

## ***CABINET Agenda***

Date Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024

Time 5.30 pm

Venue Council Chamber, Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1NL

Notes 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST- If a Member requires advice on any item involving a possible declaration of interest which could affect his/her ability to speak and/or vote he/she is advised to contact Paul Entwistle or Peter Thompson at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

2. CONTACT OFFICER for this agenda is Constitutional Services, e-mail [peter.thompson@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:peter.thompson@oldham.gov.uk)

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS - Any Member of the public wishing to ask a question at the above meeting can do so only if a written copy of the question is submitted to the contact officer by 12.00 noon on Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

4. FILMING - The Council, members of the public and the press may record/film/photograph or broadcast this meeting when the public and the press are not lawfully excluded. Any member of the public who attends a meeting and objects to being filmed should advise the Constitutional Services Officer who will instruct that they are not included in the filming.

Please note that anyone using recording equipment both audio and visual will not be permitted to leave the equipment in the room where a private meeting is held.

### MEMBERSHIP OF THE CABINET

Councillors Ali, Brownridge, Dean, Goodwin, F Hussain, Jabbar, Mushtaq, Shah and Taylor

### Item No

- 1 Apologies For Absence
- 2 Urgent Business  
Urgent business, if any, introduced by the Chair
- 3 Declarations of Interest

To Receive Declarations of Interest in any Contract or matter to be discussed at the meeting.

4 Public Question Time

To receive Questions from the Public, in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

5 Minutes (Pages 1 - 10)

The Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023 are attached for approval.

6 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge - Feedback and next steps (Pages 11 - 48)

A report updating the Cabinet on the outcome and findings of the recent Corporate Peer Challenge and to agree the Council's action plan in response to the recommendations.

7 Council Tax Base and Non-Domestic Rates Tax Base Forecast 2024/25 (Pages 49 - 62)

A report presenting the Council Tax Base and provisional Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) Tax Base forecast for 2024/25.

8 Digital switchover's impact on the Helpline & Response Service (Pages 63 - 68)

A report seeking funding to mitigate the risk of Helpline and Response customers becoming disconnected from the service as a result of the national digital switchover programme.

9 Report requesting contract extension for Care at Home and Extra Care Flexible Purchasing System and seeking authority to enter into procurement exercises in relation to specific activity related to the Care at Home service (Pages 69 - 72)

A report seeking authority to extend the term of the contracts awarded under the Care at Home and Extra Care Flexible Purchasing System, for a further two years.

10 Awarding of Occupational Health contract following re-tender exercise (Pages 73 - 76)

A report seeking approval for the Council's re-contracting of Occupational Health and associated services from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 for four years.

11 Targeted Youth Support Commissioning and Delivery Intentions including UKSPF from April 2024 (Pages 77 - 80)

A report seeking approval to extend the current contract for targeted Youth Support Commissioning Services, for a period of 12 months from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

12 Youth Justice Service Extension to contract from 1 April 2024 (Pages 81 - 84)

Approval is sought to extend the current arrangements for a period of six months from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024

- 13 Exclusion of the Press and Public
- That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following five items of business on the grounds that they contain exempt information under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and it would not, on balance, be in the public interest to disclose the reports.
- 14 Digital switchover's impact on the Helpline & Response Service (Pages 85 - 100)
- To consider confidential recommendations
- 15 Report requesting contract extension for Care at Home and Extra Care Flexible Purchasing System and seeking authority to enter into procurement exercises in relation to specific activity related to the Care at Home service (Pages 101 - 132)
- To consider confidential recommendations
- 16 Awarding of Occupational Health contract following re-tender exercise (Pages 133 - 138)
- To consider confidential recommendations
- 17 Targeted Youth Support Commissioning and Delivery Intentions including UKSPF (Pages 139 - 144)
- To consider confidential recommendations
- 18 Youth Justice Service Extension to contract (Pages 145 - 150)
- To consider confidential recommendations

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**CABINET**  
**11/12/2023 at 6.00 pm**

**Present:** Councillor Shah (in the Chair)  
Councillors Ali, Brownridge, Dean, Goodwin, F Hussain, Jabbar,  
Mushtaq and Taylor

1           **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence received.

2           **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3           **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4           **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions for this meeting of the Cabinet to consider.

5           **MINUTES**

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023 be approved as a correct record.

6           **ADULT SOCIAL CARE - STRATEGY**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Adults Social Care, which explained to Members that the Adult Social Care Service had devised a vision and strategy for the future delivery of statutory services in the borough for adult residents. It was intended to launch and roll out across the borough once endorsed.

In July 2022, the Adult Social Care service had agreed a vision 'supporting you to be independent, healthy, safe and well' for people in Oldham. Further to this, the department had developed a strategy which outlined how the Council will work, with its partners, to deliver this vision and turn its ambitions into reality. It was based on principles agreed with residents, the people supported by the Council and their carers to set out core values.

This strategy is supported by specific action plans and other strategies that have been developed to support delivery of outcomes. It was intended to be read alongside 'The Oldham Plan – Our Future Oldham', The Oldham Council Corporate Plan, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Adult Social Care Market Position Statement all of which set out the Council's priorities, as well as regional and national social care and health policies.

Within the strategy document, Adult Social Care is defined as a service which supports adults of all ages, disabilities, and backgrounds to be independent, healthy, safe, and well. There

was a continual focus on independence, as the Adults Social Care service understands that for most people, staying independent is important for ensuring that a happy and fulfilling life is achieved.

However, the statutory functions of Adult Social Care are included within the document and remain the core service function, with reference to the role of social work in supporting: personal care, and practical support for younger and older adults with a physical disability, learning disability, physical or mental illness, it includes safeguarding for those at risk of harm and abuse and support for unpaid carers.

Alternatives/options considered:

- a. Option 1 – Cabinet approves the recommendations in the submitted report – to approve the Adult Social Care Strategy.
- b. Option 2 – Cabinet rejects the recommendations in the submitted report.

Resolved:

That the Cabinet notes the detail of the Strategy and approves it for publication, with a related roll-out and communications thereon.

7

## **TO EXTEND THE CONTRACT FOR THE DELIVERY OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE SERVICE**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Interim Director of Public Health that sought approval to enact the option to extend the contract for the Young People's Sexual Health and Substance Misuse Service by a period of two years, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, as per the provision made in the original award of the contract for the delivery of the service.

The Cabinet was informed that having a high functioning sexual health and substance misuse offer for young people was an essential component of the range of activity required to achieve better population health and to reduce demand on health and social care services. As per Public Health funding conditions and mandated responsibilities, the Council was required to deliver drug and alcohol services and ensure access to sexual health services for young people.

In January 2021, the award for the provision of Young People's Sexual Health and Substance Misuse Service was awarded to the current provider for an initial period of three years (from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024) with an option to extend for a further period of two years plus two years dependent on performance, achievement of key performance indicators (KPIs), continued funding and local need.

It was proposed that we enact the option to extend the contract with the current provider by a further two years (up until 31 March 2026) to ensure the continuation of a high-quality service provision for the Borough of Oldham's young people.

Options/Alternatives

The various options and alternatives, available for the Cabinet to consider were set out in the confidential appendices of the report and were deliberated at agenda item 13.

Resolved:

That the confidential recommendations be considered at item 13, below.

8

**YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE EXTENSION TO CONTRACT FROM 1ST APRIL 2024**

The Cabinet received a report of the Director of Education, Skills and Early Years which advised members that the current Youth Justice Service (YJS) Contract expired on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. The contract was currently held by Positive Steps. The report sought approval to extend the existing arrangements for a period of six months from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024. This course of action would enable Oldham Council and its partners to continue to fulfil their statutory duties and meet the requirements of the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

The Cabinet was advised that at its last inspection, the service had been rated Good by Ofsted.

The service was regarded as being high performing and was a statutory duty. The contract extension being sought would provide a period of stability for service delivery. If approval were to be given to the extension, this would avoid possible gaps in statutory service delivery affecting some of the Borough's most vulnerable and at-risk young people. As a key part of the process, the Youth Justice Board, Management Board and other key stakeholders would be consulted on future delivery models from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024.

Options/Alternatives considered:

The Cabinet various options and alternatives, available for the Cabinet to consider were set out in the confidential appendices of the report and were deliberated at agenda item 14.

Resolved:

That the confidential recommendations be considered at item 14, below.

9

**DRAFT LOCAL PLAN**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) which sought permission to approve the publication and consultation of the draft version of a new Local Plan for Oldham (referred to as the Draft Local Plan in this report).

The council was required to prepare a Local Plan to ensure that it has an up-to-date and comprehensive planning framework to support the borough's economic, environmental and social objectives. Oldham's Local Plan will guide development in the borough up to 2039. Once adopted, it would replace the current Local Plan (the Joint Core Strategy and Development

Management Policies DPD) which was adopted in November 2011 and any saved older planning policies from the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 2006.



The Draft Local Plan follows on from public consultations that were carried out on the Issues and Options for a new Local Plan in Summer 2021. It builds also upon the comments the authority has received and has been informed by on-going studies and pieces of evidence that have been completed since the Issues and Options consultation. The Draft Local Plan is accompanied by an Integrated Assessment (IA), which incorporates the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) and Health Impact Assessment (HIA), and by a Habitat Regulations Assessment. The Draft Local Plan and associated appendices, IA, IA Scoping Report Update, HRA, Consultation Statement and Issues and Options Comments and Response Schedule are attached at Appendix 1 to 8. Approval is sought to publish and consult on the Draft Local Plan and supporting documents, with consultation commencing no earlier than 10 January 2024 for six weeks. Note, following approval there may be further formatting amendments made to the documents to address accessibility requirements prior to publication for consultation.

Topic Papers on key themes and the Site Allocations Background Paper will also be published alongside the Draft Local Plan and accompanying documents. These topic/background papers helped to explain the current guidance and requirements and pull together the evidence available.

The Cabinet was informed that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) set out the framework for the preparation of a Local Plan, with paragraph 16 stating that plans should be:

- prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development;
- be prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable;
- be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees;
- contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals;
- be accessible, through the use of digital tools, to assist public involvement and policy presentation;
- serve a clear purpose, avoiding unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area (including policies in this Framework, where relevant).

In considering the report, Cabinet was advised that the Place, Economic Growth and Environment Scrutiny Board, at its meeting held 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023 had considered this report, in some detail and endorsed the recommendations in the report.



Option 1 – To publish and consult on the proposed Draft Local Plan and supporting documents commencing no earlier than 10 January 2024 for six weeks. Advantages - this will be in accordance with NPPF and provide certainty to residents and developers that work is under way on preparing an up-to-date Local Plan. It will also help to ensure that the council is keeping to its programme for preparing a new Local Plan for submission for Examination before 30 June 2025. Disadvantages - there are no disadvantages to publishing and consulting on the Draft Local Plan and supporting documents as it is positive to engage and seek the views of residents, businesses and stakeholders as we prepare such an important document for the council.

Option 2 – To delay publishing and consulting on the proposed Draft Local Plan and supporting documents. Advantages - if there are concerns by Members on any aspects of the proposed Draft Local Plan, there may be some advantages to working these concerns through before publishing for consultation. 12 Disadvantages - not publishing and consulting on the Draft Local Plan and supporting documents would likely mean that the council is not able to prepare a new Local Plan under the current regulations for submission for Examination by 30 June 2025. This will result in the council having to start Local Plan preparation again under the new regulations for the new-style Local Plan and mean that the Council would have to continue to rely on the Joint DPD (elements of which are somewhat out of date) and the high-level GM-wide policies in Places for Everyone when making decisions on planning application. This would mean that developers may be more likely to challenge our planning application decisions on appeal and be more likely to succeed with that challenge as the Joint DPD becomes more and more out of date.

Option 3 – To not take forward a Draft Local Plan at this stage and cease work on a new Local Plan. Advantages - this option would reduce costs for the council, given that preparing a new Local Plan does require significant investment in evidence studies, the preparation of the Local Plan and supporting documents, public consultation and the examination of the Local Plan by a Planning Inspector. Disadvantages - not preparing a new Local Plan would not be in accordance with government guidance and planning legislation, which now requires councils to prepare a new Local Plan every five years. The council would also be reliant on the Joint DPD (elements of which are somewhat out of date) and the high-level GM wide policies in Places for Everyone when making decisions on planning applications for the foreseeable future. This would mean that developers may be more likely to challenge our planning application decisions on appeal and be more likely to succeed with that challenge as the Joint DPD becomes more and more out of date.

Resolved:

That the Draft Local Plan and supporting documents, including the Integrated Assessment and Habitat Regulation Assessment,

be approved for publication and consultation commencing no earlier than 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024 for six weeks.

10

## **REVENUE MONITOR AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Finance which provided Members with an update as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (end of Quarter 2) of the Council's 2023/24 forecast revenue budget position (detailed at Annex 1) and the financial position of the capital programme together with the revised capital programme 2023/24 to 2027/28 (at Annex 2), as outlined in section two of the report.

In terms of the Council's revenue position, Cabinet was advised that the forecast outturn position for 2023/24 was a projected deficit variance of £14.588m after allowing for approved and pending transfers to and from reserves. Unlike 2022/23, when £12.000m of corporate resources were held to offset costs arising from the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, the budget for 2023/24 had been prepared so that anticipated COVID-19 legacy costs were consolidated within the mainstream budgets of Children's Social Care and Community Health and Adult Social Care.

It was of concern that the overall financial position had worsened between quarters 1 and 2 (2023/24). In view of the projected adverse variance, it was considered important to ensure that measures were taken to address the overspending, namely: management actions across all service areas to review and challenge planned expenditure and to maximise income; to establish processes to monitor the recruitment of staff to vacant posts and significant items of expenditure; and ensuring that non-essential expenditure was minimised.

Information on the Quarter 2 position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Collection Fund was also outlined in the report. The 2022/23 DSG outturn was a cumulative surplus of £0.899m; the first time that a surplus has been reported since 2016/17, representing the achievement of a major financial milestone for the Council. Future projections continue to improve with forecast surpluses of £3.193m and £4.025m in 2023/24 and 2024/25 respectively. Action was to continue to be taken with the aim of mitigating cost pressures and delivering and maintaining the surplus position. There were currently no significant issues of concern in relation to the HRA.

