

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Arooj Shah, Leader of Oldham Council & Cabinet Member for Building a Better Oldham

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

Building a Better Oldham

- **Spindles transformation:** The work being undertaken in the Spindles is already being externally recognised with two contractors securing prestigious awards for their partnership with Oldham Council on the scheme. The Spindles phase 3 accommodation scheme is on track to complete in January 2025 with the transfer of Children services colleagues from Metropolitan Place enabling increased collaboration with various colleagues and services already located within the Spindles whilst releasing Met Place for development as part of our strategic accommodation approach.
- **Coliseum and Old Library:** Work is taking place to prepare the Coliseum for refurbishment, with asbestos removal already underway and due for completion mid-December. The Council have now secured a main contractor for the scheme with works commencing early in the new year. The internal fit-out of the Old Library Building continues to bring this beautiful heritage building back to life and we look forward to welcoming the members and the public next summer.
- **Town Centre Living / Muse Partnership:** The Oldham Town Centre Development Framework was approved by Cabinet at the Council meeting on the 18th of November following community engagement over summer. This is a positive step toward bringing housing to the Civic Centre, former Magistrates court and Leisure Centre sites.
- **Prudential Building.** Following the successful Compulsory Purchase Order process the Council gained ownership of the Prudential Building in mid-October. We are now in the process of undertaking an initial asbestos survey to establish safe working methodologies for the upcoming environmental clean-up.
- **Levelling Up Partnership grant funding.** The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government has confirmed that the £20m Levelling Up Partnership grant funding will continue. We are currently working with MHCLG to confirm the arrangements on eligible schemes and the associated timescales for those schemes.

Town Centre Events

Alongside the physical regeneration of the town centre, we have refreshed our approach to events. We need to ensure that our both local residents and visitors are attracted into the town centre or the benefits of the significant regeneration investments made by the council may not be fully realised.

We have been investing in events that are aimed at animating Oldham Town Centre, those which generate significant economic value and profile for the borough, as well as delivering on cultural, social and wellbeing outcomes. We are also developing a long-term plan for events targeting new funding sources, particularly around sponsorship and further enhancing co-investment and collaboration with partners and stakeholders.

This Autumn we have delivered:

- **Nostalgic Oldham**, which increased footfall by 19% on previous year.
- We brought the firework display into the town centre with over **8,000 people** coming into the town centre on a Tuesday evening and spending money in our town centre businesses.
- **Activities for families every Saturday** in the town centre, starting with the Christmas lights switch-on in November. Which drove a 10% increase in footfall in Spindles compared to the previous year's switch-on event, with businesses feeling the benefit with positive reports of spending across the event days.

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- The impact of the events is also felt across our social media engagement. The switch-on event also had the most Facebook engagement we have had for **any event**, the sentiment across our social media is that people are talking about Oldham town centre with renewed pride.

Strategy and Performance:

- **Corporate Plan:** The new Corporate Plan, *Ready for the Future*, was adopted last month. Focus areas include delivering efficient, resident-focused services, supporting our workforce, and actively working to reduce the need for our services by focusing on prevention and early support. Preparations are underway for the next round of Business Planning, ensuring alignment with the new Corporate Plan. Our Transformation programme has been reviewed with a focus on quick recovery, rapid improvement and ensuring resilience as a key driver of the programme. Work is already underway to transition the current transformation programme to the *Ready for the Future* programme.
- **Oldham Plan:** The refreshed Oldham Plan, *Pride, Progress, Partnership*, was also adopted in November, reflecting the shared ambitions of the Oldham Partnership to achieve healthier, happier lives, create a great place to live, and drive a green and growing local economy.
- **Leading Oldham Board:** Plans are progressing for the Leading Oldham Board, which brings together leaders from across the borough to drive forward the strategic priorities of the Oldham Plan. The Board will meet twice a year to review the delivery of the three sub-boards (Growth, Health and Wellbeing, and Communities), with the next meeting scheduled for March 2025.
- **Developing Oldham's Co-operative Sector:** Reflecting the council's co-operative ethos, engagement with stakeholders is ongoing to explore innovative co-operative opportunities linked to the Oldham Coliseum, ensuring community-led models are at the forefront of Oldham's economic vision.
- **Armed Forces Gold Award Accreditation:** We are aiming to achieve Armed Forces Gold Award accreditation in 2025, reflecting our commitment to supporting veterans and active service personnel.

Communications and engagement:

The communications service has been continuing to promote good news stories about Oldham across all media channels, with significant volumes of positive coverage across Oldham media and positive responses on social media.

Highlights include:

- Excellent coverage of the Christmas programme of events with the tagline "Give the gift of Oldham this Christmas" to encourage footfall into shopping areas across the borough and uptake of the Oldham gift card.
- Rave reviews for the opening of the Egyptian Room, with coverage across all local titles and on the BBC, leading to a successful opening and sustained usage.
- Positive coverage of the Choose Oldham campaign to recruit children's social workers, with a prominent report on BBC Politics North West, the region's flagship political TV show.
- Significant social media traction following the visit of three of the Oldham Theatre Workshop's alumni – including Doctor Who star Millie Gibson - to the Old Library to view progress on OTW's new home.
- Regular moving stories on social and mainstream media channels highlighting the work that is being done to support vulnerable residents throughout winter to demonstrate that no one in the Borough should go cold or hungry as the temperatures drop.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.