LEVELLING UP OLDHAM

The Oldham Economic Review of
Economic Transformation and Civic Pride

MARCH 2022

OERB | Oldham Economic Review Board

FOREWORD

Oldham residents are rightly proud of the place we call home. From the monumental mills that remind us of our heritage in the cotton industry, to communities where the impulse to help out a neighbour is still strong, to the glorious Peaks on our doorstep, Oldham has a lot going for it.

There's no doubt, however, that we have potential that's currently untapped. Our position in Greater Manchester and the youth and talent of our population means Oldham could be a great place to base an ambitious, innovative and growing business. But like lots of other places in the UK we've faced challenges as the economy has changed. We need to do something different if our residents are to have the opportunities and successes they deserve. We want every young person in Oldham to know they'll have the chance of a great career without having to leave their hometown. We want to give people options when it's time for a career change, or they'd like to upskill. We want every family to have a decent income, as well as activities and opportunities on the doorstep to boost pride and make Oldham a fun place to live.

That's why I asked Alun Francis, the Principal at Oldham College, to lead a Commission to help us plot a brighter economic future for the borough. We need to make the most of the great leaders we have in Oldham, and draw on expertise from elsewhere to turn the Government's Levelling Up mantra into a reality.

I'm grateful to the Commissioners for the time and insight they've brought to this process, and look forward to working with them and our valued partners across the borough to translate the vision set out here into reality.

Cllr Arooj Shah
Leader, Oldham Council

CONTENTS

Introduction **4**

Chapter 1. Oldham: Past and Present **18**

1.1 Introduction 18

1.2 Oldham – a timeline 19

1.3 Economic Resilience 26

Chapter 2. Defining the Challenge: What does Oldham want to be? **32**

2.1 Introduction 22

2.2 Summary of Expert Evidence sessions 33

2.3 Levelling Up opportunities 35

2.4 Recommendations 38

Chapter 3. Business and Innovation **40**

3.1 Introduction 31

3.2 Summary of Expert Evidence sessions 31

3.2 Oldham's Business Base 34

3.4 Recommendations 45

Chapter 4: Jobs and Skills **55**

4.1 Introduction 55

4.2 Summary of Expert Evidence sessions 56

4.3 Oldham data – employment and skills 58

4.4 Analysis 64

4.5 Recommendations 68

Chapter 5: Civic Pride, Housing, Health, and Oldham Town Centre **69**

5.1 Introduction 69

5.2 Summary of Expert Evidence sessions 70

5.3 The importance of 'Civic Pride' and 'Social Fabric' 71

5.4 The Town Centre, Housing and Health 74

5.5 Recommendations 85

Chapter 6: Institutions **86**

6.1 Introduction 86

6.2 What do we mean by institutions and why are they important? 87

6.3 Institutions and Institutional Capital in Oldham 90

6.4 Recommendations – Does Oldham need new institutions? 96

Recommendations **97**

INTRODUCTION

The Oldham Economic Review has been undertaken at the request of Oldham Council, with a remit to examine the town's approach to improving its economic prospects.

It has been conducted through a partnership between Oldham College and the University of Manchester, which has helped ensure that the Review has access to the expertise it has required, but has also maintained its independence. Oldham Council contributed toward essential costs and this was matched by the University of Manchester, using CAPE funding. The Review has also leveraged in additional expertise to undertake further research which will help Oldham define and achieve its ambitions.

THE REVIEW BOARD MEMBERS

The Review board has comprised 12 independent members, chosen from a range of public, private and voluntary organisations – in Oldham and its wider environs. It has been chaired by **Alun Francis,** Principal and Chief Executive of Oldham College and vice chair, **Rubbi Bhogal Wood,** Director of Wild and Form digital consultancy. **Andy Westwood,** Professor of Government Practice and Vice Dean for Social Responsibility, has led the input from the University side, and other members have included:

- **Bilal Rahman** (Business person, owner of ibreathe and KickSonic)
- **Cath Green** (Housing consultant, former CEO of First Choice Homes)
- **Clive Memmott** (Chief Executive, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce)
- **Donna McLaughlin** (Northern Care Alliance)
- **Emma Barton** (Director of Economy, Oldham Council)
- **John Wrathmell** (Director of Research, Strategy and Economy, Greater Manchester Combined Authority)
- **Kashif Ashraf** (Joint Chair and Founder of Asian Business Leaders)
- **Laura Windsor Welsh** (Oldham Action Together)
- **Richard Jones** (Chair in Materials Physics and Innovation Policy, University of Manchester)

The Review has been undertaken in the style of a parliamentary commission, with the Review board meeting on a monthly basis to hear evidence from national and local expert witnesses, before forming conclusions and making recommendations.

SCHEDULE OF EVIDENCE SESSIONS

	21 October 2021	Witness
1	**Devolution, from MIER to Towns Fund**	Mike Emmerich (Metro Dynamics)
2	**Levelling Up Oldham**	Will Tanner (Onward) Jen Williams (MEN)
3	**GM's strategy, levers and projects**	Simon Nokes (GMCA)
4	**Oldham's strategy, levers, projects**	Emma Barton (Oldham Council)
	11 November 2021	
5	**Work, Skills and Levelling up**	Jonathan Simons (Public First)
6	**Breaking Oldham's Low Skills Equilibrium**	David Goodhart (Policy Exchange)
7	**Oldham's strategy, levers, projects**	Jon Bloor (Oldham Council) Neil Thomas (Dudley College)
8	**GM's strategy, levers, projects**	Gemma Marsh (GMCA)
9	**Employer training:** what does the data say about good employers?	Stephen Evans (Learning and Work Institute)
	25 November 2021	
10	**Plan for the North:** what do post-industrial places like Oldham do?	Steve Fothergill (Sheffield Hallam University, Industrial Communities Alliance)
11	**A Plan for Oldham:** underpinned by community wealth building?	Sarah Longlands (Centre for Local Economic Strategies)
12	**What does Oldham Make?**	Andy Gosharge (Ultimate Products)
13	**What could Oldham Make?** Learnings from national policy initiatives: Industrial Strategy and Innovation	Giles Wilkes (Global Flint) Richard Jones (Innovation GM) Paul Swinney (Centre for Cities)
	02 December 2021	
14	**Town Centres and High Streets**	Cathy Parker (MMU & Institute for Place Management)
15	**Housing**	Cllr Hannah Roberts (Oldham Council)
16	**Crime**	Inspector Nick Derbyshire (Greater Manchester Police)
17	**Health**	Katrina Stephens (Oldham Council)
	09 December 2021	
18	**Oldham's historic assets:** Mills and wider assets	Catherine Dewar (Historic England)

THE POLICY CONTEXT

The Review began in September 2021 with the expectation that the Government's "Levelling Up White Paper"[1] was pending. It was planned for the Oldham Review to complement the direction of travel in the White Paper, as this alongside other local, regional and national policy agendas is likely to have a profound impact on the context in which Oldham will be operating.

The White Paper was delayed and was not published until February 2022, which meant that it was not available until the final phase of the Review was due to complete. There is however, considerable overlap between the method of approach taken in the White Paper, and the approach taken in the Review – with the former considering issues of geographical disparity from the perspective of national systems and policies, while the Review takes a "local" approach, focussing on the options for improving one particular place.

The Review has intentionally mirrored the themes in the Levelling Up White Paper. The aim is to help Oldham be clear about how it might engage positively in the new policy landscape, with a strong focus on the twin themes which have come to characterise the meaning of "levelling up": economic transformation and civic pride.

1. See https://levellingup.campaign.gov.uk/

STRUCTURE

The full analysis of the Review will be published in the chapters outlined below, containing the evidence presented by expert witnesses, a more detailed level of analysis, commentary and data.

The document is organised into six chapters, which explore the key challenges for Oldham, organised in terms of the key themes of "levelling up". This document provides the detail and analysis which the Review board considered in arriving at its conclusions and recommendations.

The chapters are organised in the following order:

CHAPTER 1 Contextualises the problem

The Levelling Up White Paper provides an overview of the history and characteristics which shape and drive economic, social and geographical disparities in the country. This chapter provides an introduction to the way these issues are evident in Oldham, and how they relate to structure of its economy and the decline of some of its main industries. It describes Oldham's main challenges, provides a summary of key data, and summarises recent trends including where progress has been made in the shaping of its future.

CHAPTER 2 Economic purpose

The White Paper sets out five pillars through which it intends to drive levelling up policy, alongside a set of six capitals and twelve policy 'missions'. However, it is also clear about the ultimate destination, which is to create a "new model of economic growth, public and private investment and a high skill, high wage economy". While successful places require strong public services and have a clear role for community and voluntary activity, the focus of policy is on "supporting the private sector" as the "real engine of wealth creation – to invest more, grow more and take more risks". This chapter discusses the core challenge of defining Oldham's economic purpose and why having a clear and relentless commitment to this is important in driving change over the long term.

CHAPTER 3 Business and Innovation

Improving productivity, pay and living standards are a core theme and objective of the White Paper, with a strong emphasis on growing the private sector, especially through business innovation and improving infrastructure such as transport and digital connectivity. This chapter focusses on the importance of private sector growth in Oldham and the role of private, public and voluntary sector partners in supporting employment and local enterprise.

CHAPTER 4 Skills and Jobs

Opportunities and improved public services, with a particular emphasis on education and skills, are central to the White Paper proposals. This chapter focusses primarily on skills, and the issues which Oldham needs to solve, in order to fulfil its ambitions.

CHAPTER 5 Civic Pride and 'a Sense of Place'

The White Paper focusses a great deal of attention on restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, particularly around town centre regeneration, housing and crime. This chapter focusses on the related theme of 'social fabric', the role of 'community wealth building' and the importance of the town centre and the borough's high streets and the role of civic pride within Oldham.

CHAPTER 6 Institutions

The White Paper makes very clear recommendations about systems for delivering change, alongside the importance of local institutions, capacity and clear "missions" and targets which provide a focus for action and a source of accountability. This chapter focusses on the systems for delivery within Oldham, as part of Greater Manchester, and what can be done to improve these.

SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

The starting point of this Review is that Oldham must establish a clear and shared sense of its longer term aims and ambitions as a place. These need to drive public, private and voluntary/community activity in Oldham itself, and also need to be the basis on which Oldham engages productively with neighbouring places as well as with the Greater Manchester city-region and with Government and its agencies at a national level.

It is also a defining principle of this Review that Oldham's aims and ambitions should focus on its long term transformation. The challenges which Oldham faces are many, but have their origins in structural changes in the economy, bought about by deindustrialisation and the shift to a new economy dominated by services rather than manufacturing. Without a clear and shared sense of the future shape of the town within this new context, it is difficult to marshal and coordinate the efforts of local stakeholders or to strongly articulate the needs of the place and its people within wider partnerships, either sub-regionally or nationally.

The Levelling Up White Paper

The Review echoes many of the themes and ideas recently published in the White Paper, "Levelling Up the United Kingdom" (LUWP). This was published during the final phase of the Review process and although it is not yet policy (it is subject to consultation), provides an indication of the likely policy context within which Oldham's leaders and institutions will be working at least for the next few years. There will be plenty of debates and arguments around how to resource and fund this approach, but we are not concerned with this level of detail in this Review. The focus of this Review is on the method and analysis. The LUWP sets out a useful framework within which Government can work with different places to address geographical disparities, with a focus on economic transformation and the renewal of civic pride. We think this framework also applies well to our own thinking and for Oldham as a whole. It is a good starting point, which must be built on in the future, if change is really going to happen.

The LUWP presents a clear analysis of the long-term economic changes which underpin geographical disparities. However, it recognises that the issues are not "simply economic". The framework which it proposes to evaluate those disparities recognises the interconnection between six related, but distinct, forms of capital. Alongside financial, physical and human capital, it recognises the role of intangible capital (a critical aspect of the new economy recognising the importance of R&D and innovation), as well as social and institutional capital – which are key to understanding the twin roles of civic pride and social fabric and Oldham's institutions and their collective capacity in shaping successful places. It presents a cogent analysis of the way that deficiencies in one or more forms of the six capitals are evident in places which underperform, such that they become caught in a vicious cycle of persistently worse outcomes[2].

The LUWP is also helpful in the way that it proposes to address the long-term challenges of "levelling up". It does not seek to provide an "economic plan" for the country, but a framework within which resources can be devolved to local level, with a clear sense of purpose and achievable targets against which to focus efforts and measure success. These missions and targets focus on improving productivity, pay and living standards; spreading opportunities (with a focus on education, skills and health); and restoring a sense of community, pride and belonging. There is confidence in the role that public policy can play in coordinating efforts around these missions, in order to deliver economic transformation and a renewal of civic pride for people and places who are sometimes referred to as "left behind". And there is recognition of the role of local leadership in driving these solutions.

Cities and towns

However, the LUWP is also a reminder and a reinforcement of some of the challenges which Oldham has in establishing a clear identity and strong voice within a larger economic geography. The national Levelling Up strategy takes, as its focal point, the role of cities as the drivers of growth. "Levelling up" is envisaged as a process of devolving resources by building on the existing arrangements in city regions, rather than directly to individual towns or boroughs. In many respects, it aims to build on the foundations set out for devolution in the initial 2014 devolution deal in Greater Manchester. This is the framework within which Oldham has operated since then.

It is important to recognise and address the fact that there is still disagreement amongst some communities and actors that this is the best approach for places like Oldham. Nationally, there is a degree of scepticism about the benefits which city-region models of growth bring to surrounding towns and this view has gathered pace since the 2016 Referendum and the 2019 General Election. Indeed, the fact that previous approaches to regional disparities have not always delivered for everyone has been the major theme of policy in the last five years or so – enhanced by new economic and social consequences from Austerity, Brexit and Covid-19. This has been reflected in the changing status of towns within policy and public and political debate, particularly in the last five years. They have increasingly been seen less as an adjunct of neighbouring cities, and more as places in their own right.[3] This has been reflected in funding streams such as the 'Towns' and 'Future High Street Funds' as well as 'Levelling Up Funds', which have been allocated directly to Oldham and places like it, rather than through intermediaries, such as combined authorities.

2. See Levelling Up White Paper (2022), page 88

3. See David Goodhart (2017) "The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics" and Centre for Towns (2017) Launch Briefing https://www.centrefortowns.org/reports/reports/launch-briefing.

In many respects, the LUWP shifts the focus of policy back from a direct focus on individual places, to the wider economic units of which they are a part. It reasserts the model of economic renewal which focusses on cities and city-regions as the engines of growth. This Review is broadly supportive of this model. It is realistic to recognise that outer towns are unlikely to thrive independently, unless they position themselves to maximise the benefits of being situated within a larger economic entity. This is particularly the case in terms of private sector growth, which the LUWP identifies, quite rightly as the "real engine of wealth creation". It also relates to the creation and ongoing importance of new institutions, powers and resources at the city-region level such as the Mayor and the Combined Authority and its family of city-region organisations. Places like Oldham owed their original economic purpose to the fact that they were part of a bigger, sub-regional economic unit. And any new economic purpose is not going to be forged alone, but as part of the drive to foster a stronger private sector across Greater Manchester as a whole.

Spillovers and trickle out?

