

Cabinet Report of Finance and Corporate Resources Portfolio

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

This report provides an update on the main activity since the last Council meeting relating to portfolio responsibilities.

Finance - Since the last report to Council, a huge amount of work has been undertaken to develop the savings options necessary to allow the development of a balanced budget for 2024/25 which was agreed at Full Council on 28 February. Whilst the Provisional Local Government Settlement was disappointing, the Council did benefit from the recent notification of an additional £500m for social care.

Whilst the £2.3m additional funding is welcomed, the impact this has on the underlying deficit is limited. The Administration has collectively worked hard to devise a package of measures which include the delivery of £15.8m worth of new savings over the period 2024/25 and 2025/26 which will help deliver a balanced budget.

Revenues and Benefits - The first phase of the council's roll out of Gov Tech, which will improve customer experience and back-office efficiency in Revenues and Benefits, has been successfully implemented. The first phase of the project went live on 29 January and includes Direct Debit requests, Single Occupier Discount requests and cancellations, and changes of address/moves in and out of the borough.

Customer Services – The opening of a new Access Oldham is scheduled for May 2024 offering a new, accessible one-stop shop for council services in the heart of Spindles shopping centre. The new space will be accessed from opposite Rhode Island on the ground floor of Spindles.

February saw the launch of the initial face to face resident offer across four of our five districts with the launch of North District scheduled for summer 2024 following the extensive refurbishment of Royton Town Hall.

Residents can now access a wider range of help and support at each site including financial support and advice, housing queries, mental health support and signposting and support in accessing all other council and partner services. Each district has trained staff from Tameside, Oldham and Glossop (TOG) MIND, Citizen's Advice, the council, and many other partners available to support local people.

February also saw the launch of 'Donate IT Oldham', a device gifting programme for residents in significant need of a device. The scheme will provide refurbished laptops, smartphones, and tablets that businesses and members of the public no longer need.

When surveyed almost 40% of Oldham residents said they, or someone they lived with, experienced some form of difficulty getting online because they lack suitable digital devices and internet connections at home. Donate IT Oldham is committed to reducing this figure and helping as many residents as possible. We have a target of receiving a minimum of 500 devices from residents, business, partners and staff across 2024 that can either be recycled or refurbished.

IT - Cyber security continues to be a significant risk facing local authorities across the country. In response to a request from the Home Office, the IT service are assessing our compliance with the National Cyber Security Centre's new Cyber Assessment Framework standard – a set of 14 security and resilience principles for organisations. A whole business change approach is being programmed to adapt to these new required standards. As part of our wider security activity we are investing in a new data backup solution which will make us even more resilient against growing cyber security threats by protecting data in the event of attack or disaster.

Procurement - The Procurement Team has progressed the council's commitment to driving social value by working with the Social Value Portal to create a social value policy for the council and the borough. This policy sets out the approach that the council takes as well as our work with partners, suppliers, and service providers to ensure additional benefits for residents and the borough are delivered through all council activity and spend - creating the best possible outcomes for our residents and communities.

As part of this work we are creating an updated Local Needs Analysis. This is a document which includes a summary of insights to highlight the areas of highest deprivation and needs within the local community. It provides guidance for stakeholders, suppliers, developers, contractors, and others working in Oldham to develop more robust social value strategies.

Green Summit - On Friday 8th March the Council held Oldham's first Green Summit at Oldham Event Centre at Boundary Park. The event brought together businesses and other key organisations from across Oldham to join the Council in working to tackle climate change and make Oldham the greenest borough in Greater Manchester. The summit was an opportunity to share best practice and network and showcased the help available locally and regionally to help businesses improve their environmental performance and reap benefits such as lower energy bills, increased competitiveness and reputational excellence.

Green Network Fund - On Monday 26th February, Cabinet approved a report to accept £8.7m in grant funding from the Green Heat Network Fund. This grant funding will support delivery of an innovative hybrid low carbon heat network for Oldham Town Centre, expanding and decarbonising the existing heat network at St Mary's which is currently owned by First Choice Homes Oldham and adding a range of Council and new residential sites to be supplied with low carbon heat from a range of sources such as the air, wastewater and minewater.

The new heat network will save more carbon than the entire carbon footprint arising from the Council's consumption of gas to heat buildings and will provide a secure energy source for town centre buildings for the future.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.