



Oldham
Council

Report to Place, Economic Growth and Environment Scrutiny Board

Oldham Council Libraries Performance Update

Portfolio Holder:

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Purpose of the Report

To provide an update on Oldham Council Libraries' Performance, highlighting capital and revenue programmes.

Recommendations

To note the report.

Overview and Scrutiny Board

[24th July 2024]

Oldham Council Libraries Update

1. Background

Between April 2021 and July 2022 Heritage, Libraries and Arts (HLA) became an integrated service. This was undertaken to ensure the service could meet required budgetary savings and become a more agile organisation, meeting the needs of its diverse service users. Total recurring savings achieved £250k.

The HLA service is an integrated team that combines the offer of the following services:

- Gallery Oldham
- Oldham Libraries
- Oldham Local Studies and Archives
- Oldham Theatre Workshop

Our mission is to make a positive difference to people's lives by connecting them to high-quality information and creative experiences.

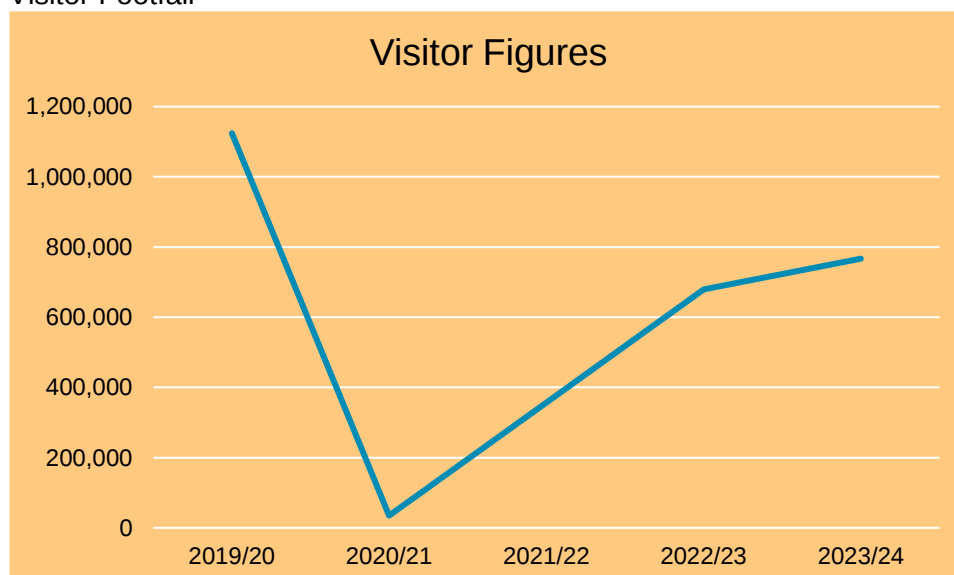
The integrated team have worked together to develop a new HLA Strategy – available on our website [About Heritage, Libraries & Arts - Oldham HLA](#)

This report will focus primarily **on library activity**; however we work across the service on seamless and integrated services and projects.

2. Current Position

2.1 Key Library Performance Stats

2.1.1 Visitor Footfall



The service is gradually getting back to pre-pandemic levels which is in line with regional and national trends. Oldham, after Manchester, has highest visitor footfall in GM.