This Review also acknowledges that much more needs to be done in Oldham and places like it for these benefits and advantages to be fully realised. There is scepticism about some of the 'spill over' or 'trickle out' effects from city centres and these need to be taken seriously if a new approach to levelling up is going to work and gain public support. This exists across the country, and in outer boroughs in Greater Manchester, including in Oldham.

It is important to consider this in context. Part of the problem is that, despite the progress which cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Birmingham and others have made in recent times, they continue to underperform economically compared to both the national averages in various measures and also to similar cities in Europe and North America. The transformation task remains significant and long-term, and the benefits will not be evident for everyone or everywhere in the short-term. However, these benefits do need to be tangible and evident at some point. It is a measure of the maturity of strategies, partnerships, structures and processes within those devolved authorities, whether they can grasp the complexity of individual place-based needs, within the wider whole. The whole needs to be more than the "sum of the parts". But the needs of individual "parts" must also be recognised and taken seriously, and not lost – or the "whole" becomes somewhat empty.

Making city led growth work better

Levelling up is clearly not easy, at national or local level, and is swamped in complexity. The question is how to deal with this. It is the firm finding of this Review, that this is best achieved by finding ways of making the model work better, rather than by seeking alternatives to it. A key theme of this Review is that stakeholders should think differently about the way that the benefits of the City-region can be made to work. This is often thought of in terms of spillovers from the core to the periphery, but this is not the only element of the model. There is also much to be gained by collaboration between neighbours in the peripheral areas. But this requires active, sustained effort and co-ordination across multiple partners. It cannot be laissez faire and nor can it be expected to weather the repeated shocks of external events such as the financial crash or the pandemic without help or effort.

It is also important to ensure that Oldham is able to articulate a strong and confident voice within the City-region, making more of its relationships within Greater Manchester and its role in its governance. First it must be clear about its own long-term vision. Second is to place a renewed sense of its economic purpose, as a place, at the centre of that vision. Then there is a need to think this through, as an organising framework, for how Oldham should deal with the issues of productivity, opportunity, civic pride, and institutional capacity.

The recommendations of this review are organised around how Oldham can shape a strategy which builds on these themes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE LONG GAME

The Review heard evidence from a variety of witnesses on the wider "levelling up" challenges for Oldham and similar places, the ingredients for success, and the place of Oldham within the wider city region. A key theme was that Oldham needs to establish a clear long-term view of what success might look like. There may be an understandable reluctance to do this, given that so many are variable, external and internal, which can make ambitious missions and targets appear undeliverable and unrealistic. However, just as the Levelling Up White Paper does not seek to set out an economic plan for the country, this Review does not set out a detailed economic plan for Oldham. Instead, our aim has been to focus on general principles, backed up by analysis, systems and policies which are required, in the longer term, to understand the problems that need to be fixed, and to establish a platform to deliver confident, purposeful and optimistic solutions.

The single most important challenge is for Oldham to have a clear and sustained view of the "long game". The importance of this is precisely because so many factors will arise which potentially detract, divert or undermine the delivery of long-term change. The geographical disparities described in the LUWP, which particularly (but not exclusively) affect post-industrial towns like Oldham, have deep roots. There are no magic wands which will bring overnight change. It is important therefore to have something clear and systematic to focus on, which ensures that collective efforts do not become dissipated, or wander off course. A central theme in this Review, which is repeatedly echoed in the White Paper - has been that successful places – those which have transformed themselves and rebuilt their civic pride – have been driven by exactly this kind of vision, which they stuck to, and have relentlessly worked to deliver over a long period of time. Manchester city centre is the nearest local example. London Docklands, Barcelona, and Lille are all cited in the White Paper, as is East Germany, and a number of US cities.

This is not because the immediate here and now is not important. It is. It is evident that the short term "shocks" presented by events such as the 2008 financial crisis, "austerity" or the pandemic – and which may now be entering a new iteration due to inflation and war – have a significant impact. One of the features of places like Oldham is that they are not resilient in the face of these events. They are hit harder, and the damage lasts longer, than in other places. However, crisis management can obscure the wider challenge of long-term economic transformation. For Oldham, as for many other former industrial towns, the primary challenge is that it has lost its original economic purpose and has not yet found a convincing alternative. The key to its long-term future is to be clear about what its economic purpose is, bearing in mind the evolving context in which it operates.

2. ECONOMIC PURPOSE

The need for a clear "economic purpose and vision" was a persistent theme during the Review. Defining this is harder than it might seem. Oldham's original role was relatively simple and easy to understand. It was part of a division of labour and specialisms with neighbouring areas, and its strengths were clear. Cotton and engineering not only provided local employment and wealth, they also helped to establish institutions and a civic pride, from housing through to notable buildings in the town centre, great local projects like Alexandra Park, and amenities such as the sports facilities at Avro. Oldham in the 19th and early 20th century offered a successful example of the LUWP's 'six capitals' coming together to create an upward spiral of wealth, productivity and civic pride. The town 'worked'.

Oldham's more recent history has witnessed industrial and manufacturing decline and a decline in the relative levels of wealth within the borough. Accordingly, this has had a direct impact on other issues within Oldham – such as its high streets, its institutions and its social fabric. It is unrealistic to expect the complete substitution of previously strong sectors and institutions with new ones with a similar reach and impact. The future economy and labour market in Oldham (and Greater Manchester) is likely to be more diverse in its sectors, occupations and types of jobs and firms than in the past.

One of the findings of this Review is that up to 70% of current employment in Oldham is within the "foundational economy" (mainly, but not exclusively public sector). While it is important to acknowledge its importance and to improve conditions in this part of the economy, the disproportionate reliance on public sector funding, either through services, grants or central government, as well as on wealth transfers and welfare payments is problematic. It means that in "normal" times, Oldham is heavily dependent on the public or quasi-public sector for much of its activity, and that changes to public sector funding, often outside of Oldham's direct control, have a disproportionate impact.

The Review has considered Oldham's economic resilience (and the findings are published in the Final Report) and it is not strong. **The economic transformation of Oldham must star by breaking the dependence which it has on the "foundational economy" employment. This should be a central target in reshaping its long-term economic purpose. And Oldham needs to set out clear plans for how it intends to achieve this.**

This is almost certainly going to be multifaceted. There is much to be said for the benefits of "community wealth building" initiatives. These encourage public, voluntary and community sector partners to think and work hard to maximise the impact of the "public pound" in bringing

greater economic and community benefits. It also makes a strong case for the importance of 'anchor institutions' and social value in the growth of the economy. This Review acknowledges that Oldham has made some strong recent progress in this respect and makes recommendations as to how this can be further developed and improved.

However, it is important to recognise that this approach, at its best, is only likely to operate at a limited scale[4] and improve the use of the resources already in the town and will do less to address the fundamental challenge of creating and/or bringing more wealth to Oldham. **For this to be achieved, it must be coupled to a strong and clear strategy for supporting private sector business and employment, particularly in the parts of the economy that can create most wealth and value.**

When this challenge is placed at the centre of Oldham's long-term vision, it becomes very important to be clear about what parts of the challenge can be met within Oldham's own boundaries, and what parts require partnerships with neighbouring places and activities.

In terms of productivity and business, it is important to make much more of the successful private sector companies which still exist in Oldham, but also to recognise that much future employment is also likely to be in neighbouring areas. This means focussing efforts not just in Oldham, but also collaboratively with neighbours to support growth, while also working hard to make sure that Oldham residents are equipped to succeed in the wider sub-regional labour market. And this is not just about business and skills (financial, physical and human capital) in isolation. It is about making Oldham a place which is attractive to live in, invest in and visit – a place which all stakeholders can consider with pride. **A recommendation is that Oldham set out a clear statement of its economic purpose, which acknowledges what part of business growth and employment will be delivered in the town and what parts require a reshaping of its relationships to neighbouring areas within the City Region. Missions and targets need to be developed in relation to the restatement of Oldham's economic purpose.**

This is not a completely new direction for Oldham. There has been considerable progress over the last decade in a number of areas, and there are a number of successes and strengths which can be built on in the future. **It is important, however, that future activity is relentlessly anchored back to the delivery of Oldham's long-term transformation, that it is organised through a set of coherent sub-strategies, with missions and targets which are directly connected to the delivery of that transformation.** Such an approach will enable Oldham to clearly articulate its long-term ambitions, engage local, sub-regional and national stakeholders around delivering them, and have a clear set of accountabilities and measures to demonstrate progress.

The subsequent recommendations in this Review build on the analysis of long-term vision around economic repurposing, to suggest ways that Oldham can renew its strategy and realign stakeholders around the core levelling up themes of improving productivity; spreading opportunity; and renewing civic pride. It then concludes with a set of recommendations about institutional capacity.

3. BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

The need to grow enterprise and employment through private sector growth both in Oldham, and in partnership with neighbouring boroughs, is a central challenge for "levelling up". To explore these issues, the Review heard evidence from successful local businesses, and from expert witnesses in the fields of post-industrial towns and their challenges, community wealth building, industrial strategy and innovation. The LUWP correctly identifies the private sector as fundamental to improving economic performance in every part of the country, and sets out proposals to redistribute research and development spending, support innovation accelerators, unlock and spread investment, support SMEs, and improve transport and digital infrastructure. Of these, the focus of this Review has been on measures to support innovation, develop enterprise and engage with business.

It is important to recognise that, although deindustrialisation dominates the story of Oldham's recent economic history, it continues to be home to a significant number of manufacturing firms as well as successful private enterprises in other fields. More work needs to be undertaken to understand the nature and potential of the manufacturing sector. Different companies are in receipt of support from initiatives to improve manufacturing, such as 'Made Smarter', but there is no single umbrella strategy to bring these together and understand their overall impact. **A clear analysis of the opportunities for manufacturing in Oldham and a strategy to support the sector, is a recommendation of this Review.**

Similarly, Oldham is in receipt of a significant amount of business support, for manufacturing and non-manufacturing firms. This is mainly delivered by Greater Manchester partners, but it is not clear how well scrutinised this in terms of its contribution to Oldham's plans, whether it shares the same specific priorities, or its level of integration with other initiatives. This is important because Oldham hosts its own enterprise initiatives and has an impressive track record of business start-ups. It has a less impressive record, however, in terms of the growth and survival of those new initiatives. There is a need to understand why this is the case, and this involves better understanding the impact of both enterprise activity and business support. **It is recommended that further work be undertaken to examine the impact of enterprise and business support initiatives, and that**

4. See GM Inequalities Commission: https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/equalities/independent-inequalities-commission/

Oldham develops a clear strategy for enterprise, based on sound analysis of what works, in order to prioritise and evaluate the allocation of these resources.

This should moreover, be part of a wider strategy to coordinate work with businesses. In addition to business support and enterprise, Oldham has a range of stakeholders who, in different ways for different reasons (employment schemes, support programmes, skills supply, procurement and so forth) engage with local employers. However, this work is uncoordinated and so it is difficult to assess the size and scale of activity, whether there are gaps, or whether things could be done to improve impact. **It is recommended that, all employer facing partnership work be bought into a single strategic framework, with a clear set of missions and targets around improving productivity, increasing wages and boosting standards of living.**

This part of the challenge is very much about improving the coordination, focus and accountability of initiatives already being delivered within Oldham. It is also evident, however, that Oldham should be outward looking too. It can improve its engagement with neighbours where better support for private sector business is a shared priority. An obvious example, which was discussed extensively and repeatedly in the Review, was around manufacturing – as other boroughs, most notably Rochdale and Tameside, have a similar industrial legacy. The business led Advanced Machinery and Productivity Institute (AMPI) in Rochdale has become a focal point of Greater Manchester's "Northern Gateway" plans. Oldham has not actively engaged in this project, but a strong recommendation of this Review is that it should. **It is recommended that Oldham proactively engages with neighbouring authorities in the Northern Gateway, and in particular the AMPI project to support manufacturing. There are considerable benefits to be gained by having a shared approach to manufacturing support across the North East of Greater Manchester, and in putting the joint strategies (planning, business support, skills) to maximise the impact of these initiatives across a broader geography.**

A related theme is innovation and the potential for Oldham to pilot new initiatives to support innovation in the borough and in Greater Manchester. The new Innovation GM network is led by business and universities and is seeking to strengthen the links between research and development and to support the business application of inventions and innovations. Oldham does not have a university, but does have a further education college with a strong partnership with the University of Manchester, which is helping to lead Innovation GM. A proposed part of this project is to champion innovation in businesses across all sectors and at all levels, and a town centre pilot based in Oldham would help test this area of work which, within Greater Manchester, is currently underdeveloped. **It is recommended that Oldham seek to play a leading role in extending the emerging innovation network in Greater Manchester, into Oldham town centre, with details around governance, longevity and timescales to be negotiated with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).**

Finally, there is scope to accelerate and expand work with 'anchor institutions' working strategically, through local recruitment, the liberalisation of procurement rules, and a coherent strategy to maximise the impact of major public, voluntary and private partners on local business growth and employment. **It is recommended that a programme of dedicated work to exemplify "best practice" for anchor institutions in this regard, be an outcome of this Review.** It is also recommended that **Oldham develop a broader strategy for social enterprise, and support its social enterprises to proactively engage with Greater Manchester initiatives to build capacity, share and develop expertise in the sector.**

4. SKILLS AND JOBS

The Review heard extensive evidence on education and skills in Oldham, particularly the importance of alternative routes to higher skills for young people and adults, and the need to consider skills demand and the supply of jobs, rather than skills supply in isolation. The Review heard about the national priorities for skills, the challenge of improving low skills and the role of employers in investing in skills. It received a presentation on the Greater Manchester Skills and Work programme, and an excellent account from Dudley College of Technology on the renaissance of further education in their town, which has some similar challenges to Oldham, and the importance of having a strong general further education college to deliver a comprehensive package of skills interventions in post-16 learning.

The LUWP does recognise the central importance of education and skills in improving productivity and spreading prosperity, and makes recommendations to improve outcomes through Education Investment Areas, new post-16 providers with a focus on access to leading universities, a new UK National Academy to provide online tutoring, and a set of measures to improve post-16 skills outcomes. These include Local Skills Improvement Plans, an "in work" progression offer for those on low incomes, and the implementation of existing plans for reform and improve opportunities for adults to upskill and reskill.

The education and skills challenge facing Oldham is large and complex. The Review did not consider pre-16 performance in detail, due to the constraints of time. However, given that the LUWP places considerable emphasis on improving school performance, there are some observations that should be made in passing.

The Review did not closely consider education pre-16, so is not able to make detailed recommendations. Given

that Oldham is likely to become an Education Investment Area, within the Levelling Up proposals, it is important to note some issues in the pre-16 and post-16 phases which are worthy of further consideration. These include close analysis of differential performance across the borough, not just in terms of institutions, but by place, neighbourhood, and families (intergenerational); gaining a better understanding of current performance in terms progression routes to high skills, including the conventional three year residential degree; a strategy for improving English and maths achievement by 16, including an analysis of the knock-on effect for learners in post-16 settings; and the improvement in performance in terms of qualifications acquired by the age of 19, contrasted with high levels of 16-24 year old unemployment. **It is recommended that these, and related issues around educational underachievement, are considered in future Education Investment Area planning.**

All of these have implications for the area that this Review has considered – which is post-16 learning and adult skills. Between 2005 and 2020 there has been a marked reduction in the numbers of adults who have no qualifications. However, it is not clear that this has made any difference to employment or income patterns. And comparative skills performance at all levels remain low compared to other boroughs, while employment remains a problem. There is a higher proportion of economically inactive residents and above average numbers on incapacity benefit. As with many other indicators, this is not evenly distributed throughout the borough. There is a strong concentration of lower levels of skills achievement, and low incomes, in specific neighbourhoods. Pay levels and household incomes are also low in these places.

