

Report to CABINET

Levelling Up Oldham: The Oldham Economic Review of Economic Transformation and Civic Pride

Portfolio Holder:

Cllr Chadderton, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for
Regeneration and Housing

Senior Officer:

Harry Catherall, Chief Executive of Oldham Council

Report Author:

Emma Barton, Executive Director of Place and Economic Growth

25 July 2022

Reason for Decision:

Oldham's residents are rightly proud of the place we call home. From the monumental mills that remind us of our heritage in the cotton industry, to communities where the impulse to help out a neighbour is still strong, to the glorious Peaks on our doorstep: Oldham has a lot going for it, but it is recognised that we have untapped potential that is untapped.

Cabinet approval is sought for formally accept the recommendations of the independent Oldham Economic Review Board, through their report: ***Levelling Up Oldham: The Oldham Economic Review of Economic Transformation and Civic Pride. (March 2022)***

Recommendations

Cabinet members are asked to:

- 1) Note the findings of the Commission and endorse the recommendations set out in the review and accept and approve them
- 2) Confirm that the recommendations will feed into the work programme / agenda for the refreshed Oldham Partnership to continue with wider partnerships for the accountability of deploying relevant actions and delivering solutions to improve the lives of Oldham's residents.

Executive Summary

Alun Francis, the Principal at Oldham College was asked to lead a Commission to help plot a brighter economic future for the borough: utilising the great leaders in Oldham, and drawing on expertise from Greater Manchester, the wider region and nationally to turn the Government's Levelling Up mantra into a reality for Oldham's communities.

The Review began in September 2021, however the Government's "Levelling Up White Paper" was delayed and was not published until February 2022, which meant that it was not available until the final phase of the Review was due to complete. There is however, considerable overlap between the method of approach taken in the White Paper, and the approach taken in the Review – with the former considering issues of geographical disparity from the perspective of national systems and policies, while the Review takes a "local" approach, focussing on the options for improving one particular place.

On the conclusion of the Commission, the documents are in the public domain, however this report is to formally allow the Council to accept the findings and to embed the recommendations into the work of the refreshed Oldham Partnership.

***Levelling Up Oldham:
The Oldham Economic Review of Economic Transformation and Civic Pride***

1 Background

- 1.1 Oldham’s position in Greater Manchester and the youth and talent of our population means Oldham could be a greater place to base an ambitious, innovative and growing business. But like lots of other places in the UK, we’ve faced challenges as the economy has changes. We need to do something different if our residents are to have the opportunities and successes they serve.
- 1.2 We want every young person in Oldham to know they’ll have the chance of a great career without having to leave their hometown. We want to give people options when its time for a career change, or they’d like to upskill. We want every family to have decent home and income, as well as activities and opportunities on the doorstep to boost pride and make Oldham a fun place to live.
- 1.3 Alun Francis, the Principal at Oldham College was asked to lead a Commission to help plot a brighter economic future for the borough: utilising the great leaders in Oldham, and drawing on expertise from Greater Manchester, the wider region and nationally to turn the Government’s Levelling Up mantra into a reality for Oldham’s communities.
- 1.4 The Economic Review was undertaken under a remit to examine the town’s approach to improving its economic prospectus. It was conducted through a partnership between Oldham College and the University of Manchester, which has helped ensure that the Review had access to the expertise needed, but also maintained independence.
- 1.5 The Review began in September 2021, however the Government’s “Levelling Up White Paper” was delayed and was not published until February 2022, which meant that it was not available until the final phase of the Review was due to complete. There is however, considerable overlap between the method of approach taken in the White Paper, and the approach taken in the Review – with the former considering issues of geographical disparity from the perspective of national systems and policies, while the Review takes a “local” approach, focussing on the options for improving one particular place.
- 1.6 The Review has intentionally mirrored the themes in the Levelling Up White Paper. The aim is to help Oldham be clear about how it might engage positively in the new policy landscape, with a strong focus on the twin themes which have come to characterise the meaning of “levelling up”: economic transformation and civic pride.
- 1.7 Oldham’s residents are rightly proud of the place we call home. From the monumental mills that remind us of our heritage in the cotton industry, to communities where the impulse to help out a neighbour is still strong, to the glorious Peaks on our doorstep: Oldham has a lot going for it, but it is recognised that we have untapped potential
- 1.8 Cabinet approval is sought for formally accept the recommendations of the independent Oldham Economic Review Board, through their report: ***Levelling Up Oldham: The Oldham Economic Review of Economic Transformation and Civic Pride. (March 2022)***

