

Corporate Issues & Reform

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 8 March 2022

Subject: School Readiness Update

Report of: Councillor Eamon O'Brien Portfolio Lead for Children and Young People and
Steven Pleasant Portfolio Lead Chief Executive for Children and Young
People.

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an update on the Greater Manchester School Readiness programme, including the impact of the pandemic and key achievements during the current programme delivery phase.
- Provide an overview of the new, headline performance measures that will be used to measure School Readiness outcomes in the refreshed Greater Manchester Strategy.

Recommendations:

The Corporate Issues and Reform Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and endorse the contents of the report.

Contact Officers

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Previously existing and newly arising inequalities in our society have been clearly evidenced by the coronavirus pandemic. Families expecting babies or with young children, especially those living in poverty have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic which is expected to impact on early years outcomes in Greater Manchester. This paper outlines priorities activities that are underway to address the risk of growing inequalities in the early years as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Referenced in section 3.

The report also outlines the performance measures that will be used as part of the refreshed Greater Manchester Strategy to help understand if programme activities are making a difference for families and children. Referenced in 2.2.

Risk Management

N/A

Legal Considerations

N/A

Financial Consequences – Revenue

The activities within this update are being carried out using existing resource. The current funding stream is referenced at 1.2.

3.3.Financial Consequences – Capital

N/A

Number of attachments to the report: 0

Background Papers

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8th March 2022

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1. The current GM Children and Young People's (CYP) plan includes a priority focus on improving early years outcomes and school readiness levels; this is also a stated priority in the GM Children's Health and Wellbeing Framework and Population Health plan. Priority activities within this theme are delivered through the GM School Readiness programme, a 24-month programme of transformation work which builds on a long history of collective working within GM to improve early years outcomes.
- 1.2. The current programme has benefited from £2.1m of investment from the GM Health and Social Care Partnership alongside strands of additional non-recurrent funding. This is a joint programme of work, with GMCA as the lead delivery partner, that seeks to build on work to embed the GM Early Years Delivery Model (EYDM), providing capacity to accelerate priority work and engage the early years system.
- 1.3. The programme has focussed on closing the gap with national performance rates for school readiness, through strong system integration, early identification of family need by universal services and delivery of evidence-based interventions. Broadly speaking, the programme is structured around delivery of activity within three priority strands, identified below.
 - 1.3.1. **Developing an evidence-based model.** Further development and implementation of an evidence-based model for improving early years outcomes.
 - 1.3.2. **Embedding best practice pathways.** The GM EYDM includes several evidence-based pathways focused on universal and targeted provision that supports early intervention. The current programme of work focuses on developing and strengthening new and existing pathways.
 - 1.3.3. **Developing system enablers.** Activity within this priority focuses on providing a GM approach to developing the enablers identified by localities as critical to realising our ambition for early years and school readiness, including workforce, digital and high-quality early education.

2. School Readiness Performance and Impact of Covid

2.1. Performance academic year 2018/19

2.1.1. Prior to the start of the pandemic, school readiness for all pupils had been steadily improving in Greater Manchester. In the academic year 2018/19, 68.2 percent of children achieved a good level of development (GLD), compared with 71.8 percent nationally.

2.1.2. Although progress in this measure has plateaued in recent years, data released in 2018/19 showed that GM had closed the GLD gap with the England average for children eligible for free school meals. The GLD average for this cohort increased from 55 percent for the academic year 2017/18 to 56 percent for 2018/19. This is despite having higher levels of deprivation than in England as a whole.

2.1.3. However, we know that the impact from the Covid pandemic has widened the attainment gap with a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged communities. The Marmot *Build Back Better* report highlights that the pandemic will 'disproportionately hamper development for more disadvantaged young children' and 'worsen inequalities in educational attainment and lead to worse outcomes throughout life'.¹

2.1.4. The challenges posed by the Covid pandemic has had a particular impact on the provision of services for families and young children. Specific challenges in relation to school readiness and early years include:

- Children missing out on early education due to the partial closure of early years settings and schools.
- Increased childcare and early education market instability due to lost income; this has impacted on market management and local authority sufficiency duties.
- Disruption to delivery of the universal assessments within the GM EYDM resulting in delays to identification of need and provision of support for children and families from pregnancy to age 5.
- Delayed developmental milestones e.g., speech, language and communication, due to the impact of restrictions, the additional pressures experienced by families and a

¹ Michael Marmot, Jessica Allen, Peter Goldblatt, Eleanor Herd, Joana Morrison (2020). *Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review. The Pandemic, Socioeconomic and Health Inequalities in England*. London: Institute of Health Equity

reduction in the day-to-day interactions and experiences that are critical to early years development.

