

## Portfolio Report

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Arooj Shah, Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Growth

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

**Housing Delivery:** The council received the fantastic news that our bid to the GM Good Growth Fund for Prince's Gate was successful. The £35.1m secured will top up the £9.9m of brownfield grant funding already secured and the £5m of Community Regeneration Funding we have already committed to the project to ensure the delivery of 331 new homes, including 75 social homes. I'll be joining our partners at Muse in breaking ground on the site in the coming week as enabling works for the development get underway.

**Creating A Better Place:** The positive progress I reported last month continues as part of our ongoing investment across Oldham.

The construction of a new Visitor Centre and Forestry Skills Hub at Northern Roots is progressing at pace, and I was pleased to recently attend a key milestone of the Visitor Centre steel signing ceremony alongside the contractor Wilmott Dixon, the Northern Roots Charity and other key stakeholders. The buildings will contain a cafe, shop, production kitchen, space for educational visits, support for residents to gain valuable qualifications and training, performances and exhibitions. The scheme is already generating additional Social Value, to date providing employment opportunities for five previously unemployed residents. The Northern Roots scheme will put Oldham on the map as a place leading the way in sustainability and green skills whilst bringing long-term benefits to Oldham, including a boost to skills, jobs, tourism, and our economy.

A contractor has now been appointed to deliver the Wrigley Head Solar Farm, our first ever large-scale solar powered facility, as part of our Green New Deal Strategy. The Council owned landlocked site is part of the Moston Brook Green Corridor. The Contractor is a North West based company using local suppliers wherever possible, continuing our commitment to support local and regional businesses. The Solar farm aims to generate around 830,000Kwh of electricity per year, which is enough to power around 310 homes.

The relocation of the outdoor market from its current location, at the rear of the Tommyfield indoor market, is another key component to the ongoing transformation of the town centre. It will 'radically transform' George Square, a small plot of communal space between Spindles Shopping Centre and the police station progressing up to the edge of the bus station. I am pleased to announce that work has now commenced on site. The location will create a strong link between the new homes proposed on the Old Magistrates Court site, connecting with many independent businesses on George Street. The location is well placed to benefit from strong connectivity to the bus station, the existing Spindles car park and the Metrolink for both residents and visitors to access the new market.

The new space will be multi-functional, when not in use for the outdoor market the location can be used for various events, and with proposals including new seating and greening of the space that will provide a tranquil space for relaxation.

**Oldham Town Centre Grants Update:** The Oldham Town Centre Shop Front Grant scheme was launched in June 2025 with a deadline to apply by August 2025 and for all works to be complete by March 2026. The grant was targeted at specific parts of the town centre to encourage traders to improve the facade of their premises thus contributing to the wider regeneration of the town centre. Businesses were able to apply for a maximum grant of £20,000 or £10,000 for double or single fronted premises respectively. All businesses in the eligible areas were contacted and visited by officers to encourage them to apply. Overall, 44 applications were received, 25 of which were approved for grant funding totaling £266,668. 19 applications rejected due to a lack of information provided or because they did not meet eligibility criteria.

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**Leader of the year:** On a personal note, I was honoured to receive the LGIU's Leader of the Year award. While it is a personal recognition, I see it as an acknowledgement of Oldham's progress, our collective ambition, and the hard work of staff, partners, and communities over the last few years. Oldham is increasingly being recognised nationally for the improvements we are driving together and I am determined that we continue to improve for the benefit of all our residents.

**GM Civic Commissioners Graduation:** Last month I was proud to speak at the Greater Manchester Civic Commissioners Graduation 2025. Oldham has been a strong supporter of this programme from the beginning, and it was inspiring to see residents from across GM – including participants from Oldham – step forward as leaders in their communities. Their work reflects the values we hold as a borough: fairness, collaboration, and the belief that real change is shaped by people with lived experience. Alongside the GM Mayor, Andy Burnham, I congratulated all the graduates and reaffirmed Oldham's commitment to strengthening community leadership.

**Development of our partnerships work:** November also saw the launch of Oldham's new Communities Board. This is a key partnership bringing together local organisations and community leaders to strengthen cohesion and build a more resilient borough. The Board held its first meeting with a clear focus on community relations, shared values, and how we can work together to address the issues that matter most to local people. This Board is not a talking shop: it is a space for honest conversation, joint problem-solving, and collective action. Its work will support the wider Oldham Partnership and play a central role in shaping a more connected, confident, and inclusive borough. I look forward to the Board driving meaningful progress in the months ahead.

**National Budget Announcement & Two-Child Limit:** The recent Budget included a landmark commitment to lift the two-child benefit cap. This is a policy change which will make a significant difference to families in Oldham, where too many children are growing up in poverty. As a council we have consistently highlighted how this cap drives hardship and limits opportunity. Its removal is a positive and long-overdue step, benefitting over 10,000 children across the borough.

**Pride in Place Funding:** At the end of November the Chadderton Neighbourhood Board, who are managing the Pride in Place funding for this area, submitted their 10-year Regeneration Plan to the Government. This sets out the 10-year vision and objectives along with the case for change. Alongside this, a 4-year action plan that shows prioritised projects, all of which have been developed as part of a community consultation process, was also submitted for approval. This is a significant milestone in the programme which will see £19.5M investment spent on projects that our communities have said they would like to see.

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