

Report to CABINET

Arts Council Investment into Oldham's Cultural Programming and Venue Development Extension Grant

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Peter Dean, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure

Officer Contact: Emma Barton, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Director of Place and Neil Consterdine, Director of Communities

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20th Feb 2026

- **Reason for Decision**

To seek approval to accept extension funding offered by Arts Council England (ACE) for 2026–27 in support of the continued development of Oldham's cultural programme and the new theatre project.

- To seek delegated authority to accept a further extension for 2027–28, should it be awarded by ACE

Recommendations

- Approve the acceptance of a grant of £656,147 from Arts Council England for the financial year 2026–27.
- Delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive (Emma Barton) to accept a further one-year extension for 2027–28 of a similar value, should this be offered by Arts Council England

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1 Background

- 1.1 In February 2023, Oldham Council formally accepted a £1.845 million grant (£615,000 per annum) from Arts Council England for the period 2023–26. This funding was ringfenced to:
- Engage communities and stakeholders in the development and delivery of a new theatre for Oldham.
 - Develop an appropriate leadership and governance structure for the new theatre.
 - Deliver a programme of performance and engagement that tests new approaches to programming, creative learning, talent development and audience development.
 - Meet the outcomes and principles of ACE’s Let’s Create strategy.
- 1.2 Cabinet approved this as part of the Urgent Business – Investing in a New Theatre for Oldham report (February 2023).
- 1.3 Since 2023, the Council has worked with Oldham Coliseum and key cultural partners—including Oldham Theatre Workshop, Stand and Be Counted Theatre, and CHAI Ladies—to deliver a programme of cultural events, artist development opportunities, and community and schools engagement activities.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 Arts Council England had planned to release the next National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) application process. However, due to delays arising from the Hodge Review, the process has been postponed. Consequently, ACE has offered all currently funded organisations—including Oldham—a one year extension with a 5% uplift for 2026–27. Oldham has been offered £656,147 as part of this extension.
- 2.2 As with the current agreement Oldham Council will continue to offer match funding as part of the ACE investment; £138,000 grant to the Coliseum and £127,000 towards development of a new theatre model.
- 2.3 ACE is currently considering offering a further extension for 2027–28, for which eligibility would remain consistent with the current programme.
- 2.4 Acceptance of the extension funding will ensure momentum is sustained in key areas including creative learning, talent development, artistic commissioning, community participation and the continued development of the new theatre’s operating model.

3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 Option 1 – Accept the Grant (Recommended)

Accepting the funding enables the continuation of cultural delivery, community engagement, and preparatory work for the new theatre, ensuring Oldham remains compliant with ACE requirements and well positioned for future national portfolio funding.

3.2 Option 2 – Decline the Grant

Declining the grant would significantly reduce cultural delivery capacity, limit engagement with communities, and hinder progress towards a successful launch of the new theatre. It may also impact future eligibility for ACE funding.

4 Preferred Option

4.1 The recommended option is Option 1: Accept the grant

5 Consultation

5.1 Portfolio leader has been consulted and supportive of the recommendation.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 The £656k revenue grant funding will be utilised to support the Coliseum and the development of the Council's cultural programme and represents an extension to existing funding arrangements. The Council will be accountable to the Arts Council England for the use of the grant and will need to ensure that the grant is spent in line with the conditions of the funding.

(James Postle, Senior Finance Manager)

7 Legal Implications

7.1 The proposed acceptance of the grant is lawful, subject to the Council entering into and complying with the Funding Agreement and the associated External Delegation Agreement both of which have been reviewed and substantively agreed. The Council will remain accountable to Arts Council England for compliance with the funding conditions, including monitoring, governance, reporting and onward granting requirements.

As the existing Grant Funding Agreement between the Council and Oldham Coliseum Theatre Limited expires on 31 March 2026, a variation or new grant agreement will be required to govern the 2026–27 onward funding and to ensure appropriate monitoring, audit and clawback provisions remain in place.

The funding constitutes a grant rather than a procurement arrangement and does not engage the Procurement Act 2023. Onward grant arrangements structured as grant funding and comply with the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

Pamela Nsofor (Solicitor)

8 Procurement Implications

8.1 None

Angela Porter (Senior Category Manager Commercial & Environment)

9 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People

9.1 Yes

10 Key Decision

10.1 Yes

11 **Key Decision Reference**

11.1 RBO-07-26.

12 **Background Papers**

12.1 The following is a list of background papers on which this report is based in accordance with the requirements of Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972. It does not include documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information as defined by the Act :

Name of File: Urgent Business – Investing in a New Theatre for Oldham Cabinet Report February 2023



Urgent Business
-Investing in a New

13 **Appendices**

13.1 Equality Impact Assessment



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