A disappointing aspect of the LUWP is that it both undersells the scale of the reforms to further and technical education, and the contribution which they should make to levelling up plans, and underestimates what is needed for further education to maximise its potential impact. This is partly because the LUWP focusses too narrowly on adult skills. This makes sense, insofar as adult skills is the part of the skills system which has already been devolved, and is also the area where, through the Lifetime Guarantee and changes to adult funding rules, the national policy for skills is currently seeking to make a significant difference. However, adult skills policy remains very muddled, with a large number of priorities competing for a limited amount of resource with very little evaluation of impact to help focus efforts. There has been no evaluation of the impact of devolving adult skills, either at national or local level. This is partly, perhaps, because it has had few clear measures of success, either at the level of devolved authorities, or at local authority level. However, the LUWP offers a way to resolve this.

The introduction of the new missions and targets will, in this respect, be a step forward.

It is recommended that Oldham take a lead in setting its own missions and targets for adult learning, with negotiation with local providers (the two main ones are Oldham Council and Oldham College) and the Combined Authority, which will shape the distribution and use of adult funding in the borough to 2030. In so doing, it will need to separate out the local authority's strategic role in setting the aims and ambitions for the transformation of place, with its role as a skills provider. At present, this is confused, and the conflict of interest is neither acknowledged or managed. If this matter can be addressed, and effective targets set, then these can serve to focus local providers and the devolved authority on priorities and hold them collectively to account.

In forming such a plan, however, it will have to deal with the fact that the national targets, set out in the LUWP, may be unambitious compared to the scale of the problem of adult skills. Evidence received by this Review considered data relating to two similar areas – Oldham and Blackpool – and concluded that if these two areas were to improve their adult qualification rates to the national average, they alone would amount to over half of the 80,000 target for adult learners. This may, of course, amount to a claim for a larger allocation of adult funding, either from national or devolved sources. **It is recommended that Oldham's analysis of missions and targets should include its own analysis of the challenge of adult skills, and the levels of investment needed to make the borough competitive in the labour markets of Greater Manchester.** This should form the basis of its ongoing dialogue with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and, through it, to national government too.

Beyond adult skills, the LUWP is very positive about the need to "strengthen locally accessible institutions, notably the national network of further education colleges" and the wider proposals for an employer led skills system, as set out in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill which is currently going through Parliament. This is a welcome recognition of the need for strong further education institutions, because of the role they place in the community, both in terms of skills delivery and their wider contribution. The example of Dudley suggests that this should be a priority for Oldham. Oldham College has followed a similar journey to Dudley, with considerable investment, improvement in the range and quality of provision, and establishing its wider role despite, until recently, and unfavourable policy environment, nationally and locally. **It is recommended that Oldham make a commitment to supporting its general further education to play it full role in the locality, and that it works with Greater Manchester partners and national government to secure this for the long run.**

At the centre of this work should be a clear strategy for delivering of a coherent alternative set of pathways, both work-based and classroom based, for those young people

and adults seeking to progress into careers without following the residential three year degree route. Part of the problem with the approach which the LUWP makes to skills is that it leaves a great deal of positive reforms out of the picture. These reforms, which include T levels, apprenticeships, Level 4 and 5 provision in the classroom and workplace, as well as changes to HE access rules and potential changes below Level 2, amount to a system shift for technical education and training. This should cumulatively provide the "alternative pathways" to high skills which are essential to Oldham's "levelling up mission", particularly given it has no university and depends on its FE college to deliver the major part of this system. This perspective on the wider skills system as a whole is often missing from devolved authorities (which tend to only focus on the funds they control and the provision they can commission), so the LUWP was a real opportunity to address what a new skills system might look like at a very local level.

This also means addressing two related issues: first, competition and second employer engagement. In terms of competition, there are a number of providers – in all phases of post-16 delivery – who are potentially working at cross-purposes and it is questionable whether this has always produced the best outcomes. **It is recommended that the strategy for skills should include consideration of the positive and negative impacts of competition between providers throughout the post-16 phase (16-18, adult, apprenticeships and higher education), whether this is helping or hindering the pursuit of more effective provision, and what can be done to improve arrangements.**

In terms of employer engagement, this aspect of technical and professional education and training is often misunderstood and misconceived in policy terms, both locally, regionally and nationally. The LUWP does propose, drawing on proposals in the Skills Bill, to create a stronger relationship between providers and employers through the introduction of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). These are a positive move, but still very experimental. The current pilots are focussed on relatively small areas, and it is not clear that LSIPs would work at the level of a geographical area as big as Greater Manchester. As currently defined, moreover, LSIPs are relatively one dimensional. They conceive the problem of skills as a mismatch between supply and demand, with the plan helping to articulate what employers need, so that skills supply can be reformed to better meet demand. This potentially works well in areas where the economy is strong. In "levelling up" places, however, this is not the case. There is a profound problem of demand, and a need to work with employers in myriad ways to stimulate demand. Skills supply is a key aspect of this – but not just a passive respondent to a fully formed requirement.
This makes the relationship between specialist providers and employers a more profound partnership challenge, with a "two way" street between what is taught and how it is practiced. The current Local Skills Improvement Plans are unlikely to address this issue. **It is recommended therefore, that Oldham adapts the LSIP model, addressing skills supply and demand in a much broader economic context including business support and innovation. As in other LSIP pilots, it is recommended that this work is led through a partnership between Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Oldham College.**

5. CIVIC PRIDE AND 'A SENSE OF PLACE'

This Review started from the position that improved economic performance, in the sense of stronger businesses, more enterprise, and greater competitiveness in labour markets are all central to Oldham's future, but that "non-economic" factors are of equal importance in shaping and delivering successful places. The Review board heard evidence from expert witnesses on place management (focussed on town centres), housing, crime, health and civic identity and pride.

One of the reasons why the LUWP marks a step forward, is that it acknowledges the importance of social and institutional capital – and the interaction between them and the four other "capitals" (financial, human, intangible and physical) in order for "levelling up" to have any chance of working. It sets out a series of interventions designed to support the renewal of civic pride and a sense of community. This includes the 'Shared Prosperity Fund', which will invest in business and skills, but also communities and place; brownfield regeneration, further measures to improve town centres and high streets, securing access to green space, investing in grassroots sports and culture, introducing a 'National Youth Guarantee' and related measures to improve opportunities for young people, measures to relocate the Civil Service, a set of measures to improve housing and investment to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour.

The evidence presented in the Review illustrated the enormous impact of these "social fabric" issues on Oldham. The town centre featured strongly in these discussions, as it has in focus group work with local residents. Its importance is clearly acknowledged in the Council's ongoing commitment to its redevelopment. This includes projects delivered, such as the Old Town Hall and Leisure Centre, projects in the pipeline such as the relocation of Tommyfields Market and the acquisition of Spindles Shopping Centre, and work taking place through the High Streets Fund and Towns Fund Board.

This is an area where the importance of having and holding to a long-term vision is particularly important, because the funding regime tends to be organised through competitive bidding rounds. This can lead to fragmentation and "pepper potting" of resources – particularly given the number and scale of regeneration

projects needed to complete the town centre's transformation. **It was encouraging that Oldham was actively engaged with the Institute of Place Management, which has produced a diagnostic report on ways that town centre management can be improved and it is recommended that the report is considered and implemented.** It is also encouraging that Oldham has recently strengthened private sector leadership in the Towns Fund Board. **It is recommended that the Council continue to work with partners from all sectors to enhance private sector engagement in the regeneration of the town centre, and increase investment from all sources.** It is also important however, that each and every project has a clear assessment in terms of how and what specifically it contributes to the long-term vision of Oldham, and how it contributes in terms of growing business, increasing employment, or improving Oldham as a place to live or visit. **It is recommended that this assessment is built into all current and future projects, to ensure that their purpose is clear, and their contribution is robust, transparent and accountable to the "long game".**

Housing emerged as one of Oldham's biggest challenges, but also as the single policy area where the strategy already appeared to grasp the complexity of the "long game". The strategy recognises that Oldham has to have very broad appeal – attracting and retaining those with higher incomes and high skills, while also working hard to improve the outcomes for those who do not. One of the enormous challenges for Oldham in improving the supply and variety of housing, is that it has significant constraints in terms of available land. The LUWP commitment to new approaches to developing brownfield sites may help open up possibilities here, and there is a case for Oldham, both in terms of housing and business, considering innovative options for redeveloping heritage provision.

The Review board heard evidence relating to heritage in Oldham and the potential for mill redevelopment. Focus groups confirm that heritage is one of the aspects of Oldham which local residents are most proud of - and that Oldham's industrial past plays a significant role in shaping its current reputation. In evidence relating to heritage – including the legacy of mills in the borough – a key theme was around making more of the past in order to shape the future. This is an area which may be underdeveloped in Oldham's current thinking, given that the town has had a unique place in the history of industrialisation, but there is relatively little for visitors to see which could tell that story. The Council has recently commissioned and is about to launch a strategy for renovating mills. This is a strong basis on which to build a strategy for heritage. **It is recommended that the Council implement a strategy for mill renovation, which could contribute to both business and housing needs, and fit with the wider national ambition to redevelop brownfield sites.** Part of this might be Oldham and university/college partners bidding (eg through either 'levelling up' and/or 'strength in places' or 'Innovate UK' funding) to set up a brownfield redevelopment pilot, undertake a mill redevelopment as a demonstrator of new technologies and materials (including environmental/net zero), of best practice and a site for future excellence in both high-level skills, apprenticeships and firm innovation. Given the large stock of industrial heritage buildings across the city region and beyond this has the potential to be of regional/national specialisation and significance.

This leaves the challenge of neighbourhoods, which almost certainly sit at the centre of some of the most challenging "levelling up" issues, both within Oldham and nationally. Within Oldham there is a very heavy dependency on social housing, and poor housing stock, particularly in the areas near to the town centre, is a legacy of Oldham's industrial past. It is predominantly red bricked terraced properties, with few larger properties – or newer social housing, often in the same areas. There are a number of challenges around the extent of private landlords in specific neighbourhoods, and new arrivals to Oldham bought through the asylum system, or rehoused by other local authorities, because housing is relatively low cost. These residents are welcome, but often have support needs, and these are left for Oldham to provide. This is particularly challenging in neighbourhoods which already have high levels of concentrated poverty. It is not clear exactly how far this concentration of poverty is linked to the wider challenges of education, skills and health, but initial evidence suggests the link is strong, and that a "neighbourhood effects" approach to improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged may be worth pursuing. Crime and health also have distinct neighbourhood patterns. Crime is a major issue in some communities, and there are particular issues around the general public feeling safe in areas such as the Metrolink and the town centre. Health inequalities appear to mirror the neighbourhood patterns evident for other indicators of poor outcomes. **It is recommended that this issue is explored in further detail, sharing data on education, skills, health and crime, with a view to gaining a better understanding of "neighbourhood effects" and designing more coordinated neighbourhood interventions to improve multiple outcomes in an area.**

It is particularly important that this work recognises the different places, geographical disparities and communities within Oldham, and engages voluntary and community institutions, including sports clubs and cultural organisations, in building social capital across Oldham. It should also recognise the key importance of particularly institutions, such as Oldham Colosseum, Oldham Athletic Football Club and Oldham Rugby League Club, as well as grassroots community clubs and cultural organisations – along with the "anchor institutions" which deliver key public services.

It is recommended that Oldham produce a strategic plan to protect and develop its key voluntary, community, cultural and sporting institutions, and a strategy for how they, along with the anchor institutions, can work together to build the foundations of the long-term transformational plan.

6. INSTITUTIONS

As the LUWP recognises, institutional capital and capacity will play a vital part in improving economic and other conditions in Oldham. The Review agrees that Oldham needs to support and strengthen anchor institutions and their role within the borough. These include the Council itself, but also the Hospital and NHS Trust, the College and other institutions in the public, private and voluntary sectors. They need to be more than the sum of the parts and national policy needs to play its part in this support. Furthermore, institutional capacity and the role of anchor institutions also applies to Greater Manchester institutions such as those in the GMCA family that have Oldham in their footprints. They must be better joined up and their efforts and strategies more effectively co-ordinated. All need to own and buy in to the same long-term vision for Oldham.

It is unsurprising that many institutions and strategies within Oldham and Greater Manchester have suffered from fragmentation and poor co-ordination. One factor is that Government that runs too many separate and siloed policy frameworks with little effective joining up. The proliferation of one-off schemes and bidding competitions encourages further duplication and fragmentation - a problem acknowledged by the National Audit Office and the LUWP itself.

However there have also been too many uncoordinated strategies and bodies within Oldham too that have been established in parallel or abandoned along the way. Oldham and GMCA need to make extra effort to co-ordinate policy and strategy and for this to be part of a long term approach. This effort must make practical local sense of the rising numbers of strategies and funding rounds coming from different regeneration and local growth schemes operated nationally. This requires constant effort and grip as well as some rationalisation and clear accountability and transparency.

It requires a new simplified, strategic approach to economic development and levelling up in Oldham.

Neighbouring authorities such as Rochdale have established new economic development agencies and the Review board have been impressed with their ambition and actions (such as the support for AMPI for example). There are also precedents across Greater Manchester in the form of Mayoral Development Corporations, eg in Stockport, where high profile chairs and additional capacity are helping to drive long term strategies and individual projects.

Oldham should learn from these vehicles and adopt a similar approach, streamlining existing decision-making structures, creating new capacity and supporting its long-term economic vision by creating a single structure. It must rationalise previous and current activities and strategies to provide a single direction where the vision is set and maintained. It also needs to be the place where relationships with Greater Manchester agencies and institutions are governed too. Oldham Council is already in the process of rejuvenating its partnership structures. **It is recommended that this include deciding how best to take forward the key recommendations of this Review, in terms of business and innovation, skills and civic pride and how the collective partnerships will build capacity to deliver "levelling up".**

Whatever the specific model adopted, **it is recommended that the Council establish a "Levelling Up Board", to oversee the delivery of a coherent Oldham plan, with detailed missions and targets to 2030, which can be used to oversee the work in Oldham, the work with City Region partners, and which can produce an annual progress report, which can be used as a basis for assessing the success of "levelling up" initiatives locally.**

It is also recommended that the Council work with Greater Manchester partners to ensure transparency about the investment of resources and expertise into Oldham and the impact of these on Oldham's levelling up vision for 2030.