The Collection Fund was forecasting a surplus with the Council's proportion of this surplus being £1.054m. The Collection Fund was a particularly volatile area to forecast with many variables, including the impact of Government Business Rate reliefs, therefore, this area was to be closely monitored over the remaining months of 2023/24. Information would likely be available later in 2023/24 to determine if/how a surplus or deficit on the Collection Fund would impact on the 2024/25 Council budget.

In terms of the Capital Position, the submitted report outlined the most up to date capital spending position for 2023/24 to 2027/28 for approved schemes. The revised capital programme budget for 2023/24 was £76.595m, a net decrease of £27.153m from the £103.748m reported at the close of Quarter 1 (30<sup>th</sup> June 2023) and a net decrease of £33.710m from the original budget approved at Council on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023 of £110.305m. The actual expenditure to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 was £33.700m (44.0% of the forecast outturn). It was likely that the forecast position would continue to change throughout the year with additional re-profiling into future years.

Options/Alternatives considered:

1. To consider the forecast revenue and capital positions presented in the report including proposed changes.
2. To propose alternative forecasts.

Resolved:

That Cabinet approves:

1. The forecast revenue outturn for 2023/24 at Quarter 2 being a £14.588m adverse variance and action being taken to manage expenditure.
2. The forecast positions for the Dedicated Schools Grant, Housing Revenue Account and Collection Fund.
3. The revised capital programme for 2023/24 and the forecast for the financial years to 2027/28 as at Quarter 2.

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## **TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF YEAR REVIEW REPORT 2023/24**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Finance which advised Members of the performance of the Treasury Management function of the Council for the first six months of 2023/24 and provided a comparison of performance against the 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators.

The Council was required to consider the performance of the Treasury Management function in order to comply with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management (revised 2021). This submitted report provided an additional update and included a new requirement in the 2021 Code, mandatory from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023, of quarterly reporting of the treasury management prudential indicators. The report therefore sets out the key Treasury Management issues for Members' information and review and outlines: An economic update for the first half of the year of 2023/24; A review and updates of the Council's current treasury management position; Council Borrowing; Treasury Investment Activity; Treasury Performance for the first six months of the financial year; and Treasury Management Prudential Indicators.

The Director of Finance reported that due to the reduction in the Capital Financing Requirement during the year, it was proposed that both the Operational Boundary and the Authorised Limit be reduced. The proposed limits were presented at Table 8, in the

submitted report and showed a reduction in the Operational Boundary from £508.500m to £494.000m and the Authorised Limit from £533.500m to £519.000m.

The report was presented to the Cabinet to enable members to have the opportunity to review and scrutinise the Treasury Management Half Year Review report prior to its presentation to Council on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

Resolved:

That the Cabinet:

1. Notes the Treasury Management Half Year Review report
2. Accepts the proposed revisions to the Operational Boundary and Authorised Limit as presented at paragraph 2.6.9 of the submitted report, in relation to the reduction in the Capital Financing Requirement.
3. Commends the report to the Council at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

12 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the two following items of business on the grounds that they contain exempt information under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and it would not, on balance, be in the public interest to disclose the reports.

13 **TO EXTEND THE CONTRACT FOR THE DELIVERY OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE SERVICE**

Consideration was given to the commercially sensitive information in relation to Item 7 - To Extend the Contract for the Delivery of the Young People's Sexual Health and Substance Misuse Service.

Resolved:

That the Cabinet agrees to the proposal to enact the provision to extend the current contract for a period of 2 years from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026 (with a remaining provision to extend for up to a further 2 years up to a total contract length of 7 years) as permitted in the original terms and conditions for the contract, thereby ensuring that there is continued delivery of drug and alcohol services and ensure access to sexual health services for young people in the borough, in line with our public health funding conditions and mandated responsibilities.

14 **YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE EXTENSION TO CONTRACT FROM 1ST APRIL 2024**

Consideration was given to the commercially sensitive information in relation to Item 8 - Youth Justice Service Extension to contract from 1st April 2024.

Resolved:

1. That the options and alternatives, that the Cabinet considered in the confidential appendices to the report, be noted.
2. That the current contract arrangements with Positive Steps, be extended for a period of six months, up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024, within the funding envelope awarded by the Youth Justice Board.



The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 6.17pm

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**Report to CABINET**

## **LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Feedback and next steps**

**Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor Arooj Shah, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Reform and Regeneration

**Officer Contact:** Shelley Kipling, Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Resources

**Report Author:** Jonathan Downs, Policy Lead / James Mulvaney, Policy Manager

**22 January 2024**

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### **Reason for Decision**

To update Cabinet on the outcome and findings of the recent Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) and to agree the Council's action plan in response to the recommendations.

### **Executive Summary**

In early-November 2023 the Local Government Association undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge in Oldham. The purpose of this was for the experienced and knowledgeable peer team to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement at Oldham Council.

The review looked at five key areas: our priorities and outcomes, organisational and place leadership, governance and culture, financial planning and management and capacity for improvement.

The most recent review was broadly positive recognising a range of improvements since the last LGA Peer Challenge in 2020, including the transformation of the town centre; clear corporate priorities, performance management and grip on the organisation; and that staff are passionate about getting the best for Oldham. The review also suggests nine key recommendations which will support the organisation to meet its key priorities.

### **Recommendations**

- That Cabinet note the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge report, summarizing their findings and recommendations
- That Cabinet agree the Council's response and action plan
- That Cabinet refer the Corporate Peer Challenge report to Full Council for discussion and noting

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## LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Feedback and next steps

### 1 Background

- 1.1 Oldham Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during the week of Monday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023 to Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023. It is recommended best practice for councils to undertake a CPC every five years. The previous Peer Challenge was undertaken in January 2020, but with the Covid-19 pandemic shifting the priorities of the council, the updated Corporate Plan (2022 – 2027), and with the renewed 'Resident Focus', it was an appropriate moment to undertake another CPC.
- 1.2 Peer challenges are improvement focused; they are not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.
- 1.3 The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement:
- 1.4 **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
- 1.5 **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
- 1.6 **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
- 1.7 **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
- 1.8 **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?
- 1.9 In addition to these questions, the council asked the peer team to provide feedback on the Council's approach to 'Resident Focus'.

### 2 Current Position

- 2.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge set out nine key recommendations to the council:
1. Resident focus needs to be embedded across everything the Council does, with clarity about what that means in practice for the experience of residents, including with customer service.
  2. Agree and deliver a budget for 24/25 and 25/26 that deals with the budget deficit without relying on the continuing use of reserves.
  3. Develop a clearer line of sight between the expected deliverables of the transformation programme including the budget and the next iteration of 'Getting to Good'.



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4. Start to build and communicate a new reputation inside and outside the Council, sharing positive local stories more.
  5. Clarify how the changes to senior officer leadership will work in practice and review the effectiveness of this arrangement after 6 months alongside the other options at that point.
  6. Commission an external review of the governance and capacity needs of managing the Creating a Better Place programme, to ensure it delivers everything it can for Oldham and the Council.
  7. Refresh the Oldham Plan to harness the collective power of partners to improve the borough.
  8. Build on the early progress seen with Overview and Scrutiny with support, training and capacity as detailed throughout this report.
  9. Further develop the Council as a member-led organisation using the examples given in this report.
- 2.2. An action plan has been developed with senior officers to address the recommendations made by the Corporate Peer Challenge. This is accompanied to this report as an appendix.

### 3 **Options/Alternatives**

- 3.1 Option 1: Note the recommendations and content of the Corporate Peer Challenge report, agree to the actions laid out in the action plan and note the timescales for completing those actions. This course of action would allow the council to improve in line with the recommendations.
- 3.2 Option 2: Do not agree with the actions set out in the action plan. This course of action would mean business as usual and disregarding the recommendations set out by the Corporate Peer Challenge.

### 4 **Preferred Option**

- 4.1 Option 1 would be the preferred option, leading to a programme of improvement at Oldham Council.

### 5 **Consultation**

- 5.1 A series of meetings between senior staff and the policy team took place to determine the Council's action plan in response to the recommendations made by the Corporate Peer Challenge.

### 6 **Financial Implications**

- 6.1 The preferred option as detailed in paragraph 4.1 is to agree and implement a programme of improvement at Oldham Council following a recent Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC).
- 6.2 The CPC has set out nine key recommendation to the Council. Please refer to paragraph 2.1 for details.
- 6.3 There are no financial implications associated with approving the preferred option in this report.
- 6.4 With reference to Key recommendation number 2. The Council has a statutory duty to set a balanced budget and has a robust Budget setting process in place. The budget for 2024/25 and 2025/26 will be is balanced firstly using budget reductions and then a projected use of reserves to support transformational activity which will support the delivery of the budget reductions.

(Matthew Kearns – Matthew Kearns)

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7      **Legal Implications**

7.1      The CPC report makes nine clear recommendations for the Council. It is clearly important that the Council endeavor to achieve best practice. In doing so it would be prudent to instigate the recommendations of the CPC report. Failure to do so would not only defeat the purpose of having a Corporate Peer challenge process, but would also likely lead to a reputational risk, particularly if any failings should occur by the Council which were recommended points of improvement.

The recommendations would likely help the Council serve the residents better within the borough and help the Council operate at a more efficient level.

(Alex Bougateg – Interim assistant Director Legal Services)

8.      **Co-operative Implications**

8.1      The proposals set out in the action plan accompanying this report set out a clear plan of improvement for the council, which in turn will lead to improved services for our residents. A core recommendation from the CPC is to have a golden thread of resident focus throughout everything the council does. Acting upon this recommendation will mean working for the benefit of our residents, which is a core element of our cooperative values.

(James Mulvaney, Policy Manager)

9      **Human Resources Implications**

9.1      N/A

10      **Risk Assessments**

10.1      N/A

11      **IT Implications**

11.1      N/A

12      **Property Implications**

12.1      N/A

13      **Procurement Implications**

13.1      N/A

14      **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

14.1      N/A

15      **Community cohesion, including crime and disorder implications in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

15.1      N/A

16      **Oldham Equality Impact including implications for Children and Young People**

16.1      N/A

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17     **Key Decision**

17.1    No

18     **Key Decision Reference**

18.1    N/A

19     **Background Papers**

19.1    None

20     **Appendices**

20.1    Appendix A – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report

Appendix B – Peer Challenge Action Plan January 2024

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# LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

31<sup>st</sup> October – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023

Feedback report





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## 1. Executive summary

Oldham is a growing and changing borough with a population of around 242,000. This population has grown in the last ten years by around 7.6%, with particular growth in Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black communities.

Whilst the economy of Oldham was historically built around manufacturing and textiles, the fabric of the borough is now very much changing, on the back of the leadership provided by the Council.

The 'Creating a Better Place' programme lays out the plan for this change, which is now taking shape within the town centre. This programme is unlocking nearly £300 million pounds of investment which includes - but is not limited to - creating a neighbourhood of 2,000 homes and a new park, a redeveloped culture quarter, creating an estimated 1,000 new jobs and 100 apprenticeships – significantly reshaping the town centre of Oldham.

'Creating a Better Place' is for Oldham residents, but also creates opportunities for the Council, which this report explores in more detail.

Given the scale of this programme and the learning from other councils who have been through similar programmes, the peer team encourage the Council to commission an external review of the governance and capacity needs of managing the Creating a Better Place programme.

The leadership the Council has brought to this programme has been essential to the progress that continues to be made. More widely - this is a Council that is benefiting from well regarded, credible and visible leadership from the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council, both as individuals and as a partnership. This includes a very positive relationship with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, which is benefitting both Oldham and Greater Manchester.

The Leader of the Council, who was elected back onto the Council in May, returning to be the Leader for a second time, has a very clear and strong message about taking a 'Resident Focus' which is heard across the Council. This is a message that people recognise including staff, many of whom are from Oldham, identifying that *"the resident focus approach makes me proud"*. At this stage, it does however appear that *"Resident Focus means different things to different people"* so this needs to be clarified and the peer team encourage the Council to further embed this resident focus across everything the Council does – providing a clear narrative for what this means, how it is being implemented and the difference local residents will see.

On the basis of the feedback given to the peer team throughout the week, an area where the Council needs to improve is in getting the basics of the resident / customer experience consistently right. There are examples throughout this report where the Council has engaged with residents to great affect which can add to this, however the difficult experience many residents have when contacting the Council was a consistent theme fed back to the team. The Council should look to address this at pace. The staff the peer team met with were welcoming, open, honest and reflective. They're passionate about getting the best for Oldham and are behind this drive for a 'Resident Focus'. Forming a clear plan which shows how this will happen and monitors the progress of this, will help build further momentum.

This continued shift towards a 'Resident Focus' also requires looking at the role played by members across the Council, which is explored in more detail in this report. Supporting a 'Resident Focus' includes both the role that all members are able to play in their ward – supported by timely responses from services when making enquiries, but also the role that all members play in the running of the Council, in representing local residents.

Both the Leader and Chief Executive shared with the team throughout this process their wish to move the Council more towards being a 'member-led' Council. Taking more steps in developing the role and impact of Overview and Scrutiny will also aid in this regard. All members, whatever their party, should engage fully in the life of the Council and in overview and Scrutiny in particular.

The Council has experienced a change of Leader on three occasions since the time



of the last peer challenge in January 2020. During this period, the Council has also changed Chief Executive and has seen a number of changes within the senior officer cohort. The Council is now transitioning into new arrangements for the Chief Executive role. To support the Council through this transition and ensure the Council benefits the most from this arrangement, the Council are encouraged to clarify how the changes to senior officer leadership will work in practice and then review the effectiveness of this arrangement after 6 months, considering the other options available at this point.

To further support stability and improvement during this period of transition, the Council are also encouraged to refresh the partnership plan, 'The Oldham Plan', as a means of harnessing the collective power of partners towards improving the borough and capitalising on all of the opportunities now being created in Oldham.

Corporate prioritisation is an area that has shown improvement since the last CPC in January 2020, with performance management and the level of corporate oversight and assurance also being seen to have increased. The Council has strengths in analytical and data presentation, improving and bringing more systems together can help the Council to benefit more from this capability. This can help aid improvement and delivery, in a Council which demonstrates an openness to external support and challenge. The use of models such as the 'Getting to Good' board which has had a positive impact in Children's Social Care, being just one example of this. A similar arrangement has been established recently in SEND, following the recent CQC and OFSTED Area SEND Inspection of the Oldham Local Area Partnership.

