

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.

Key Achievements for 2025/26

Major Cultural & Heritage Improvements

- Reopened Gallery Oldham's Old Library & Art Gallery with new permanent displays showcasing Oldham's history and global links.
- Oldham Archives relocated to Spindles, with all collections — including the Oldham Chronicle archive.

Growing Participation in Libraries

- Outstanding Summer Reading Challenge delivery: 1,700+ signups, 911 completions, and 363 new young members.
- Library Service shortlisted nationally for 'Library of the Year' for the second consecutive year.
- Launched Year of Reading 2026 with a borough-wide programme promoting reading for all ages.

Strong Festivals & Events Programme

- Festival Oldham & Winter Events Programme drew major attendance, including a successful Christmas Lights Switch-On despite severe weather.
- Illuminate Festival (Feb 2026) introduced a new borough-wide light parade involving families and local artists.
- Launched the Time Trek AR Heritage Trail, offering an interactive family experience of Oldham's history.

Oldham Theatre Workshop – A Standout Year

- Moved into new JR Clynes studios, supporting 600+ young people weekly.
- Delivered Hansel & Gretel plus a school's tour reaching 2,186 pupils, and a youth-devised production *What They Left Behind*.
- Achieved a sold-out summer show, *Chasing the Wind*, featured on BBC North West.

Improvements to Leisure Facilities & Community Impact

- Major investment in leisure: £160k in new gym equipment, £125k Royton Pool refurbishment, and ongoing Radclyffe track lighting upgrade to Class II standards.
- Rolled out free gym & swim for 14–16-year-olds on free school meals, including 16 nutritious meals.
- Strengthened community health engagement through the Women's Health Forum (400 attendees), Menopause Awareness events, and a Volunteering Fair at Oldham Library.

Culture

Oldham Theatre Workshop: Oldham Theatre Workshop, in partnership with Oldham Libraries and Oldham Coliseum Christmas, delivered a successful Show 'Hansel and Gretel' in the Library Theatre Space in-Dec 2025. This production then toured to 10 schools in January, reaching 2,186 young people. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting high levels of engagement, pupil enjoyment and the value of combining performance with participatory learning

Events: Following the successful Christmas Lights Switch On and Winter Weekends in Nov and Dec, the team delivered Illuminate Festival on Sat 21st Feb. This included a light parade, with families showcasing lanterns they had created at Gallery Oldham during the half term holiday.

Libraries: Oldham Libraries have, for the second-year running, been shortlisted for the *Library of the Year* Award — this time in recognition of the amazing work the team has delivered with the

community as part of the Northmoor Library refit. [Library of the Year Finalists | The British Book Awards](#)

2026 is The National Year of Reading and the service are planning a series of reading initiatives and events to encourage reading for all. To kick start the campaign, a reading calendar has been devised by staff with monthly reading prompts and book recommendations. The events programme for the National Year of Reading offers something for everyone – including author events, World Book Night celebrations, the Summer Reading Challenge and the Greater Manchester Festival of Libraries.

Library service delivered several innovative new events and activities to support health and wellbeing:

- Hosted a Health film screening, in collaboration with NHS Healthy Minds. A film showing of *Ping Pong* – a documentary with a focus on aging well and how staying active and social in older age can boost mental health and wellbeing.
- Toured Ali's Big Day across 4 HLA venues, a sensory piece of theatre using music and humour to tell a story for EY and key stage 4 (14-16) SEND audiences, that supports physical, emotional and skills development (153 attendees).

Gallery Oldham: Two new exhibitions launched in January 2026:

- '150 Years of Oldham Rugby League Football Club' 10 Jan – 7 Mar 2026, and
- 'Women Portraits: Trades and Professions by Charlotte Hodes 17 Jan – 9 May 2026

Sport and Leisure

Bikeability

I'm pleased to update Council on the strong progress of our Bikeability programme this year. After a slower start due to the short lead-in time between contract award and delivery, performance has recovered extremely well. We've seen strong demand from schools, and the programme is now firmly on track to meet or exceed its annual targets.

A key early challenge was that all of our instructors were from outside the borough. Thanks to our growing relationship with the Bikeability Trust and the NCA, we have now hosted two instructor training courses, successfully training 12 local people. This has strengthened our local delivery capacity and will make the programme much more sustainable in the long term.

Bikeability continues to make a major contribution to our Public Health and Move More priorities. It is increasing children's physical activity, improving road safety knowledge, building independent travel skills, and helping to establish long-term active travel habits. It also plays an important role in reducing health inequalities and supporting our clean air and sustainability ambitions.

Overall, despite early challenges, the programme has recovered strongly due to the work of officers and is delivering real benefits for children and families across Oldham. The move to a three-year national funding model will give us greater long-term stability in the future too.

Oldham Active

Oldham Active has had a very positive period. More than 5,000 residents took part in events and activities, including the Oldham Halloween Half Marathon,

Our leisure centres continue to improve what they offer, with new sessions such as post-natal Pilates, chair Pilates, and more adult swimming lessons help our residents to Move More and improve their Health and Wellbeing.

Membership numbers continue to grow on previous years, helped by new equipment and good feedback from users.

A special mention goes to Rachel Holloway, a REACH Exercise Referral Programme Instructor who received an Excellence in Heart Care Award for her outstanding work and lifesaving actions, with 20 years of service at Oldham Active.

Overall, this has been a strong period, showing real progress both inside our centres and out in our communities.

Sports Club Taster Week

We're also gearing up for our **Sports Club Taster Week**, which takes place from **16th March**. This is a great chance for local clubs and organisations to showcase what they offer and inspire more residents to Move More and have fun whilst they do it.

I'd encourage councillors to spread the word and urge clubs in their wards to get involved so we can shine a spotlight on the brilliant grassroots sport we have across Oldham. They can contact our Move More team for more information.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.