And it is recommended that the Council and Oldham Leadership Board consider building on this Review, by working with the University and the college, and other key institutions, to develop a bespoke leadership and training programme, to build capacity and expertise and to focus the "common purpose" of all stakeholders around the 2030 vision for Oldham.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE LONG GAME

Oldham must set out is long term ambitions and aspirations, with missions and targets, for the aims and ambitions for Oldham through to 2030.

ECONOMIC PURPOSE

- Breaking Oldham's dependence on "foundational economy" employment should be a central target in reshaping its long-term economic purpose. And Oldham needs to set out clear plans for how it intends to achieve this.
- Relentlessly anchor all future activity and projects back to the delivery of Oldham's long-term transformation, that it is organised through a set of coherent sub-strategies, with missions and targets which are directly connected to the delivery of that transformation.

BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

- A clear strategy for productivity and business, which includes manufacturing, business support, enterprise and innovation, all within a single strategic framework, with a clear set of missions and targets around improving productivity, increasing wages and boosting standards of living.
- Proactive engagement with neighbouring authorities in the Northern Gateway, and in particular the AMPI project to support manufacturing.
- Liaise with Innovation GM for Oldham to play a leading role in extending the emerging innovation network in Greater Manchester, into Oldham town centre.
- Develop a "best practice" programme for anchor institutions.
- Develop a broader strategy for social enterprise, including its engagement with Greater Manchester initiatives to build capacity, share and develop expertise.

INSTITUTIONS

- Recognise the mutual importance of the six capitals in driving improvements and develop a strategy to capacity build and support key institutions.
- Set up a new overarching 'levelling up' board, with independent representation, to oversee the delivery of the 2030 vision, with clear reporting around the local "levelling up" Missions and targets, back to the Council and Oldham Leadership Board.
- Work with Greater Manchester partners to ensure transparency about the investment of resources and expertise into Oldham and the impact of these on Oldham's levelling up vision for 2030.
- Work with the University and the college, and other key institutions, to develop a bespoke leadership and training programme, to focus the "common purpose" of all stakeholders around the 2030 vision for Oldham.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

SKILLS AND JOBS

- Take a lead in setting the missions and targets for adult skills, with negotiation with local providers (the two main ones are Oldham Council and Oldham College) and GMCA, which will shape the use of adult funding in the borough to 2030. This should include its own analysis of the challenge of adult skills, and the levels of investment needed to make the borough competitive in the labour markets of Greater Manchester.
- Capacity build its general further education college to maximise its impact, including the delivery of a coherent alternative set of pathways, both work-based and classroom based, for those young people and adults seeking to progress into careers outside of the residential three year degree route, should be a clear policy priority.
- Undertake a review of post-16 provision which assesses the positive and negative impacts of competition between providers throughout the post-16 phase (16-18, adult, apprenticeships and higher education), whether this is helping or hindering the pursuit of more effective provision, and what can be done to improve collective impact.
- Oldham should pilot and adapted the LSIP model, addressing skills supply and demand in a much broader economic context including business support and innovation. It recommended that this work is led through a partnership between Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Oldham College.

CIVIC PRIDE AND 'A SENSE OF PLACE'

- Receive and act on the Institute for Place Management diagnostic report on ways that town centre management can be improved.
- Continue to work with partners from all sectors to enhance private sector engagement in the regeneration of the town centre, and increase investment from all sources.
- An assessment is built into all current and future projects, to ensure that their purpose is clear, and their contribution is robust, transparent and accountable to the "long game".
- Build on the mill strategy to a brownfield mill redevelopment project as a demonstrator of new technologies and materials (including environmental/net zero) of best practice and a site for future excellence in both high-level skills, apprenticeships and firm innovation.
- Review the potential for a stronger neighbourhood approach to those areas where multiple indicators – education, skills, health and crime – appear to overlap and consider focussed partnerships to test out new approaches to improvement.
- Develop a strategic plan to protect and develop its key voluntary, community, cultural and sporting institutions, and a strategy for how they, along with the anchor institutions, can work together to build the foundations of the long-term transformational plan.

CHAPTER 1. OLDHAM: PAST AND PRESENT

This chapter provides a contextual introduction to the economic and social starting point in Oldham. It aims to set out the history of Oldham and its economy as well as to describe the present situation in the town and the wider borough.

Section 1.2 provides a statistical overview of Oldham's post-industrial legacy, providing a summary of its economic changes and data relating to a series of key performance indicators which defined Oldham's present and future challenges. Section 1.3 provides an analysis of the resilience of Oldham's economy. This is important, because it illustrates the disproportionate impact which "shocks", such as the 2008 global financial crisis and the coronavirus pandemic have in a place where the transition to a confident post-industrial future is not yet complete.

1.2 OLDHAM – A TIMELINE

The Metropolitan Borough of Oldham lies to the north east of Manchester. It was established under the Local Government Act of 1974[5], amalgamating the county borough of Oldham with the neighbouring towns and districts of Chadderton, Failsworth, Shaw, Royton, Lees and Saddleworth. It comprises of a mix of dense urban and much sparser rural areas.

The inner urban core of Oldham – Oldham as a town, rather than its wider local authority boundary - is very much a product of its industrial past. The town experienced rapid population growth during the 19th century because of its role the cotton industry. This was characterised by a sophisticated division of labour between Manchester (the market for importing raw materials and exporting end products and the home of finance and commerce), the spinning districts of Oldham and Bolton and the weaving districts of Preston and Burnley. Finishing industries, such as bleaching, tended to be in the outer edges of east and north Manchester.

Oldham was initially chosen as a location for spinning, because of its proximity to Manchester, and because its damp and rainy climate helped to reduce breakages when cotton was being spun into thread, thereby improving productivity. By 1838 the parish of Oldham already contained more cotton factories than any of the neighbouring districts: 213 factories compared to 117 in Rochdale and 82 in Ashton-under-Lyne. Its population quadrupled in the first half of the 1800s, numbering 52,820 in 1851.

The rapid expansion of production, drove further expansion. By 1911 Oldham boasted 335 mills, with their 15.8m spindles representing almost 10% of all the cotton spindles in the world. It deserved its nickname of 'Spindleopolis' or 'King Cotton'. Key to this expansion, was the application of new technology – made possible by the symbiotic relationship between cotton and engineering. Platt Brothers were at the forefront of technological innovation and their plant in Oldham was the most highly mechanised of its kind. By 1879 Platt Brothers reached its highest recorded levels of power loom production and highest export of spinning machines. The Platt Company was at that time the largest employer in Oldham (employing over 15,000 people) and the largest maker of cotton-processing machinery in the world[6]. Another important specialism which developed out of cotton was mill architecture and construction, with the local Stotts practice responsible for modernising mill building from the 1880s. Coal mining was also a major feature of late-nineteenth/early twentieth century powering industrial Oldham, with the last mine closing in 1956.

5. See https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/7/contents.
6. uring the late 1960s the company recognised that textile technology was in a state of rapid change, the company was rationalised with Platt International formed in 1970. In 1982 Stone-Platt Industries closed and the few viable parts were sold off. For more information on the history of Platt Brothers see https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Platt_Brothers.

The economic strengths of engineering technologies and knowledge created in Oldham were exported across the world. Building on Oldham's strengths (with specialism in electrical engineering) global firms, such as Siemens and Ferranti operated from the town, which increasingly contributed to the defence industry. The Avro aircraft factory opened in Chadderton in 1939. The economic purpose of Oldham during the post-World War Two period was dominated by cotton and engineering, but with increasing global competition and the decline of manufacturing across the UK (particularly during the 1980s), these both gradually declined. Oldham's industrial legacy is represented in dense, inner-urban housing and former mill buildings, showcasing what the town and its entrepreneurs achieved.

Oldham has seen a number of major employers closing local sites in recent years, from the decision of BAE to close the Avro site in 2011, costing around 200 jobs, to the recent closure of Shop Direct which affected around 2,000 employees and agency workers. However, Oldham still has a large manufacturing sector directly employing over 10,000 people (12.8% of the workforce) with this accounting for a larger share of output (15.3%) in the borough (see Chapter 3).

This brief history of key sectors shows that Oldham has faced structural change in the past with the decline of the textile industry but that it was able to transform to one with engineering and manufacturing specialisms. This remains an important feature of the economy today – both the remaining manufacturing capability but also the notion that the town has transformed itself in the past and is able to do so again.

Population and Demography

As of mid-2020, Oldham's population was 237,628, making it the sixth largest borough in Greater Manchester. See the population pyramids for UK and Oldham in Figure 1.1. In the 2011 Census it has a higher proportion (22.5%) of non-white residents than in Greater Manchester (16.3%), the North West (9.8%), or England (14.6%). This proportion has increased from 13.5% in 2001. It is important for any analysis to note that the increasing number of ethnically non-white residents in Oldham is largely a result of migratory trends to places renowned for their multiculturalism, like Oldham and due to trends in birth rates amongst ethnic groups; over recent years, there has been an increase in the number of births within with South Asian community, predominantly within Bangladeshi and Pakistani families.

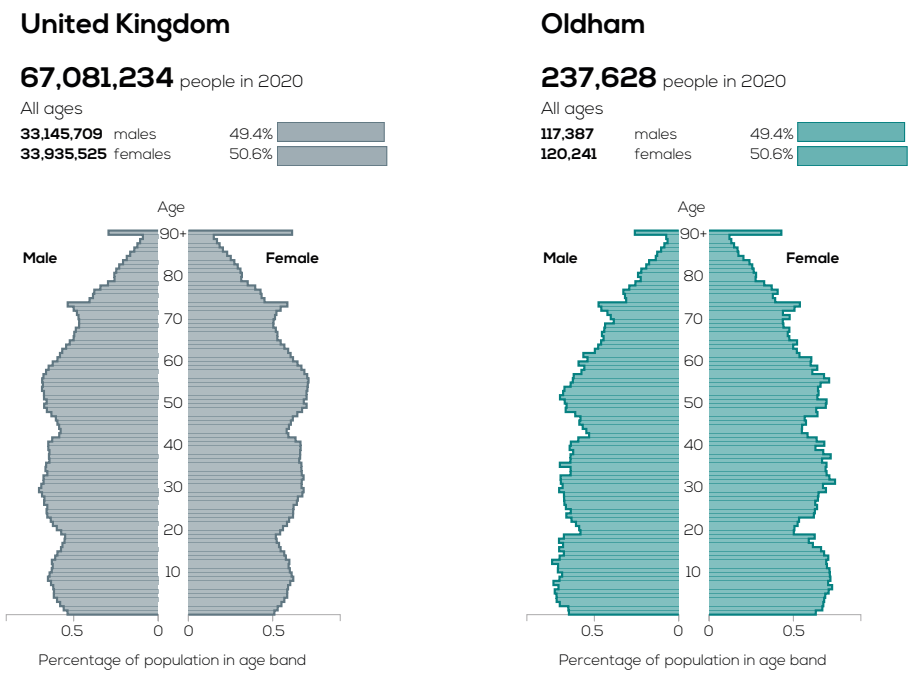

Figure 1.1: UK and Oldham's Population Pyramid (ONS, 2021) [7]

The ethnic composition of Oldham changed considerably between the 2001 and the 2011 censuses. The proportion of the population from white backgrounds decreased from 86.2% to 77.5%, again due to ageing factors, mortality rates and migratory trends.

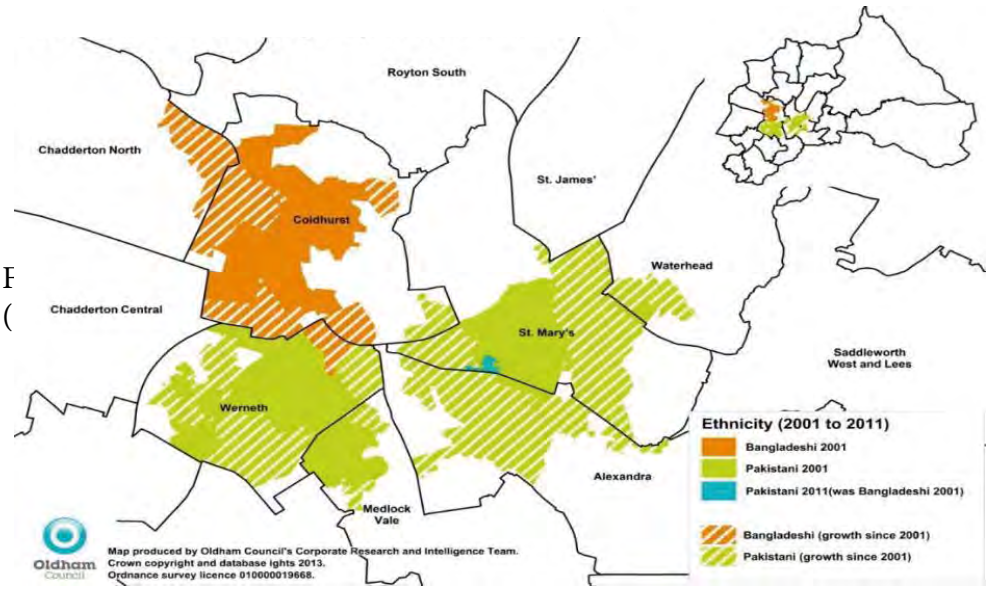

Figure 1.2: Predominant ethnic groupings in Oldham (Oldham Council, 2019) [8]

7. See ONS https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/latest
8. See Oldham in Profile, 2019 from: https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200632/profile_of_oldham/1588/research_and_statistics_about_oldham

Meanwhile, the South Asian population continued to grow, with residents of Pakistani heritage increasing from 6.3% to 10.1%, and residents of Bangladeshi heritage increasing from 4.5% to 7.3%, a result of birth rates and migratory trends. These communities primarily live in the wards surrounding the town centre – typically the most deprived areas in Oldham, see Figure 1.2.

