

Housing and Licensing Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Elaine Taylor
Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing & Licensing

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

Housing Round Table

At the Council's inaugural Housing Roundtable, which was led by Leader of the Council and took place on Thursday 1 February 2024, we pledged to get 500 new social homes built in the borough over the next five years as part of our local response to the national housing crisis. The roundtable discussed housing standards, demand and supply challenges in Oldham and called on partners from across the room to make a commitment to building a local solution to a national crisis.

Senior representatives from all of Oldham's major social housing providers were at the event, along with private landlords, letting agents, developers and housebuilders, and charities, together with the Council, to importantly discuss how partners can work together to tackle the national housing crisis issues at a local level to directly support Oldham's residents. Among those discussing the reality of the crisis were three members of Oldham Poverty Truth Commission, who shared their own experience of navigating the social housing system.

With more than 7,000 families on the council housing register and over 500 families in temporary accommodation - among them are 500 children – the issues under discussion at the Round Table event included the national problems with housing supply, driven by factors such as the high costs of renting and home ownership, the lack of Government funding to invest in social homes, differences in the definition of truly "affordable" homes, and a reduction in the supply of social and affordable housing.

Housing Delivery

In early January 2024 GMCA announced the successful applications for their GM Brownfield Housing Fund Years 2 and 3, with 3 Oldham schemes provisionally allocated funding. Funding has been awarded 3 schemes at total value of £6.4m helping to deliver 397 new homes.

Enabling works on the Civic Centre site, as part of the Town Centre Strategic Partnership with Muse, commenced on the 26th of February for a 2-week period. Significant progress has also been made with Muse in relation to the completion of an initial draft Strategic Development Framework for the Town Centre, which is scheduled to go out for public consultation during May/June of this year, with final Cabinet endorsement proposed for September 2024.

An application by the Council for £1.9M has been submitted to Round 3 of the One Public Estate Brownfield Housing Land Remediation Fund, in relation to the Southlink site, to accelerate the delivery of up to 190 new homes, including 40 % affordable homes. This would be in addition to the £3.15M of OPE funding that has already been secured via Round 2, in relation to the core Town Centre Partnership sites of the Civic Centre, former Magistrates Court and former Leisure Centre sites.

Establishment and first meeting of the newly formed Housing Recovery Board, including a Housing Supply sub-group, with a focus on increasing and accelerating the delivery of new homes wherever possible.

Planning

Further to the decision on this Council meeting's agenda to adopt the Places for Everyone Joint Plan, councillors will be aware that the council have been preparing our own Local Plan for Oldham to sit alongside PfE. This will cover more locally-specific planning policies to add to and build upon the strategic policies in PfE.

Consultation on a Draft Local Plan closed on 25th February. We received XX responses to the consultation. Whilst this is perhaps a lower response than we hoped for, it reflects the fact that the policies we're proposing in the Local Plan are not particularly contentious and are generally being received positively. However, we did receive some helpful comments from those that did respond to the consultation, and I will reflect on these with the planning officers as we amend the Draft Local Plan and finalise the Local Plan that we want to take forward and submit for Examination.

The next stage will be the Publication of the Local Plan we want to take forward to examination in Autumn 2024, where members of the public and any other interested parties will be able to make formal representations on this Publication version of the Local Plan. Those representations will then be submitted along with the Local Plan in early 2025 for the Inspector to consider when they are examining the Local Plan. All being well with the examination, I would hope that the council would be in a position to adopt the Local Plan in late 2025 / early 2026.

Separate to these planning policies, we have committed to preparing a series of District Place Plans across the borough, under a borough-wide Economic Place Vision. We're starting with District Place Plans in the West and North districts but will then roll them out to the other three districts later in the year.

A District Place Plan is intended as something of a delivery strategy for physical interventions and investments in each district that will help to unlock their economic potential. As such, officers will be engaging with councillors, by district, on the preparation of these District Place Plans, to help identify what the key challenges and opportunities are in each district and so establish a list of priority projects for physical investment in each district. These District Place Plans, sitting under the borough-wide Economic Place Vision, will then help the council to develop proposals for those projects and to bid into appropriate funding opportunities to make those projects a reality.

Taxi Licensing

The Authority continues to receive increased new driver applications after the Taxi Policy was amended earlier this year. I can now report that since the changes to the policy in June 2023, the Council has issued an additional 727 new taxi driver licenses, increasing the number of licensed drivers to 2,042. In addition to this, the Council has another 878 applications pending validation of documents and mandatory driver training. This is a positive outcome as it allows for local regulation of drivers to protect the public.

We are also continuing to see an increase in the number of vehicles licensed locally – with an additional 422 private hire vehicles now licensed through the Council - joining the existing fleet of 1,035 private hire vehicles.

Selective Licensing of Private Landlords

The 5-year scheme that commenced in June 2022 in certain neighbourhoods of the Borough involves private landlords applying for a license and having a condition audit carried out. So far, the Council has licensed 414 properties with another 422 applications being processed. In addition, 218 condition audits have been carried out and any issues identified being highlighted to the landlord and remedied as part of the conditions imposed.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.