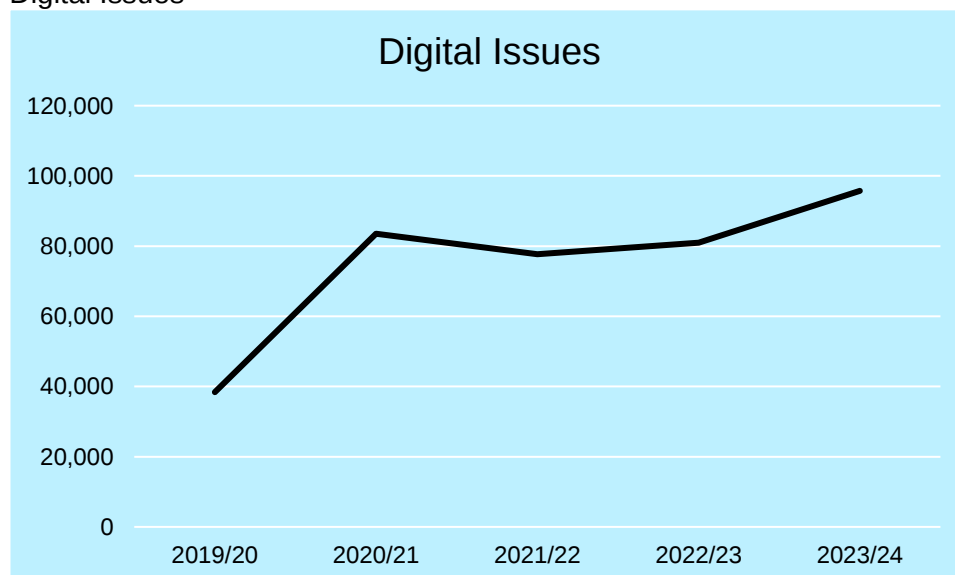
Please note Royton library has been operating from a temporary site offering limited service, which affects total visitor footfall.

2.1.2 Physical Issues



Physical issue figures have also increased year on year but at a much slower rate and seem to be plateauing. We are undertaking more detailed analysis of reading patterns to inform stock purchase and focus on more reader development initiatives to increase loans with children and young people such as StoryFest and Summer Reading Challenge (see 5.1) and special collections based on borrower trends.

2.1.3 Digital Issues



Digital issues saw an exponential rise during the pandemic which has remained high post pandemic.

2.1.4 Annual Report –See [LINK](#) for full HLA Annual Report 2023/24

2.2 Resident Focus - Place-based Integrated Model of deliver

2.2.1 As key Place Based Integrated Hubs, libraries are essential community hubs, working collaboratively with a range of partners, including various council departments, NHS and health providers, community groups and the business

sector, to deliver vital access to support and services for residents in the heart of their communities. ***See link – District Service Mapping Information, for detail on the offer within each district.*** [Resident offer - District service mapping info v2 May-24231.xlsx](#)

- 2.2.2 Flexible and resident focused, libraires have adapted to support and deliver services as needs arise, including being at the forefront in responding to the Cost-of-Living Crisis by providing warm, safe spaces and signposting residents to essential services, and more recently delivering the Housing Support Offer from Oldham Library, working closely with housing and doorstep engagement teams.
- 2.2.3 Oldham Libraires are also an integral part of the Family Hub offer, working closely with Children Services to ensure families have access to a range of services across the 0-19 offer.
- 2.2.4 To tackle the high levels of digital exclusion, Oldham Libraries are playing a critical leading role in supporting residents to gain digital access, skills and knowledge. For example, libraries supported residents to complete the 2021 Online Census and have developed the digital device lending scheme.
- 2.2.5 During the pandemic, libraries were recognised by central government as an essential service and remained open during lockdown to offer access to essential PC use and click and collect book service, supporting digital inclusion and mental wellbeing. In addition, libraries played a critical role in supporting the covid response, from being used as community testing centres, distributors of lateral flow tests, working with partner agencies to deliver covid emergency response services and an anchor site for the community engagement teams.
- 2.2.6 Oldham Libraries provide welcoming spaces for people to work, study, connect with others. We work with over 60 groups across all our libraries.
- 2.2.7 All of Oldham Libraries are Libraries of Sanctuary – supporting new migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and deliver Autism, Age and Dementia Friendly Services
- 2.2.8 Libraries offer Work Experience, Apprentice and Volunteering opportunities, aiding access to vital skills and supporting entry routes to employment.
- 2.2.9 Several of our libraries are placed based hubs (Chadderton Library and Wellbeing Centre, Failsworth Library, Oldham Library, and Royton Library). Failsworth went live first in Dec 2023, followed by Chadderton in Feb 2024.
- 2.2.10 All library staff were part of the first phase of training to support the new way of working. Management have facilitated the training sessions to support cultural change. This builds on work we are already undertaking with key partners to deliver services from Oldham Libraries including health and community partners.