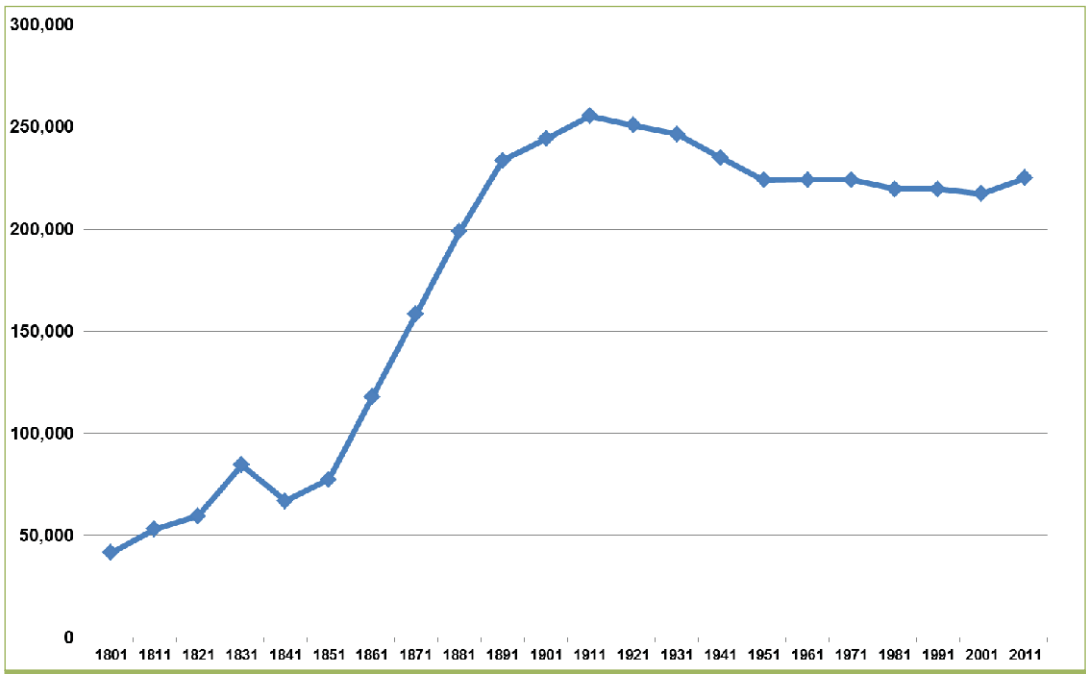

Figure 1.3: Population of Oldham between 1801 and 2011 (ONS Census, 2011) [9]

Incomes in Oldham

The median household income for Oldham is currently low. In 2021 this was £25,357, which is significantly lower than the Greater Manchester (£28,078) and Great Britain (£32,736) averages. When compared to Great Britain, Oldham has a greater proportion of households falling into the two lowest income bands, particularly the second lowest band where 27.3% of all Oldham households have a median income less than £15,000, compared to 18.5% nationally. Figure 1.4 illustrates the difference in income at ward level. There are also important contrasts within the borough with an income gap of around £24,000 between Saddleworth North – the most affluent ward in Oldham, where median annual incomes are around £40,840 – and Coldhurst – the least affluent ward, with an income of only £17,341 per annum. The income disparity and inequality within Oldham is increasing year upon year.

Figure 1.4: Median Household Income by Ward (CACI Paycheck 2021) [10]

9. See Oldham in Profile, 2019 from: https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200632/profile_of_oldham/1588/research_and_statistics_about_oldham
10. See https://www.caci.co.uk/datasets/paycheck/.

Skills in Oldham

Skill levels are one of the most important determinants of socio-economic outcomes. Skills are not only an important route out of poverty for individuals, but a key driver of economic prosperity. Oldham has traditionally had a weak skills base – a legacy of generations of manual employment, meaning residents can find it difficult to enter new growth sectors.

Whilst Oldham has improved attainment rates across the borough in recent years, adult skill levels still remain a concern. There is a higher proportion of residents with no qualifications compared to Greater Manchester and England, see Figure 5. Tackling this gap must be a prime objective in order to enhance economic prosperity in the area and enable Oldham to compete with other local authorities in attracting new businesses to the area. At the other end of the skills spectrum, obtaining a degree or equivalent level of qualification will enhance the opportunities for individuals to find work and be employed in higher paid jobs. The data shows clearly that Oldham has a significant deficit in the percentage of the working age population with a Level 4 qualification (or above), compared to the Greater Manchester and the England average.

	Oldham (%)	Greater Manchester (%)	England (%)
NVQ 4 and above	28.3	39.2	42.8
NVQ 3 and above	51	57.6	61.2
NVQ 2 and above	71.8	75.2	78
NVQ 1 and above	83.5	86.3	87.9
Other qualifications	7	5.9	5.9
No qualifications	9.5	7.7	6.2

Figure 1.5: Highest Qualification Level Attained (ONS Annual Population Survey, 2021) [11]

Health

On average, Oldham residents can expect to live 2.2-2.6 years less than the average person in England. Male life expectancy at birth in Oldham is 77.2 years compared to the 79.4 years England average and female life expectancy is 80.5 years compared to the 83.1 years England average. Within the borough, male life expectancy is 11 years less in the least affluent ward compared to the most affluent ward, and female life expectancy is 12.4 years less[11]. The rates in life expectancy are directly linked to a host of factors, including poverty, socio-economic class and health. Furthermore, the economic impacts of COVID-19 have exacerbated and will continue to exacerbate poverty in the borough and further deepen and widen existing inequalities.

Geography of deprivation – neighbourhoods

Levels of deprivation across the borough are generally ranked among the highest in the country. Relative to other authorities, Oldham's levels of deprivation have maintained a steady downward trend since 2004, according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), see Figure 1.6. The worsening of the 'extent' rank may indicate that deprivation (relative to other areas rather than in absolute terms) is taking on a wider geographic scope across Oldham. The balance of employment rank improvement and income rank worsening may suggest a challenging environment of lower income job creation. Note however that employment and income statistics pre-dates some recent initiatives on Government's National Living Wage in particular. The Greater Manchester Employment Charter (see Chapter 3) targets the Real Living Wage. The Real Living Wage is set to increase to £9.90 in April 2022 compared to the Governments national living wage of £9.50 (for over 23-year-olds)[13].

11. See Nomis Nomis Labour Market Profile https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/report.aspx?town=oldham
12. See page 20 in Marmot (2021), Build Back Fairer in Greater Manchester: Health Equity and Dignified Lives, https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/build-back-fairer-in-greater-manchester-health-equity-and-dignified-lives.
13. See https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/real-living-wage-increases-%C2%A39.90-uk-and-%C2%A311.05-london-cost-living-rises.

Domain	2019 rank (of 317 LAs)	2015 rank (of 326 LAs)	2010 rank (of 326 LAs)	2007 rank (of 354 LAs)	2004 rank (of 354 LAs)
IMD Score	19	34	37	42	43
Income Scale	39	44	44	39	48
Employment Scale	46	45	48	49	44
Concentration	22	28	25	23	26
Extent	18	29	30	34	36

Figure 1.6: Oldham Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2004-2019 & Components (Oldham Council, 2019) [14]

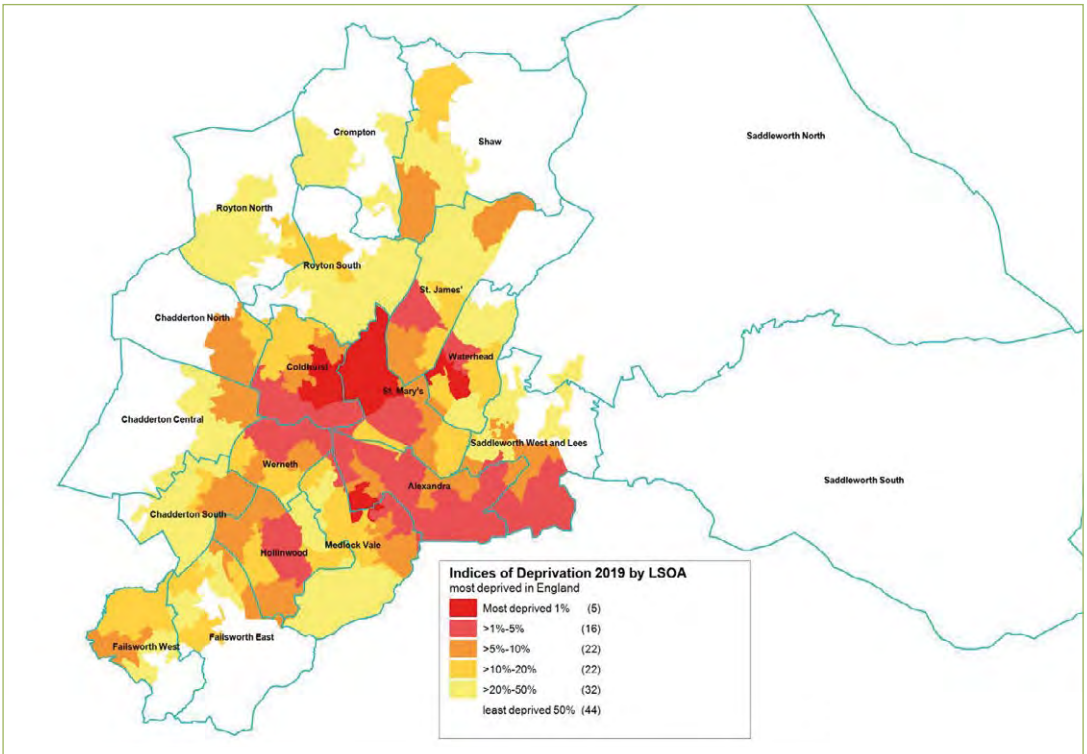

Figure 1.7: Indices of Multiple Deprivation (MHCLG, 2019) [15]

Oldham currently has four areas within the borough which are among the top 1% of the nation's most deprived areas. Most of these areas are centred in and around Oldham's town centre (Figure 1.7), particularly within the wards of St Mary's, Coldhurst and Alexandra. Only the wards of Crompton, Saddleworth North and Saddleworth South do not contain any areas that fall within the nation's top 20% most deprived areas.

Oldham's Location and Travel/Connectivity

Oldham is situated in the Combined Authority area of Greater Manchester (GM) which includes nine other local authority boroughs, see Figure 1.8. Figure 1.9 illustrates the location of the borough and the key transport infrastructure routes within Oldham. The arrival of Metrolink has significantly improved transport connectivity within the borough. It has increased the appeal of Oldham to skilled and higher-earning commuters and has linked residents in many areas historically poorly-served by public transport with employment, retail, and leisure destinations throughout the Greater Manchester conurbation. However, some areas (e.g., Sholver, Diggle) are still socially/economically isolated for those without cars, and some areas of potential employment (e.g., Stakehill) are still difficult to reach.

14. See Oldham Council (2019), https://www.oldham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/5730/briefing_on_the_2019_indices_of_deprivation.pdf
15. See https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019

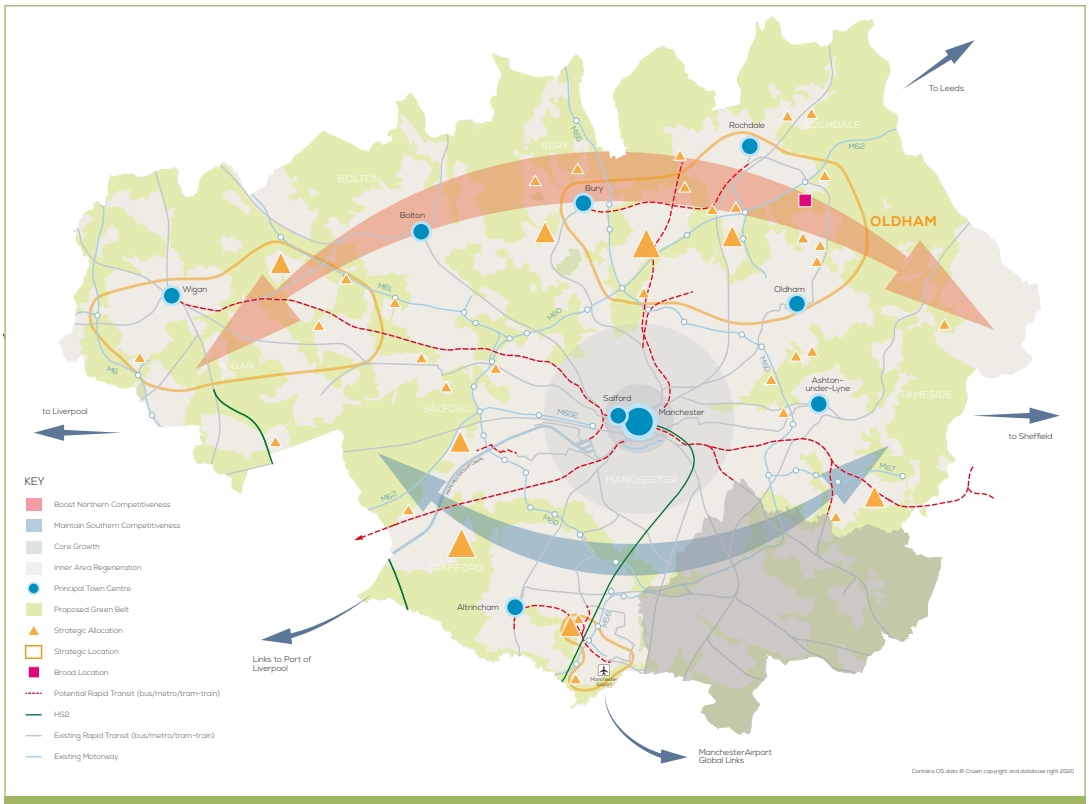

Figure 1.8: Greater Manchester Transport Connectivity (GMCA Places for Everyone, 2021) [16]

Figure 1.9: Oldham's Key Transport Infrastructure (Oldham Council, 2019) [17]

Commuting patterns to and from Oldham are captured in GM travel survey data[18], finding that between 2017-19, 10.8% of commutes go into Manchester; 9.6% of commutes are to Rochdale and 10.4% of commutes from Rochdale coming into Oldham (this shows the close economic links between the boroughs). However, overall, 61.9% of the borough's residents - a large majority - live and work in Oldham.

The modes of transport for Oldham residents are also captured with 35.6% of journeys by car or van; 34% walking; 18.8% are car or van passengers; 5.3% by bus, minibus or coach journeys and 3.8% via Metrolink. Walking is noticeably higher than GM as a whole – perhaps linked to the high proportion living and working in Oldham.

16. See https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning-and-housing/places-for-everyone/ for the development plan, figure from page 37. Note, the borough of Stockport is shaded grey in the figure as the council voted against the Greater Manchester spatial framework.
17. Analysis provided by Oldham Council
18. The Greater Manchester Travel Diary Surveys (TRADS) [16] collects transport and travel information from GM residents. Transport for Greater Manchester https://tfgm.com/trads.

Digital Connectivity in Oldham

Oldham has well developed internet infrastructure, with practically all of the borough's population able to access fibre optic broadband in their homes. There is close to 100% coverage within the central Oldham area. However, the lower end of Saddleworth appears to have less access, and whilst lower levels may also be noted on the border of Moston and Failsworth, this falls primarily within the borough of Manchester.

Broadband availability, however, is only part of the picture, as there are many different speeds and suppliers available, with marketing jargon making it difficult to compare products. Cost and affordability are also issues for both firms and households. Currently, less than 1 in 200 of the borough's premises (both residential and business) are unable to access at least "High Speed" broadband (16+ mbps) connections. Overall, Oldham has the joint 5th best rate in Greater Manchester.[19]

1.3 ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

As of September 2021, Oldham's working age population (aged 16-64 years) was 148,800. Of that population, 110,000 are classed as economically active, including 92,700 employees, 10,900 self-employed and 6,700 unemployed. Women are significantly underrepresented in the active labour market, with only 66.4% of female residents economically active compared to 74.8% for Great Britain as a whole. Low female representation in the labour market in Oldham, in comparison to Great Britain as a whole, is due to cultural factors that exist in some community groups than others, which inhibit female access to the labour market.

26.9% of Oldham's working age population is classified as economically inactive. This compares to a figure for Great Britain of 21.5%. Of these 38,700 people, a disproportionate number are looking after family or the home compared to Great Britain (26.6% in Oldham compared to GB 19.3%) or are long-term sick (26% in Oldham compared to 24.2% in GB). Less than average are students (25.6% in Oldham compared to GB 28.4%), or retired (9.5% in Oldham compared to GB 13.6%).[20]

We analyse the resilience of the Oldham labour market and output to the economic shocks from the 2008 global financial crisis and the coronavirus pandemic. Regional economic resilience[21] is defined as the capacity of a local economy to withstand or recover from market, competitive or environmental shocks. The local economy may adapt and change its economic structures so as to maintain or restore its previous growth path or move onto a new sustainable path characterised by a fuller and more productive use of its physical, human and environmental resources. To determine if Oldham has experienced a recession, business cycle turning points (peaks and troughs) are dated in economic variables over time and compared to the downturn in the national business cycle.

