



Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Fida Hussain, Cabinet Member for Enterprise

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

Key Achievements in 2025/26:

Employment Support: Get Oldham Working

- In November, the **Get Oldham Working** team were announced as the national award winners for the prestigious **ERSA Awards 2025** in London, where GOW was shortlisted for five national awards and, most significantly, announced as national winners for **Tailored Employment Support**.
- Oldham Jobs Fair (September 2025): Over 2,200 attendees and 100 employers, with strong engagement from priority wards including Alexandra, Werneth, Coldhurst and St Mary's.
- **Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund:** £266,000 secured to develop community digital hubs, mobile outreach and volunteer training to tackle digital exclusion across the borough.

Supply chain support:

- **Supply-chain development activity:** Muse, Willmott Dixon and Tilbury Douglas have hosted Meet the Buyer events that attracted strong attendance from Oldham SMEs. These events are directly focused on increasing local participation in Council contracts supporting the Council's commitment to community wealth-building and local value which is reflected in the collaboration with Get Oldham Working.
- The **Oldham Trading Platform** continues to scale, with 148 businesses registered and further firms progressing through onboarding. Work with major contractors aims to embed the platform as a central route for local procurement, supporting inclusive economic growth.

Enterprise Support:

- **Oldham Business Awards:** Oldham's business community was showcased through the **17th Oldham Business Awards**, drawing more than 500 attendees and recognising local entrepreneurial success. The launch of the 2026 awards cycle continues to raise the borough's profile, with expanded categories that align with Council priorities and includes sponsorship from Get Oldham Working.
- **Innovation:** The Council supported Heyside Plastics with a £10k grant, this led to support from the business growth which connected the company to key programmes including Made Smarter, NERIC, Innovate UK, Salford University, and the GMCA loan fund. The outcome - projections show a 40–60% increase in production capacity within five years, which could generate an additional £3.2m–£4.8m in revenues per year.

Launch of Oldham Business Awards 2026

The launch of the 18th annual Oldham Business Awards took place on 26th February at Billingtons, in Oldham Town Centre. With over 100 people in attendance mainly from local businesses, the night saw the presentation of over £9,000 raised by the Business Awards to local charities Mahdlo and Dr Kersahw's. This year there are 13 categories for businesses to apply for including 3 new ones: Heart of the High Street, Community Impact and Sustainable Innovation. This year's celebration event takes place on the 2nd October in the Town Centre's new event space, The Loom.

Labour Market Report -

- i. **Unemployment is decreasing:** The February Labour Market Report shows an improving position with unemployment reducing from 7.3% in December 2024 to 6.5% in December 2025, continuing the trend which saw unemployment rates peak in July 2024 (7.7%).

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- ii. **Youth Unemployment:** Youth unemployment remains steady at 9.8%. Work is progressing with GMCA to develop the Youth Hub initiative and to engage with the Youth Guarantee programme that HM Government announced as part of the Get Britain Working programme.
 - iii. **Business Count:** The latest data shows that Oldham continues to grow its business base with a 3-percentage point increase over the last year with a net gain of 210 businesses – 7515 companies in total.

Business Growth Hub Quarterly Oldham Business Clinic

The Business Growth Hub holds quarterly drop-in clinics across the Borough to provide free support and advice for local businesses. This quarter the clinic was held at Audi Oldham on 26th Feb and the focus was innovation. Businesses were able to talk to an Innovation Advisor about the challenges they face and find out what support is available. Businesses had a 1-hour individual sessions looking at how to:

- Develop or improve a product or service
- Make your processes easier or more efficient
- Protect your ideas or brand
- Find funding or partners to support your plans
- Start using AI in a practical way for your business

Launch of BREE Network

The Council is pleased to host a launch event of Oldham's new BREE (Brokering Relationships Employers and Educators) Network on Wednesday 25 March 2026 at the JR Clynes building. To support the Employment and Skills Strategy, the BREE Network aims to strengthen meaningful connections between local employers and education providers. The process acts as a brokerage system to reduce demand on employers and ensure educators are being connected with employers who can offer meaningful careers education. The programme will be launched by Cllr Hussain alongside, our flagship employers including Casey's Construction, Willmott Dixon and Northern Care Alliance, as well as officers from the post-16 team and Get Oldham Working. North Chadderton School will also be present, having recently completed a pilot project with Caseys.

Get Oldham Working Performance:

Get Oldham Working (GOW) has begun 2026 strongly, with positive employment outcomes, new investment and growing neighbourhood delivery.

1. Performance

- Employment outcomes remain ahead of target (740 vs 718).
- Vanguard Work Well continues to exceed expectations, delivering 103% starts and high in-work outcomes.
- Restart achieved recognition, winning the Restart Team Trophy for First Earnings (Dec 2025).
- Engagement dipped briefly in Q3 due to planned activity pauses but is expected to rise in Q4.

2. Community & Digital Support

- Neighbourhood delivery expanding, including weekly employment/digital sessions with SAWN.
- Youth Hub development in Spindles progressing for improved 18–24 support.
- £266,084 secured for GOW Digital, introducing two Digital Hubs, a Mobile Hub, structured

3. Employer Engagement: GOW continues to work closely with:

- Good People, Retrofit Academy and Generation UK on green/retrofit pathways
- Manchester Airport Group and NHS/care employers
- Muse Developments on regeneration-linked opportunities

These partnerships ensure strong sector pathways and alignment with Oldham's growth priorities. The GOW team will be hosting a mini-jobs fair with the Manchester Airport Group in March, ahead of the summer season.

4. Resident Wellbeing & Confidence

The GOW Wardrobe & Wellbeing service has relaunched with high demand, offering interview clothing, mock interviews, hygiene packs and holistic therapies to build confidence and reduce anxiety.

5. Promoting the service

- The Get Oldham Working service are pleased to be able to sponsor the Oldham Business Awards. This helps cement the relationship with local companies.
- The team are also looking at how they can raise awareness of personal wellbeing and links to their services this includes the Head of Service, Jonathan Phillips, completing one running event per month in 2026, raising awareness for Type 1 Diabetes and other causes and in July, the full GOW team will take part in a Tough Mudder-style challenge at Heaton Park, raising funds for Cancer Research UK and promoting teamwork, wellbeing and service visibility.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.