

Present: Councillor McLaren (Chair)
Councillors Iqbal, Moores and Williamson

Also in Attendance:

Paul Clifford	Director of Economy
Nasir Dad	Director of Environment
Andrew Mather	Constitutional Services

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ghafoor and Ibrahim.

Portfolio Holders Councillors Shah and Taylor and the Deputy Chief Executive (Place), Emma Barton also submitted their apologies.

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**

5 **TAXI LICENSING UPDATE**

The Director of Environment submitted a report and gave a presentation updating Members on the status of the private hire and hackney carriage trade in Oldham.

The Presentation provided an overview of the licensing policy, highlighting Oldham Council's proactive collaboration with authorities across Greater Manchester to establish and uphold minimum standards. Notable among recent changes, approved in June 2023, were amendments aimed at reducing regulatory burdens while upholding paramount concerns for public safety and maintaining high industry standards. These changes included the removal of the lower age limit for vehicles entering the taxi fleet, replacing front license plates with more practical window discs, and updating operator door signs to reflect licensing-issued signage. Such adjustments were designed to streamline processes without compromising the integrity of safety measures.

It was reported that there has been a significant increase in the number of applicants and licensed drivers since April 2023, prompting a thorough review of operational processes and staffing requirements to ensure continued service effectiveness. Emphasis was placed on the rigorous vetting procedures in place to safeguard passenger and public safety, underscoring Oldham Council's commitment to maintaining high standards within the industry.

Trade liaison was also highlighted, emphasizing the ongoing dialogue and collaboration with industry representatives to address concerns and facilitate policy adjustments. Improved dialogue and understanding is proving effective in developing policy and whilst some trade requests cannot always be supported, communication is strong and effective, and the trade associations assist their members with issues that arise from time to time

Challenges facing the industry were acknowledged, particularly regarding outdated legislation and ambiguous regulatory guidance from the Department for Transport. To address these concerns, project work was outlined, encompassing various aspects such as reviewing vehicle age limits, enhancing accessibility standards, and reassessing DBS check frequencies. These initiatives underscored the Council's proactive stance in advocating for regulatory clarity and promoting industry sustainability. A particular challenge came from a number of authorities which were actively seeking to attract licence applications from other areas. The lower fees offered by these authorities made it difficult to compete on price alone.

In conclusion, the report reaffirmed the Council's commitment to collaboration with Greater Manchester authorities and its dedication to integrating taxi licensing considerations into the broader framework of the next Local Transport Strategy, thereby ensuring continued progress and resilience within the industry.

In response to a member question concerning the carrying of 'psychiatric service dogs' the Director of Environment undertook to check the position and report back to members.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Panel notes the report, the changes in policy and the impact this has had on driver/vehicle applicants, the current approach towards engagement with the trade, and the challenges that exist in terms of ongoing compliance in the industry.

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CREATING A BETTER PLACE UPDATE

The Director of Economy submitted a report and gave a presentation providing an update on the Creating a Better Place (CABP) programme. Oldham's commitment to fostering a sense of belonging, safety, and pride was underscored, alongside efforts to bolster the local economy through social enterprise, business support, and employment opportunities. The CABP programme was highlighted as instrumental in securing substantial external funding for regeneration projects, notably through partnerships such as with MUSE to develop up to 2,000 new homes in strategic locations within Oldham Town Centre.

The CABP program continues to make strides in regeneration efforts, delivering significant revenue savings and securing external funding exceeding £70 million. Progress includes initiatives like the Green New Deal, Broadway Green development, and housing targets achievement. Social value remains a priority, with contractual commitments ensuring community benefits such as apprenticeships and job creation.

An overview of the CABP's impact on the Town Centre, housing developments, and the Green New Deal was provided. The program's success stems from robust community consultation, ensuring local priorities are integrated into project planning and execution. Notable achievements include progress on the Oldham Town Centre Low Carbon District Heat Network and securing partnerships to advance housing projects and sustainability initiatives.

Updates on the progress of CABP projects were given, emphasizing the program's commitment to transparency and timely execution. Members were encouraged to review the accompanying presentation for deeper insights into project advancements and social value commitments.

The importance of community engagement in shaping CABP projects was reiterated, emphasizing ongoing consultation efforts through digital and in-person events. The Big Oldham Conversation served as a platform for feedback from residents, businesses, and specialist groups, ensuring alignment with local aspirations and needs throughout project development stages.

Members commented about the need to ensure the Town Centre and buildings were accessible and safe for persons with disabilities. Potentially hazardous steps and street furniture were given as examples of obstacles. It was suggested that involving a disability focus group could identify problems.

Members noted the significant progress that had been achieved and successes such as attracting external funding. It was suggested that more could be done to make the public aware of the achievements and progress. Displays and information stalls were suggested. It was also suggested that a Town Centre tour for members should take place after the May elections.

RESOLVED: That the report and good progress of the Creating a Better Place programme be noted.

7

WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered its Work Programme for 2023/24.

RESOLVED: That Officers and Cabinet Members be thanked for their contributions to the work of the Scrutiny Board in the current year.

8

KEY DECISION DOCUMENT

The Board noted the Key Decision Document, which records key decisions that the authority is due to take.

9

RULE 13 AND 14

The Chair reported that there was nothing to report under this heading.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.10 pm