The first variable presented in Figure 1.10 is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimated as the output from Oldham's local economy. During the global financial crisis Oldham's output reached its peak turning point in 2007 with trough reached in 2009. After two years in recession, it then took seven years to recover its pre-recession peak level in 2014. The loss of output during this recession was -5.3%, peak to trough, greater than the hit to national output which was -4% with the UK recovering its peak in 2011, 3 years before Oldham. Figure 1.10 also shows that output in Oldham declined again in 2015 and 2017.

To see how the Labour Market in Oldham reacted to the 2008 financial crisis and the effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic we present the employment series in Figure 1.11. The employment series is shown along with its component series of employees (this and the self-employed are in employment). The ONS now publishes real time information from HMRC administrative data of employees on company payrolls, we show this series in Figure 1.11 from 2014.

19. See https://www.oldham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/5375/digital_oldham_report_2018.pdf.
20. https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/printable.aspx
21. For a UK study of regional economic resilience see Sensier and Devine (2020), "Levelling up regional resilience: policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis", An Industrial Strategy for Tomorrow Policy Series, no. 5, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge. https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/Indust._Strat._5_Levelling_up.pdf.

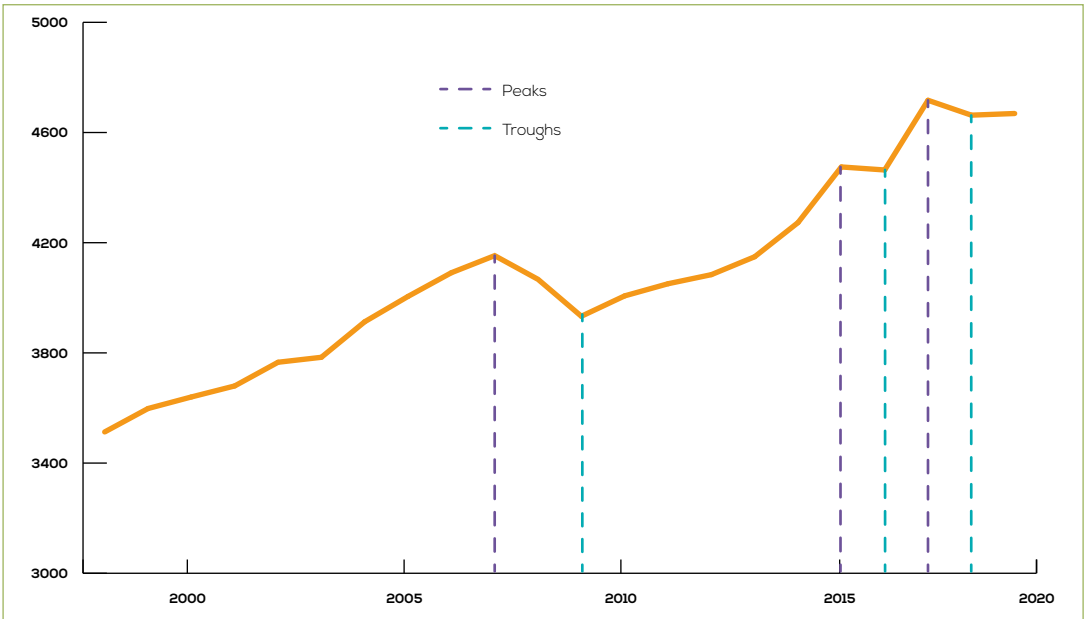

Figure 1.10: Oldham Business Cycle in Output, 1999-2019 (ONS, GDP chained volume measure in 2018 money value (£ millions), 2021) [22]

Figure 1.11: Oldham Business Cycle in Employment for over 16s (Nomis, Employment and Employees and ONS 21 , Real Time Information PAYE employees on company payrolls, 2021) [23]

Oldham's employment total reached its peak turning point before the global financial crisis in 2005q4, this was much earlier than the 2008 UK employment peak and the trough was reached in 2008q3, earlier than national series in 2009. After nearly three years in recession Oldham employment took fourteen years to recover its pre-recession peak level in 2019.

The loss of employment during this recession was -10.8%, peak to trough, greater than the hit to national employment which fell -1.5% recovering its peak in 2012, 7 years before Oldham. We can see the effect of the pandemic recession in the PAYE Employees series in Figure 1.11. Here the peak turning point is in 2019q4 falling for a year until the trough in 2020q4 with a loss of -3.4% or 3,233 employees. The Oldham employee's series recovered its pre-recession peak level in September 2021 and at the end of the sample reached 96,132 employees (in November 2021).

22. See ONS, https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities/1998to2019

23. See ONS https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/realtimeinformationstatisticsreferencetableseasonallyadjusted

Oldham's employment total reached its peak turning point before the global financial crisis in 2005q4, this was much earlier than the 2008 UK employment peak and the trough was reached in 2008q3, earlier than national series in 2009. After nearly three years in recession Oldham employment took fourteen years to recover its pre-recession peak level in 2019. The loss of employment during this recession was -10.8%, peak to trough, greater than the hit to national employment which fell -1.5% recovering its peak in 2012, 7 years before Oldham. We can see the effect of the pandemic recession in the PAYE Employees series in Figure 1.11. Here the peak turning point is in 2019q4 falling for a year until the trough in 2020q4 with a loss of -3.4% or 3,233 employees. The Oldham employee's series recovered its pre-recession peak level in September 2021 and at the end of the sample reached 96,132 employees (in November 2021).

The rate of self-employed in Oldham, GM and England is shown in Figure 1.12 (% for those aged 16-64 years). The Institute of Employment studies[24] explain how although UK PAYE employee numbers have recovered their pre-recession level, total employment in the UK has not yet recovered and is still 600,000 lower with the employment rate 75.9% at the peak down to 74.4% at the trough and in November 2021 at 75.5%. The IES say this is partly due to changes in 'off payroll working rules' (known as the IR35 changes) which came into effect in Spring 2021 for those working as self-employed for the private and third sectors to be moved back to company payrolls (employees may have also been moved back to PAYE to enable them to get furlough payments during 2020-21). This may be partly responsible for the drop in the number of self-employed in Oldham by -29% from the end of 2020, with a corresponding increase in PAYE employees from that date.

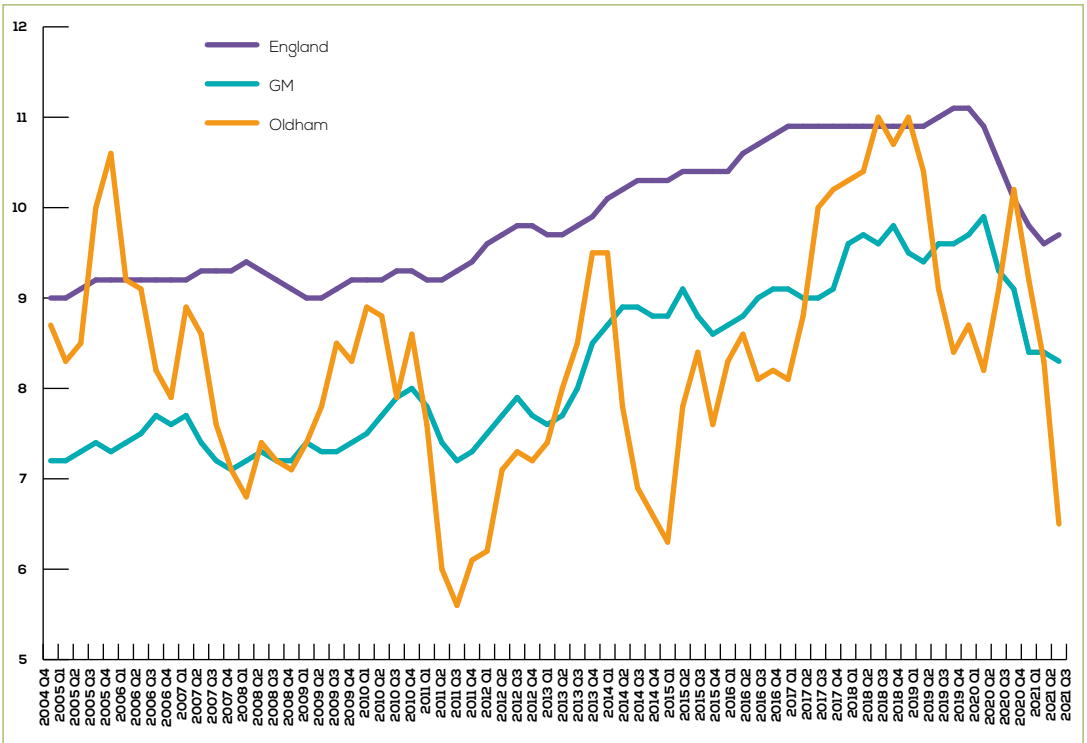

Figure 1.12: Oldham Self-employed for 16-64 (Nomis, 2022) [25]

High levels of employment are a key indication that an economy is in good health. The employment rate in Oldham fluctuates over time but is generally lower than in Greater Manchester and England, see Figure 1.13. The average employment rate between 2005 and 2021 in Oldham was 67.3%. This is lower than the GM average of 69.6% and the England average of 72.9%. The gap between Oldham residents, GM and England is largest in the 35-49-year-old group as shown in Figure 1.14. If the employment rate in Oldham is to be improved, then this cohort needs to be tackled.

24. See https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/IES%20briefing%20-%20Labour%20Market%20Statistics%20January%202022.pdf
25. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/report.aspx?-town=oldham#tabempunemp

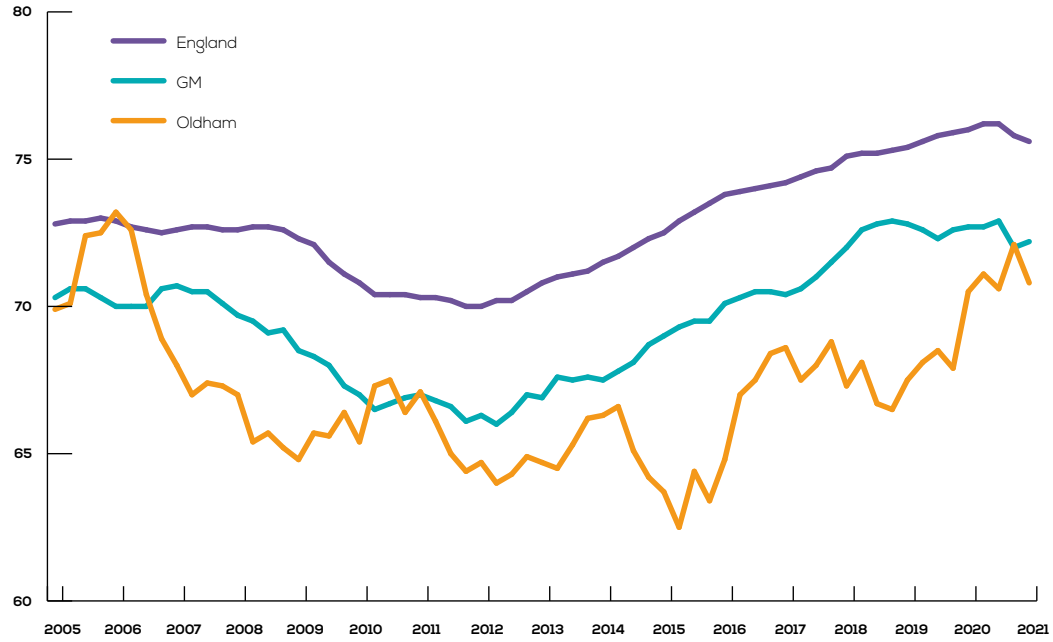

Figure 1.13: Oldham Employment Rate 16-64 (Nomis, 2022) [26]

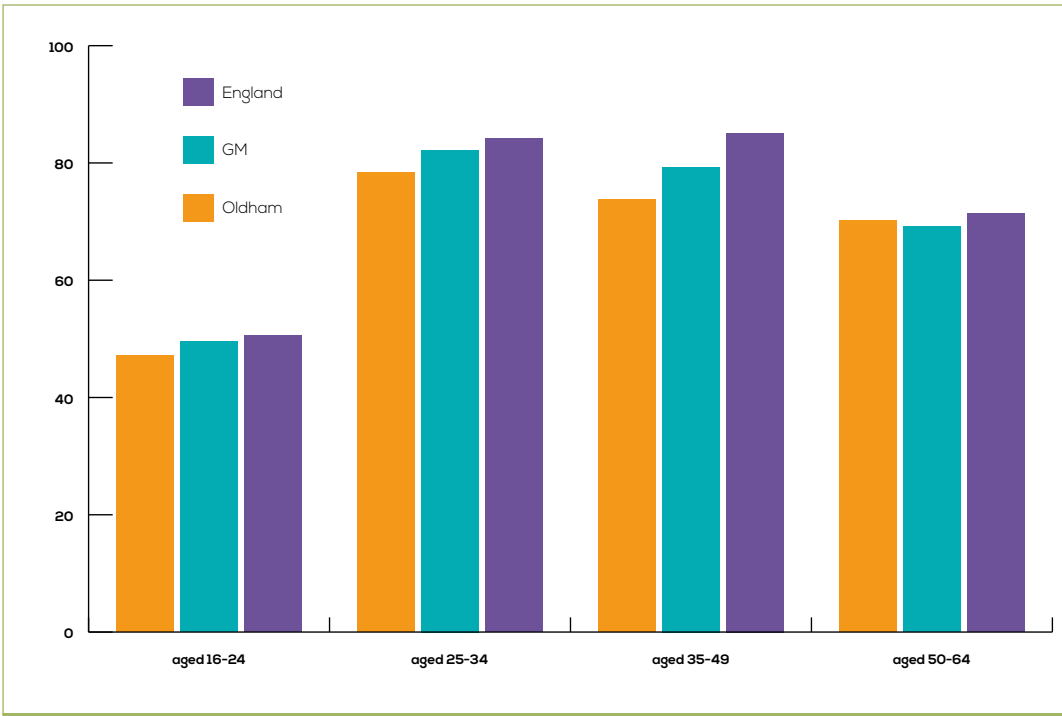

Figure 1.14: Oldham Employment Rate, by age bands (Nomis, 2021) [27]

Oldham's employment rate is negatively impacted by a high proportion of economically inactive residents. Oldham has high rates of residents with long term illness/disability and large numbers of inhabitants choosing not to work. Another factor to consider is Oldham's large South Asian population – women in this community are more likely to choose not to take paid employment. However, recent trends suggest that there has been a cultural shift, with greater numbers of younger Pakistani and Bangladeshi women accessing the local labour market (Figure 1.15).

26. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/report.aspx?town=oldham#tabempunemp

27. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/report.aspx?town=oldham#tabempunemp

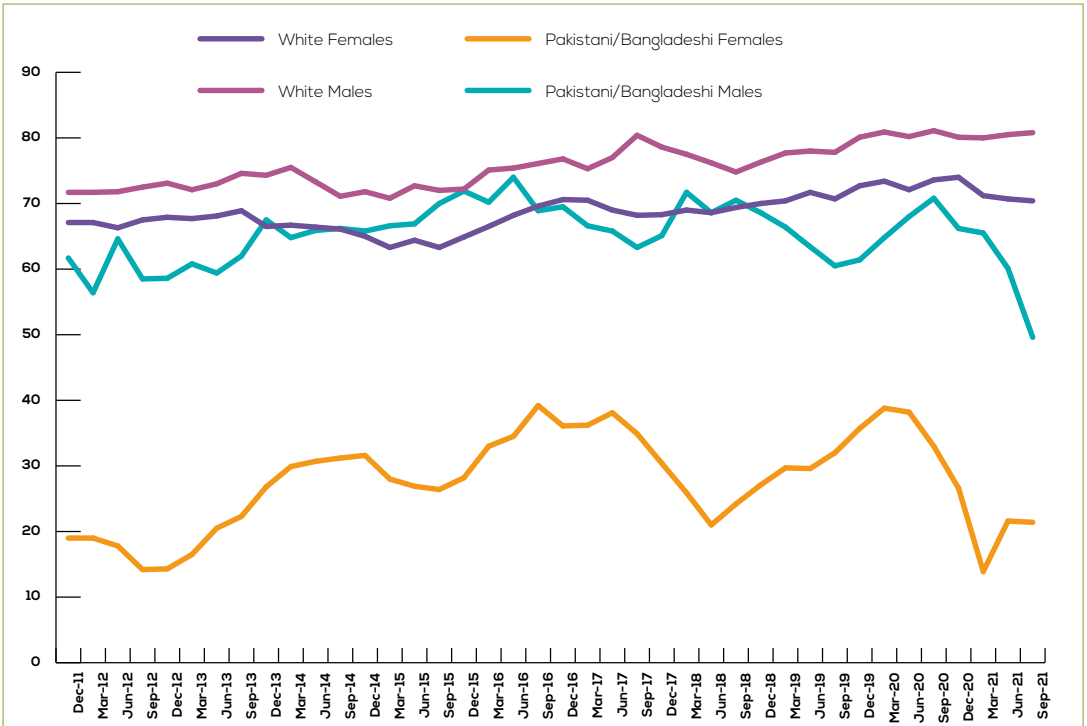

Figure 1.15: Oldham Employment Rate, by ethnic group and gender (Nomis, 2021) [28]

Unemployment in Oldham

The extent of economic scarring following the 2008 recession is evident in the unemployment rate for Oldham in Figure 1.16. As shown for employment in Figure 1.11 the contraction in the labour market meant that unemployment in Oldham reached an early turning point before the national impact of the 2008 recession. Unemployment rose from a low of 4.6% in 2005q2 rising steeply from 2006 and continued to increase to a high of 10.7% in 2012q2. There was then a gradual decline in the rate to 4.5% at the end of 2019 and in the first half of 2020, when it then began to rise again during the pandemic reaching 6.2% in 2021q2.

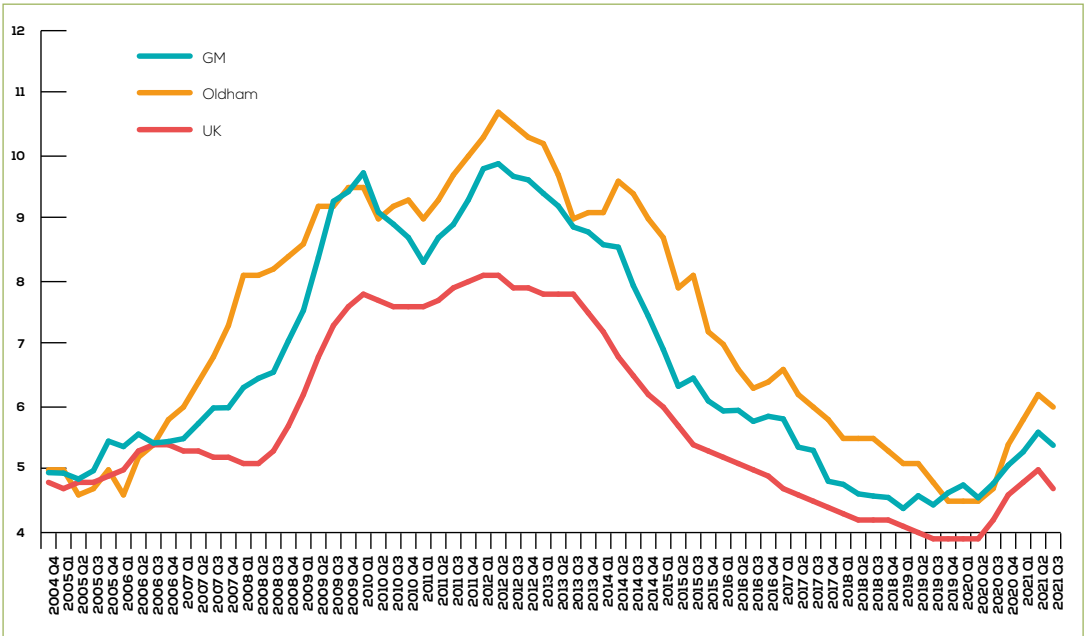

Figure 1.16: Oldham Unemployment Rate (Nomis Unemployment rate, model based estimates for GM & Oldham, 2021) [29]

28. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/report.aspx?-town=oldham#tabempunemp

29. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=127

It is important to note that the migration of unemployment benefits from legacy Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) to Universal Credit (UC) has seen an increase in the number of claimants from 2015 to 2020, see Figure 1.17. Due to the migration of claimants from JSA to UC, we cannot accurately compare unemployment to regional and national indicators. When the coronavirus pandemic started in early 2020, this caused a massive spike in the claimant count.

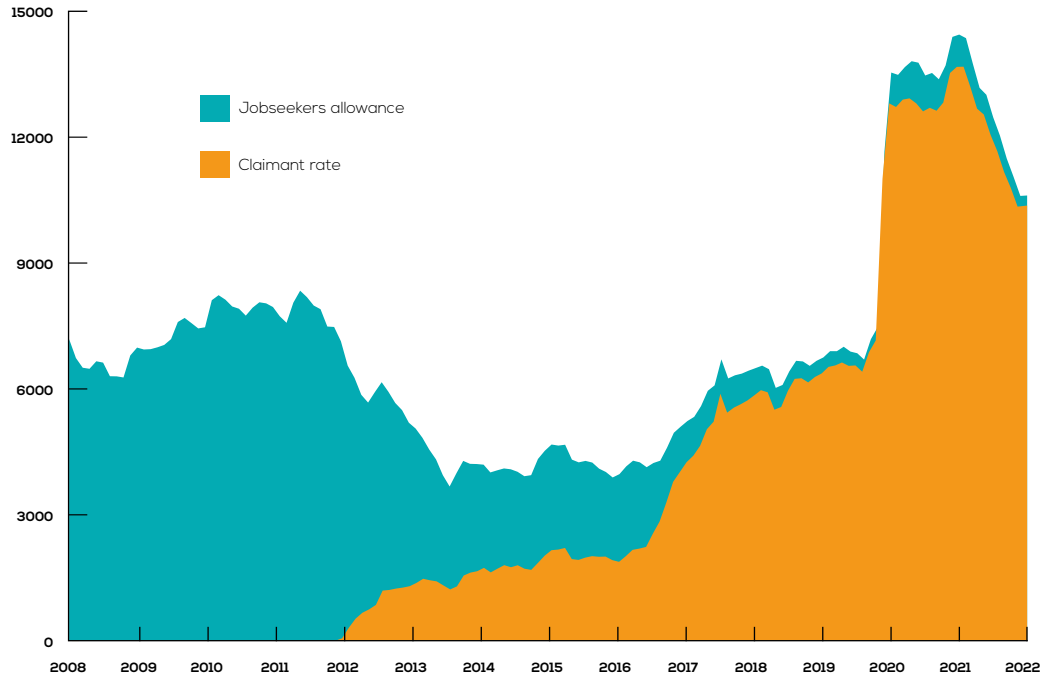

Figure 1.17: Oldham Job Seeker's Allowance and Claimant Count Rate 2008 –2022 (Nomis, 2022) [30]

Figure 1.18 shows the real median weekly wage (adjusted with the CPIH price index) for all full-time workers. Here we see that the Oldham weekly wage of £544.70 is lower than Greater Manchester of £569.70. During 2021 Oldham recorded a larger annual increase in the real wage of 6.6%, higher than the GM increase of 1.3%.

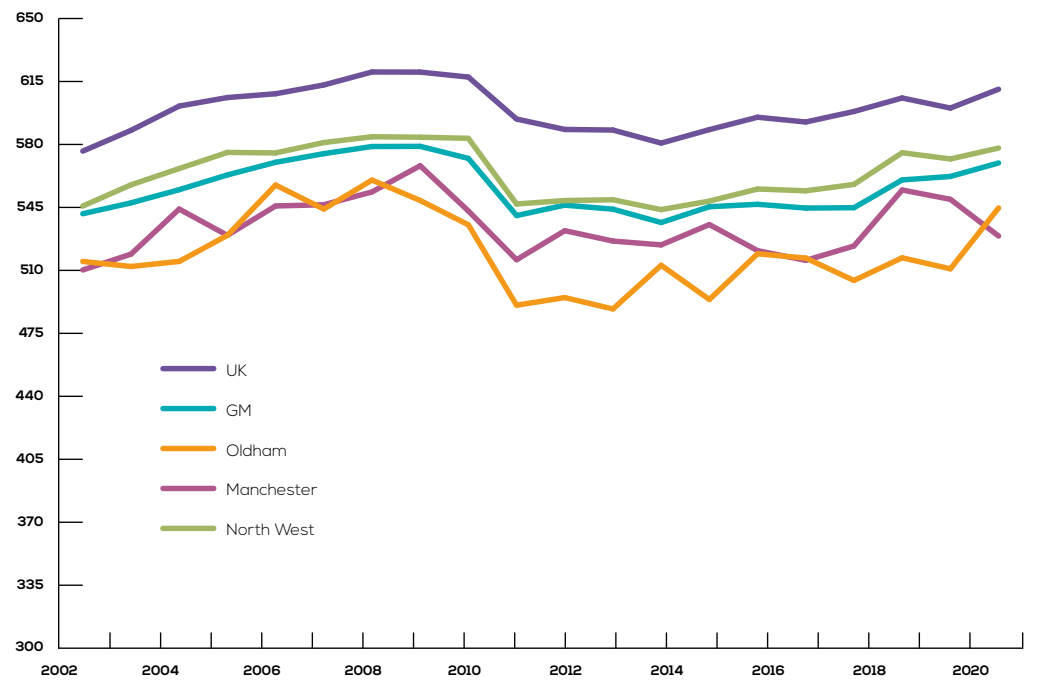

Figure 1.18: Oldham Real Gross Weekly Wage for all fulltime workers, 2021 prices (Nomis, median weekly wages from Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2022) [31]

30. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/report.aspx?town=oldham#tabempunemp
31. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/report.aspx?town=oldham#tabearn

CHAPTER 2. DEFINING THE CHALLENGE: WHAT DOES OLDHAM WANT TO BE?

It is important to understand the challenges which Oldham now has, as a town and borough within Greater Manchester, where its economic function and role might have been clearer in the past but is less obviously so today. As a result, it is important for Oldham to put forward an economic vision that sets out Oldham's role – and ambitions - locally, regionally and nationally.

Oldham's economy has historically been built upon manufacturing, firstly in textiles, and then with mechanical and electrical engineering in the second half of the 20th century. In more recent years, like many other towns and cities in England, Oldham has experienced large-scale deindustrialisation and significant economic change. A range of current issues and challenges have been set out in Chapter One and whilst these are by no means unique to Oldham, the possible solutions and overall vision for the town and borough should start from within.

The Review's first evidence session considered the issues arising from Oldham's location (and economic role) within the city-region of Greater Manchester, receiving evidence from expert witnesses about these challenges and opportunities. As both these sessions and recent focus groups undertaken by Onward,[32] also demonstrated, there is some scepticism locally about the benefits of being part of Greater Manchester in both economic and governance terms. This was a theme alluded to in the evidence of expert witnesses. The LUWP makes it clear that the future development of Oldham will be as part of the devolved arrangements for Greater Manchester, so part of Oldham's challenge is to establish itself as a distinct but integral part of the city-region.

Section 2.2 summarises the evidence presented by expert witnesses in the first session, which focused on this key economic relationship between Oldham and Greater Manchester. Section 2.3 reflects on the opportunities presented in the approach set out in the LUWP both for Oldham and Greater Manchester. Section 2.3 makes recommendations about this relationship and how it might work more effectively.

32. The UK Onward think tank conducted a number of focus groups in Oldham, including groups of members of the public and specific interviews with leaders from across the borough. This was supported by the Review and their findings will be published at: www.ukonward.com

2.2 SUMMARY OF EXPERT EVIDENCE SESSIONS

Mike Emmerich, Chief Executive, Metro-Dynamics

Without growing the economy, there will be no future prosperity. While the town needs a growth model, it must be a sustainable one. The form of growth matters too, because if it does not break the legacy of low capital/low wage industrialisation, it will remain in a low skills equilibrium (skills are low, jobs created are low skilled, and the two reinforce each other). There are clear links between the quality of employment and health, housing and related factors.

Models of growth need to consider how to make the service sector work more effectively, including the opportunities presented by low carbon retrofitting. The foundational economy is an important part of this, but it is by no means sufficient. It can help, through public sector institutions supporting business and skills growth in various ways, but the bigger challenges are about private sector growth.

Lastly, the most important consideration is to establish a vision that persists over the long run and provides a framework for focussing on key priorities. Discussions took in a number of issues, including the potential for Oldham to shift away from struggling retail to reshape the town centre as a destination for visitors, developing projects to attract investment and spend into the borough, and recognising that more Oldham people need to compete for higher paid, higher-skilled work outside the borough.

Will Tanner, Chief Executive, Onward

Within Whitehall there is a growing acceptance that the productivity and growth benefits of transport infrastructure projects have been overstated, and the Treasury Green Book process has understated the role of human capital. It is estimated that an 80% variation in earnings is driven by skills in an area.

Social mobility needs to be thought about in a different way. Previously, it has been viewed as the distance people travel to get a good job, rather than their ability to succeed in the place they call home. In addition, social and cultural projects are needed not just for economic outcomes. Building the social fabric of places will help build economic prosperity. At 4.43, Oldham scores below the UK average (4.88) on the Social Fabric Index.

Transport data suggests Oldham has potential for accessing employment in neighbouring areas. Public transport brings access to 79% more jobs than exist within the borough. By comparison, in London, public transport brings four times as many opportunities. Oldham currently has lower levels of commuting than other Greater Manchester boroughs.

