

Heritage, Libraries and Arts Strategy

2023–2027



Oldham
Council

Foreword

Councillor Peter Dean

Cabinet Member – Communities and Culture

Oldham's vibrant heritage, libraries and arts service provides vital facilities, inviting spaces, and valued experiences for all. The service brings people of all generations and backgrounds together to enjoy culture and learning. Our cultural heritage is a living testament to the resilience, creativity, and diversity that define the borough. Our spaces are community hubs where residents can find support and information to inspire their imaginations and improve their personal wellbeing.

I am delighted to launch this strategy. It is an ambitious plan of action, and also a shared vision for a future where our cultural legacy is preserved and thrives. Our libraries are centres of learning and leisure, and our arts experiences are accessible to all. The new strategy responds to the needs of our communities and places them at the heart of service development. It outlines how we will work in partnership with other organisations to deliver a dynamic and impactful service.

With highly qualified and dedicated staff, Oldham Heritage, Libraries and Arts forms the backbone of our rich Oldham community and cultural networks. This strategy represents our ongoing commitment to excellence in a service that benefits the whole community. We look forward to many more years of transforming and enriching the lives of Oldham residents.



Peter Dean

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1. Our Mission

Our mission is to make a positive difference to people's lives by connecting them to high-quality information and creative experiences.

We will do this by ensuring our services;

- are rooted within and responsive to the communities we serve, through an evidence and place-based approach, and built upon appropriate consultation.
- have welcoming, animated and flexible spaces.
- offer a wide range of free accessible resources, services, and cultural experiences for all ages.
- have skilled, knowledgeable, and happy staff.



Objectives

We will work with our communities and a range of local, regional and national partners to ensure that we offer a community focused HLA service that:

1. Raises literacy levels through inspiring a passion for reading, spoken word, writing, drama, theatre and the arts.
2. Inspires and develops audiences through encounters with our collections – collecting, preserving, curating and making accessible Oldham’s collections for present and future generations.
3. Delivers a diverse range of participatory, co-produced, fun, creative and cultural experiences, reflecting the heritage and identity of our local area.
4. Ensures that learning remains at the heart of everything we do – providing relevant, accessible, inclusive high-quality services which encourage curiosity, fun, exploration and a sense of wonder.
5. Provides equal opportunities for all to access a range of Information and Digital learning resources and develop digital skills.
6. Works with local businesses and creatives to develop and explore funding and partnership opportunities.
7. Inspires and supports people to improve their health and wellbeing.
8. Reaches out to those in the community that are vulnerable, isolated or hard to reach and welcomes individuals and organisations into our spaces.
9. Provides a welcoming and excellent customer service by skilled, knowledgeable, and happy staff.
10. Raises the profile of our services through effective marketing and advocacy, highlighting the wider benefits and impact of heritage, libraries and arts to stakeholders.
11. Ensures we are environmentally responsible, and that we develop, embed and celebrate sustainable practices.



2. Heritage, Libraries and Arts

2.1 The Power of Heritage, Libraries and Arts

‘I believe in the power of artists, curators, librarians, arts organisations, museums and libraries... I believe, above all else, that people with creativity and culture in their lives are happier and more fulfilled human beings.’

Darren Henley, Chief Executive, Arts Council England

Enjoyable, satisfying and pleasurable in themselves, heritage, libraries and arts are also powerful tools enabling people to be inspired, empowered, included and engaged. They provide opportunities for people to express themselves and celebrate diversity, understand contemporary issues and work together for mutual benefit.

Participation in heritage, libraries and arts supports learning and wellbeing and contributes to economic wellbeing for individuals and society:

- Almost 60% of people are more likely to report good health if they've attended a cultural place or event in the last 12 months
- Arts and cultural intervention can have a positive impact on specific health conditions such as dementia, Parkinson's and depression
- Children from low-income families who take part in arts activities at school are three times more likely to get a degree
- Secondary school pupils engaged in arts and culture are twice as likely to volunteer in the community and are 20% more likely to vote as young adults
- Students who study arts subjects are more employable and more likely to stay in employment
- The cultural sector creates economic growth and jobs: it is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the economy
- Being a regular library user is associated with a 1.4 per cent increase in the likelihood of reporting good general health
- Libraries provide £27.5m savings p.a. to the NHS