In moving forward, the Council is developing its medium term financial strategy 2024/25 – 2028/29 within a challenging environment. The Council is faced with continuing exceptional inflationary and demand pressures and anticipates a significant budget gap for 2024/25. The Council recognises its reliance on reserves, which has been seen here over a number of years, cannot continue in dealing with this. Wider collective ownership for addressing these financial challenges is needed across the organisation, supported by a clearer line of sight between the expected deliverables of the transformation programme including 'Getting to Good' and the budget. The budget proposals for elected members were still being developed at the time of the peer challenge and this needs to be accelerated.

In supporting the Council to move forward into this new future, it is important to begin to build a new reputation inside and outside the Council, which highlights the exciting changes taking place in Oldham – as well as how the Council is changing too, around a ‘Residents Focus’. This will mean being able to step forward with confidence, sharing more of the positive local stories that are developing. The team have spent a significant amount of time in recent years dealing with challenging stories about Oldham and the Council which has had its toll. The Council has in place some strong communications officers that are well placed to do this and there is clearly here a story to begin to tell more. All members also need to play their part in championing Oldham, which will help secure recruitment and investment benefits for the borough. There is learning, from other councils who have made similar shifts in approach, that the Council could learn from, to move forward in this regard.

## 1. Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team’s key recommendations to the council:

- 1. Resident focus needs to be embedded across everything the Council does, with clarity about what that means in practice for the experience of residents, including with customer service.** Establish a clear plan for this, which has a focus on the resident experience of the Council at its core.
- 2. Agree and deliver a budget for 24/25 and 25/26 that deals with the budget deficit without relying on the continuing use of reserves.** Ensuring that the plans benefit from wider collective ownership across the organisation.
- 3. Develop a clearer line of sight between the expected deliverables of the transformation programme including the budget and the next iteration of ‘Getting to Good’.**
- 4. Start to build and communicate a new reputation inside and outside the**

**Council, sharing positive local stories more.**

- 5. Clarify how the changes to senior officer leadership will work in practice and review the effectiveness of this arrangement after 6 months alongside the other options at that point.** In doing this, review now the role and involvement of statutory officers in governance arrangements and ensure clear accountability for all statutory functions is in place to support good decision making throughout this transition.
- 6. Commission an external review of the governance and capacity needs of managing the Creating a Better Place programme, to ensure it delivers everything it can for Oldham and the Council.**
- 7. Refresh the Oldham Plan to harness the collective power of partners to improve the borough.**
- 8. Build on the early progress seen with Overview and Scrutiny with support, training and capacity as detailed throughout this report.**
- 9. Further develop the Council as a member-led organisation using the examples given in this report.**

## 2. Summary of the peer challenge approach

### 3.1 The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Lead Peer – **Sarah Norman** (Chief Executive – Barnsley Council).
- Lead Member Peer – **Cllr Emma Hoddinott** (Rotherham MBC).
- **Cllr Mike Ross** (Leader - Hull City Council).

- **Felicity Mercer** (Director for Customer and Commercial Services – Telford and Wrekin Council)
- **Helen Seechurn** (LGA Associate and LGA North West Financial Improvement Adviser)
- Peer Challenge Manager – **Dan Archer** (LGA)
- Shadow – **Katharine Goodger** (LGA)

### 3.2 Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, the council asked the peer team to provide feedback on the Council's approach to 'Resident Focus'.

### 3.3 The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent three days *virtually or onsite* at Oldham, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 50 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 150 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

## 3. Feedback

### 4.1 Local priorities and outcomes

The Council's last CPC in January 2020 recommended that the Council should focus its different priorities into a clear corporate set. The Council did this by producing a new Corporate Plan (2022- 2027) which states five key priorities:

- Health, safe and well supported residents
- A great start and skills for life

- Better jobs and dynamic businesses
- Quality homes for everyone
- A clean and green future.

However, how these priorities will be delivered with a Resident Focus is not as clear as well as how the Resident Focus relates to the Council's Values & Behaviours framework "Forward". The members and officers the team spoke with are clearly driven by a strong desire and endeavour to be responsive to the needs of local communities. It is clear that the drive for a 'Resident Focus' is a really strong, clear message from the Leader, which is heard and recognised across the Council. As stated by one member *"we all share the same objective – to improve Oldham"*. To move forward with this, further develop the narrative of the 'Resident Focus' to ensure a clear golden thread which cuts across everything the Council does.

There are great examples where the Council can demonstrate taking a 'Resident Focus' – including the approach to resident engagement developed during the COVID-19 pandemic which has provided a way to reconnect with residents and the Don't Trash Oldham Programme. There are also a number of examples where a resident focus is very much at the heart of service delivery and strategy development. This includes the development of policy in Adult Social Care and the work of the local Youth Council who regularly bring motions to Full Council for debate and decision, driving through significant policy changes such as free prescriptions for care leavers.

Whilst these examples are helping to improve the relationship that the Council has with local communities, a relentless, consistent focus on improving the resident experience of the Council across all services is required. This means for example, improving the experience that residents have when contacting the Council for support and the experience that ward members have when contacting the Council on behalf of residents. Given the widespread support for a 'Resident Focus', the Council should develop a consistent, coherent vision, with a clear delivery plan which cuts across all service areas.

There are also opportunities from existing strong work, that the Council can develop further with this 'Resident Focus' at its heart. For example, the door-to-door engagement model which was seen by many as helping to "*reach the otherwise suffering in silence cohort*" can be further developed to enable communities to do things for themselves and galvanise volunteer action. The Council should consider how this model can be safeguarded in this current financial climate, and further developed, with the use of local volunteers.

It is clear that this is a Council that knows local communities well and has business intelligence teams at the Council that are clearly an asset.

The approach to Performance Management has improved and is now more embedded and focused than was the case at the last CPC in January 2020. The Council's Corporate Plan (2022 - 2027) incorporated the views of around 300 local young people in its development. All services have a service plan and are supported to identify key indicators that provide oversight and assurance of performance and delivery. A quarterly corporate performance report supports the monitoring of key corporate indicators based on the Corporate Plan, as well as actions and the risks associated. Continuing to build on this will include further developing the approach to target setting which helps create earlier warning signs of issues and successes, increasing the window for remedial action when required, whilst also highlighting successes that the Council can communicate. A 'Resident Focused' approach to target setting is an opportunity to test whether the targets set by services, meet with the expectations of local residents, including practical things like call waiting times. Helping to meet the Leader's ambition of '*...looking at all of our services through the eyes of local people rather than service providers and doing our best to help and support people in the best way we can*'.

The [most recent published, LGInform performance data at the time of the CPC](#) shows that the Council is lower spending on Children's services, when compared to the most similar CIPFA neighbouring councils, spending £1,090.80 per 0 – 17 year old, compared to an average of £1,291.23 elsewhere (2022/23). The latest published data on the number of Children Looked After in Oldham in 2021/22 was 87 per 10,000 compared to 95 per 10,000 in the CIPFA nearest neighbour group. Only 1% of the principal road network is deemed in need of maintenance, compared to 3%

elsewhere, with the non-principal road network similar to other areas at 4% (2021/22). All planning timeliness measures are either performing equal to or better than the CIPFA group nearest neighbour average (Q1 2023/24). Whilst the borough has lower levels of smoking, alcohol related hospital admissions and childhood obesity than the most similar areas, adult overweight or obese rates as well as the under 18 and under 16 conception rates are higher. The percentage of people taking up an NHS health check in Oldham in 2022/23 was the lowest in the CIPFA neighbour group, at around 21.7% of those offered one. The borough has had a higher rate of infant mortality than the national and regional average for over a decade and the local Health and Wellbeing Strategy has a particular focus on this, including a targeted action plan to reduce infant mortality across the borough. The Director of Public Health has taken a lead on this issue sub-regionally.

The number of people living in temporary accommodation in Oldham has almost doubled since 2021. The Council have a DLUHC 'deep-dive' review into the procurement and management of temporary accommodation and have agreed to host a summit on housing in the coming weeks to explore options to address some of the tough challenges in this area.

## **4.2 Organisational and place leadership**

The Council has a strong Leader and Chief Executive in place who work well in partnership, are visible, open, energetic and focused. This leadership has helped to bring a focus towards service delivery and a 'Resident Focus'.

The Council has strong engagement in Greater Manchester – providing leadership on the Green/Environment Portfolio via the Chief Executive and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion assurance via the Leader. Further-to-this, the Council benefits from wider collaborations with Greater Manchester including examples such as occupational health, employee assistance and procurement.

Cabinet members more recently have seen a refresh of the role they play within the Council, which includes new expectations, which they very much welcome. This includes new briefing arrangements for their portfolio, a regular update slot for each



Portfolio Holder at each Full Council meeting with questions from all members, and clear expectations about engaging with Overview and Scrutiny. There is a range of external support available to Cabinet members via the LGA which can help Cabinet Members to further develop in their roles.

The Leader and Chief Executive are keen to further develop the Council as a member-led organisation and the steps being taken with the Cabinet are just one part of this. This can also be supported by helping all elected members to develop in their roles and to participate fully in the governance of the Council. It is only through the regular engagement of all members in the life of the Council that the Council can become more member-led. Ensuring suitable support is available to members in their roles will help with this as will having a different approach to member enquiries. The team received examples of when members had reached the point of requesting information via Freedom of Information requests. Whilst it is not appropriate to explore the circumstances of individual cases in this report, it is clearly an area that should be looked at to avoid members resorting to this in future. Elected members spoke of the experience of residents, who would often avoid calling the Council or logging enquiries directly, rather going directly to their local councillor first (based on previous experiences of these systems, which was poor). Members are then required to use the same systems as residents to raise these queries, to then have a similar experience of delay and in some instances no response, it is important that members are fully supported in how they are assisted with the casework queries they receive. Improving the resident experience of Council services will help to take some of this pressure off ward members who are then freed up to play a different role in their community and in the Council.

The Council is due to launch its next staff survey in the coming months, which follows the last full staff survey in 2021. The 2021 staff survey came on the back of a number of changes at the Council, including new ways of working following the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this staff survey showed that 32% of officers at that time did not feel that *'Senior Management took an interest in what is happening in my work'*. Through the discussions the peer team had with staff through this process, the feedback given was that senior management are much more visible now. There is a regular flow of communications between senior management and staff more widely, as well as within each of the service areas represented by staff the team spoke with.

As the Council begins the process of relocating staff from the Civic Centre into new office space in the Spindles Shopping Centre, and as the Council Chamber then follows by moving over to the redeveloped 'Old Library' - which is just a short walk away and comes with additional Council office space - it is important that this increased senior officer visibility continues and is not lost.

Following a recent external campaign to recruit a new Chief Executive which demonstrated a challenging recruitment market, the Council, in discussion with the current Chief Executive, decided to delay his planned retirement for another 2 years, to remain as Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service on a part-time basis (0.6 FTE) working alongside a chief executive development role (0.4 FTE) which would be filled by the Deputy Chief Executive - Place. To ensure the Council benefits the most from this arrangement, whilst developing the person in this role, the Council are encouraged to clarify how the changes to senior officer leadership will work in practice, then review the effectiveness of this arrangement after 6 months, alongside the other options at that point. Clarifying how the changes to senior officer leadership will work in practice also includes testing the rhythm of senior leadership meetings. In doing this, review the role and involvement of statutory officers in governance arrangements and ensure clear accountability for all statutory functions is in place to support good decision-making.

During this period of transition, refreshing the partnership plan, the 'Oldham Plan', can help to develop partner commitment around a clear, defining mission for Oldham, which partners including the Council can collectively rally around. To make the most of this, it is important that the structures required for the partnership are then shaped to support the delivery of this refreshed plan. Refreshing the Oldham Plan is an opportunity to more clearly define with partners the type of place you want Oldham to be, the roles that each partner are to take, how this can be approached with a clear 'Resident Focus' and the support that partners can provide each other in pursuing this common goal. This should include clarifying the links with Council's Corporate Plan and thus the Council's contribution.

The team found partners enthusiastic about the changes and felt they had a role to play, but that the current plan and structures didn't fully enable that. A refresh might therefore include how, as a partnership, Oldham will gain the most benefit from the

changes happening locally, including through Creating a Better Place. The progress of the reshaping of the town centre is exciting, is gathering pace and is building the confidence of partners. This is a great opportunity to help the borough to further deal with challenges around unemployment and youth unemployment and clear links should be made with Getting Oldham Working.

Developing the way in which communications to partners can become more structured and strategic in nature, is an opportunity from refreshing the Oldham Plan, the structures that underpin it and the roles that partners can take.

Residents the team spoke with appear to have a sense of optimism about what Creating a Better Place will mean for Oldham and are keen to hear more.

The Council has a number of mechanisms in place to support resident engagement as covered throughout this report, including the Residents Panel and Youth Council. Participating residents have a good experience of the Residents Panel, feel listened to and receive feedback. The Council also has a very positive relationship with the Youth Council, demonstrating full and real resident involvement, with real efforts to make this inclusive and impactful. These are positive examples from which the Council could further develop its approach to resident engagement.

The Council also has positive 'on the ground' day-to-day relationships with Trade Unions. This includes, for example the work to develop a new sickness management toolkit, which supports a preventative approach and was well received by the Trade Unions. The Council should build on this, by improving strategic engagement with the Trade Unions, particularly given some of the difficult decisions to come - for example, by re-establishing the Joint Consultative Committee.

Following an independent review into historic Child Sexual Exploitation, which was launched in November 2019 and reported back in June 2022, the Council fully accepted the findings of the independent report and established a CSE cross-party working group which is well attended by members cross-party. The Council is working towards a Survivors' Charter, which are further welcome steps forward. Ensuring all external partners (including the Police) are resourced to fulfil their roles around this is an important, ongoing consideration.

### 4.3 Governance and culture

The staff the team spoke with feel well engaged, with regular communications internally including staff conferences, email and Yammer accounts, to name a few. Like many councils, the Council is very aware of the challenge of communicating in the same way with non-office based staff and are continuing to make further attempts to do this. Relevant service managers are also alert to this and are making efforts too.

In early 2022, the Council agreed to bring the Unity Partnership back in-house, with 400 staff moving back into the Council – including call centre, highways, revenues and benefits, ICT, payroll and HR. This has been an ongoing programme of change and is now seen as being in a better place by staff, with less duplication, enabling the Council to secure new efficiencies and align more of its activity directly under the ‘Resident Focus’.

