficking. These young people are extremely vulnerable – their irregular immigration status coexists alongside the trauma they have too often experienced, and at the same time they lack a parent or carer to support them.

We estimate that at least 2,500 of these children are now 'cut off from justice' by being removed from the scope of legal aid, and in many areas of the country 'advice deserts' exist where young people are unable to access legal help.¹³ This help includes finding assistance with applications for Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) – the safety net that was put in place following LASPO.

Since the introduction of LASPO in 2012, across England and Wales there has been a 51% drop in the availability of non-fee charging organisations providing legal advice. This is across all levels ranging from level one (basic advice) to level three (appeals and the most complex cases). For

unaccompanied and separated children the availability of advice at levels two and three is the most important.

-51%

In Greater Manchester, availability of free immigration legal advice organisations has fallen by -51%, leaving many children cut off from justice.¹⁴

Recommendations

- Councils should publish guidance to ensure that all staff working with children subject to immigration control can properly signpost young people to the right advice services.
- Councils should commit to applying for Exceptional Case Funding on behalf of all children in care subject to immigration control who are not eligible for legal aid.

Conclusion and summary of recommendations

The coming years will be a crucial period for vulnerable children in your area. We look forward to working with you to promote policies that will help the most disadvantaged.

Our key recommendations to help children during your term in office are:

Protecting children who go missing

- When placing a child outside of their local area, councils should share relevant information about risks to, and vulnerabilities of, the child with local police forces.
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If you would like to discuss any of these issues with us, please contact our Senior Public Affairs Officer, Tom Redfearn, at thomas.redfearn@childrenssociety.org.uk or call 020 7841 4573.

Our services

The Children's Society deliver a range of services across the country, supporting children:

- Missing from home or care
- With mental health or well-being needs
- In the care system, leaving care and transitioning to adulthood
- Who are unaccompanied and separated or are refugees
- Who have drug or alcohol misuse problems, either themselves or in the family
- Who are young carers
- Who are victims or affected by domestic violence
- Who are victims of, or at risk of, sexual or criminal exploitation.

Last year we worked with 13,568 children and young people, and achieved 27 local and national policy changes to improve their lives.

The Children's Society in your area

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21-23 Broadway
London E15 4BQ
020 8221 8200

The Children's Society – Midlands
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120 Vyse Street
Birmingham B18 6NE
T: 0121 212 5580

The Children's Society – North
4 The Pavilions
Bridge Hall Drive
Bury BL9 7NX
T: 0161 763 2170

Notes

- ¹ Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; ONS; www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesanalysisistool; Sheet MYE2 - ALL
- ² Children in need by local authority and age group www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2015-to-2016
- ³ National Crime Agency (2017) Missing Persons Data Report 2015/16 2.0
- ⁴ Children looked after in England including adoption: 2015 to 2016. Table LAG1
- ⁵ Data from 26 providers from a Freedom of Information request
- ⁶ Children looked after in England including adoption: 2015 to 2016. Table LAF1a
- ⁷ All police forces record sexual crimes against children by quarter and these are published in a data set called Police recorded crime and outcomes.
 - We have aligned parliamentary constituency to police force area and have added up the list of crime against children (abuse of children through sexual exploitation, abuse of position of trust of a sexual nature, incest or familial sexual offences, rape of a female child under 13 and 16, rape of a male child under 13 and 16, sexual activity involving a child under 13 and 16, sexual assault on a male under 13, sexual assault on a female under 13, sexual grooming).
 - This will be an underestimate, as they do not include all crimes against children under 18 due to police reporting and some crimes that can be committed against a person of any age, for example offences of exposure or voyeurism, trafficking for the purposes of modern slavery or offences where victims has not been identified and correspondingly age not recorded (some indecent images offences).
 - The actual number will also be higher due to many children not reporting these offences to the police.
- ⁸ Data collected from an FOI from 41 police forces across England and Wales
- ⁹ Institute for Fiscal Studies www.ifs.org.uk/publications/6668
- ¹⁰ The Children's Society (2016) The Damage of Debt
- ¹¹ The Children's Commission on Poverty (2014) 'At what cost? Exposing the impact of poverty on school life'

- ¹² The child poverty data we use are estimates of child poverty compiled by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University. Updated annually, these estimate what the national data on child poverty, collected through the Households Below Average Income dataset, would look like at the constituency, local authority and regional level. They are estimates based on the relative measure of child poverty, defined as 60% below the median income, and are calculated for both before, and after housing costs. To produce these local estimates a combination of HMRC data and information from the Labour Force Survey are combined and calibrated against the HBAI figures. For a full methodological explanation please see: http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/images/ecp/paper_explaining_calculations_and_method_to_ECP.pdf
- ¹³ The Children's Society (2015) Cut off from Justice
- ¹⁴ The regional drop in availability of legal aid is based on an FOI done by The Children's Society in 2012 and repeated in 2017. The FOI asked about the availability of legal aid advice across Levels 1-3 and this percentage drop is based on the total availability of firms across all levels.

Too many children and young people in this country don't feel safe, loved or able to cope. Together we can change their lives.

The Children's Society is a national charity that runs local services and campaigns to change the law to help this country's most vulnerable young people.

Our supporters around the country fund our services and join our campaigns to show children they are on their side.

Find out more at
childrenssociety.org.uk

If you would like to know more about The Children's Society and our work with children and young people, please visit childrenssociety.org.uk or call our Supporter Care team on 0300 303 7000.

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