Figures taken from The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society – An Evidence Review, Arts Council England (2011) and The Health and wellbeing benefits of Public Libraries, Arts Council England (2015)

2.2 Oldham's Heritage, Libraries and Arts Explained

This strategic plan covers the following Oldham Council Services that work together as an integrated team to deliver a range of services:

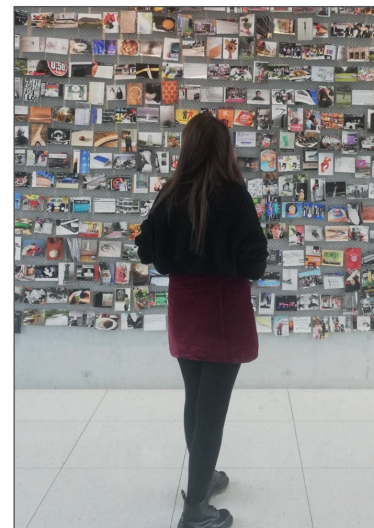
- Gallery Oldham
- Oldham Local Studies and Archives
- Oldham Libraries
- Oldham Theatre Workshop

Gallery Oldham

Gallery Oldham provides a programme of exhibitions, events, educational and outreach initiatives focusing on art, craft, digital media, social history, photography and natural history. We care for the borough's historic collections of art, natural history and social history. Our online offer has continued to expand with increased digital access to collections and activities.

A comprehensive schools' programme links to the National Curriculum and includes grant funded programmes for least engaged schools, artist led sessions and outreach.

Learning is at the heart of everything we do and in addition to our regular family holiday programmes we are continually seeking ways to inspire and engage. From our Go Baby! early years initiative to artist workshops, an evolving young people's programme, dementia friendly activities alongside BSL and audio described sessions for those who require them.



**'Every time I visit the Gallery, I leave feeling inspired.
We love what you do!'**

Visitors aged 24 and 29 at Gallery Oldham

**'As usual it opens my eyes to possibilities about which I'd never
thought before...the most valuable building we have in Oldham'**

Resident, aged 89



Oldham Local Studies and Archives

Local Studies and Archives maintains a public study facility open six days a week providing members of the public and council employees with access to the wealth of archives and local studies resources held by Oldham Local Studies and Archives.

Talks to local groups, family history sessions, schools' workshops and the popular Oldham Histories Festival are included in the ongoing programme, with additional grant funded work and projects. Recent examples include the project with First Choice Homes on The Towers Project as well as ongoing work around commemorations and special events, including the centenaries of the First World War and Women's Suffrage.

'May I place on record my grateful thanks to all the staff at the Centre for being so accommodating and a great source of help to me. Without exception they were attentive, always professional and not only to me as I witnessed how they dealt with casual enquirers too. Although I have completed my current research in Oldham I shall miss my visits to the Centre which I honestly rate as the best record office I have visited in the last 20 years.'

Visitor to Oldham Local Studies and Archives



Oldham Libraries

Oldham has a network of 12 libraries across the borough, serving as community hubs co-located with a variety of partner services including neighborhood teams, housing providers, health partners and leisure services. We also work with a range of business and third sector partners delivering vital services to our communities.

Collectively open 477.5 hours per week, with late night and weekend opening, libraries deliver a range of resources and services including:

- reading and information materials in physical and digital formats,
- programme of activities for all age groups to encourage reading for pleasure,
- digital skills training and digital services including access to computers, free Wi-Fi, printing and scanning, digital lending scheme, as well as new technologies such as VR experiences, 3D printing and coding activities,
- health and wellbeing information and activities,
- a programme of participatory and inspiring creative and cultural experiences.



‘You have been so kind and looked after me and chosen me some smashing books and you have all done it with a smile and been so helpful all the time and I know how lucky I am to have such a lovely library in Failsworth, with such caring people.’

Visitor to Failsworth Library, 2023



Oldham Theatre Workshop

Oldham Theatre Workshop (OTW) delivers high quality participatory performance opportunities for young people and adults in and around Oldham. Activities focus on improving confidence, developing social skills and allowing participants to explore issues that affect their lives in a safe and open environment. Support for formal education is also given in the form of INSET training and workshops in schools.