- Disruption to key protective factors critical to the safeguarding of babies and young children.

2.1.5. While GM and locality plans aim to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on early years, the GLD data released later this academic year will help provide a snapshot of the immediate impact of the pandemic on education attainment in the early years. This will be the first GLD release since the academic year 2018/19 due to the pandemic and the cancellation of the EYFSP in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

2.1.6. In addition to the gaps in reporting data, from this academic year (2021/22) GLD data will not be comparable with the historic data. EYFS reforms introduced in September 2021 mean that the assessment criteria have changed and the 2022 GLD will be based on these new criteria. The reforms fundamentally change how the measure will be interpreted and generated, it will take time for the new criteria to be applied consistently and the data to therefore be reliable. Additionally, data will no longer be subject to local authority formal moderation as this statutory requirement has been removed as part of the reforms.

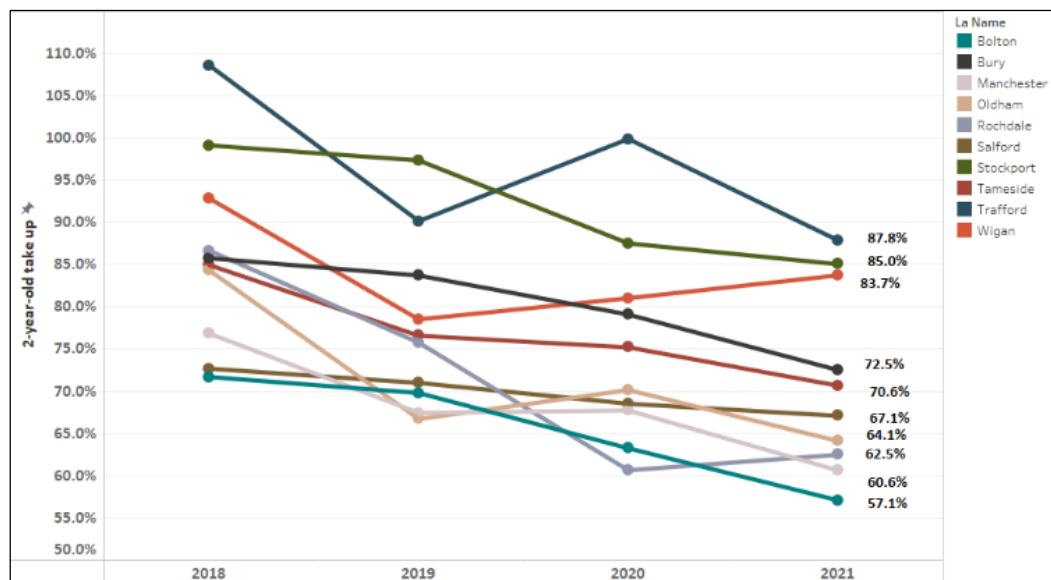
2.2. Greater Manchester Strategy Refresh – School Readiness

Measures

2.2.1. GM will now use two new headline measures to measure the impact of its school readiness strategies. These indicators – outlined below – have a central wellbeing and equality focus, reflect the impact of the pandemic in highlighting inequalities and have been informed by the report of The Independent Inequalities Commission and the Marmot City Region Build Back Fairer report.

2.2.2. **% take-up of funded childcare and early education places for two-year-olds, presented as a neighbourhood floor target to reduce spatial inequalities.** Two-year-olds are eligible to receive funded early education if their parents are in receipt of certain benefits, they are looked after or have left care, or they have an Education Health and Care (EHC) Plan. This measure is effectively a proxy for a number of key future outcomes along the life course and focuses particularly on more disadvantaged children and their families.

