

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Abdul Jabbar, Deputy Leader of the Council & 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

As reported in the Month 3 Financial Monitoring report, we continue to face immense financial challenges, particularly in caring for our most vulnerable residents where demand for our services continues to increase. This is not just an issue here in Oldham - analysis by the Local Government Association shows that over the next two years councils are facing a blackhole of more than six billion pounds and it is areas such as Oldham – with high needs and a relatively low Council Tax base - that are most affected.

We're committed to working hard to bring down the projected in year pressures, and a lot of work has gone into bringing that down. This is already bearing fruit with the Month 4 Financial Monitoring report indicating that the projected deficit for 2024/25 has reduced from £26m to £21.07m. I am hopeful that it will continue to reduce over the remainder of the year as more measures take effect.

However, I recognise that we need to go further. It's why we've started our budget process so early this year and we've gone out to our staff to work with them to identify ways to reduce costs. This has included inviting applications for flexible working and voluntary redundancy. Applications will be assessed over the next month on a case-by-case basis, always ensuring the impact on Council services is minimised.

We're also working with the new Labour Government to try and plug the financial gap and ultimately bring into effect a fairer funding model that redistributes resources to Council's like Oldham that have had their funding significantly reduced in recent years.

We continue to make excellent progress with the Revenues and Benefit digital transformation programme with the implementation of the GovTech system. To date we have automated forms in respect of single persons, movers and direct debits with work underway to automate discounts and exemptions. As at the end of quarter one 75% of the transactions that could be automated had been dealt with through GovTech and as business rules and the system are refined, we are confident that this level of automation will increase further. Further forms in respect of Special Payments, student discounts and landlord moves will be subject to testing throughout summer with a view to these going live by September.

IT & Digital

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

- The final key staff move into Spindles from the Civic, was Access Oldham alongside which, IT implemented a queue management and ticketing system to ease customer traffic whilst residents wait for service.
- Ongoing IT infrastructure work is being conducted for key regeneration projects throughout the Borough, including The Old Library, Royton Town Hall and Library, Alexandra Park and preparation for new Children's homes.
- A new Corporate Room Booking system has now been implemented for staff and is in operation across Spindles and Civic offices and capable of expanding to absorb new building meeting rooms as refurbishments complete.

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- Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) Transition: Nationally the PSTN will close in 2027 with a requirement to move current connectivity to digital networks. IT are now finalizing the output from the auditing of all impacted sites across the borough to prepare for the transition and to assess any upgrades or changes that may be required.
 - GMA 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 region driving efficiency and security. The first site live on GMA One was the Civic Centre, followed by Spindles which proves the service is active and ready and now paves the way for decanting services from the Civic Centre. Royton Library will go live on GMA One when it opens after refurbishment.
 - IT continues to migrate systems and services to the Cloud which will aid the massive undertaking they have this and next year, in decanting all services, systems, network connectivity from the Civic Centre Data Centre, into Spindles.
 - IT are developing a data service platform with a capability for interrogating data across the Council with the first tranche of data being made available at the end of the Summer with an approach designed to improve data quality, consistency and accessibility.
 - The implementation of the BARTEC Waste Management system for trade waste is progressing and is planned to go live in the Autumn.

Human Resources & Organisational Development

We're pleased that the new **Greater Manchester Jobs Site and Application Tracking System** has been introduced. For the last 8 years, Oldham Council has been part of the Greater Manchester collaboration which sees GM authorities take a coordinated approach to recruitment and advertising of roles in their authorities. All roles are advertised on [Greater.Jobs](#). Because of the collaborations success, other authorities outside of GM are signed up to the site.

The contract expired on 31 August 2024. Oldham Council were involved in the re-procurement of the recruitment and applicant tracking system and website support, which Wigan Council agreed to act as Lead Authority.

The refreshed website (now live) offered an improved user experience, design and adaptable viewing for optimization on mobile phones and tablet devices. It also offers more local authority customization which for Oldham, means better ability to promote our colleague benefits and new office space – Spindles, as an example.

The Applicant Tracking System allows for candidates to track candidates throughout the recruiting and hiring process and significantly increases candidate engagement, and provides improved efficiency in the back office function.

Climate Change & Green New Deal

Significant progress has been made in respect of the Alexander Park Depot over the last period with the building construction works reaching practical completion. Work is now progressing to make the building operationally ready by the end of September.

Green New Deal Delivery Partnership: Work is ongoing to prepare the tender for a commercial low carbon energy infrastructure partner to establish Joint Venture with the Council. The timeline for the procurement is being finalised with a target publication date of November.

Carbon Co-op have begun work on the next stage of Community Led Energy Planning, which will revisit the CLEPs in Sholver and Westwood and test the approach in a new area, yet to be decided.

A tender has been run to select consultants to produce an Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy for Oldham, as part of the Greater Manchester Local Net Zero Accelerator programme. Evaluation of bids is underway.

Oldham Low Carbon District Heat Network: Technical consultants have been selected to deliver the next stage of feasibility (RIBA Stage 3 design) for the town centre low carbon heat network, and will start work in September. This work will feed into the procurement of the Green New Deal Delivery Partner as the heat network will be the 'anchor' project for the procurement.

Wrigley Head Solar Farm: Evaluation of the tenders for the Engineer, Procure & Construct (EPC) contractor continues. Discussions with Electricity North West around the grid connection are also continuing. The grid connection is the key factor which will ultimately determine whether the scheme can be implemented.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.