Our Applied Theatre work uses theatre and drama as a change agent for a wide range of social, personal, community and corporate issues. OTW's Applied Theatre work extends far beyond the borough's boundaries with significant and fruitful relationships with regional, national and international partners.

As well as being a cornerstone of the borough's cultural offer we aim to inspire and empower people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to lead active lives, enriched through cultural experiences and use cultural activities to address specific personal and community issues.

'I love working with Oldham Theatre Workshop. Their innovative, sensitive and thought-generating approach to working with children and young people allows schools and communities to develop social change through the arts in really exciting ways.'

Natalie Brown, Extended Schools Project Officer, Oldham Council

'It is seen as a pinnacle of achievement and good practice. It is seen as a beacon of excellence, a dynamic and impressive youth-based theatre. It is seen as a fine example of a council initiative in the arts hugely benefitting its communities, directly and indirectly.'

Sally Mackey, Deputy Dean of Studies, Central School of Speech and Drama (London)



3. Context and Key Drivers for the Future

3.1 Local Context

This strategic plan will ensure that our activities support local needs in line with the Oldham Plan and Corporate Plan.

The Corporate Plan sets out how the council helps to uplift every resident. It ensures every effort and every penny goes towards improving services for residents, and on the things that matter most to them. This is especially important when times are tough.

Five key priorities are:

- Better Start and Skills for Life
- Better and Dynamic Business
- Healthy, safe and well supported residents
- Clean and Green future
- Quality Homes

We believe that the customer is, and should be, at the heart of what we do. Heritage, libraries and arts services are uniquely placed to respond to people on an individual level.

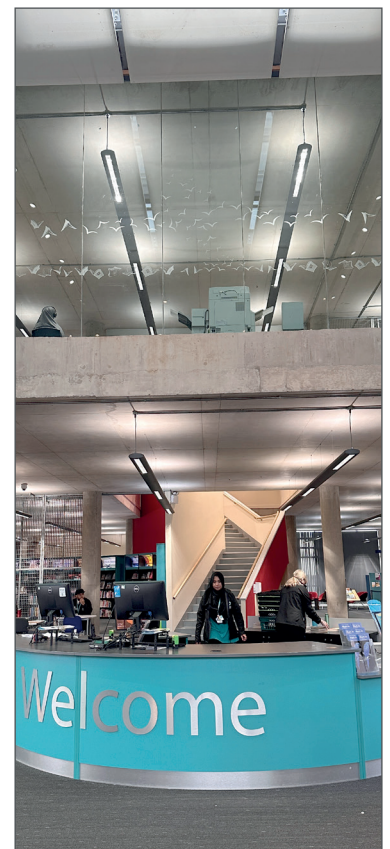
Arts as a tool for expression, exploration and development have a track record of reaching disengaged and excluded people and creating positive outcomes for them. Libraries, through their welcoming spaces, providing universal free access to resources and services reach people from all communities and ages. Museum and archive collections are unique, authentic, and rooted in the locality and as such help us connect and reflect; people's stories provide meaning to collections and collections enable people to come together and make sense of the world they live in.

We will be responsive to the expectations and needs of our customers, seeking feedback from them and involving them wherever possible in the design and delivery of services.

By employing a variety of methods to capture and assess visitor and user experience and expectations we will benchmark our services with other libraries, museums, galleries and archives throughout the region.

As trusted community hubs and services, our strengthened integrated placed-based working model will provide targeted support to residents to access a variety of heritage, library and arts as well as wider services; helping communities to thrive.

Working in partnership is integral to delivering Oldham's Cultural Strategy and supporting the Creating a Better Place Programme which has culture at the heart of driving regeneration for Oldham.



Other influencing factors and key drivers for the service include:

3.2 Economic

In the current challenging economic climate and the increases in cost of living, cultural organisations and local authority cultural services are facing shrinking budgets and increased competitiveness for resources.

The requirement to demonstrate value for money helps us focus on costs but also on outputs and outcomes, seeking out opportunities and applying creative approaches for efficiencies and income generation, and also reviewing and refining our partnership arrangements.

Last year the HLA service secured over £400k of funding and worked with a variety of business, community and council partners to extend reach and deliver targeted services. We will continue to maximise resources and make savings and efficiencies through collaborative working, sourcing funding and income generation opportunities.

3.3 Professional standards

Recent professional and government policy directives have focused on the need for cultural institutions to demonstrate value whether that is social or economic, personal or community.