Chart 1 - % take up of FEEE places for 2-year-olds – Individual locality trends

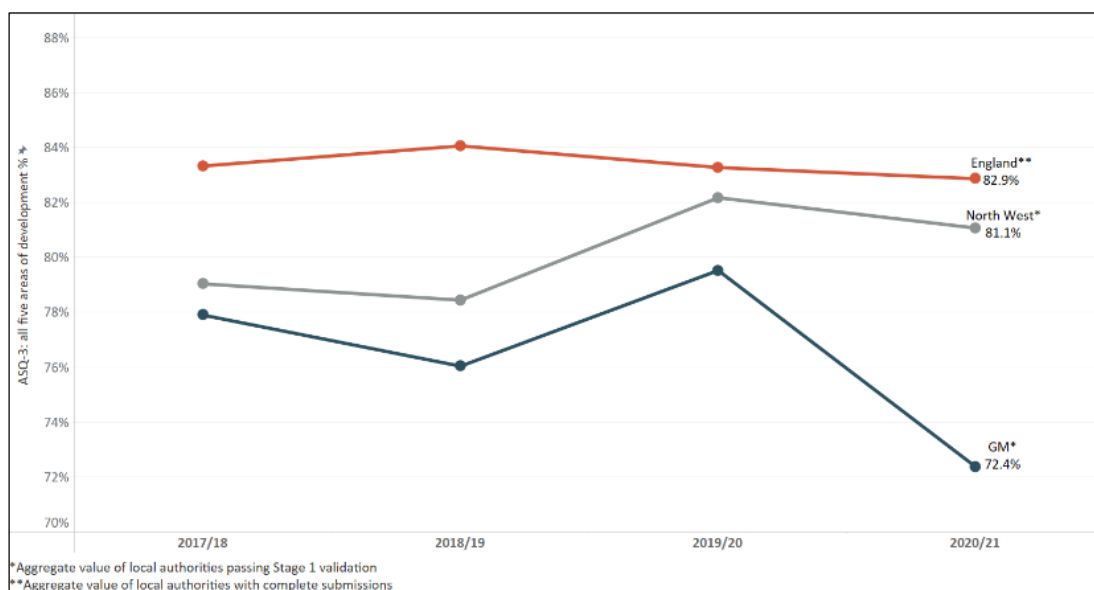


2.2.3. Although GM outstrips the England average, GM average take up is 67.6% compared with England average take up 61.8%, there is substantial variance across localities. Chart 1 shows that rates of take up in GM in January 2021 ranged from 57.1% to 87.8%. This spatial variation was further highlighted within localities through mapping of the baseline take up at a neighbourhood level.

2.2.4. We have now selected priority neighbourhoods for the focus of the GMS floor target on 2 year old FEEE take up and confirmed these with the School Readiness board. There will be a shared commitment to narrow the gap in take up between these areas and the rest of GM, with appropriate locality targeting led by the evidence.

2.2.5. **% Of children at or above the expected level of development at 2-2.5 years.** This measure is based on data collected by health visitors during the Healthy Child Programme 2 year review or integrated review which uses the ASQ (Ages and Stages Questionnaire) tool. This captures overall child development based on five areas: communication; gross motor skills; fine motor skills; problem solving; and personal-social development.

Chart 2: % children at or above the expected level in all 5 areas of development, annually 2017/18-2020/21



2.2.6. ASQ data for 2020/21 shows a 10.5 percentage point gap between the GM and England average, as shown in Chart 1. GM experienced a drop of 7.6 percentage points in performance in the last year while England remained relatively the same.

2.2.7. We have agreed that the GMS will include a target to narrow the gap between GM performance on the percentage of children who reach the expected level of development at 2 - 2.5 years, when compared to England. This will require the overall GM performance to be raised to 83 percent.

3. School Readiness Programme Delivery Update

3.1. With the GM CYP plan entering the final months of delivery, work is ongoing to deliver key priorities and identify achievements against the programme's stated ambitions. To support this process the GMCA Research Team have been commissioned to undertake a deep dive review which will report to the GM Children's Board in March 2022. A summary of key delivery progress within the 3 priority strands is included below.

3.2. Key Achievements April 2019 – March 2022

- 3.2.1. **Investing in strong system leadership which supports collaboration and partnership** to help identify the evidence around 'what works' and engage the system to learn and scale interventions. This has been demonstrated through the development of strategic partnerships with Manchester Metropolitan University, Education Endowment Foundation, Nesta, University of Oxford and the BBC.
- 3.2.2. **Ongoing work to pilot and develop the evidence base for implementation of a universal 18 month assessment (stage 4b within the EYDM).** Learning from proof of concept pilots in Salford and Stockport and developing GM standards which outline delivery principles, outcomes for children and families, indicative costings, and outcomes. Locality engagement has also taken place to identify readiness to implement and key enablers/challenges.
- 3.2.3. **Securing of £1.5million DfE grant funding to deliver the Greater Manchester Pathways to Talking (GMPTT) project.** The project supported work to embed the GM speech, language and communication pathway across GM and strengthen multi agency working within localities.
- 3.2.4. **Development of GM Top Tips for Talking and GM Top Tips for Moving,** evidence based key messages aimed at professionals and families to support early years language and physical development. Messages have been promoted across GM and supported priority work to strengthen the home learning environment.

