



## 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.

### Key Achievements for 2025/26

#### Strong Financial Management

- 2024/25 Statement of Accounts published on time, placing Oldham among only four GM authorities to meet the statutory deadline.
- Major reduction of a £26m projected pressure to under £5m, achieved through strict spending and recruitment controls and revised MRP policy.

#### Improved Revenue Performance

- Council Tax and Business Rates collection improved, with arrears reduced by £1.16m and overall collection performance up on last year.
- Welfare Rights generated £830k for residents in Q1, including £260k in backdated awards.

#### Strengthened Workforce & Organisational Development

- Significant improvement in staff engagement, with *Let's Talk* conversation completion rising from 24% to 76%.
- Expansion of early-career pathways, including new graduates, T-Level placements and work-experience programmes.

#### Digital Transformation Progress

- Laptop refresh, Wi-Fi upgrades, and Cloud migration underway, including closure of the Civic Data Centre.
- Inclusive Bytes digital inclusion work expanded, supporting residents with skills, device repair and access.

#### Climate Change & Green New Deal Delivery

- Wrigley Head Solar Farm construction beginning, following contractor appointment and site preparation.
- Green New Deal Partnership development advanced, with strong market engagement from ~100 organisations.
- Progress on Low Carbon Heat Network 'Early Works', utilising the Green Heat Network Fund.

**Finance:** Our 2024/25 Statement of Accounts was signed off by the External Auditors on 16 February 2026 with a clean (unqualified) opinion. This was completed ahead of the legal deadline of 27 February and is a major achievement, especially as many councils nationally haven't managed this. Across Greater Manchester, only four councils met the deadline: Oldham, Stockport, Bolton and Rochdale.

As reported before, our financial position remains very challenging. Demand for essential services—particularly Adult Social Care and Children's Services—continues to rise. The Month 10 position reported to Cabinet shows a projected overspend of £4.946m by year-end. Although this is still a significant pressure, it is a major improvement on the £23.2m overspend projected during the summer. Work will continue to reduce the overspend further before year end.

**Revenues and Benefits:** Council Tax and Business Rates collection remains in line with last year at the end of Quarter 3. We have also made progress on recovering arrears: £3.8m for Council Tax and £425k for Business Rates.

The Accounts Receivable/Payable team is performing strongly, with 75.64% of the £79m billed so far collected and more than 94% of invoices paid within 30 days.

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The Benefits team continues to manage high volumes of Universal Credit updates from the DWP. This has slowed processing times for new Council Tax Reduction claims to 43.49 days, though new Housing Benefit claims are now quicker at 22.01 days. Processing times for changes in circumstances remain strong at around 6 days.

We continue to work closely with Adult Social Care on improvements in the Financial Assessment team. The backlog has reduced significantly, and we are working to complete the annual uprating process faster to prevent backlogs building up again.

**Financial & Digital Inclusion:** We welcome the Government's confirmation of £5.747m per year for three years from April 2026 through the new Crisis and Resilience Fund. This replaces the Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments and provides over £1m more than previous funding.

As part of this, residents facing sudden financial hardship will be able to apply to our £1m Crisis Payment Scheme.

Our Pension Credit campaign has already helped 22 residents start receiving this important benefit, with more expected as new data comes in. The Welfare Rights Service has helped residents secure an extra £2.3m in support by the end of Quarter 3.

We have secured 100 free mobile phones from the GMCA Tech Fund (via Virgin Media O2) and will distribute them to residents who need them most.

**IT and Digital:** We are finalising papers for Cabinet in March on the new 3-year IT Capital Programme, which includes major improvements to cyber security and supports future digital transformation.

The rollout of new staff laptops is gathering pace. Attention is now turning to upgrading public computers in libraries, the Customer Service Centre, town halls and lifelong learning centres.

Cloud migration work continues, and the decommissioning of the Civic Data Centre is progressing well. Wi-Fi improvements are also ongoing, and site surveys have begun for infrastructure and telephony upgrades at six family hubs.

We are assessing upgrades to meeting room technology across council buildings. We are also progressing proposals to use Microsoft Dynamics "accelerators" to improve processes for member casework, complaints, FOIs, SARs and data breaches.

The IT development fund is supporting two pilot projects using MagicNotes for transcription in Adults' and Children's Services.

**HR and OD:** Phase 2 of the HR & OD ReBuild Plan continues, and a new senior structure has been agreed, strengthening technical expertise and strategic workforce support.

Statutory workforce reporting is underway. The Pay Policy Statement goes to Cabinet on 4 March, and the Gender Pay Gap report is being finalised.

The service continues to support staff wellbeing and engagement. Three free flu vaccination clinics were delivered this winter, vaccinating over 100 staff. Planning for the twice-yearly Staff Get Togethers continues.

We're also proud of our work to support under-represented groups. The Young Person Peer Support Network held a successful career panel, and three colleagues graduated from the GM Elevate Programme. We continue to expand our early careers offer and delivered a strong programme for National Apprenticeship Week in February. The team also represented the Council at the Blue Coat School Careers Fair.

**Governance, Risk and Performance:** The Constitution Working Group continues to review updates to Council and Committee procedures. A task and finish group is reviewing the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny, and all Members have been invited to complete a survey to support this.

Democratic Services has supported 66 meetings since the last report. Overview and Scrutiny has [reviewed the Council's performance from July to September using the corporate performance report and dashboards.](#)

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**Internal Audit & Counter Fraud:** Up to Quarter 3, 25 audit opinion reports and one grant assurance statement have been issued. Regular progress updates have been shared with Audit Committee and the Chief Executive's Strategy Group, contributing to the overall Limited assurance opinion for 2024/25.

The Counter Fraud team has identified £183,096 of overpayments and fraud to date.

**Procurement:** A new Interim Head of Procurement joined in late January. Work is underway on preparing the Council's first pipeline notice, which must be published by May 2026 under the new Procurement Act 2023.

Improvements include faster updates to the Contracts Register on The Chest and a new single internal procurement pipeline to improve oversight and planning.

**Climate Change & Green New Deal:** A full update report on programme activities is submitted to Council for noting.

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