Following this move, the Council now has plans in place for immersive experience workshops to help further cement values, behaviours and the strategy of the Council with all staff, including those who recently transferred from Unity partnership. This is an opportunity to immerse staff into the difference made for people by the Council having a clear and consistent ‘Resident Focus’. and refresh the different ways that Oldham currently talks about culture, values and behaviours to ensure coherence and alignment to a ‘Resident Focus’.

The Council has recently developed and launched a new Equality Impact Assessment tool. Rather than having individual Equality Impact Assessments that sit next to individual decisions and are not particularly equipped for having a horizon scan of the cumulative effect on equalities of the different decisions the Council is making, this tool helps the Council to see the broader impact in real time. It is a great example of new practice which can help support a ‘Resident Focus’ throughout Council decision making.

The Council has clearly acted on the recommendations from the previous Corporate Peer Challenge in January 2020, which were to focus on a singular set of corporate priorities and review the levels of oversight and assurance against these. However these need to be clearly aligned to the overarching Residents Focus approach.

The Council benefits from a robust approach to risk management and internal audit with a refreshed strategy and framework now in place and some pockets of particularly strong engagement with these functions (for example in Adult Social Care). The Corporate Risk Register is reviewed at least quarterly and presented both at Management Board and Audit Committee. All service risk registers are reviewed quarterly and inform the Corporate Risk Register. Internal Audit have closely aligned the Audit Plan to the Corporate Plan, to help ensure the work of Internal Audit is focussed around the highest priorities and challenges the Council is managing.

The Council is proactive in seeking out independent challenge and scrutiny and recently appointed a strong independent chair of the Audit Committee. The Council has however found it challenging to appoint other independent members, a challenge that the Council is continuing to work on. Appointing to these roles will further support the overall system of assurance at the Council.

The Council recently refreshed its arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny (O&S), with dedicated LGA support in February 2023. Following this support the Council has more closely aligned its arrangements for O&S with the organisational structure and priorities and is in the process of delivering a wider improvement plan to further improve O&S at the Council. The changes to O&S and the appetite for improvement here are welcomed by all those the team met. There is clearly a commitment to making this work better for the borough and Council.

O&S is essential to a well working Executive/Cabinet system of governance and as such, it's highly important that all members play their part.

From the discussions the peer team had, the following steps can help further support the improvements the Council seeks to O&S and as such, support the Council in moving further forwards as a member-led Council:

- Support for members of Overview and Scrutiny – this includes support on the distinct role(s) of O&S and ways in which O&S can have most impact. This also includes further informal service background briefings for members of the committees.

- The Council should develop dedicated scrutiny officer capacity – these are distinct roles which are there to support members and officers, ensuring that the information presented to O&S supports members of the committee in their roles and stops information being presented which does not aid with this. These officers also play an essential role in supporting the committees to plan and prepare their scrutiny work.
- Dedicated support for the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny in their roles, which includes the relationships they require beyond the Committee and outside individual O&S meetings.
- Support for committees for work planning and prioritisation, considering the different mechanisms of assurance and insight in the area of their Committee, alongside the key priority issues and identifying ways in which O&S can maximise the impact it has in light of this.
- Support for officers at the Council to develop their understanding of O&S, its value to a well-functioning system of local assurance and improvement and what this means for them in their role and how they interact with O&S.

In terms of assurance and oversight more widely, there may be some opportunities to look at whether the level of oversight could be relaxed slightly, to help officers to progress activity at a quicker pace, when safe to do so. For example, officers spoke about the challenges presented by an internal Delegated Decision Report (DDR) template, which requires comments/consent from a number of other services before progress can be made as one example, when used for decisions that do not need this level of governance. At times, officers felt that this might be an example when *“most people just want to get on with things but feel the system is slightly against them”*.

The Council has established an ambitious and wide-ranging transformation programme based on 8 change programmes, since the last Corporate Peer Challenge in January 2020. This includes a children’s change programme, adults programme, place based integration, the Creating a Better Place programme,

commissioning, procurement, contract management, income maximisation, business insight, performance and strategy and digital. All 8 programme areas have dedicated briefs, governance boards and identified lead officers. A clear programme management discipline is in place to manage this transformation programme, with regular monitoring of delivery evident. Given the breadth of this programme and the amount of work that is progressing within it, ensuring that it is communicated as a coherent change programme for Oldham is inevitably a challenge. Helping more members and officers to be able to communicate the overall aims of this transformation programme, consistently and succinctly and how it relates to the Resident Focus approach, will help more people to more easily see the change that it represents for Oldham overall and so prepare for the opportunities that it will create, including the opportunities when different aspects of the change programme are layered on top of each other, but also any future challenges it may present indirectly for other services and service users.

Within the above transformation programme, the team were particularly impressed with the progress made on the Creating a Better Place programme and excited by what this might mean for residents. This is a 'once in a lifetime' change for the borough. However, it also presents significant risks and requires the council to work in different ways and secure delivery from a range of commercial partners. Thus the team highly recommend that the Council commission an external review of the governance and organisational capacity needed to deliver the Creating a Better Place Programme, to ensure its success.

#### **4.4 Financial planning and management**

Oldham Council faces significant challenges to its finances which are largely driven by increasing inflationary pressures, external costs and levels of service demand. The whole organisation is aware of the financial challenge the Council faces and the need to address it. Whereas the Council has relied upon the use of reserves to balance the budget over a number of years, the Leader, Cabinet and Chief Executive recognise the need to agree and deliver a budget for 24/25 onwards that no longer relies on the continuing use of reserves, following the use of £10.167m of reserves to underpin the budget in 2022/23 and £11.557m in 2023/24.

In order to achieve this, the Council needs to build upon the collective understanding of the financial challenge which is in place, to develop a stronger collective ownership across the Council of the steps required to deal with it. This will mean ensuring that all Council decisions and spending give due regard to the MTFS challenges. It also means that all opportunities to safely raise income and save money should be seriously considered, which will inevitably involve difficult decisions.

The latest published budget monitoring report at the time of the CPC, for the period April – June 2023, highlights an overall forecast year-end overspend of £12.104m against the current net revenue budget for 2023/24 of £292.316m. This is after a predicted and proposed in-year transfer from reserves of £7.385m. Within this forecast overspend, Children’s Services has a forecast overspend of £10.886m and ‘Place and Economic Growth ‘ has a forecast overspend of £3.553m. Favourable variances totalling £2.853m from Public Health (£0.250m), Communities (£0.128m), Corporate Services (£0.587m) and Capital, Treasury and Accounting (£1.888m) are helping to contain overspends in Children’s Services and Place and Economic Growth.

In regards to Children’s Services, the main element of this overspend relates to Children’s Social Care (£10.820m) and is mainly due to an increased demand for social care placements where children have complex needs, and in particular those requiring external placements, for which the costs have significantly increased within the external market in recent months. It also includes the increased costs of agency workers required, given the level of demand being seen. The percentage of agency social workers increased from 32.6% at Quarter 4 2022/23 to 48% at the time of the peer challenge, with average social worker caseloads at 16, compared to a target of 18.

The rapidly changing spend profile being experienced by the Council, due to changes in cost from external providers to the Council has been a significant challenge and the Council is revisiting its financial modelling for next year on the back of this. This is vitally important work to support the financial resilience of the Council overall in future years. The Council had already included £11.8m of additional funding into Childrens Social Care for 2023/24, to enable the service to rebase its budget and address the



pressures that it faced. Alongside this investment, an additional sum of £2.900m, funded by reserves was included within the 2023/24 budget to fund transformational activity. The total investment of £14.700m was anticipated to be sufficient to enable the service to address current and future pressures and therefore no additional budgetary requirements were included within the MTFS for 2025/26 to 2027/28. This is a complex challenge, which the Council are acutely aware of.

The Council has some plans to help reduce the exposure to escalating costs of external children's care placements by developing additional internal placements. This includes the conversion of a Children's Home into a residential home for example. Given the pressures faced by the Council, it is important to develop a clear timeframe for this, with corporate support prioritising this work to help accelerate progress and reduce the level of risk to the Council's future finances.

Exploring ways in which the new Adult Social Care model could be driven faster and deeper may also be an area in which the Council can take some of the pressure out of the budget challenge faced. Developing a clearer line of sight between the expected deliverables of the transformation programme and the budget will also support collective ownership further.

The Council's planned work on estate (land and property) rationalisation and utilisation is expected to realise £8.058m of approved revenue budget savings between 2022/23 and 2026/27 with a wide range of schemes in-train or due to be started between 2023/24 and 2027/28, under the Creating a Better Place programme.

To support the Council with this budget challenge, the Council benefits from a finance team who are held in high regard inside and outside the Council for the quality of their technical work and briefings. The Council continues to achieve an early closedown of the annual accounts and has received a clean bill of health from external audit. The recent external audit report to the Council's Audit Committee on 5th September 2023 indicated that the 2020/21 audit was now formally closed, with an unqualified opinion and no significant weaknesses in relation to value for money.

The Council's long-serving Chief Finance Officer, who recently retired, is held in

particularly high regard within the Council and across Greater Manchester. The Council has been successful in being able to appoint an external candidate to this role, who is due to take up the role in the weeks following the peer challenge. Ensuring suitable support for the new CFO in coming into post is in place is an important step for an effective transition.

The Council has a long serving finance portfolio holder who provides leadership stability in this area which will support this transition and revenue and capital budget monitoring is reported to Cabinet regularly.

The Council's 2022/23 Dedicated Schools Grant outturn position was a cumulative surplus of £0.899m; the first time that a surplus has been reported since 2016/17, representing the achievement of a major financial milestone for the Council. Future projections continue to improve with forecast surpluses of £2.517m and £2.765m in 2023/24 and 2024/25 respectively.

The Council's MTFS is aligned to the Corporate Plan and to the Capital Strategy, covering the same 5 year period, with a longer term view of capital also provided up to 2037/38. The Council has also had success in obtaining external grants with £98m funding available to support the delivery of the Council's priorities for Oldham. The Council has in place a gateway process for capital investment which includes consideration of risk exposure and appropriate mitigations. The Council is using £3m of capital receipts in 2023/24 to support transformation, which is monitored regularly and subject to audit.

Finally, given the Council's drive towards a 'Resident Focus' and the challenge presented financially, the Council should look at how the budget development timetable could be brought forward in future years to provide more clarity to the organisation and facilitate considered decision making. This should include ways in which the budget setting process for 24/25 and beyond could more actively engage residents in keeping with the drive for a 'Resident Focus', particularly around the tough decisions to come. This is an important consideration and an area that may require innovative new approaches from which others in the sector could also learn.

## 4.5 Capacity for improvement

Oldham Council are clearly open to support and challenge, being bought into the need for ongoing continuous improvement. The staff the team met with are committed to the Council and supporting continuous improvement and transformation work.

For example, in Children's Social Care, the Council was graded 'Requires Improvement' by OFSTED at the most recent ILACS inspection (January 2019). To help support improvement here, the Council proactively sought a 'Getting to Good' board in 2021, which is externally chaired and involves lead officers from Children's Services. This is a model that has clearly served the Council well since it was established and has been approached openly and maturely by the senior officers involved. This is also a model that the Council has now replicated with SEND, following the recent CQC and OFSTED Area SEND inspection of the Oldham Local Area Partnership which featured two priority actions for the Greater Manchester ICB and Council.

In Children's Social Care, the Council may wish to consider extending the membership of the Getting to Good board for its next stage of improvement, to include relevant partners, corporate services and the Cabinet member. Doing so can help to continue the improvement journey, whilst potentially taking on a more holistic remit of also driving budget management and savings delivery. Further corporate support for Children's Services is available which could be tapped into in doing this, which includes offers of support from housing and risk management as part of their corporate parenting role.

The Council has established a prevention framework and can draw on good examples of measurable successes in Adults, Childrens and Public Health. For example, the team heard how the early help service achieves a 10% reduction in Children's Social Care re-referrals following engagement with the service and 70% of the contacts through the Adult Referral Contact Centre then go on to receive community support rather than more intensive support from Adult Social Care.

The work to develop Place Based Integration aims to have an integrated public service hub in each of the five districts working more closely and collaboratively with partners like the NHS, schools, housing associations and Police. This supports early intervention and prevention in a more integrated way, within communities. The first hub in Failsworth is in operation, with hubs in Chadderton and Neon now opening also.

The Council's prioritisation of prevention and early help is also applied internally through the work to support the wellbeing of staff and reduce sickness absence. The wellbeing support the Council is providing employees through the menopause, provides another example of this.

The drive to prioritise a 'Resident Focus' at the Council can also help to support the work around prevention and early intervention. When residents get the information or service they want more easily, they are more likely to get this earlier, reducing the risk of their needs escalating and therefore needing to access more intensive support later on. However, active steps may need to be taken to make sure an enabling approach is fostered rather than one which, by making services more readily available, could unintentionally foster dependency as a result. A good example of where the Council is already using an enabling approach was the Chadderton alleys work, but there is a need to explicitly design this into local engagement work.

As part of the Council's 'Resident Focus' it is clear that the Council has extensive, separate sources of resident insight and feedback. If the Council is able to bring together different sources of resident feedback, then the Council will be supported with a more informed overview of residents experience that can then inform service delivery and decision making. The Council's new approach to Equality Impact Assessment, as mentioned elsewhere in this report, provides a way in which information is being brought together in a different way for a more informed overview. This is the type of outlook that could be utilised for a similar benefit here - to bring together data/information from the many different sources of resident feedback and insight e.g. complaints, resident engagement teams etc for a more holistic view.

Putting in place an effective CRM system is an opportunity for improving the resident / customer experience of Council services. This also opens up the opportunities of

utilising self-serve technology, to speed up processes and reduce the demand from repeat contact and 'chase-up'. Agreeing how to now take forward the digital strategy and the recruitment to the vacant director role in this areas, are important steps in setting out the strategic direction and delivery steps to achieve this. This can build on the steps already taken including the development of the Resident First Customer Experience Guidelines.

There are good examples of internal and external communications shared by the Council which can now be built upon further, with the experienced team of communications professionals the Council has. This includes helping the Council to build a new reputation inside and outside the Council which is an important step in helping the Council to deal with the workforce challenges it faces. Taking this next step, means not being deterred by the challenges the Council has faced but stepping forward with a new confident presence, sharing positive local stories more and promoting Oldham outside of Oldham too.