2 Levelling Up White Paper Policy Context:

- 2.1 **Context:** the problem The Levelling Up White Paper provides an overview of the history and characteristics which shape and drive economic, social and geographical disparities in the country. This chapter provides an introduction to the way these issues are evident in Oldham, and how they relate to structure of its economy and the decline of some of its main industries. It describes Oldham's main challenges, provides a summary of key data, and summarises recent trends including where progress has been made in the shaping of its future.
- 2.2 **Economic purpose** - The White Paper sets out five pillars through which it intends to drive levelling up policy, alongside a set of six capitals and twelve policy 'missions'. However, it is also clear about the ultimate destination, which is to create a "new model of economic growth, public and private investment and a high skill, high wage economy". While successful places require strong public services and have a clear role for community and voluntary activity, the focus of policy is on "supporting the private sector" as the "real engine of wealth creation – to invest more, grow more and take more risks". This chapter discusses the core challenge of defining Oldham's economic purpose and why having a clear and relentless commitment to this is important in driving change over the long term.
- 2.3 **Business and Innovation** - Improving productivity, pay and living standards are a core theme and objective of the White Paper, with a strong emphasis on growing the private sector, especially through business innovation and improving infrastructure such as transport and digital connectivity. This chapter focusses on the importance of private sector growth in Oldham and the role of private, public and voluntary sector partners in supporting employment and local enterprise.
- 2.4 **Skills and Jobs** - Opportunities and improved public services, with a particular emphasis on education and skills, are central to the White Paper proposals. This chapter focusses primarily on skills, and the issues which Oldham needs to solve, in order to fulfil its ambitions.
- 2.5 **Civic Pride and 'a Sense of Place'** - The White Paper focusses a great deal of attention on restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, particularly around town centre regeneration, housing and crime. This chapter focusses on the related theme of 'social fabric', the role of 'community wealth building' and the importance of the town centre and the borough's high streets and the role of civic pride within Oldham
- 2.6 **Institutions** - The White Paper makes very clear recommendations about systems for delivering change, alongside the importance of local institutions, capacity and clear "missions" and targets which provide a focus for action and a source of accountability. This chapter focusses on the systems for delivery within Oldham, as part of Greater Manchester, and what can be done to improve these.

3 Summary of Recommendations:

- 3.1 **THE LONG GAME:** Oldham must set out its long term ambitions and aspirations, with missions and targets, for the aims and ambitions for Oldham through to 2030.
- 3.2 **ECONOMIC PURPOSE:** Breaking Oldham's dependence on "foundational economy" employment should be a central target in reshaping its long-term economic purpose. Oldham needs to set out clear plans for how it intends to achieve this. Relentlessly anchor all future activity and projects back to the delivery of Oldham's long-term transformation, that it is organised through a set of coherent sub-strategies, with missions and targets which are directly connected to the delivery of that transformation.