3. Capital Projects

3.1 Royton Library and Town Hall

The library refurbishment will be complete by mid-August 2024 and this will see a new refreshed library offer with flexible shelving, and spaces that facilitate group sessions and learning. The library will be the front door for residents with access to a range of partner Place Based Integrated Services in the North District.

3.2 Northmoor Library (£152k Arts Council England, Library Improvement Fund Round 2)

As well as structural repairs to the roof and windows, the focus of the investment will be in creating a community garden and associated outdoor education programme, modernised interior library furniture and layout to create flexible spaces for large group activities, events and high-quality cultural programming, improved signage to make the library more accessible and digital kit to meet demand and expand the offer. This will provide young people and families the opportunity to learn new skills, raise aspirations, support their educational outcomes and take ownership and pride in their local library.

3.3 Oldham Library (£277k ACE, LIF3 funding)

This investment will focus on 4 primary strands of work at Oldham Library:

An Adult Library Refit:

- Creating pop-up event and exhibition spaces through the introduction of mobile shelving
- Adding 32 study/ bring your own-device digital access terminals
- Relocating existing computer suites for space optimization
- Introducing Gallery Exhibition display cases to amplify cross-cultural offers

A Shop Refit - Integrating the Tourist Information offer, including:

- Modern, open-access merchandising units
- Versatile wall-mounted display
- Mobile shop units that can be optimally located for events
- Oldham merchandising graphics and/or design features
- Visible attractive Tourist information offer

Wi-Fi Printing Solution, including:

Payment Kiosk
Software licenses
Installation and training
Cyber-security updates.

Neurodiversity Friendly, Signage and Digital screen, including:

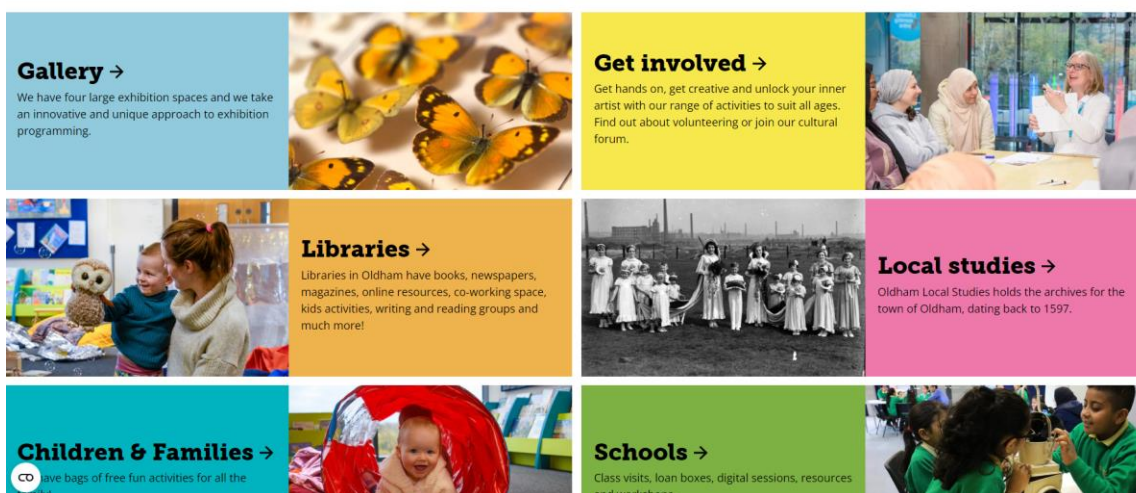
- Professional expert design for neurodiversity friendly signage
- Installation of new signage
- Power and data cabling for digital screen
- Digital screen installation

4. Information and Digital

4.1 New Website

Oldham HLA secured £42,150 from the Library On Grant (British Library supported by ACE) to develop new integrated website to improve our online presence and discoverability. The new website focus on the user experience, with the introduction of an image-led and intuitive information architecture, with bespoke interactive elements. [Home - Oldham HLA](#)