Linked to value and cost is the focus on driving up standards and striving to achieve the highest possible standards. As well as securing collections, increasing access to them and developing sector skills and leadership, accreditation schemes such as the long-standing ACE and more recent Archive Service Accreditation scheme, alongside other forms of external validation, can bring new partners on board and be an effective route to new funding and investment.

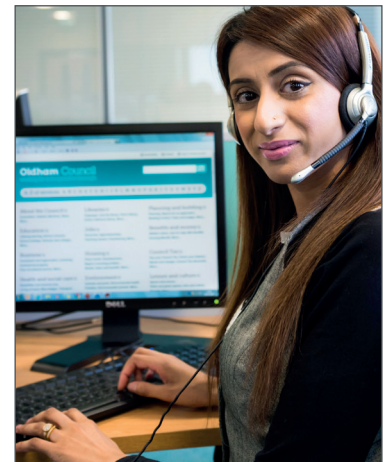
Gallery Oldham will seek to retain its accredited status and the Oldham Local Studies and Archives will build on its provisional award of TNA accreditation. Oldham Libraries will work with Libraries Connected who will be introducing new accreditation standards for libraries. Although there are no agreed national standards relevant to Arts and OTW they will keep abreast of good practice and benchmark our activities against the best in their fields. Our aspiration to achieve and maintain the highest possible professional standards will require us to develop a culture of



4. Heritage Libraries and Arts Objectives and Key Deliverables

Monitoring Our Performance

- We will produce quarterly reports that report against indicators for each of the objectives as outlined in our performance framework
- We will also produce an annual report highlighting key successes
- Annual business and action plans will be developed
- Performance reviews with staff will include key actions that relate back to the business plan and strategy
- We will ensure our impacts are measured against and contribute to wider council and Oldham Plan objectives
- The strategy will be reviewed annually



Objective 1 – Literacy

Raising literacy levels through inspiring a passion for reading, spoken word, writing, drama, theatre and the arts.

We will deliver:

- An accessible service that caters for a wide range of audiences
- Programming that links literacy (book displays) to wider HLA offer
- Programming that includes more themed events for a range of ages



Objective 2 – Collections

Inspiring and developing audiences through encounters with our collections - collecting, preserving, curating and making accessible Oldham's collections for present and future generations.

We will deliver:

- Improved collections care by developing new stores that meet accreditation standards
- A refreshed exhibitions offer to engage a wider range of audiences
- Co-curation opportunities for our communities
- A focus on taking collections out into communities



Objective 3 – Creative and Culture

Delivering a diverse range of participatory, co-produced, fun, creative and cultural experiences; reflecting the heritage and identity of our local area.

We will deliver:

- A programme of events and exhibitions delivered outdoors and in community settings
- A participatory programme enabling residents to actively take part
- New work co-produced with local artists and in partnership with other organisations

Objective 4 – Learning

Ensuring that learning remains at the heart of everything we do – providing relevant, accessible, inclusive high-quality services which encourage curiosity, fun, exploration, and a sense of wonder.

We will deliver:

- A range of opportunities for everyone to access informal learning across the service
- An integrated offer for schools and early years across our service

Objective 5 – Information and Digital

Providing equal opportunities for all to access a range of Information and Digital learning resources and develop digital skills.

We will deliver:

- Training opportunities to develop skilled residents, a skilled workforce and skilled volunteers
- A rich online offer of events and resources
- Support for digital inclusion through provision of devices, connectivity, and skills

Objective 6 – Maximising Resources

Working with local businesses and creatives to develop and explore funding and partnership opportunities.

We will deliver:

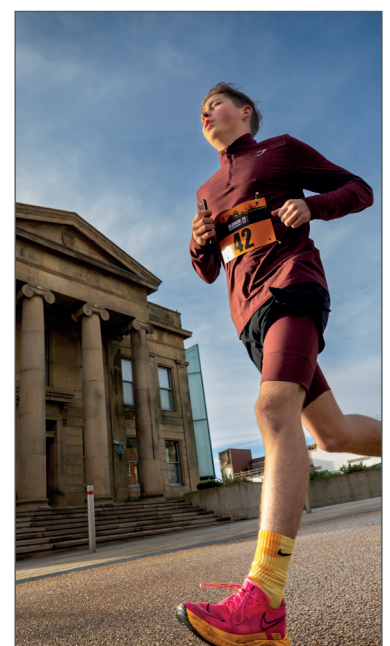
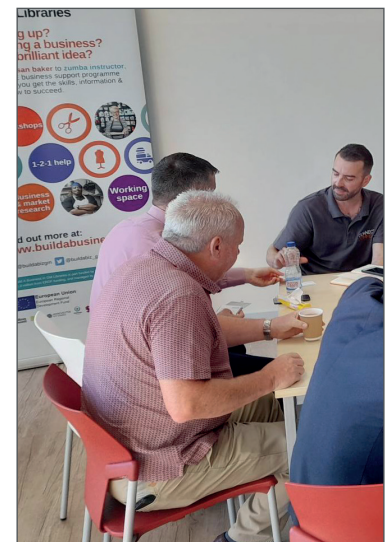
- A focused funding strategy to inform strategic decision making
- A coherent and transparent charging strategy across our events, shop offer and room hire
- Working in partnership to deliver projects efficiently

Objective 7 – Health and Wellbeing

Inspiring and supporting people to improve their health and wellbeing.

We will deliver:

- Ways of working that prioritise the wellbeing of our staff and volunteers
- A health partners network – responding to community need through partnership working
- Several community response hubs to meet specific needs
- Service wide programming that has wellbeing at its core



Objective 8 – Community Outreach

Proactively reaching out to those in the community that are vulnerable, isolated or hard to reach. We will do this by working in partnership with a range of organisations across all sectors and through our welcoming sanctuary of community hubs.

We will deliver:

- Increased activity in community settings
- Meaningful and sustainable partnerships with targeted groups
- A stronger marketing profile to raise awareness of our community offer

Objective 9 – Workforce Development

Providing a welcoming and excellent customer service by skilled, knowledgeable and happy staff and volunteers.

We will deliver:

- Opportunities for peer learning and secondments to develop our staff team
- An integrated team that can advocate and signpost across the whole HLA offer
- Clear development pathways and enhanced support for applicants to join the team or progress within it

Objective 10 – Marketing and Advocacy

Raising the profile of our services through effective marketing and advocacy, highlighting the wider benefits and impact of heritage, libraries and arts to stakeholders.

We will deliver:

- An improved and engaging online offer including a relaunched HLA website
- Increased capacity in marketing through partnerships and staff development
- A clearer HLA identity reflected throughout our offer

Objective 11 – Environmentally Responsible

Ensuring we are environmentally responsible, developing and embedding sustainable practices.

We will deliver:

- An educated and carbon literate staff team with the confidence to place sustainability at the heart of decision making
- Programming service wide that raises awareness of environmental issues
- A service wide programming that ensures no duplication of spending or waste of resources



5. Key Achievements 2022 – 2023

679,357

visitors to
Oldham
Libraries



Visitors to
Gallery
Oldham

28,833



HLA delivered

5,075

in-person
events with

109,894

attendees

7,086

visitors to
Oldham
Local Studies
and Archives



12,158

Participants
visits with
Oldham
Theatre
Workshop

12

Exhibitions

14

Gallery
Talks

9

Local
History
Talks

Heritage
Open Day

115

Art
classes
with

1,148
participants

6

Festival events across the
Town Centre with over

60,000

attendees and
participants

196,384

Digital
Loans



We worked with **528** Artists and
Performers and delivered

98 Business Support Events

86,920

**PC
sessions**



38,848

**Wi-Fi
sessions**



29,170

**Active
library users**



16,091

**Attendees
to events
for under
5's**

972

**Children benefitted from
Holiday Activities and
Food programmes**

236

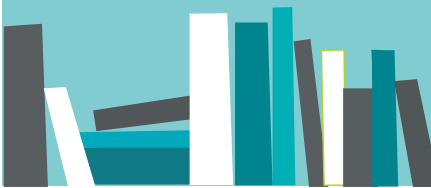
**English
conversations
classes with**

1,951

participants

246,244

**Physical
Book Loans**



27

**live@thelibrary
events with**

2,545

attendees

149,182

**Sessions
with online
database
resources**

156 Volunteers donated more than

5,850 hours



Over £400,000 funding awarded to support targeted programme of activities including arts programming, wellbeing workshops and business support