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- 3.3 **BUSINESS AND INNOVATION:** A clear strategy for productivity and business, which includes manufacturing, business support, enterprise and innovation, all within a single strategic framework, with a clear set of missions and targets around improving productivity, increasing wages and boosting standards of living. Proactive engagement with neighbouring authorities in the Northern Gateway, and in particular the AMPI project to support manufacturing. Liaise with Innovation GM for Oldham to play a leading role in extending the emerging innovation network in Greater Manchester, into Oldham town centre. Develop a “best practice” programme for anchor institutions. • Develop a broader strategy for social enterprise, including its engagement with Greater Manchester initiatives to build capacity, share and develop expertise.
- 3.4 **SKILLS AND JOBS:** Take a lead in setting the missions and targets for adult skills, with negotiation with local providers (the two main ones are Oldham Council and Oldham College) and GMCA, which will shape the use of adult funding in the borough to 2030. This should include its own analysis of the challenge of adult skills, and the levels of investment needed to make the borough competitive in the labour markets of Greater Manchester. Capacity build its general further education college to maximise its impact, including the delivery of a coherent alternative set of pathways, both work-based and classroom based, for those young people and adults seeking to progress into careers outside of the residential three year degree route, should be a clear policy priority. Undertake a review of post-16 provision which assesses the positive and negative impacts of competition between providers throughout the post-16 phase (16-18, adult, apprenticeships and higher education), whether this is helping or hindering the pursuit of more effective provision, and what can be done to improve collective impact. Oldham should pilot and adapted the LSIP model, addressing skills supply and demand in a much broader economic context including business support and innovation. It recommended that this work is led through a partnership between Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Oldham College.
- 3.5 **CIVIC PRIDE AND ‘A SENSE OF PLACE’:** Receive and act on the Institute for Place Management diagnostic report on ways that town centre management can be improved. Continue to work with partners from all sectors to enhance private sector engagement in the regeneration of the town centre, and increase investment from all sources. An assessment is built into all current and future projects, to ensure that their purpose is clear, and their contribution is robust, transparent and accountable to the “long game”. Build on the mill strategy to a brownfield mill redevelopment project as a demonstrator of new technologies and materials (including environmental/net zero) of best practice and a site for future excellence in both high-level skills, apprenticeships and firm innovation. Review the potential for a stronger neighbourhood approach to those areas where multiple indicators – education, skills, health and crime – appear to overlap and consider focussed partnerships to test out new approaches to improvement. Develop a strategic plan to protect and develop its key voluntary, community, cultural and sporting institutions, and a strategy for how they, along with the anchor institutions, can work together to build the foundations of the long-term transformational plan
- 3.6 **INSTITUTIONS:** Recognise the mutual importance of the six capitals in driving improvements and develop a strategy to capacity build and support key institutions. Set up a new overarching ‘levelling up’ board, with independent representation, to oversee the delivery of the 2030 vision, with clear reporting around the local “levelling up” Missions and targets, back to the Council and Oldham Leadership Board. Work with Greater Manchester partners to ensure transparency about the investment of resources and expertise into Oldham and the impact of these on Oldham’s levelling up vision for 2030. Work with the University and the college, and other key institutions, to develop a bespoke leadership and training programme, to focus the “common purpose” of all stakeholders around the 2030 vision for Oldham.
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4 **Consultation**

- 4.1 Extensive consultation with panels, experts, think tanks, partners and community representatives took place, as part of the Commission work.
- 4.2 During the launch of the OER findings, further engagement took place with wider stakeholders, partners, Members and MPs.
- 4.3 As various programmes of work develop through the Oldham Partnership, further engagement and consultation will be needed.

5 **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 There are no financial obligations for the Council to consider at this stage in accepting the findings of the OER. Any financial implications for the Council that may arise from the Oldham Partnership programmes of work will be the subject of future reports.
(James Postle - Finance Manager)

6 **Legal Services Comments**

- 6.1 There are no legal issues for the Council to consider at this stage in accepting the findings of the OER. Once acceptance translates into action then the Council will need to make sure it conducts and takes proper account of all necessary consultations and continues to comply with the Constitution in particular the Contract Procedure Rules, Financial Procedure Rules and if Council assets are involved, the Land and Property Protocol.
(Rebecca Boyle, Group Solicitor – Corporate Team)

7 **Human Resources Comments**

- 7.1 There are no HR matters for consideration in accepting the findings of the OER.
(Catherine Pearson – Strategic HR Lead)

8. **Co-operative Agenda**

- 8.1 The recommendations are in line with the Co-operative Agenda, the creation of a refreshed approach to supporting the economic prosperity of the borough. (Amanda Richardson - Policy Manager)

9 **Risk Assessments**

- 9.1 There are no specific risks for consideration in accepting the findings of the OER at this stage. The detailed risks and benefits will become apparent as the Council begins the detailed work to deliver the aspirations of the OER. (Mark Stenson – Assistant Director of Corporate Governance and Strategic Financial Management)

10 **IT Implications**

- 10.1 N/A

11 **Property Implications**

11.1 N/A

12 **Procurement Implications**

12.1 There are no Procurement issues for consideration in accepting the findings of the OER.
(Dan Cheetham, Procurement.)

14 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

14.1 N/A

15 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**

15.1 N/A at this stage of accepting the findings of the OER.
(Natalie Downs, Stronger Communities)

17 **Implications for Children and Young People**

17.1 Positive outcomes, opportunities and aspirations noted within the findings and recommendations of this work.

18 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**

18.1 N/A

19 **Key Decision**

19.1 Yes

20 **Key Decision Reference**

20.1 **ESR-14-22**

Appendices – Levelling Up Oldham Reports

Appendix A – Executive Summary

Appendix B – Full Report