See all our what's on listings →



4.2 Digital health literacy project at Fitton Hill and Lees

Following on from the success of delivering digital health literacy sessions at Fitton Hill Library (funded by CILIP, Libraries Connected and Arts Council England, Health Education England), we have secured investment from the Oldham One Fund (£9,720) to roll the programme out and deliver Digital Gifting and Training Programme for Better Health Outcomes at Lees Library

4.3 Build a Business UKSPF

Following on from the success of the ERDF funded Build A Business (BAB) Programme, GM Libraries secured UKSPF funding to continue to deliver the BAB programme. In 2023/24 we ran 73 Business events with 494 cumulative attendees, including Build a Business coffee morning talks and themed workshops. We hosted 10 Start up Huddle Sessions where 227 attendees had the opportunity to network, market and launch their products and services.

4.4 Donate IT

With community partner Tameside Community Computers (TCC), we have launched Donate-IT, Oldham Council's device donation, refurbishment and gifting programme. Residents can donate an unwanted device at any library in Oldham for it to be transferred to TCC who wipe, refurbish or recycle the device before returning it to Oldham Libraries for gifting to digitally excluded residents. [Donate IT Oldham | Oldham Council](#)

4.5 Failsworth Sanctuary Hub and Digital Cafe

Sanctuary seekers attend Failsworth Library every Thursday afternoon, when the HLA team put on an English conversation group, offer digital support and distribute free SIMs via the GM Databank. 681 people attended in 2023/24 and the library team were runners up for a national Libraries Connected award for their work there.

4.6 English Conversation groups

The offer has expanded in recent months and a group is now offered every day Monday – Friday at Oldham, Northmoor or Failsworth Libraries. These are well attended and help to support residents who need to access the massively oversubscribed ESOL provision in the borough. The 3 weekly sessions at Oldham Library regularly exceed 40 participants.

5. Literacy

5.1 Story Fest and Summer Reading Challenge

Having delivered a successful pilot Children's Literature Festival last year in Chadderton, we have secured £6,000 from our Library PFI partner *Kajima* to deliver StoryFest this year.

Eight authors will visit schools on Friday 12 July and on Saturday 13 July, and the authors will be at Oldham Library for "Sign Up at StoryFest", where children will be encouraged to join the **Summer Reading Challenge**. Also, on 13 July, all branch libraries will be hosting a competition: inviting children and adults to get creative and design our new membership card. The winning entries will have their design printed onto our sustainable library cards.

5.2 Author Sparks (ACE Project Grant £29,325)

We will be working with local authors to create a schools offer that ignites a sustained interest in creative writing and reading by providing children with a series of author encounter. Comprised of short films, a workshop co-created with the featured author, written correspondences, and the opportunity to see authors in-person, Author Sparks is an inspirational and sustainable free at-the-point-of-access class visit programme for children living in a diverse predominantly urban borough

5.3 GM Festival of Libraries

As part of the UNESCO Manchester City of Literature, Oldham Libraries along with all GM libraries take part in the GM Festival of Libraries. We hosted Queenie and the Pooka, a family show with heartfelt insight into Gypsy Traveller culture and lifestyles as part of Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month.

We were also selected to host the Festival's biggest event with children's author **Konnie Huq**. Children were invited to "Look for a Book" across libraries in Greater Manchester with a huge social media campaign. The winners attended an event with Konnie Huq at Oldham Library, where we had 109 adults and children introduced to our service, many for the first time. We received praise for our spaces, event management skills and for quality compering of Konnie's interview.

6. Creativity and Culture

6.1 HLA integrated Creative Offer

The team deliver:

- live@theLibrary - a programme of theatre, spoken word and comedy in the hosted across all Oldham libraries and is member of the Big Imaginations and Venues North network.
- Festival Oldham - annual outdoor arts festival established in 1997 and showcases street arts, music, dance and visual arts. The festival is part of the Without Walls Consortium of national outdoor festivals which provides £11,000 of additional funding each year.

