

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Arooj Shah, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Growth.

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

LGC Awards – Most Improved Council: I was absolutely delighted that Oldham Council was named *Most Improved Council* at this year's prestigious LGC Awards. The national recognition reflects the hard work, resilience, and dedication of our staff, partners, and communities who have played a part in our improvement journey.

The judges praised the clarity of our vision, our strong leadership, and the progress we have made in areas such as financial management, partnership working, and delivering better outcomes for residents through our Resident Focused approach.

This award isn't just about where we have come from, it's about where we are going. I know there is still more to do, but this award shows we are on the right path. Together, we are building a better Oldham and I'm proud of every single person who helped us get here.

Greater Manchester Leading the Way: Oldham has played a key role in shaping the new Greater Manchester Strategy (launched Wednesday 9th July). Through working closely with partners across Greater Manchester, we have ensured that Oldham's priorities and ambition are reflected throughout the strategy. Importantly, Oldham is ready to deliver, our Oldham Plan and Corporate Plan are fully aligned with the new Greater Manchester Strategy, meaning we are well positioned to turn our ambitions into action, benefiting all Oldham's communities. As part of our contribution to the GMS, we have included three clear commitments to help drive Oldham's growth and live well aspirations:

- **Creating an Oldham Mayoral Development Corporation** which will include: 8,000 new homes, the transformation of Oldham Town Centre, the development of the Northern Roots Eco-Park, development of the SportsTown facility, Beal Valley & Broadbent Moss development and a £20m investment to support the growth of Chadderton.
- Major upgrades to **Transport & Active Travel infrastructure** including Cop Road Metrolink stop (inc. Park & Ride) and associated new bus service connections, Atom Valley connectivity.
- Supporting the **development of a co-operative model to boost the cultural and night-time economy** in Oldham, continuing to build on the successful major town centre regeneration underway, and the delivery of 2,000 new town centre homes. This will include redeveloping Oldham Coliseum Theatre on Fairbottom Street, complimenting the High Street Accelerator funding secured for Yorkshire Street.

Resident Focus: I am delighted to share that as part of our on-going commitment to working with a resident focus, we have extended access to the Registrars service to enable urgent burials for communities when they face heartbreaking losses. From early July, residents are now able to contact the service to arrange the paperwork required for time critical burials on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.

As part of our renewed commitment to resident focus and the number of enquiries coming through to members and staff, I have asked for a full business case and feasibility study to be undertaken with the aim to transform vacant space in Spindles into a new Customer Service Centre, and we are currently exploring whether this space can be one of Oldham's 'Live Well' centres.

Growth: I am delighted that the six planning applications submitted by our Town Centre residential development partner, Muse, were all approved at Planning Committee two weeks ago. The first site to come forward will be Prince's Gate, where enabling works will begin this Autumn, before works on the developing the first of the three new blocks of apartments will start in the New Year. The first phase of development on the Civic Centre site will also begin next year. The intention is that both the first phase on Princes Gate and the first phase on the Civic Centre site will be affordable and social homes delivered with a registered provider housing association partner.

I am pleased to report that we continue to make strong progress in delivering regeneration projects strengthening our town centre for everyone who lives, works, studies and visits. The high street can now be accessed from the central bus station via Snipe Gardens which creates a vibrant and welcoming first impression of our town centre. As the much-loved Old Library nears completion in the next few months plans to relocate from the Civic Centre into the building are already underway releasing the Civic Centre site for much needed new homes.

Place Making: At the end of May officers hosted a study visit from Scotland's Towns Partnership, Architecture and Design Scotland, and Scottish Futures Trust. They travelled down for the day to learn about the multi-funded and ambitious approach to our town centre transformation. They felt that our 'strong place leadership, design-led regeneration and climate-conscious planning' were stand out examples of good practice.

In June we held the first Town Centre Forum where the Chief Executive and I spoke to the businesses and traders who keep our town centre thriving, we broke the news that we were renaming 'The Spindles Town Square Shopping Centre' simply to 'The Spindles', that the new market hall would be known equally as simply as 'The Market' and that the new events space would be called 'The Loom'.

As always, I am keen to ensure that the standards our residents receive are always the best, and the decision to keep the Queen Elizabeth Hall open for Panto means we can ensure that the final works to Parliament Square and The Loom are spot on for a grand opening later this year.

We also launched a shop front grant scheme to enable tenants or landlords in the town centre to apply for financial support to improve their shop frontages. Applications are now open, and I would encourage businesses to apply as soon as possible to ensure they can secure funding.

I was also really pleased that we have retained a Post Office in the town centre. We have a temporary counter now whilst the permanent fit out works take place over the coming weeks. Residents have fed back to me and officers how pleased they are to see this vital service back.

Finally, I am really pleased to welcome our parking enforcement and administration team to the council: insourced from NSL on 26 June, the team are now very much part of our town centre team, so we can help ensure focused parking enforcement action in the most needed areas of the borough to keep our roads safe.

Housing Needs/Strategy: It's great to see the hard work achieving a reduction in the number of households requiring temporary accommodation (TA) by either preventing or relieving homelessness – this includes making best use of the private rented sector (where appropriate to do so). At the end of June 2025, we had 564 households in TA, this steady reduction is a consistent trend month-by-month. At the height of the crisis, we had over 700 households residing in TA. Building on the prevention work already being undertaken coupled with the new resources that are being brought online, we should see an even sharper decline in the number of households residing in TA.

Oldham's refreshed Strategic Housing Partnership had its first meeting in May. The group focused on ensuring we have a partnership approach to tackling the issues we all face, i.e. high demand, lack of stock, and supporting our most vulnerable residents, some of whom have high levels of complexity. The Partnership agreed to focus on how we can work together to increase levels of affordable suitable TA and how we can make best use of the existing socially rented stock in the borough, for example introducing a new right sizing scheme, and co-producing the new Allocations Policy.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.