

## Portfolio Report

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Elaine Taylor, Deputy Leader of Oldham Council & Cabinet Member for Decent Homes

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

**Licensing:** The Licensing team delivers the Council's statutory licensing service which has a varied remit and in addition to dealing with licensing premises, alcohol licenses, the team also fulfils the council's statutory duty relating to the private hire and hackney carriage taxi trade.

The Council has seen a significant increase in the number of drivers and vehicles registered, leading to more engagement and feedback about how we can continually improve the service. Currently, there are 1,592 licensed vehicles and 2,852 licensed drivers. There are also another 816 applications for a driver's license being processed. To support the trade, improve facilities and to meet the additional demand, a new waiting area is being installed at Moorhey Street and MOT testing capacity is being increased through the installation of a 3rd testing bay.

In the last 12 months, the Licensing team inspected 160 vehicles and drivers to ensure compliance. This included joint agency initiatives involving Greater Manchester Police and Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, and the team work closely with the other Greater Manchester Authorities in sharing information to ensure compliance with drivers, vehicles and to ensure consistent standards and policies.

**Planning:** The new Government have announced a number of changes to the planning legislation and regulations as part of updating the National Planning Policy Framework, but they also intentionally aim to "Get Britain Building Again" by increasing housing targets nationally and relaxing rules around development in the Green Belt.

There is a formal consultation on the proposed changes, and the Council will be responding ahead of the deadline later this month. We're really pleased to see the associated changes around the Right to Buy programme and new funding for new social homes that the Government have proposed, to help get much-needed new social and affordable housing built in Oldham, and to help ensure the rent levels are truly socially affordable.

The Planning Reforms were also very timely given the Motion on Places for Everyone that was considered at the last Council meeting in July. The new Planning Reforms will need to be fully considered as part of the Member workshops arranged for the end of September ahead of considerations being presented back to full Council in November.

Finally, in the four months of 1st April to 3rd August, this council granted planning permission for 214 new homes. This includes 15 supported-living apartments on Foundry Street in the town centre and 132 new homes on vacant, brownfield land in Derker, 43 of which will be affordable homes.

**Housing Needs / Homelessness:** The new Housing Options Office opened on 18 July 2024, and the new space is working well. Working with the Customer Service's team we are

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now reviewing how we collate resident's satisfaction from visiting Housing Options and the service they have received so we can feed this into our continual service improvement plans. We are also reviewing how we collate reasons for residents' attendance at Housing Options to help with demand management.

The demand through the front door is on average 60 per day for bidding assistance, housing register enquiries and homelessness. The team are dealing with 6,783 live housing applications and in addition we currently have 678 households in temporary accommodation. We're exploring numerous options to help families and residents move out of temporary accommodation as soon as possible.

Locata – Housing Register System is used by numerous local authorities across the UK, but it is owned and managed by a third party company. Unfortunately, it was subject to a cyber attack and we had no choice but to close the system was down for about 10 days while robust assessments were undertaken to understand if Oldham's data had been compromised in any way. Delighted to report that in Oldham's case, there was no data breaches reported and therefore the system was reactivated on Friday 16 August. During this period, while residents could not update their applications via the system, the call centre and the new Housing Options Office reprioritised their activities to ensure residents had access to help and support.

**Housing Delivery:** Tender returns have been submitted for the development at the Southlink site, which is owned jointly with Transport for Greater Manchester. This site has the potential to deliver approximately 130 net zero homes, including around 20 Social Homes. We are looking forward to announcing our preferred development partner over the next couple of months.

We are marketing the former South Chadderton School site, Butterworth Lane, Chadderton to test interest in new homes being built on this Council owned residential development. This site of approximately 10.8 acres will have capacity for up to 175 new high-quality net zero homes, with at least 30% being affordable homes, including a number of which will be social homes. The closing date for offers is later this month.

**Town Centre Living / New Homes:** Public consultation on emerging proposals for the 2,000 new homes in the town centre commenced on 24 July and closes tonight (11 September). We're delighted so many people have taken part and had their say on the proposals at the various drop-in events, through the online webinars, and by responding to the online survey. The team are collating the feedback received to inform the planning applications for each of the development sites so that local people can see that their contributions and suggestions have influenced and shaped the final designs and development proposals.

**Recommendations:** Council is requested to note the report.