Communicating the move into new office accommodation and an improving town centre are also opportunities that can support the Council in dealing with its workforce recruitment challenges and in promoting the borough. This includes building on the growing events programme within the town centre, such as the recent return of the Oldham half marathon 'The Halloween Half' which took place at the start of the week that the peer team were onsite.

The Council has some early example of using a 'Grow your own' workforce approach to address the recruitment challenges it faces (e.g. T-Levels and Social Work Academy). To take this a step further, the Council could look to develop a comprehensive approach to 'Grow your own' with recruitment, which includes career pathways across the organisation, including the work already taking place at the Council to develop the Social Work Academy. The current Workforce Strategy is dated (2020 – 2023), the refresh of this Strategy could be used to help set out the Council's approach in this regard.

The approach to EDI in the workforce however needs to be further developed at the Council and across the partnership. The EDI workforce data available is limited, however staff recognise that the workforce does not at present, represent the

residents of Oldham and improving this is an opportunity for the Council and borough. Developing a comprehensive EDI Workforce Strategy for both existing staff and recruitment can help to set out the Council's direction of travel in this regard. At present it is not clear how this is being addressed or how people from different groups are supported / engaged with, within the workforce. In progressing all of this, there are opportunities to modernise workforce practices and systems, which would be welcomed by staff – making these processes relevant to a more challenging recruitment market. This could include the approach to recruitment – the processes and systems involved - as well as the availability of accurate workforce data. The Council is already taking steps to modernise some of its practice in this regard which are welcomed and can be built upon, for example toolkits which have been developed for appraisals and sickness management.

## 4. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

The CPC process includes a progress review, which provides space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the recommendations from this report and is due to take place in August 2024.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. Claire Hogan, Principal Adviser for the North West region, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Claire is available to discuss any further support the council requires.

[claire.hogan@local.gov.uk](mailto:claire.hogan@local.gov.uk).

# Corporate

# Peer Challenge

## Action Plan

January 2024



# Recommendations overview

**The Corporate Peer Challenge report makes nine clear recommendations for the council, these are:**

1. Embed resident focus across everything the council does.
2. Agree and deliver a budget for 24/25 and 25/26 that deals with the budget deficit without relying on the continuing use of reserves.
3. Develop a clearer line of sight between transformation and improvement programmes (Getting to Good) .
4. Build and communicate a new reputation, inside and outside the council.
5. Clarify how changes to senior officer arrangements will work in practice and review the effectiveness after six months.
6. Commission an external review of the governance and capacity needs of Creating a Better Place.
7. Refresh the Oldham Plan and harness power of partners.
8. Build on early progress to improve Overview and Scrutiny.
9. Further develop council as a member led authority.





## **1. Embed resident focus across everything the council does**

- Launch communications and engagement campaign (internally and externally) to promote customer service access points and levels of service in line with Place Based Hubs launch and opening of new Access Point in Spindles (February/March 2024)
- Relaunch a clear narrative for the council, what we do, what we stand for and how we are changing including updated values and behaviours (March 2024)
- Include resident first action and improvement planning in all Business Plans and review corporate performance reporting to better measure delivery of improvements (March 2024)
- Launch Oldham Experience (induction type programme) for all council staff (May 2024)
- Review the council's Corporate Plan to align with the new agreed narrative (May 2024)

## **2. Agree and deliver a budget for 24/25 and 25/26 that deals with the budget deficit without relying on the continuing use of reserves.**

- Plans are already well underway to deliver a budget for 2024/25 with Budget Scrutiny and Budget Council (February 2024) with implementation from March 2024
- Timescales for budget setting for 2025/26 onwards to be brought forward to Summer 2024
- Establishment of monthly officer and member Budget Delivery Board led by the Leader and Chief Executive to oversee effective delivery of savings programmes and oversight of budget management (ongoing from January 2024)

### **3. Develop a clearer line of sight between transformation and improvement programmes (Getting to Good)**

- Transformation and Finance are working together to define new approach to better align transformational savings and management of budget savings (ongoing)
- Review opportunities to use success of Getting to Good approach in other areas of major improvement (ongoing)
- Membership and wider engagement around Getting to Good Programme in Children's to be reviewed to look at wider organisational and system involvement (March 2024)



### **4. Build and communicate a new reputation, inside and outside the council**

Communications Strategy and action plan to be drafted and launched (March 2024) to include;

- Place Marketing strategy and action plan focused on investment, civic pride and visitor economy
- Internal Communications and Engagement Strategy launched to drive awareness of corporate messaging and better use of staff as core ambassadors
- Trade and sector communications and engagement plan to be developed to promote good practice and build relationships and partnerships regionally and nationally
- LGA Communications Peer Challenge commissioned to determine priorities, strengths and weaknesses and shape future structures and plans (February 2024)

### **5. Clarify how changes to senior officer arrangements will work in practice and review the effectiveness after six months**

- Management arrangements to be reviewed regularly by Leader with the Chief Executive through existing appraisal and review processes (ongoing)
- Development Plans for all Senior Management Team in place and reviewed (ongoing)
- New approach to meetings and briefings at all levels now in place to support new way of working including weekly Management Board meetings, six-weekly Extended Management Team meetings and both annual directorate and council wide staff events (from January 2024)
- Staff Survey launched to test employee confidence and understanding on a range of issues including Senior Management (January/February 2024)

## **6. Commission an external review of the governance and capacity needs of Creating a Better Place**

- A review of the governance, capacity and benefits of the Creating a Better Place programme and our strategic partnership with Muse is being commissioned and will be completed by Arcadis by May 2024
- A report on the findings and recommendations of this review will be provided during Summer 2024.

## **7. Refresh the Oldham Plan and harness power of partners**

- Review the Oldham Plan engaging a wide range of public and private and third sector partners in its development (March – May 2024)
- Renew and relaunch Oldham Partnership and associated work plans (June 2024)
- District Reviews and Growth Plans are in development working with a range of partners (ongoing)



## **8. Build on early progress to improve Overview and Scrutiny**

- Undertake review of capacity and structure of Constitutional Services to best support Overview and Scrutiny (March/April 2024)
- Review Overview and Scrutiny elements of member training programme (March 2024)
- Develop forward plan of Scrutiny items ahead of new municipal year (May 2024)

## **9 Further develop council as a member led authority**

- Undertake a Governance Review including refreshing decision-making processes and templates (April 2024)
- Improve our use of decision-making and reporting systems (including modern.gov) to provide greater oversight and more advanced visibility (March/April 2024)
- Reviewing briefing and reporting processes for Combined Authority and AGMA meetings to best support attendees (ongoing)
- Review member training programme including timing and engagement approach to content (March/April 2024)
- Better and more proactively promote and encourage take-up of training and development opportunities (May 2024)
- Review how member case work is managed and supported across the authority (July 2024)



## Report to Cabinet

# Council Tax Base and Non-Domestic Rates Tax Base Forecast 2024/25

**Portfolio Holder:** Report of Councillor Abdul Jabbar MBE,  
Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources

**Officer Contact:** Chris Kelsall (Assistant Director of Finance)

**Report Author:** Helen Cairns (Senior Accountant)

**22 January 2024**

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### Reason for Decision

This report presents to Cabinet the Council Tax Base and provisional Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) Tax Base forecast for 2024/25 which will underpin the forthcoming Council Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy scheduled for consideration at Budget Council on 29 February 2024.

The report also seeks delegated authority to finalise the 2024/25 Non-Domestic Rates (Business Rates) forecast to reflect up to date Non-Domestic Rates details to be submitted to Central Government via the annual NNDR 1 return by the statutory deadline of 31 January 2024.

### Executive Summary

This report sets out information on the Council Tax Base for 2024/25 using the most up to date valuation list and all other information and estimates available.

The total number of chargeable properties included in the Council Tax Base calculation in Oldham for 2024/25 is 98,628. This figure is reduced to 87,971.8 after allowing for discounts and exemptions and translates to the equivalent of 69,938.4 Band D properties. After applying adjustments for the Local Council Tax Support scheme offset by the additional charging for empty properties and an anticipated increase in the number of properties to be included in the valuation list over the forthcoming year, the number of Band D equivalent properties reduces to 61,374.7. The final Tax Base after the application of the anticipated collection rate of 96.75% is 59,830 which is an increase of 880 when compared to the Council Tax Base for 2023/24 of 58,500.

The 2024/25 Tax Bases for Saddleworth and Shaw and Crompton Parish Councils of 9,150 and 5,724 respectively, have been calculated using the same methodology.

Statute requires local Billing Authorities to prepare and submit to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) a locally determined and approved Business Rates forecast through the NNDR 1 return by 31 January each year. This forecast will be used to determine the 2024/25 “demand” and payment schedule for Business Rates between Oldham Council and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). The Council remains a participant in the Greater Manchester 100% Rates Retention Pilot Scheme, this means the Council no longer pays a share of Business Rates to Central Government. Instead, Oldham currently retains 99% of the income with 1% being paid to the GMCA for Fire and Rescue services.

The estimated rating income for 2024/25 attributable to Oldham Council using the latest information is currently £51.644m. Delegation is sought to enable the Business Rates income forecast to be updated to take account of up-to-date Non-Domestic Rates information, enabling the submission to Central Government of the annual NNDR 1 return by the statutory deadline of 31 January 2024.

As the 100% Business Rates retention regime is continuing, the Council has assumed a benefit of £4.083m from the pilot scheme for 2024/25. The current arrangement is that the Council can retain 75% of this benefit with the balance attributable to GMCA. The Council’s share, £3.062m will be made available to support the 2024/25 budget whilst the GMCA share will be transferred to a reserve to be paid to the GMCA once the final position has been agreed. These figures will only be confirmed by the end of 2024/25.

It is important to highlight to Members that the preparation of Council Tax and Business Rates Tax Bases is being undertaken in a period of unprecedented uncertainty and volatility. The current economic climate including uncertain prospects for economic growth, Government changes in policy in year, the revaluation of Business Rates from 1 April 2023 and the decoupling of business rates multipliers are amongst the issues which make forecasting challenging.

The Collection Fund (combined) has moved into a projected surplus position in 2023/24 providing the opportunity to use the surplus to support the 2024/25. This is the result of the continued recovery following the lifting of COVID-19 related restrictions and consequent improved collection rates. It also reflects the level of Government support provided via Business Rate reliefs which has reduced any losses in collection.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

- 1) Cabinet approves:
  - a) The Council Tax Base for 2024/25 at 59,380 Band D equivalent properties.
  - b) The latest estimate for 2024/25 Business Rates revenue that is attributable to Oldham Council as being £51.644m.

- c) The drawing down from the Collection Fund of £4.083m of Business Rates retention gains anticipated for 2024/25, of which the Council will utilise £3.062m (75%)
- 2) Cabinet notes the Tax Bases for Saddleworth and Shaw and Crompton Parish Councils of 9,150 and 5,724 respectively.
- 3) Cabinet delegates the decision to vary the final Business Rates forecast and hence the Business Rates Tax Base, if required, to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources in consultation with the Director of Finance.

**Council Tax Base and Non-Domestic Rates Tax Base Forecast 2024/25****1 Background**

- 1.1 The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) and the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 requires the Council as the Billing Authority to calculate and approve the Council Tax Base for 2024/25 by 31 January 2024, based on the valuation list and other information and estimates available. The method of calculation is contained in the regulations.
- 1.2 This report presents for approval, Oldham Council's Council Tax Base for 2024/25 and the extracted Tax Bases for Saddleworth and Shaw & Crompton Parish Councils. This will enable Tax Base information to be made available to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) in relation to major precepting functions and the two Parish Councils in Oldham.
- 1.3 The Council will use the Council Tax Base for 2024/25 in setting the Council Tax and determining the level of Council Tax income for 2024/25.
- 1.4 Notification of the 2024/25 Council Tax Base must be provided to Major Precepting Authorities by the statutory deadline of 31 January 2024. The GMCA is responsible for determining the two major precepts, the Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept and the Mayoral General Precept (which incorporates precepts for both and Mayoral General Service provision and the Fire and Rescue Service).
- 1.5 The Non-Domestic Rating (Rates Retention) Regulations 2013 set out a timetable for informing the Government and precepting Authorities of the Business Rates revenue calculation. The Council is required to submit a Government return (NNDR 1) by 31 January in the year prior to the financial year for which the calculation is being made. The return estimates the amount of Business Rates (Non-Domestic Rate (NDR)) that it is expected will be collected in the following financial year. Given the legislative changes introduced from April 2013 and the extension of the 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot arrangements for a further year, the estimates now take on a higher profile because the Council is using a greater proportion of the business rates collected.
- 1.6 Consequently, the Council must formally approve the NDR forecast in a manner similar to the Council Tax Base.

**2 Current Position****Collection Fund Forecast Outturn Position for 2023/24**

- 2.1 The Collection Fund forecast outturn position is presented within the revenue monitoring reports considered by Cabinet throughout the year. As explained later in this report, it is exceptionally challenging to accurately forecast both Council Tax and Business Rates revenues over the short to medium term.



- 2.2 For budget setting purposes and for the purpose of notifying the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) as major preceptor, the Collection Fund forecast outturn position for both Council Tax and Business Rates for 2023/24 will be an estimated surplus of £0.805m, the preceptor shares are shown below.

#### Estimated Collection Fund Forecast Position as at Month 8

Collection Fund Balance	Council Tax £000	NDR £000	Total £000
Balance Brought Forward	410	4,127	<b>4,537</b>
Contribution to deficit carried forward from 2022/23	48	(4,131)	<b>(4,083)</b>
<b>Prior Year Balance Brought Forward</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>454</b>
(Surplus) for the Year	(234)	(1,025)	<b>(1,259)</b>
<b>Net Deficit/(Surplus) Carried Forward</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>(1,029)</b>	<b>(805)</b>

#### Collection Fund – 2023/24 Share of Balances; Forecast Position

Collection Fund Balance	Council Tax £000	NDR £000	Total £000
Share - Oldham Council	189	(1,019)	<b>(830)</b>
Share – GMCA Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner	24	-	<b>24</b>
Share – GMCA Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services)	11	(10)	<b>1</b>
<b>Total Deficit/(Surplus)</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>(1,029)</b>	<b>(805)</b>

- 2.3 The preceptors will be notified of the 2023/24 Council Tax surplus/deficit by the statutory deadline.

## Calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2024/25

- 2.4 The Council Tax Base determines the Council Tax revenue generated at a given collection rate, for each £1 of Council Tax levied. It is the estimated full year equivalent number of chargeable dwellings. This is expressed as the equivalent number of Band D dwellings with two or more liable adults in occupation.
- 2.5 In October each year the Government requires the submission of a return, the Council Tax Base 1 (CTB1), and a version of this is used as the basis for the calculation of the Tax Base. Using the CTB1 and up to date property information, Appendix A shows the total number of dwellings on the valuation list in Oldham is 98,628. Allowing for exemptions, demolitions and disabled relief dwellings, this number reduces to 96,321 chargeable dwellings which are then allocated across the nine Council Tax Bands. Some of these chargeable dwellings receive discounts from Council Tax (e.g., dwellings occupied solely by students) whilst single person households pay only 75% of the charge otherwise payable. The number of dwellings is therefore adjusted to reflect these discounts and exemptions, giving a figure of 87,971.8 dwellings.
- 2.6 The nine Council Tax Valuation bands provide the basis for the Tax Base calculation, with the number of chargeable dwellings in each band being calculated through to its 'Band D equivalent'. A bill for a Band A property is equivalent to 6/9 of that of a Band D property whilst a Band H property is equivalent to 2 times (18/9) of a Band D property. The application of the Band D equivalent calculation therefore reduces the Tax Base to 69,938.4.
- 2.7 A further adjustment is required to the Tax Base due to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS). The scheme replaced Council Tax Benefit and was introduced for the first time in 2013/14. The LCTRS is treated as a discount rather than a benefit and therefore reduces the Tax Base. A recent modelling exercise was undertaken which considered variations to the LCTRS, however in view of the continued uncertainty concerning Universal Credit (UC) and the marginal impact of any practical change to the LCTRS at this stage, it was recommended that the Council maintains the current scheme during 2024/25. This will provide continuity regarding entitlement to those residents on the lowest incomes and allow time for the impact of the roll out of UC to become clearer. The LCTRS discount is anticipated to continue to be capped at 85% of a Band A property.
- 2.8 The summarised method of calculating the 2024/25 Tax Base is shown in Appendix A. This shows that, taking the above issues into account, the Tax Base would be 61,374.7 at a 100% collection level but would be 59,380 at a collection rate of 96.75%. The Tax Base has increased by 880 compared to the figure for 2023/24 (the Tax Base in 2023/24 was 58,500), largely reflecting an increase in the number of chargeable dwellings, reduced discounts for empty properties and initiatives to reduce the number of households incorrectly claiming Single Person Discounts.

### Estimated Collection Rate

2.9 A recent review of collection levels has been undertaken to inform the 2024/25 budget process. This review has been informed by:

- The impact of the LCTRS on Council Tax revenues.
- The inflationary pressures on households impacting on their ability to manage their finances is beginning to result in an increased number of Council Taxpayers falling into arrears in the future.

2.10 In view of the above uncertainty and potential volatility it is considered appropriate to maintain the anticipated collection rate at 96.75%. The Council will however continue to closely monitor the collection rate and Tax Base position to determine whether the changing environment around the wider economic outlook has any impact on the Council Tax collection rate and Collection Fund position.

#### Parish Council Tax Bases

2.11 The Tax Base calculated for 2024/25 for the Parish Councils of Saddleworth and Shaw & Crompton are 9,150 and 5,724 respectively. This represents an increase for Saddleworth of 198 Band D equivalent properties and for Shaw & Crompton an increase of 109 Band D equivalent properties when comparing totals to the Parish Tax Bases for 2023/24. The Tax Bases have been calculated on a basis consistent with those for the Borough as a whole.

2.12 The Council provides grant compensation to the two local Parish Councils for losses associated with the introduction of Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes in 2013/14. The amount of grant payable to each Parish for 2024/25 is detailed in the table below.

	2024/25 £000
Saddleworth Parish Council	13
Shaw & Crompton Parish Council	5
<b>Total Parish Grant Payable</b>	<b>18</b>

#### Business (Non-Domestic) Rates

2.13 Local billing authorities are required to prepare and submit to the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) a locally determined and approved Business Rates forecast through the NNDR 1 return by the statutory deadline of 31 January each year. This forecast is used to determine the 2024/25 “demand” and payment schedule for Business Rates revenues between Oldham Council and the GMCA. The GMCA determines the Mayoral General Precept which covers general Mayoral service provision as well as Fire and Rescue functions for which (due to the piloting of the 100% Business Rates Retention Scheme as explained below) it receives 1% of all Business Rates Revenues collected across Greater Manchester. Under the 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot scheme arrangements, Central Government does not receive a share of Business Rates revenues.

- 2.14 Over the past few years, the Government has introduced a series of Business Rates reliefs. This has meant the Council has received Grant in Lieu of Business Rates as compensation for the Business Rates not billed due to the reliefs given to businesses. Each year the Council forecasts its allocation for Grant in Lieu of Business Rates for the following financial year as part of the NNDR1 return. The initial estimate for 2024/25 is £28.202m of which the Councils' share is £27.920m.
- 2.15 2024/25 will see some radical changes to the Business Rates Retention System (BRRS), with the introduction of the Non-Domestic Rating Act 2023 giving central government the power to set the small and standard business rating multipliers separately from one another. Until 2023/24 these two multipliers had to be increased by the same percentage.
- 2.16 The change, while allowing the flexibility to support small businesses has added additional complexity to an already intricate system, this is particularly relevant when forecasting future business rates income. In the Autumn Statement the Chancellor used the new power and froze the Small Business Rates Multiplier at 49.9p while raising the Standard Multiplier to from 51.2p to 54.6p. Up to 2023/24 the BRRS has been linked to the small multiplier and the cap compensation fraction has been calculated with reference to only the small business rates multiplier. The new system has introduced two different under-indexation factors based on the two multipliers. Going forward cap compensation will be calculated by splitting business rates income raised on each multiplier and applying the appropriate under-indexation factor.
- 2.17 Business Rates are a highly complex and volatile tax, and it is increasingly difficult to forecast movements over the short to medium term with great accuracy. Since the change to the Business Rates regime in 2013/14 and the revaluation exercises undertaken by the Valuation Office Agency (effective from 1 April 2017 and most recently 1 April 2023), much more uncertainty has been introduced into the setting of Council budgets as the Tax Base is prone to significant changes and can fluctuate for many reasons; the most common of which are listed below:
- Changes in liability resulting from a change in occupancy.
  - Appeals against rating decisions, the length of time it takes to conclude appeals and the requirement to make an assessment of the cost of appeals prior to settlement;
  - Demolitions and the point at which properties are removed from the rating list;
  - New builds and the point at which rateable occupation is triggered;
  - Changes in building use and alterations to building size or layout;
  - Changes in entitlement to mandatory and/or discretionary reliefs;
  - Action taken by property owners/occupiers to avoid full liability and maximise relief; particularly empty property and charitable relief;
  - Changes in Council policy in relation to discretionary rate relief;
  - Changes in the requirement to provide for doubtful debts.
- 2.18 Fluctuations in the amount of Business Rates income collected are also strongly influenced by the performance of the wider economy. In an economic

downturn there is a heightened risk of properties being left empty and lower levels of development activity. Conversely, when the economy is more buoyant, business activity and thereby rating income can increase. As the economy is currently in recession then this creates even greater uncertainty in projecting Business Rates income for 2024/25.

- 2.19 The level and timing of appeals against a rateable value are perhaps the most significant factors that can have an impact on variability in yield. Appeals are dealt with by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and can date back many years. Recent information highlights that appeals covering around £25m of rateable value remain unresolved. Total rateable value for the Oldham Billing Area is around £165m meaning appeals currently impact on approximately 15% of the overall Business Rates Tax Base.
- 2.20 The Check, Challenge & Appeal process introduced by the VOA after the 2017 revaluation exercise has tried to incorporate a degree of consistency to the appeals submission process, whilst simultaneously seeking to limit the number of 'speculative' claims. The revised process has significantly reduced the number of claims that reach the appeal stage. However, it is not clear whether the process is reducing the real number of appeals or simply causing delay. What is clear is that greater financial provision will need to be made for individual claims that reach the appeal stage as, having been through check and challenge, their probability of securing a rateable value reduction is much greater than under the previous arrangements.
- 2.21 Recognising the challenges that this volatility presents, the Council has put in place arrangements to monitor Business Rates liability on a monthly basis. The output from these monitoring arrangements shows that net liability tends to reduce as the year progresses from each the start of the financial year in April. These reductions are the result of:
- Reductions in gross rates payable as outstanding appeals are settled.
  - Increases in mandatory and empty property relief as more claims are submitted and processed as the year progresses.
- 2.22 These trends/movements set against the base position form the basis of the forecast business rates outturn position for 2023/24 and forecast for 2024/25.

#### Greater Manchester (GM) 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme

- 2.23 On 1 April 2017, the GMCA, Oldham Council and the nine other GM districts commenced a pilot scheme for the 100% local retention of Business Rates. Under the pilot scheme, additional Business Rates income was initially offset by reductions in other funding streams such as Revenue Support Grant and Public Health Grant in exchange for the local retention of all future growth in Business Rates revenue (rather than just 50% as is the case with the national scheme of business rates retention). The pilot scheme has delivered year on year financial benefits for its participants. Whilst there has been some uncertainty as to the continuation of the 100% Business Rates retention piloting arrangements, the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement (PLGFS) announced on 18 December 2023, advised that the pilot scheme would continue into 2024/25. Therefore, based on best estimates the Council

has assumed a total benefit of £4.083m from the pilot scheme for 2024/25. The current arrangements are that the Council retains 75% of this benefit with the balance attributable to the GMCA. This means £3.062m will be made available to support the 2024/25 budget whilst the GMCA share will be transferred to a reserve to be paid to the GMCA once the final position has been agreed. These figures will be confirmed at the end of 2024/25.

### Grants in Lieu of Business Rates

- 2.24 The Council receives significant sums from Central Government as compensation for loss of Business Rates revenue resulting from previous national policy changes such as multiplier caps and the introduction of new business rates reliefs and discounts. These grants for 2024/25 awarded under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 are currently forecast to be worth around £28.202m (of which the Council's share is £27.920m). However, reliefs and discounts can be a particularly difficult area to forecast with changes in Government policy resulting in vastly different outcomes to those originally estimated. The current forecast reflects the reliefs and discounts announced as part of the Autumn Statement 2023 and confirmed in the Business Rates Information Letter (6/2023): Publication of Business Rates Relief Information published on 15 December 2023.

### **2024/25 Business Rates Forecast – Conclusion**

- 2.25 It is important to highlight to Members that the preparation of Council Tax and Business Rates Tax Bases are being undertaken in a period of unprecedented uncertainty and volatility. The impact of the cost of living crisis and the economic recession has the potential to reduce both the Council Tax and Business Rates income collected in 2024/25.
- 2.26 In addition, April 2023 signified the start of a new Business Rates Revaluation list with all properties reassessed to identify new rateable values. A property's rateable value is an assessment of the annual rent the property would generate if it were available on the open market at a fixed valuation date. From 1 April 2023, the rateable values are based on the valuation date of 1 April 2021. Revaluations are undertaken to maintain fairness in the system by redistributing the total amount payable in Business Rates, reflecting changes in the property market. They are not carried out to generate extra revenue.
- 2.27 Having considered the issues above, many factors are outside the control of the Council. Central Government confirmation that Local Government will continue to be fully compensated for implementing policy announcements made within previous Budgets provides assurance for short-term forecasting. However, over the long term, the switch to more frequent revaluations and the on-going results of Business Rates Retention are extremely difficult to assess. Forecasts for 2024/25 have been prepared based on trends emerging from the monthly monitoring of Business Rates liability during 2023/24.
- 2.28 For the purposes of formal decision making, Oldham Council's share of the Business (Non-Domestic) Rates forecast for 2024/25 is presented at £51.644m. This represents the best estimate available currently and is the assumption underpinning the 2024/25 budget estimates. However, delegation

to vary the Business Rates Tax Base is sought as the final Business Rates forecast for 2024/25 will only be confirmed when preparing the submission of the Council's NNDR 1 return in late January 2024. In addition, the Council will also precept an estimated £4.083m which is the anticipated share of Business Rate gains as a result of the 100% Business Rates pilot scheme. The Council is expecting to utilise 75% of this, a sum of £3.062m. The preceptor shares are shown below:

<b>Forecast Business Rates Income</b>	<b>Oldham Council £000</b>	<b>GMCA - General £000</b>	<b>Total £000</b>
Forecasted Business Rates Yield	51,644	522	52,166
Forecasted Business Rates Pilot Gains	3,062	1,021	4,083
<b>Total Forecast Yield</b>	<b>54,706</b>	<b>1,543</b>	<b>56,249</b>

- 2.29 As advised above, delegation is sought to vary these figures dependent on the submission of the NNDR1 form to Government. The Business Rates income used to support the 2024/25 budget may therefore be subject to change on or around 31 January 2024.

### 3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 The Council has little discretion in the calculation of the number of properties incorporated into the Council Tax Base given the legislative framework that is in place. However, there is some discretion in estimating the number of new properties that will be included on the Council Tax register during 2024/25 and the change to the number of claimants of Council Tax Reduction. A prudent view has been taken in this regard. The main area for an alternative approach is over the level of assumed collection rate. An increase in the collection rate would boost the anticipated Council Tax income and a decrease in the rate would decrease income. The Council has chosen to maintain its 2024/25 collection rate at 96.75%. This decision has been influenced by prevailing economic circumstances and current trends in collection rates.
- 3.2 The NNDR1 return generates the figures upon which the Business Rates Tax Base is prepared. It is not therefore appropriate to consider an alternative approach. However, as the figures included on the NNDR1 return on 31 January 2024 may vary from the estimated level, delegation is sought to allow the opportunity to revise the Business Rates forecast and approve a revised and more accurate position for budget setting.

### 4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 It is recommended that Members approve the Council Tax Base of 59,380 and an estimate of the Council's Business Rates Tax Base of £51.644m (plus a further £3.062m resulting from a Business Rates pilot scheme gain). Delegation to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Low Carbon in consultation with the Director of Finance is however sought for the final Business Rates Tax Base decision, the final estimated net business rate yield and ultimately the Council's retained Business Rate income for 2024/25.

