

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Abdul Jabbar MBE, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate Services & Sustainability

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

Finance: The long-awaited Policy Statement on the Local Government Finance Settlement was released on 20 November which confirmed the Government's intention to deliver a multi-year settlement in December, which will be the first multi-year settlement after seven consecutive years of one-year allocations. This will assist the Council with its financial planning over the Medium Term. The Policy Statement also confirmed some of the intentions set out as part of the Fair Funding Review consultation completed over the summer. The aim of the funding is to be allocated to those areas of high need and low tax base just like Oldham. Full details of Local Authority allocations will be published as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement which is expected for the week commencing 15 December 2025.

The budget challenge for 2025/26 at the end of Quarter 2 is estimated to be £21.094m (£23.209m at the end of Month 5) which is a positive movement of £2.115m from the position previously reported. Early management actions around spending and recruitment that were implemented earlier in the financial year are contributing toward this favourable movement, and it is expected that this will continue over the coming months.

Revenues and Benefits: We continue to make good progress with the collection of Council Tax (£95.1m) and Business Rates (£40.4m), both in line with last year at the end of October. Recovery of arrears brought forward in 2025/26 now stands at £3.3m for Council Tax and £0.4m for Business Rates.

The Accounts Receivable/Payable team are also making good progress with £41.3m collected at the end of October (73.5%), and 94.78% of invoices paid within 30 days.

The Benefits team continues to see high volumes of Universal Credit change in circumstances due to the Department of Work and Pensions programme of migration to Universal Credit. A key focus has been on reducing claim backlogs resulting from migration activity. In October, the processing of new claims for Council Tax Reduction was reduced to 30.5 days, and new claims for Housing Benefits remained steady at 19.8 days.

Officers continue to work with colleagues in Adult Social Care to monitor progress with the improvement plan for the Financial Assessment team. The backlog of cases continues to reduce with the aim of getting them up to date by the end of this financial year. We continue to benchmark our performance and processes with colleagues across Greater Manchester to identify efficiencies and best practices.

Pension Credit: The Pension Credit campaign is drawing to a close identifying 251 residents who may be eligible. Following on from my last update - my message to residents this is simple – do not hesitate to claim Pension Credit if you are eligible. There is help available once again to make an application, and I urge you to come forward for support. Please call the Helpline on 0161 770 7007.

Digital Inclusion: A joint visit with Ofcom was recently hosted together with Inclusive Bytes. We shared our experiences of supporting media literacy and how this is delivered in our digital inclusion work. We will continue to work with Ofcom moving forward to ensure our approach is informed by best practice. We have successfully secured 233 free refurbished mobile phones from Community Coleague to distribute to residents in need across council services.

IT and Digital: New IT policies have now been developed for IT Asset Management, Supplier Remote Access, Vulnerability Management and have been socialised and agreed at the Digital Board whilst the new AI and Automation policy is in the final stages of approval with the Trade Unions. An IT Capital Work Programme has been defined for the next 3 years for essential cyber security improvements and provision for an upgraded infrastructure platform capable of enabling

Digital transformation. This IT Work Programme is under discussion with Finance and Capital Treasury, and associated Cabinet papers are to be issued for sign off and presentation to Cabinet in January. In conjunction with the new work programme planning activities, IT continues the deployment of the laptop refresh and has refined the implementation process to improve the experience for new users with a focus on ironing out any issues. The migration of services into the Cloud is continuing and activity in decommissioning the Civic Data Centre is progressing although at a slower pace than liked due to shortage of resources. IT is also actively engaged with infrastructure build work to support the Markets, Events and Archives regeneration project. To address resourcing and skillset issues, selected third parties have been engaged to work with IT to assess, design and improve the current infrastructure, network and Microsoft platforms and are working in alignment with internal staff to determine / undertake change which will support the new IT work programme.

Climate Change & Green New Deal: The Council's contractor for Wrigley Head Solar Farm, Vital Energi, is awaiting confirmation from Planning that Planning Conditions have been satisfactorily discharged so that construction work can begin. The perimeter security fence is almost complete and planting of thorny bushes for ecology and security will take place early in the scheduled works. Preparation of tender documents for the Oldham Green New Deal Partner is continuing with a view to publication in January 2026. The Low Carbon Heat Network anchor project continues to be developed, and the Council has received approval from DESNZ that around half of the £7.8m GHNF Construction Grant can be used to install heat network pipes alongside the wider Town Centre regeneration programme, avoiding the need for later re-excavation of public realm.

HR and OD: The HR & OD service will soon be at the completion of the initial phase of the ReBuild Recovery programme, which has been designed to strengthen and transform services. This is based on core pillars of Strategy, Systems & Infrastructure, Structure, Team Development and Engagement and Governance. Evaluation of the initial phase will commence in December. Work also continues to drive the Council's ambition to be a great place to work. Following a series of collaboration sessions, a new staff induction was launched on 21st November to ensure a consistent and engaging experience for all new starters. We have sought agreement to develop a new Leadership and Management development offer, with a skills audit live with our extended leadership team. In November we promoted Apprenticeships and early careers opportunities via the Early Careers Fair where over 500 students attended and the Community Careers Fair in Coldhurst, supporting growth and prosperity in the borough.

Governance: The Polling District and Polling Places review has concluded, and responses to the consultation have been published. The changes to the Council's political balance agreed at the November Council meeting have been implemented. Preparations are underway for the Honorary Freeman Ceremony taking place on 20 December. Democratic Services have facilitated 30 meetings since the last meeting of the full Council. Information Governance continues to support services, coordinating in the last quarter 387 Freedom of Information requests, 96 subject access requests and 257 requests for disclosure.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.