

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Peter Dean, Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure

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

Events - Christmas Lights Switch On was a huge success, despite Storm Claudia. We had a great turnout and a spectacular show and fireworks for everyone to enjoy.

Every Saturday in the run-up to Christmas (22 and 29 November, 6 and 13 December), from 12 noon to 4pm, Oldham was alive with street bands, brilliant performers, and creative family workshops, making it the perfect destination for a day out.

A Christmas Grotto was also open from 12–4pm at the Market Hall on all event dates, giving families the chance to meet Santa and enjoy an extra-special festive moment.

Gallery Oldham - The new gallery spaces in the JR Clynes building opened for the October half term. These permanent displays are made up of three themed spaces – Cotton Stories, Oldham and the World, and the restored Art Gallery. All have already proved very popular with visitors.

Two new exhibitions opened in November. Connecting Threads 2 by Lynn Settrington showcases textile artworks made in partnership with community groups and includes the World Wellbeing Map made by participants in the HLA Speak English sessions. Ancestors Awakening by Oldham artist Peter Jankowski is inspired by neolithic objects and ancient sites.

Toddler Takeover Day took place on 22 November, as part of a national campaign organised by Kids in Museums. It included storytelling sessions, print making and consultation activities to get feedback on designs for the Our Beautiful Oldham Gallery due to open in Summer 2026. There were 135 participants in total. This event was supported with funding from Art Fund.

Oldham Archives - Following a launch event in September as part of the Oldham Histories Festival, the new facility at Spindles is now fully operational. All collections are stored onsite and accessible to view on demand. For the first time since its acquisition the Oldham Chronicle Archive is now stored in Oldham and items are being catalogued and made available to view.

Libraries - The ACE funded capital works at Oldham Library have now concluded. They have created more accessible and adaptable spaces on the ground floor, with new book shelving, a redesigned reception desk and shop, and new visitor signage across the site.

To conclude this year's Summer Reading Challenge staff visited school assemblies to hand out awards. The winning schools for completion of the challenge or improved engagement were Alexandra Park Junior School, Oasis Academy Limeside and Northmoor Academy. Each receiving £350 worth of book vouchers provided via sponsorship from Kajima.

Final figures for the Summer Reading Challenge show 911 children completed the challenge and received medals and certificates. 363 new child members joined the library during the challenge period.

Oldham Theatre Workshop - recently moved into its new home in the JR Clynes Building, and since settling in the team has been hard at work creating two exciting productions opening this December. The Youth Theatre Company will present a brand-new play, What They Left Behind, devised by the young company and written by local writer Michelle Temperley, running from 8–13 December in the new studios. While these talented young performers are delighting audiences in the new building, OTW's professional company will be staging a fresh adaptation of Hansel and Gretel, written by Sarah Nelson, at the Oldham Library Theatre. Hansel & Gretel will run from 4–24 December, bringing festive storytelling and creative theatre-making to families across Oldham.

Sport and Leisure

I'm pleased to share some positive developments in our work to help Oldham Move More and live healthier lives.

Bikeability & Active Travel - Oldham is making strong progress in Active Travel through major infrastructure upgrades, school programmes, and community initiatives. Work across Public Health, transport, education, and the VCFSE sector is helping residents Move More, travel safely, and feel better.

Schools continue to benefit from national cycle training, including Bikeability for all ages and inclusive sessions for SEND pupils. Bikeability participation numbers are set to grow further across the next quarter, driven by increased school engagement and expanded delivery capacity

Major infrastructure improvements planned for 2025/26 include upgrades to St Mary's Way, Accessible Oldham town centre streets, and new routes linking communities to the Metrolink. Community-led projects are growing, with bike libraries, walk leader training, and new forums to shape local walking and cycling. A new Community-Led Walking & Cycling Forum is being developed

Collaborative work across the council and partners continues to drive a shared ambition for a more active, healthier and better-connected borough.

Oldham Active - Oldham Active is working to provide dedicated prayer spaces at Oldham Leisure Centre and Chadderton Wellbeing Centre. In recent weeks, they have been collaborating closely with the Council of Mosques to make this possible. Suitable areas have now been identified at both centres, and they are aiming to have these spaces ready for customers to use before January 2026. This initiative reflects our commitment to inclusivity and ensuring that all customers feel welcome and supported when using our facilities.

Place Partnership / Move More Feel Better - Two new Move More Community Development Officers have started work in partnership with Oldham Council and Action Together Oldham. They are already building relationships and gathering insight across their local areas. These roles are central to our Sport England-funded Place Partnership programme, which aims to reduce inactivity and tackle inequality across all five districts of Oldham. The goal is simple: to help people build movement into their everyday lives. Right now, the focus is on identifying one priority area in each district, using data and local insight from partners and communities.

We're also delighted that Oldham has been chosen to pilot a Children and Families Physical Activity Training programme after a successful application. This initiative will support children aged 5–14 and their families to be more active, taking a whole-system approach. We'll work with selected members of the workforce and community champions in the new year to build knowledge, skills, and confidence so they can help families lead more active lives.

(Call to action)

"I'd encourage everyone to take a moment each day to move more—whether it's a short walk, a stretch, or an active play with the kids or grandkids. It's great for your health and wellbeing, and together we can make Oldham a happier, healthier and more active place for all."

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.