## 5 **Consultation**

- 5.1 Indicative Tax Base information has been shared with precepting Authorities to assist them in the budget projections, subject to confirmation by this report.
- 5.2 The Council will advise the preceptors of the approved Council Tax and Business Rates Tax Bases (as appropriate) by the statutory deadline of 31 January 2024 and will submit the final NNDR1 also by that date.

## 6 **Financial Implications**

- 6.1 These are dealt with in full in this report.

(Chris Kelsall – Assistant Director of Finance)

## 7 **Legal Implications**

- 7.1 It is necessary for the Cabinet to set the Council Tax Base having regards to the appropriate Regulations and to notify that to the relevant precepting bodies. Additionally, it is now required that the Business Rates Tax Base is approved by Cabinet.

## 8 **Co-operative Implications**

- 8.1 Income generated from Council Tax and Business Rates supports the Council's budget process and hence supports the delivery of the cooperative agenda.

## 9 **Human Resource Implications**

- 9.1 None.

## 10 **Risk Assessments**

- 10.1 There is a risk that if the anticipated Council Tax collection level is too high, there will be a shortfall in the income anticipated. This would influence the budget setting arrangements in future years. With the introduction of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, collection rates are now much more difficult to assess, and these will be kept under constant review however the proposed collection rate seeks to minimise the risk with a prudent approach taken to setting the collection level.
- 10.2 There is also a risk that if the anticipated level of Business Rates is not achieved it would lead to budget pressures in future financial years. Hence a prudent approach will be taken in assessing the anticipated business rates income levels.
- 10.3 There are economic risks outside the control of the Council which have the potential to reduce the levels of Council Tax and Business Rates income assumed in the financial modelling undertaken by the Council.
- 10.4 There is a risk the Council does not receive the 75% share of pilot gains anticipated within the report.



**11 IT Implications**

11.1 None.

**12 Property Implications**

12.1 None.

**13 Procurement Implications**

13.1 None.

**14 Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

14.1 None.

**15 Community cohesion, including crime and disorder implications in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

15.1 None.

**16 Oldham Equality Impact including implications for Children and Young People**

16.1 Not applicable.

**17 Key Decision**

17.1 Yes.

**18 Key Decision Reference**

18.1 **FLC-19-22**

**19 Background Papers**

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

File Ref: Background Papers are contained in Appendix A  
Officer Name: Helen Cairns

**20 Appendices**

20.1 Appendix A Calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2024/25

APPENDIX A

Calculation of Council Tax Base 2024/25 (Based on all properties)

Bands	A reduced	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total
Total number of Dwellings on the Valuation List		51,082	17,600	16,615	7,238	3,472	1,604	933	84	98,628
Total number of Exempt and Disabled Relief Dwellings on the Valuation List	178	(1,545)	(293)	(384)	(140)	(57)	(26)	(18)	(22)	(2,307)
No. of Chargeable Dwellings	178	49,537	17,307	16,231	7,098	3,415	1,578	915	62	96,321
Less: Estimated discounts, exemptions and disabled relief	(8.8)	(5,198.8)	(1,400.0)	(1,095.5)	(380.8)	(155.3)	(65.5)	(42.0)	(2.8)	(8,349.3)
Total equivalent number of dwellings after discounts, exemptions and disabled relief	169.3	44,338.3	15,907.0	15,135.5	6,717.3	3,259.8	1,512.5	873.0	59.3	87,971.8
Factor stipulated in regulations	5/9	6/9	7/9	8/9	9/9	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9	
Band D equivalent	94.0	29,558.8	12,372.1	13,453.8	6,717.3	3,984.1	2,184.7	1,455.0	118.5	69,938.4
Net effect of Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS) and other adjustments – reduction in Band D Equivalents										(9,317.6)
Increase in Band D equivalents in 2023/24 based on estimates of changes in discounts & exemptions and the acceleration of planned housing/ regeneration schemes.										754
<b>Total after LCTSS and other adjustments</b>										61,374.7
Multiplied by estimated collection rate										96.75%
<b>Band D Equivalents</b>										<b>59,380</b>

For information: Parish Council Tax Bases – Saddleworth 9,150

Shaw & Crompton 5,724



## Report to Cabinet

### Digital switchover's impact on the Helpline & Response Service

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Barbara Brownridge (Lead Member)

**Officer Contact:** Jayne Ratcliffe, Director of Adult Social Care  
Rob Jackson, Managing Director, MioCare Group

**Report Author:** Paula Spence, Service Director, MioCare Group

**22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024**

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#### Reason for Decision

Funding is required so to mitigate the risk of Helpline & Response customers becoming disconnected from the service as a result of the national digital switchover programme.

#### Executive Summary

The report provides details on the Helpline & Response service incompatibility issues which may occur as a result of the national digital switchover programme.

The UK's digital network delivery providers (BT, Virgin, Talk Talk etc) are introducing a fully fibre UK-wide digital network by the end of 2025. Every business and home will have their connections upgraded. For anyone using an analogue phone, the ability of this 'old' technology to then function properly becomes problematic, due to complexities around analogue protocols not being robust over a digital network.

Current alarm units are not digitally enabled. To fully replace these with digital units will incur a significant IT capital cost but will future-proof customers for years to come.

#### Recommendations

- To **note** the potential impact and proposed solutions to the customers of the Helpline & Response service as a result of the digital switchover.
- To **agree** with the recommendations that are set out in the confidential Part B report on the private agenda.

## Digital switchover's impact on the Helpline & Response Service

### 1. Background

- 1.1 The UK's digital network delivery providers are in the process of rolling-out a full digital network by the end of 2025. This means that every business and home in the country will have its connections upgraded. People will no longer be able to make landline calls using the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). Instead, calls will use Voice over the Internet Protocol (VoIP). This will have a significant impact to the Helpline & Response service, commissioned by Adult Social Care, which has close to 4,000 customers.
- 1.2 Adult Social Care commissions MioCare to deliver the service, providing an emergency call system for use by people in their own homes. Customers receive a central console unit, known as a Lifeline unit, and a personal alarm, also known as a pendant (the vast majority of units are supplied by Tunstall). Working together, the system connects people to trained staff in a 24/7 response centre.
- 1.3 As context, for 2022/23, the service supported 3,836 Oldham residents. In the 12-month period over 58,000 calls were taken, and almost 6,000 of these were assessed as requiring a physical response from the team (10%) with 2,462 people requiring a fall response.
- 1.4 Whilst the existing technology can work with a digital phone line, when the switch is made in a customer's property, most will plug their unit into the broadband router that then plugs into the newly installed data socket. This creates the following risks:
  - While the router acts as an analogue to digital converter (ATA), this is okay for the customer's telephone, but it's not that simple for the alarm unit. This is because alarm units use complex tone-based protocols that can fail. In addition, the ATA element will be switched off in the long-term.
  - In moving to the new set-up in people's homes, there is no longer a power back-up option, so should the customer lose power in their home, the alarm system will not function
  - Whilst the old/existing PSTN network has meant reliability has been good, the analogue unit will not/cannot proactively tell the Helpline & Response service that it isn't operational (though if the Lifeline unit has a low battery, this is currently flagged and acted upon).
- 1.5 To safeguard a customer, the answer is to change the alarm to digital at the same time as their property's connectivity.

### 2. Impact

#### **Oldham residents: homeowners and private tenants**

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- 2.1 There are approximately 1,800 Oldham households receiving the Helpline & Response service at any one time. This is likely to grow in future years, and the recent Care Technology business case (by PA Consulting) puts forward options for how this might happen.

### **Current position**

- 2.2 Some lines have started to be upgraded to digital in some areas of the borough i.e. when a customer orders a new phone line, the telecoms providers will install a digital line. This has resulted in some Helpline & Response customers already being affected without being aware of this. A note from the service initially went to all customers in February 2023 highlighting this change. All customers received a telephone call from MioCare during August and September 2023, advising them of the issue and asking them to undertake some basic checks and to notify the service should there be an issue, followed up by a letter to all customers. The service's online presence has also been updated with key messages.
- 2.3 There will be a second call to all customers during December, with this then an ongoing exercise every quarter until all customers have safely transferred their phone line.
- 2.4 In addition, the telephone numbers of customers are being shared with BT and Virgin Media O2 (and the aim is also to include Talk Talk and Sky) each quarter, to get the providers analysis on which customers have switched to digital, and also to note what their future work programme looks like across Oldham postcodes. During November, we have received the first set of data back from Virgin Media O2, which represents approximately 17% of the customer base – from this, we have established three customers had non-functional units due to recent engineer visits (these have been subsequently fixed)
- 2.5 Despite all actions taken above, this doesn't provide a long-term, future-proof and safe service. The only way to do this is to invest and upgrade in the alarm unit itself. This paper puts forward the option of rolling out the Legrand Reach IP unit – a digital alarm unit that works with the existing pendants in use. An initial 10 such units have been purchased and are being installed as a trial to allow installers to be familiar with the process and for the procedure to be documented and verified with customers.

### **3. Options**

- 3.1 There are three elements where decisions are required for Oldham Council to have a Helpline & Response service which is digitally compatible and fit for the future:
- a) New digital alarm units.
  - b) Installation for the new units.
  - c) Ongoing SIM annual costs

### **4. Preferred Option**

- 4.1 The options are detailed in the confidential, Part B report on the private agenda.

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## **5. Consultation**

5.1 In order to reach this position and fully understand the impact meetings have been held with:

- Head of Customer and Digital Experience for early situational awareness and to discuss potential options
- Council's IT department – where subsequent meetings have been held with Openreach
- Strategic Housing – for an understanding of their plans with Council-owned PFI homes
- Helpline & Response service
- Central procurement
- MioCare's Digital Project Board

5.2 In September 2023 all customers were called and written to explaining the potential issue of the switchover and asking them to test their current equipment. A Facebook post also went out illustrating the same and is repeated monthly. In addition all customers will be called again during December to again check if their line has been switched over and to test if there are any problems. This will then be repeated quarterly until all units have been installed.

5.3 When the new digital units are in stock and ready to be installed, customers will be prioritised for switchover by the service based on vulnerability factors.

## **6. Financial Implications**

6.1 As set out in the confidential Part B report on the private part of the agenda.

## **7. Legal Implications**

7.1 As set out in the confidential Part B report on the private part of the agenda.

## **8. Co-operative Implications**

8.1 As set out in the confidential Part B report on the private part of the agenda.

## **9. Human Resource Implications**

9.1 Not applicable.

## **10. Risk Assessment**

10.1 As set out in the confidential Part B report on the private part of the agenda.

## **11. IT Implications**

11.1 As set out in the confidential Part B report on the private part of the agenda.

## **12. Property Implications**

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12.1 As set out in the confidential Part B report on the private part of the agenda.

**13. Procurement Implications**

13.1 as set out in the confidential Part B report on the private part of the agenda.

**14. Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

14.1 There are none.

**15. Community cohesion, including crime and disorder implications in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

15.1 There are none.

**16. Oldham Equality Impact Assessment including implications for Children and Young People**

16.1 A PDF version of the Impact assessment is attached to the confidential Part B report on the private part of the agenda.

**17. Key Decision**

17.1 Yes.

**18. Key Decision Reference**

18.1 HSC-19-23

**19. Background Papers**

19.1 Not applicable

**20. Appendices**

20.1 Not applicable.

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## **Report to CABINET**

# **Report requesting contract extension for Care at Home and Extra Care Flexible Purchasing System and seeking authority to enter into procurement exercises in relation to specific activity related to the Care at Home service**

### **Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor Brownridge, Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care.

**Officer Contact:** Jayne Ratcliffe, Managing Director Health & Adult Social Care Community Services

**Report Author:** Neil Clough, Contracts & Quality Manager, Older Adults

**Ext.** 1746

**22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024**

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### **Reason for Decision**

The contracts awarded under the Care at Home and Extra Care Flexible Purchasing System are due to expire on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. This report seeks authority to extend the term of these contracts for up to a further 2 years as these are statutory services. The report also seeks authority to enter into procurement exercises via mini competitions running alongside these contracts, to appoint providers to deliver Care at Home services in 2 clusters of the borough and to deliver Hospital to Home services.

### **Executive Summary**

Care At Home (CAH) services are provided to circa 1,085 adults in the borough and circa 15,000 hours of care are delivered each week. The annual spend on these services is in the region of £17.5m. In addition, the Extra Care Housing (ECH) support 147 people per week at a cost of £2.9m annually.

The CAH services are provided by 10 preferred cluster providers who operate across each of the 5 clusters of the borough. In addition, 3 back up providers have also been appointed to provide additional support where the 10 preferred cluster providers do not have sufficient capacity to meet need and one provider delivers the Extra Care service. CAH services support established Oldham, GM Integrated Care Partnership and national priorities of a home first approach, by supporting people to live well at home, as independently as possible, focusing on the strengths

and assets available to them to support them to remain at home and avoid hospital admissions and more intensive services such as a care home stay.

This report requests authority to extend CAH arrangements for up to 2 additional years. CAH contracts were awarded in April 2019 via a Flexible Purchasing System (ref: FPS DN37347) for a period of 5 years. The option to extend for up to 2 years, utilising 2 one year extensions, was incorporated into the procurement exercise at the time.

In addition to the proposed extension, the report proposes the reliance on providers under the same umbrella ownership is limited by initiating mini-competition procurement exercises to introduce 2 replacement providers in 2 clusters.

The report also seeks authority to enter a mini competition procurement exercise with regards to the delivery of the Home from Hospital service for the following 2 – 5 years beyond the expiry of the current service on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

## **Recommendations**

I refer you to the restricted part of the agenda in order to review the options for this report.

### **1. Consultation**

Routine service monitoring does incorporate the views of service users through the collation of provider Key Performance Indicator returns. The CAH providers are aware that the options regarding extending contracts are under consideration.

### **2. Financial Implications**

I refer you to the restricted part of the agenda for the details of the financial implications provided by Sophie Eade, Senior Accountant.

### **3. Legal Implications**

I refer you to the restricted part of the agenda for the details of the legal implications provided by Mark Hope, Legal and Democratic Services.