- 3.2.5. Delivery of the early education covid recovery plan.** Highlights included development of quality assured resources to support early education settings to manage impact of lockdown; research seminar series for Early Years teachers and Headteachers; FAQs for parents to support under-5s social and emotional wellbeing and development and films to show how settings have adapted to implement covid safe practices.
- 3.2.6. Focus on increasing take up of 2 year old funded early education entitlement (FEEE), as a key intervention to support children.** In response to the trend in declining take up and variance across GM, research was commissioned to understand how take up can be increased, through parental messaging and through targeted engagement with Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities who have historically lower take up. Findings have informed the development of evidence based messaging to use in parental communications, commissioning of a communications campaign and marketing assets to be used across GM and delivery of a VCSE grants programme to reach target communities.
- 3.2.7. Development and rollout of Early Years Digital App to support digital completion of Ages and Stages Questionnaire and Wellcomm assessments.** Rollout of the app within Bury and Rochdale has received positive feedback from parents and Health Visitors and the app has recently been recognised through a national public sector transformation award. Almost 3000 parents in the pilot areas have now used the app to support their child's development review. Further work is underway to test an early education app extension which will support digital completion of universal assessments by early education settings and support the sharing of key data between agencies and families.
- 3.2.8. Co-design of the GM Early Years Workforce Competency Framework, focussing on child development as a key thematic area.** The framework represents a regional approach to enhance the practice, knowledge, and skills of the diverse range of professionals working in early years services and the wider professionals within place-based teams. The framework will be a key tool used across GM to identify competency and skills gaps and inform future commissioning of workforce development initiatives through the GM Early Years Workforce Academy.

3.3. Delivery Priorities to June 2022

- 3.3.1. The current period of programme delivery will continue to June 2022 in line with the Transformation Funding; key delivery priorities for this period are outlined below. In addition, stakeholder engagement is underway to agree the future Early Years priorities to be supported through GM work and included in the refreshed CYP Plan due to be published in spring 2022.
- 3.3.2. **Nuffield funded 5-year research project: ‘Local learning, national change’**, focussing on how “data” and “voice” can be used to improve the lives of children and families and support development of a GM framework to measure school readiness. Work will initially focus on projects in Oldham and Rochdale, testing how the use of information can be strengthened to support local authorities to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes and experiences and improve costs effectiveness. Learning will inform wider work within the GM programme.
- 3.3.3. **Development of ‘Fairer Start Local’ partnership** between GMCA/Stockport and Nesta’ which uses innovation methodologies to design solutions that aim to improve early years outcomes. The focus for the year 1 local project will include exploring practitioner and parent experiences of the EYDM to design and test an enhanced, relational-based offer that improves child development outcomes for the most disadvantaged in the first 1,001 critical days of a child’s life.
- 3.3.4. Completion of a cost-benefit analysis to support work to spread and scale the 18-month universal assessment (4b).
- 3.3.5. **Ongoing development of the GM Workforce Academy** through a ‘*design by doing approach*’ including delivery of the Early Years Hub pilot project at Martenscroft Nursery in Manchester to test early years continuous professional development (CPD) approaches and piloting of the GM Early Years Workforce Competency Framework. The EY Hub pilot is testing a sector led model of CPD and practice improvement for private, voluntary, and independent childcare providers. Learning will inform future plans to spread and scale the model across GM.

3.3.6. Focus on supporting immediate recruitment and retention challenges in relation to the early education and childcare workforce. The programme team is collaborating with the GM Work and Skills Team to better identify the key challenges and opportunities to leverage additional funding that would support our ambition to have a sustainable, resilient, high quality early years workforce.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Prior to the pandemic GM had made considerable progress in school readiness outcomes which was reflected in headline performance measures. However, the impact of the pandemic on widening inequalities in the early years will be significant. GM has robust, evidence-based plans in place to support localities with their work to meet these challenges and help close the early years attainment gap through ensuring a strong, integrated system that can support families and children.

4.2. Collaboration, innovation, and partnerships are central to the key delivery priorities over the next 6 months and into the new phase of the refreshed GM Children's Plan. A deep dive programme review will support further reflection on the added value of GM work and help to identify future priorities for the programme of work from 2022 onwards.