- Illuminate Light Night – this event brings the very best of international, national and local light art to Oldham Town Centre each February half-term. Providing creative participation opportunities for local people and further develops the evening and nighttime economy in Town Centre. Illuminate is part of the Light Up the North Network of leading UK light festivals and receives UKSPF funding.
- We have been awarded £83,250 as part of the G M Arts Network Spirit project funding from GMCA to develop new artworks created by local people for Illuminate in 2025 and 2026 and to further develop local creative industries support. The GMCA funding provides artist access grants to reduce barriers to training and developing their creative practice. Plus support to develop and deliver the Oldham Artist and Live Music Networks and newsletters.
- Further creative industries support includes the delivery of the Community Gallery / Gallery 4 exhibition programme which provides professional exhibition space at Gallery Oldham for 6 local artists annually. Plus a programme of annual adult arts and craft courses inspired by exhibitions and collections.

6.2 Shortlisted for Awards

The Creativity and Culture Team were shortlisted in for the National Outdoor Event Awards for:

- Best Events Team - Local Authority,
- Event of the Year Award - Public Sector
- Best Event - Illuminate – Light Night and
- Event Organiser of the Year Public Sector.

7. Health and Wellbeing

7.1 CHAI 5 ways to wellbeing

HLA was awarded £9,048 the European Challenge Fund to run a pilot with the CHAI Women's project offering wellbeing sessions. Participants will create a manual to support residents to improve their wellbeing utilising existing infrastructure and services and will host a giving day at Oldham Library where they will share skills with attendees.

7.2 Healthy New Year Festival

Our annual Healthy New Year Festival took place in January 2024. 780 residents visited health and wellbeing stalls at Oldham Library over 2 days and 48 took part in taster sessions.

7.3 Women's Health Festival

71 people attended our Women's Health Festival events which took place around International Women's Day 2024 - events included Menopause 101, Gong Bath and a mindfulness walk.

8. Environmentally Responsible

We are committed to being environmentally responsible by developing and embedding sustainable practices and raising awareness through our programming.

8.1 Exhibitions

Last year we showcased three Gallery Exhibitions relating to Environmental Responsibility Awareness - *Devotions to the Goddess Flora*, *Carboniferous Monsters*, and *Wild Colour* – with over 39,600 visiting the exhibitions.

8.2 Reducing Plastic Use

To reduce plastics, as a service, we have stopped buying felt-tip pens for children's crafts and replaced with crayons.

8.3 Garden Project

With a garden shed donated by Kajima and soil from B&Q, Oldham Library's Brews, Biscuits and Banter Group have created a small gardening project at Oldham Library, with 4 regular volunteers.

8.4 Community Engagement on the Climate Emergency

Oldham Libraries have delivered several programmes to engage residents on climate change – these include Climate Connections, a six-month programme at Northmoor Library to inform, engage and mobilise residents to make changes to support Oldham Council's efforts to fight climate change, and more recently a climate themed Minecraft pilot aimed at engaging children and families on the subject.

8.5 Donate IT

Encourages residents and businesses to donate their unwanted devices for refurbishment and gifting or recycling, rather than contributing to the growing issue of e-waste.

3 Key Issues for Overview and Scrutiny to Discuss

- 3.1 To consider library activity mentioned above and the new initiatives and partnerships aimed to ensure widest possible access within resource parameters.

4 Key Questions for Overview and Scrutiny to Consider

- 4.1 Overview and Scrutiny to consider the opportunities to develop a stronger library service; that delivers more innovative services that meet local needs and the challenge of balancing that with funding opportunities and increasing library visitor figures.

5. Links to Corporate Outcomes

- 5.1 As a uniquely trusted and accessible public service in the heart of our communities, Libraries are in a good position to support Oldham's co-operative ambition. By working with a resident focus libraries provide a cradle-to-grave service which empowers residents to make positive choices in their lives and make real and beneficial changes for themselves and their community.

5.2 Oldham Council Libraries delivering against Corporate Priorities

6 Additional Supporting Information

- 6.1 n/a

7 **Consultation**

7.1 n/a

8 **Appendices**

8.1