### **4. Co-operative Implications**

This work supports the Oldham Council co-operative charter and is an example of working in an open and transparent manner with the market. By working to ensure the services can continue to meet the needs of local residents supports the continuity of a resident focused approach.

The Policy Support Officer has provided the following comments: The proposal to extend existing contracts with Adult Health and social care providers for 2 years and entering procurement exercises with ASC providers, aligns with the Council's co-operative agenda, as well as the Council's corporate priorities as providing services for vulnerable adults is a key statutory service. Failing to renew contracts will not allow residents who are in receipt of support within care homes or within their own homes, to receive adequate care (Mahmuda Khanom, Policy Support Officer 13.11.23).

### Alignment to Corporate Plan

In 2022 the Council published a new Corporate Plan, one of the priorities under this is - 'Healthy, Safe and Well Supported Residents'. This includes putting residents

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first with a commitment to making every service and experience a good one for Oldham residents. The options discussed within this report all have the best interests of the current service users at the forefront to ensure the service and experience they receive remains good.

## **5. Human Resource Implications**

None

## **6. Risk Assessments**

I refer you to the restricted agenda for details of the information regarding risks provided by Vicki Gallacher, Head of Insurance and Information Management.

## **7. IT Implications**

None

## **8. Property Implications**

None

## **9. Procurement Implications**

The report requests extension for the Care at Home and Extra Care provision that was commissioned via competitive procurement exercise in lines with the Council's CPRs under contract ref: DN373470 for a period of five years with an option to extend for up to two years on one year basis. The current contract is ending on the 31 March 2024, and should the one-year extension be granted then the contract will be extended to 31st March 2025.

The Commercial Team is working with the commissioners to develop sourcing strategy and undertake procurement as per the recommendation of this report for the provision of Care at Home service and Hospital to Home service.

(Raj Ahuja, Lead Sourcing Consultant, Social Care and Health 09.11.2023)

## **10. Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

There are no environment and health and safety implications for this report. The commissioned providers will manage their own risks and this will be monitored by the Contracts and Quality manager going forward.

## **11. Community cohesion, including crime and disorder implications in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

The services included within this report are inclusive of everyone within the Borough, as per the agreed criteria within the service specification.

There are no implications on any equality groups identified by the Government

There are no implications on race or community relations

Care at Home Services are available to everyone who meet the relevant criteria.

There are no implications on crime or fear of crime.

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**12. Oldham Equality Impact Assessment Including the impact on Children and Young People)**

Yes – I refer you to the restricted agenda for information regarding Impact Assessments.

**13. Key Decision**

Yes – The services are delivered across all wards of the borough

**14. Key Decision Reference**

HSC-16-23

**15. Background Papers**

None

**16. Appendices**

I refer you to the restricted agenda for the appendices.



**Report to CABINET**

## **Awarding of Occupational Health contract following re-tender exercise**

**Portfolio Holder:**

Cllr A Jabbar, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources

**Officer Contact:** Shelley Kipling, Assistant Chief Executive

**Report Author:** Rebecca Tyrer, Head of Organisational Development

**Ext.** N/A

**22 January 2024**

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### **Reason for Decision**

This report seeks approval for the Council's re-contracting of Occupational Health and associated services from 1 April 2024 for 4 years as part of a Greater Manchester (GM), Human Resources collaboration (a group of Northwest Local Authorities working together on key workforce programmes and contracts) for the reasons outlined below.

### **Executive Summary**

The Council currently use Occupational Health and Physiotherapy services to support employees, meet our statutory obligations and to help reduce sickness absence. These services are presently delivered, through contract, by a procured Occupational Health provider.

The current contract commenced on 1 April 2020 and the current arrangement terminates on the 31 March 2024. This Cabinet report sets out how the Greater Manchester collaboration have retendered the contract and selected a preferred supplier.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that Cabinet endorse to continue with the Greater Manchester collaboration and contract the services of the preferred provider following the tender process for the full contract term of 2 years with the possibility of extension for a further 2 years.

**Awarding of Occupational Health contract following re-tender exercise**

**1 Background**

1.1 The provision of Occupational Health services within Local Authorities is a key requirement and satisfies the Council's following statutory obligations:

- Discharging its duty of care towards employees under Health and Safety legislation by ensuring employees are physically and mentally fit to undertake their duties.
- Undertaking essential Health Screening as required under Health and Safety legislation and Guidance for Hand Arm Vibration (HAVS), Audiometry and other such screening dictated by the employee's role.
- The provision of reasonable adjustments, as required under Equalities legislation, where an employee has a disability impacting on their ability to undertake their duties, and
- Undertaking Ill Health Retirement assessments as required under Pension Fund Regulations

1.3 A retender process took place in readiness for the contract end date. In consultation with the Oldham Procurement team it was agreed that the group would utilise the existing Crown Commercial Services Occupational Health Services Framework.

1.4 Collaborating with other Local Authorities provides Oldham Council with the following advantages:

- A more cost-effective Occupational Health Service delivered through greater economies of scale achieved by the successful supplier, and
- A forum through which benchmarking, the sharing of practice and contract management continued to be made more effective

**2 Current Position**

2.1 The re-tender focused on the following provision:

- A modern and efficient service which exploits technology to improve accessibility, improve turnaround times and reduce costs.
- A service better aligned with wellbeing and absence management agenda.
- A cost-effective service with transparent pricing, and

- 
- Robust performance management provided by stated service standards and challenging Key Performance Indicators

### 3 Options/Alternatives

#### **Option 1 Do nothing.**

This is not practically an option and would result in the expiration of the Council's current service provision and lead to the loss of essential services to the Council and those receiving the service under service level agreement (Schools).

#### **Option 2 Run a separate procurement process independently.**

This would likely result in more costly services and negate the benefits outlined in paragraph 1.4. This will also result in a period of service withdrawal given the timescales in which a new provider is required.

#### **Option 3 Award the contract to the preferred suppliers as outlined above.**

Continue with the Greater Manchester collaboration and contract the services of the preferred provider following the tender process for the full contract term of 2 years with the possibility of extension for a further 2 years.

### 4 Preferred Option

4.1 The preferred and only realistic option is **Option 3**. This is recommended on the following basis:

- The procurement process, led by an Oldham Procurement Manager, on behalf of the Greater Manchester Collaboration, has been robust, inclusive of all collaborating bodies and has identified an effective service for all collaborating bodies, including Oldham.
- The Council has had significant input into the specification of the service and been represented at all stages of selection. The service being procured is fully reflective of the Council's aims and objectives in respect of the service.

### 5 Consultation

5.1 As set out in Part B.

6 **Financial Implications** - As set out in Part B.

7 **Legal Implications** - As set out in Part B.

8 **Co-operative Implications** - As set out in Part B.

9 **Human Resource Implications** - As set out in Part B.

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- 10 **Risk Assessments** - As set out in Part B.
  - 11 **IT Implications** – As set out in Part B.
  - 12 **Property Implications** - As set out in Part B.
  - 13 **Procurement Implications** – As set out in Part B.
  - 14 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications** - As set out in Part B.
  - 15 **Community cohesion, including crime and disorder implications in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**
    - As set out in Part B.
  - 16 **Oldham Equality Impact Assessment including implications for Children and Young People** - As set out in Part B.
  - 17 **Key Decision**
    - 17.1 Yes
  - 18 **Key Decision Reference**
    - 18.1 FCR-04-23
  - 19 **Background Papers**
    - 19.1 Occupational Health Service Provision for the Greater Manchester Authorities Collaboration – Statement of Requirement contained within Part B – Cabinet Report Awarding of Occupational Health contract following re-tender exercise.





## Report to CABINET

### Targeted Youth Support Commissioning and Delivery Intentions including UKSPF from April 2024

#### Portfolio Holder:

Cllr. Shaid Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

**Officer Contact:** Matthew Bulmer, Director for Education, Skills and Early Years

**Report Author:** Andrea Weir, Head of Service for Children and Young People's Commissioning

Laura Farnworth Children's Commissioning Strategic Manager

**22 January 2024**

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## Reason for Decision

The current Targeted Youth Support Contract ends on 31 March 2024. The contract is currently held by Positive Steps. Approval is sought to extend the current contract for a period of 12 months from 1 April 2024 up until 31 March 2025. Statutory services within scope would be:

- Targeted Impartial Information Advice and Guidance (TIAG)
- Young Carers (YC)
- Return Home from Missing Interviews (RHFMI)

In addition, the extension would include the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) contract up until 31 March 2025 currently also delivered by the same provider and funded externally to the council.

## Recommendations

The current contract arrangements with Positive Steps ends on 31 March 2024. The recommendation is to extend the contracts in scope outlined above for a period of 12 months from 1 April 2024 up until 31 March 2025.

## Targeted Youth Support Commissioning and Delivery Intentions including UKSPF from April 2024

### 1. Background

1.1 The Targeted Youth Support (TYS) is currently being delivered by Positive Steps, the contract is due to end on 31 March 2024. This contract is made up of a range of services:

- Return home from missing interviews
- Young Carers support
- Targeted impartial, independent advice and guidance (TIIAG) for targeted groups including those not in education, employment or training (NEET) up to age 18.

1.2 As part of this process, the Targeted Impartial Advice and Guidance Project Board, Management Board and other key stakeholders have been consulted on possible delivery models and specification review.

### 2. Current Position

2.1 The Targeted Youth Service in Oldham is currently delivered by Positive Steps, the contract is due to end on 31 March 2024.

### 3. Options/Alternatives

#### 3.1 Option one:

The contract is extended for a period of 12 months from 1 April 2024 up to 31 March 2025. Services within scope are:

- TIIAG
- Young Carers
- Missing from Home Return Interviews
- UKSPF

During the extension period, the project board overseeing this work will consider all available delivery models and commissioning options.

#### 3.2 Option two:

TIIAG, Young Carers, Missing from Home Return Interviews are re-tendered through an open, robust, competitive commissioning and procurement process via The Chest for a period of two years from 1 April 2024 up to 31 March 2026. The service specification would include UKSPF. Due to time constraints and the need to continue to deliver statutory services this option is not recommended.

### 4. Preferred Option

#### Option One:

The contract is extended for a period of 12 months from 1 April 2024 up to 31 March 2025. Services within scope are:

- 
- TIIAG
  - Young Carers
  - Missing from Home Return Interviews
  - UKSPF

During the extension period, the project board overseeing this work will consider all available delivery models and commissioning options.

**5. Consultation**

5.1 Consultation is not required as this is a continuation of statutory services.

**6. Financial Implications**

6.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

**7. Legal Implications**

7.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

**8. Co-operative Implications**

8.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

**9. Human Resource Implications**

9.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

**10. Risk Assessments**

10.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

**11. IT Implications**

11.1 None

**12. Property Implications**

12.1 None

**13. Procurement Implications**

13.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

**14. Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

14.1 None

**15. Community cohesion, including crime and disorder implications in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

15.1 None

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- 16. Oldham Equality Impact Assessment Including impact on Children and Young People)**
- 16.1 Not required as services will continue to be delivered.
- 17 Key Decision**
- 17.1 Yes
- 18 Key Decision Reference**
- 18.1 CHS-03-23
- 19 Background Papers**
- 19.1 None
- 20 Appendices**
- 20.1 None



**Report to CABINET**

## **Youth Justice Service Extension to contract from 1 April 2024**

**Officer Contact:** Matthew Bulmer, Director for Education, Skills and Early Years

**Report Author:** Laura Farnworth Children's Commissioning Strategic Manager

**22 January 2024**

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### **Reason for Decision**

The current Youth Justice Service (YJS) Contract ends on 31 March 2024. The contract is currently held by Positive Steps. Approval is sought to extend the current arrangements for a period of 12 months from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. This will enable Oldham Council and its partners to continue to fulfil their statutory duties and meet the requirements of the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

### **Recommendations**

The current contract arrangements with Positive Steps are extended for a period of 12 months up to 31 March 2025 within the funding envelope awarded by YJB.

## Youth Justice Services Extension to Contract from 1 April 2024

### 1 Background

- 1.1 The Youth Justice Service in Oldham is currently delivered by Positive Steps, the contract is due to end on 31 March 2024. The current contract is performing well and meeting outcomes which are annually agreed with the YJB and the overall management board. At its last inspection, the service was rated Good by Ofsted.
- 1.2 Options regarding the future delivery of the YJS have been discussed and considered.
- 1.3 The service is regarded as high performing and is a statutory duty. The extension being sought would provide a period of stability for service delivery. If approval is given to the extension, this would avoid possible gaps in statutory service delivery affecting some of our most vulnerable and at-risk young people.
- 1.4 As part of this process, the Youth Justice Board, Management Board and other key stakeholders would be consulted on future delivery models.

### 2. Current Position

- 2.1 The Youth Justice Service in Oldham is currently delivered by Positive Steps; the contract is due to end on 31 March 2024. The current contract is performing well and meeting outcomes which are annually agreed with the YJB and the overall management board. At its last inspection, the service was rated Good by Ofsted.

### 3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 Option 1 – approve the extension to the current contract for a period of 12 months, from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 allowing the Council and key partners to discharge their statutory duties.
- 3.2 Option 2 – to bring the service in house. This option is not recommended at this time.

### 4. Preferred Option

- 4.1 Option 1 – approve the extension to the current contract for a period of 12 months, from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 allowing the Council and key partners to discharge their statutory duties.

### 5 Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation will take place during the extension period if approved, governed through the YJS Management Board. This will include the wider partnership, young people and YJB.

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6 **Financial Implications**

6.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

7 **Legal Implications**

7.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

8. **Co-operative Implications**

8.1 The preferred option would support the Council's Cooperative agenda and will provide a resident focused service.

9 **Human Resource Implications**

9.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

10 **Risk Assessments**

10.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

11 **IT Implications**

11.1 None

12 **Property Implications**

12.1 None

13 **Procurement Implications**

13.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

14 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

14.1 None

15 **Community cohesion, cohesion, including crime and disorder implications in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

15.1 The preferred option would ensure that we are providing fair and equitable services to all our customers and would ensure that the cohesion or crime implications are fully considered including crime and the fear of crime.

16 **Oldham Equality Impact Assessment including impact on Children and Young People**

16.1 No

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17 **Key Decision**

17.1 Yes

18 **Key Decision Reference**

18.1 CHS-04-23

19 **Background Papers**

None

20 **Appendices**

20.1 None



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