

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Abdul Jabbar
Cabinet Member for Value for Money and Sustainability

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

Finance: The Council's accounts for 2023/24 were submitted to the auditors on 7th June, and Oldham's audit is expected to start in September 2024. The accounts show a financially neutral position for 2023/24, however, this is after an additional contribution from reserves of £16.1m, slightly less than the forecast of £16.6m reported to Cabinet in the Quarter 3 budget monitoring report.

I have previously highlighted the financial pressures faced by this Council, which mirror those faced by many other Councils across the country. The Council is facing unprecedented demands for many services, particularly the increased number and cost of children being looked after by the Council and families needing temporary accommodation.

Work is now under way to prepare budget updates for 2024/25. The position at the end of Quarter One will be presented to Cabinet in August. The collection rate for 2023/24 was 94.11% for council tax, above the GM average of 94.00%. For business rates it was 96.22%, just below the GM average of 96.55%. This is a much-improved position from a few years ago.

At the end of May, the in-year collection rate for Council Tax was 19.39% and for Business Rates was 20.48%. Whilst it is still very early in the financial year, it is encouraging to note that rates are similar to last year, despite the financial challenges facing many of our residents and businesses. Additional technology continues to be introduced to increase efficiency, shorten processing times and improve the resident experience by reducing repeat contact. Since the Govtech system was introduced in January the number of automated processes has increased from zero to nearly 60%.

IT & Digital: Over the past three months, IIT has been instrumental in delivering key projects to support the council's transition to a digitally enabled local authority:

- **8x8 Software Telephony Implementation:** New digital telephony software has been implemented across the council driving savings through the removal of unrequired phone connections.
- **MioCare Helpline System Replacement:** The critical replacement of the MioCare Helpline System has been completed, and the new system is now fully operational.
- **GIS:** a new web application has been developed and launched which provides public access to the council's mapping system.
- **LOCATA Housing:** a new LOCATA Housing system is now live which will improve residents experience of the service and ease administrative and staffing pressures in the Housing service.
- **Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) Transition:** Nationally the PSTN will close in 2027 with a requirement to move current devices to digital networks. We are progressing with auditing all impacted sites across the borough to prepare for the transition and assess any upgrades or changes that may be required.
- **GM One Fibre Network:** IT is working with GM to activate the GM One fibres across the borough. The roll out of GM One will provide a single active network available for public services across the city region driving efficiency and security.

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- **IT Support for Key Refurbishments:** Ongoing IT infrastructure work is being conducted for key regeneration projects throughout the Borough, including The Old Library, Royton Town Hall, Alexandra Park, and the new Family Hubs.

HR & OD

Greater Jobs – New Website: Greater Jobs is a local government job search website collectively owned and hosted by the 10 Greater Manchester authorities and now also includes other authorities across the northwest. It was set up by the GM HR Directors collaboration as there is no nationally owned site for applying for Local Government jobs – unlike other public sector employers. In early June we moved from our current provider to a new provider which increases our ability to attract new applicants and has features which will make applying for roles a much-improved experience, as well as supporting our ability internally to report on relevant recruitment data. The HR&OD team in Oldham have worked tirelessly with the GM Collaboration to get our element of the jobsite live and ensuring minimum disruption for applicants and advertising managers whilst a transition to the new site was in progress.

Climate Change and Green New Deal

The Council has secured £1.3m in grant funding from the Local Net Zero Accelerator programme to establish a Green New Deal Delivery Partnership which will bring together large-scale investment from the commercial sector with Oldham's unique approach to Community Led Energy Planning. A formal tender opportunity will commence later this year for a commercial low carbon infrastructure partner to build a pipeline of low carbon infrastructure projects for the borough. The key project remains the Oldham Low Carbon Heat Network, and the Council has secured around £9m from the Green Heat Network Fund to further develop feasibility and delivery work. The Council held its highly successful inaugural Green Summit focusing on opportunities for businesses to de-carbonise and become more competitive, and the Council continues to progress a range of projects alongside the pivotal OGND Delivery Partnership.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.