

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 4 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 but a national trend. 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. As mentioned at the Council meeting on 11 September, the Month 4 Financial Monitoring report reduced the projected deficit for 2024/25 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 and the updated month 6 position will be available shortly.

However, I recognise that we need to go further. The budget process is well underway, and the applications for flexible working and voluntary redundancy are being assessed on a case-by-case basis, always ensuring the impact on Council services is minimised. Following the Autumn Budget Statement announced on the 30 October, we await our Provisional Local Government Settlement and in the meantime, we will continue to work with the new Labour Government to try and plug the financial gap and continue to lobby for a fairer funding model.

Revenues & Benefits: Testing for moving the Capita One back-office systems to the Azure cloud platform has been ongoing for several months, and the live systems are now due to be moved over on the weekend of 2/3 November. The GovTech back-office automation continues to gather momentum and have a positive impact on outstanding workloads and the customer experience. Comparison of outstanding correspondence in the first half of 23/24 to the current year shows an average weekly reduction of 46%. Overall automation of changes of address via GovTech reached 75% for Q2, meaning residents could be sent a revised bill within 24 hours of reporting their change online. Three more process automations are due to go live by 31 October.

Pension Credit: Many of our residents face the prospect of a difficult winter, with everyday costs such as energy bills still high. This is why the council is doing all we can to make sure our residents are claiming money they might be entitled to.

Part of this campaign is focused on ensuring those eligible are claiming Pension Credit. There are estimates that £7.9 million is currently unclaimed in Oldham each year and that are 3288 pensioners who are eligible for Pension Credit but not claiming their entitlement.

To help with this we're running a campaign to help maximise pension credit take up. We're promoting how residents can check their eligibility for the benefit with over 5000 targeted leaflets, online advertising, local news media, our council newspapers, newsletters and through our charity partners at Action Together. The campaign will run throughout winter and into the new year. We will monitor take up of the credit as the campaign continues to assess if we're having the correct impact.

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

- **Cloud Migration:** IT continues to migrate systems and services to the Cloud which will aid in decanting all services, systems, network connectivity from the Civic Centre Data Centre, into Spindles.
- **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 finalising

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.

- **GMOne Fibre Network:** 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 GMOne was the Civic Centre, followed by Spindles and there are now 8 sites live on the new GMOne circuits.
- **Data Service Platform:** IT are developing a data service platform with a capability for interrogating data across the Council. With the first tranche of data now being available, further analysis continues into additional data sources.
- **New Kit for Staff:** The new Laptop refresh programme has now commenced which will replace c3000 Council staff laptops.

Human Resources: The **Dignity at Work Policy** aims to protect the right of everyone to be treated with dignity and respect at work. Although there is no specific dignity at work Act in UK law, employers and offending employees can still face legal consequences for workplace abuse. Harassment, bullying and victimisation are, in the eyes of the law, forms of discrimination. **Oldham Council have a zero-tolerance approach to harassment, bullying and victimisation.** Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work.

The **Voluntary Redundancy Programme** started on 5 August and closed on 23 August, since then we have processed over 350 submitted voluntary redundancy' applications.

As part of this process, we have undertaken a number of legal processes including:

- Consulting with employees individually with their line manager and informed employees of their rights
- Providing staff with advice and information on how the voluntary redundancy programme is to be implemented and an FAQ document to address any questions regarding the offered terms.

There have been 4 VR Panels to assess the applications to consider the viability of the roles and the savings to Oldham Council, considering the financial payback position. The VR Panel have focused over 3 Phases, Phase 1 has been completed where employees have been notified, and dismissal dates and letters have gone out with the termination dates. Distribution of the Phase 2 began on 25th October, with the final Phase 3 to be completed by end of October. Dependent on the notice period, will determine when employees leave, it is estimated that employees will begin leaving from December 2024 onwards.

The **Greater Manchester People Inclusion Standards** is a key workstream within the broader city-region Workforce Inclusion Programme, involving all 10 local authorities, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS), Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), and the Growth Company. This programme aims to accelerate the inclusion agenda across Greater Manchester by fostering collaboration, demonstrating a shared commitment to equity across all boroughs, building an engaged workforce that reflects our communities, and supporting our diverse teams to thrive in their careers.

Climate Change & Green New Deal: The Council has approved the appointment of Vital Energi for the Engineer, Procure and Construct (EPC) contract for the Wrigley Head Solar Farm. Details of the grid connection are still being finalised with Electricity North West, but a start on site is expected by the end of November, with the solar farm being completed and operational in spring 2025. Arcadis were the successful bidder to produce an Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy for Oldham, and this is expected to be complete by December / January. Oldham Low Carbon District Heat Network: Buro Happold have been selected to deliver the next stage of feasibility (RIBA Stage 3 design) for the town centre low carbon heat network, and work has started with an initial round of stakeholder engagement. This work will feed into the procurement of the Oldham Green New Deal Delivery Partner as the heat network will be the 'anchor' project for the procurement.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.