The Review should focus on three priorities: skills improvement - with better resources, further education institutions could build provision in partnership with universities, particularly for degree apprenticeships; social fabric and civic pride need to be strengthened along with hyper-local neighbourhood governance; and more and better private sector jobs need to be attracted as well as foreign direct investment.

Jen Williams, Manchester Evening News

There is an important issue of pride and identity. A 2018 article in the Manchester Evening News, and profile published in Prospect, set out many of the challenges for Oldham. Much of the most difficult economic times have been recent ones, which means that people can remember a time when things were better.

It is important to acknowledge how people feel. There is some bitterness within communities at local politicians, and at Manchester getting investment ahead of places like Oldham. People feel powerless to change things, which can turn toxic under certain circumstances.

There is a need to shift direction. The question is how to start changing the narrative, and the starting point should be to focus on the things which people are proud of, historically and currently. Manufacturing and industry are important. Although it may not be the whole answer, it is bigger than people think, and is also part of the pride and heritage that people feel.

There are real challenges around capacity. People need to be honest about the state of local governance because a lot of capacity and experience has been lost in the last ten years. Devolution needs to be done thoughtfully. Before creating another level of governance, it is important to be certain how robust it will be. Can sensible and good-quality decisions be taken at the hyper-local level? The two levels of governance which currently exist within Greater Manchester already amounts to a messy structure.

Simon Nokes, Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Productivity is a major challenge for Oldham's businesses, with health inequalities being a major contributor to the productivity gap. During the pandemic Oldham saw average use of furlough, but above average numbers of workers claiming self-employment support.

Oldham has adopted the Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy, which requires an integrated approach and the North East GM growth corridor is a key area for development. It is important to help people to access jobs here and across the whole of Greater Manchester. Economic drivers and growth locations are important, too. There is a need to have holistic plans for places and make sure that public funding aligns behind that plan. For example, it is important to link transport, skills, digital and culture.

The commitment to the Real Living Wage is important. In Oldham, 15 employers have joined the GM Good Employment Charter, which includes a commitment to the LW among its eligibility criteria.

There are also real opportunities around climate change, as climate transition could be an economic opportunity. The mayor has included climate change as one of the three pillars for Greater Manchester, along with social justice and economic progress.

Lastly, across the region there are high productivity companies in every sector but not enough of them, So, there is a long tail of low productivity companies. There is business support to help companies with leadership and management training online, and the Skills for Growth programme, working with companies to provide skills support.

Emma Barton, Director of Economy, Oldham Council

The challenges for Oldham, as currently understood, include housing. Since the 2008 financial crash, there has been little growth in social housing, and a substantial impact on the housing market as people have moved from mortgage-owned property into private rental.

Another issue is connectivity. With 75,000 jobs remaining, it is not accurate to frame Oldham as a dormitory town.

Manufacturing is a large sector but reducing, with jobs also declining in accommodation and food services. Growing sectors include professional/business services, IT, construction and social care. Social enterprise is also growing.

In terms of extending the benefits of agglomeration in the city-region, the 10 local authorities and the mayor have agreed the Places for Everyone framework. However, people are proud of green spaces in Oldham, so brownfield development has to be a priority. That is difficult. Some of the land designated for employment has been a struggle to keep in the Spatial Framework, so there is a small cluster at Stakehill and town centre investment opportunities.

There is some optimism around the Creating a Better Place strategy, with strong links to reducing inequalities. The challenge is to be resilient and get through to delivery phase, building good quality homes, identifying the skills required for jobs, supporting a thriving night-time economy, and developing healthy and friendly places. The strategy and spatial plan are aligned to release brownfield land and there is some funding available. There is a problem with competitive funding for bids. Having schemes that are shovel-ready is not always possible.

2.3 LEVELLING UP OPPORTUNITIES

In many respects, the framework set out in the LUWP is an encouraging one for places like Oldham. It places geographical disparities in the context of long term economic and technological change and acknowledges that there is a process of "creative destruction" taking place, where some places are "steaming ahead" and others are more complex and "left behind". It provides an analysis (through six forms of capital – see Chapter 6 below for a further discussion) which explains the differences, and sets out a framework for intervention to improve the situation, based around four primary objectives: improving productivity; spreading opportunity; restoring civic pride; and empowering local leadership.

It is clear that delivering against these objectives will require policy reform at local, regional and national levels, with short termism and policy churn, a lack of coordination, insufficient local empowerment, and poor evidence and data combined with a lack of transparency and accountability, as priorities which must be resolved to bring about sustained improvement in circumstances. On this basis, it sets out the principles of a successful policy regime and proposes to build a new approach based on: medium term missions, reshaping central government decision making, empowering local decision making, improving data, monitoring and evaluation, and improving transparency and accountability. Finally, it is clear that:

"Levelling up" will best be achieved through a combination of public policy and private sector interventions, but while emphasising that successful places require good public services and strong voluntary and community organisations, the primary economic challenge is "supporting the private sector" as the "real engine of wealth creation – to invest more, grow more and take more risks".

All of these themes strongly echo those discussed in the Review's expert witness sessions, particularly the importance of having a clear vision and purpose, staying with this over the long term, and recognising the multi-dimensional nature of the challenge (the six capitals), while acknowledging the central requirement of supporting private sector growth and wealth.

What the White Paper is less clear on, is how such a vision for a place like Oldham, can be framed and asserted as an integral part of a city-region, without getting lost within it, i.e. to what extent should this apply at a single city-region level or at multiple levels within it? In many respects, the White Paper presents an overarching economic model, based on the theory of "agglomeration" – it also describes this as a 'modern Medici effect' - which has provided the intellectual framework for Greater Manchester since 2009, when it published the Manchester Independent Economic Review (MIER)[33] and for Government nationally, when it embarked on negotiating a series of city-region devolution deals from 2014. These all set out a case for investment and growth in central cities, helping to increase and drive wealth and economic benefits across their wider regions.

However, it is important to recognise and address the fact that there is still disagreement amongst some communities and actors that this is the best approach for places like Oldham. Nationally, there is a degree of scepticism about the benefits which city-region models of growth bring to surrounding towns and this view has gathered pace since the 2016 Referendum and the 2019 General Election. Indeed, the fact that previous approaches to regional disparities have not always delivered for everyone has been the major theme of policy in the last five years or so – enhanced by new economic and social consequences from Austerity, Brexit and Covid-19. This has been reflected in the changing status of towns within policy and public and political debate, particularly in the last five years. They have increasingly been seen less as an adjunct of neighbouring cities, and more as places in their own right.[34] This has been reflected in funding streams such as the Towns and Future High Street Funds as well as Levelling Up Funds, which have been allocated directly to Oldham and places like it, rather than through intermediaries, such as combined authorities.

The LUWP reasserts this model as its focal point, aiming to boost the role of cities as the drivers of growth especially in less well performing English regions. It envisages building on – and in the case of GM and West Midlands, deepening - existing arrangements in city-regions - rather than devolving directly to individual towns or boroughs within them. In many respects, that is going in the right direction and builds on the foundations set out for devolution in the initial 2014 devolution deal in Greater Manchester.

It reasserts the model of economic renewal which focusses on cities and city-regions as the engines of growth. This Review is broadly supportive of this model. It is unrealistic to think that every place in need of regeneration and economic transformation can or will receive individual treatment, or that they can thrive independently, when we know that there are significant benefits from being part of a larger economic entity. This is particularly the case in terms of private sector growth, which the LUWP identifies, quite rightly as the "real engine of wealth creation", but also relates to the creation and ongoing importance of new institutions, powers and resources at the city-region level such as the Mayor and the Combined Authority and its family of city-region organisations.

Ultimately, regional and local disparities in wealth and income require a larger and more productive private sector, creating more well-paid jobs across all places including in Oldham and Manchester. Places like Oldham owed their original economic purpose to the fact that they were part of a larger scale, sub-regional economy. Any new economic purpose is not going to be forged alone, but as part of the drive to foster a stronger private sector across Greater Manchester as a whole.

However, this Review also acknowledges that much more needs to be done in Oldham and places like it for these benefits and advantages to be fully realised. There is scepticism about some of the 'spillover' or 'trickle out' effects from city centres and these need to be taken seriously if a new approach to levelling up is going to work and gain public support. This exists across the country, and in outer boroughs in Greater Manchester, including in Oldham.

But Oldham has not been well served by the last fifty years' worth of economic change nor by the efforts of the public sector, over decades, to overcome the challenges that industrial job loss bequeathed the town. This Review represents a first step in putting the latter right by attempting to get local, regional and national government on the same page in terms of supporting Oldham's future prosperity. The former, however, will take decades to address, and needs to advance on several fronts at the same time. The transformation task remains significant and long-term, and the benefits will not be evident for everyone or everywhere in the short-term.

33. See http://www.manchester-review.org.uk/.
34. See David Goodhart (2017) "The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics" and Centre for Towns (2017), Launch Briefing https://www.centrefortowns.org/reports/reports/launch-briefing.

However, it is also a measure of the maturity of strategies, partnerships, structures and processes within those devolved authorities. The whole needs to be more than the "sum of the parts". But the needs of individual "parts" must also recognised and taken seriously, and not lost – or the "whole" becomes somewhat empty. It is whether or not these benefits have happened which underpins much of the scepticism and resentment about the advantages of being part of a big city-region. This is not just in terms of providing employment, but also in terms of their impact on business, social fabric and civic pride. These are all themes which are explored in subsequent chapters.

Regional centre workers live in all parts of Greater Manchester (and beyond) and significant efforts have been made to link its employment opportunities to all parts of the city-region, particularly through transport improvements (e.g. Metrolink expansion, free travel for young people). These will continue (bus regulation) and should also improve connectivity between areas less well served by radial routes (e.g. Oldham-Rochdale). The evidence of the last decade, though, is that Regional Centre success, whilst critical, cannot float all GM boats.

Two implications follow from this. First, more work is needed to understand what the area is good for in terms of private sector investment and job-creation and how its assets might be developed to enable more successes on this front. Second, any plan for future prosperity in Oldham needs to go beyond additional private job-creation from without and look to develop indigenous strengths that can improve the prosperity of the place and its people.

There are commentators who conclude that agglomeration theory cannot and will not deliver the "spillovers" which surrounding places hope to gain.[35] However, it is hard to see how an alternative approach might work. Towns like Oldham (and others in GM) did not emerge or develop as stand-alone places, but rather as parts of the scale of wider economies, linked to the nation and world beyond. It seems unlikely that they can solve internal challenges without being so. A point which has been repeatedly raised during this Review, is that despite the apparent successes of cities such as Manchester, their overall performance remains low. Part of the problem remains that, despite the progress which cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Birmingham and others have made in recent times, they continue to underperform economically compared to both the national averages in various measures and also to similar cities in Europe and North America. That still needs to change and to improve.

35. See Neil McInroy (2020) in the Guardian https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/14/uk-cities-covid-wealth-urban-centres-shareholders.

And in improving this, a big part of the challenge is about finding ways of extending the "levelling up" themes (improving productivity, spreading opportunity, improving civic pride) across all the people and places within the city-region. From this perspective, solving Oldham's problems (and those of similar places within Greater Manchester, including many places within Manchester itself), is the challenge of the city-region. One conclusion of this Review, therefore is that Oldham working as an integral part of a thriving city-region provides the best way forward, so being an active part of Greater Manchester is central to its future success.

However, this does not mean that nothing needs to change. A precondition for making a city-region work better, is that Oldham must be clear about what it wants to achieve. However, it is also clear that the delivery of this will require a different relationship with city-region partners. The details of this will be explored in subsequent chapters, but the general theme is that the city-region must acknowledge a much greater degree of complexity within its constituent parts, and that its priority has to be to create a "rising tide which lifts all boats". There is a price to not delivering this, and it comes in the form of a lack of confidence, and with this, scepticism, cynicism and resentment.

There is no doubt that the LUWP provides a framework which can be very helpful for Oldham, both in terms of shaping its own ambitions, and in terms of working with city-region partners to deliver them. The missions outlined in the White Paper invite local leaders to set clear and achievable targets against which ambitions can be set and progress measured. These are organised around:

- **Boosting productivity, pay jobs and living standards: with specific measures relating to living standards, research and development, transport infrastructure, and digital connectivity.**
- **Spreading opportunities and improve public services: with specific measures relating to education, skills, health and well-being.**
- **Restoring a sense of community and local pride and belonging: with specific measures relating to pride in place, housing and crime.**
- **Empowering local leaders and communities: with specific measures around local leadership.**

There is likely to be some debate about the details of these missions and targets, but they do provide a good foundation for focussing effort on tangible achievements within a specific timescale (2030). What will be important, is for Oldham to set out its ambitions through these missions and targets, in ways that have clear links to those set out in the Greater Manchester Strategy.[36] This will help improve transparency and accountability, both within Oldham and across Greater Manchester, and this in turn will foster better quality solutions to the shared challenges of building stronger leadership, better partnership structures and more effective implementation.

2.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Vision and strategy

Oldham should adopt the "levelling up" mantra of "economic transformation and civic pride" as the drivers of its strategy.

Welcome private sector wealth generation and employment

This means being very clear that a successful community requires strong public services and a vibrant voluntary and community sector, but that too often, the missing ingredient is a strong and growing private sector.

This is the primary challenge of renewing Oldham's economic purpose. To deliver this, Oldham must focus on a dual strategy, of supporting business (those already here and potential new arrivals) while also maximising the opportunities for Oldham residents to gain good quality employment in neighbouring boroughs.

36. See the Greater Manchester Strategy https://aboutgreatermanchester.com/the-greater-manchester-strategy-2021-2031/

Relentless focus

Oldham must then ensure that it actively provides the "relentless focus" against which all strategic projects and partners must explicitly contribute. This should acknowledge the four dimensions of:

- **Oldham as a place to live –** where people choose to live because it is an attractive place, with good amenities and services, and a strong sense of civic pride and identity.
- **Oldham as a place of opportunity –** where more Oldham residents acquire the skills and knowledge to compete for good quality employment in neighbouring areas, and there is an active strategy to support them to "live in and work out".
- **Oldham as a place to visit –** where amenities are attractive to residents of neighbouring areas, who will visit and spend money, which will support local business and employment.
- **Oldham as a place for business –** which creates and delivers high value goods and services – where business and enterprise are actively encouraged and very well supported – from planning to services, business support, to skills. This includes manufacturing firms, and a range of smaller and medium sized enterprises (currently mainly in the foundational economy, but with a growing number in knowledge intensive business services).

Missions and targets

Oldham should review the proposed Missions in the LUWP, and establish its own ambitions and measurable targets aligned with the Greater Manchester Strategy, in each area, with a delivery date of 2030. These will provide transparency and accountability for stakeholders and communities within Oldham, and also a clear basis for establishing a more effective relationship with city-region partners, and with national government.

Partnerships

Oldham should review its current partnership arrangements, within Oldham and across the city-region, to ensure that these are focussed on the core priorities and fit for purpose. This should include:

(a) Relaunching Oldham leadership board with a focus on the "levelling up" challenges outlined in this Review.

(b) Considering new partnerships with neighbouring authorities and stakeholders and new institutions within Oldham, where there are common benefits in supporting wealth creation, business growth and employment.

(c) Actively working with the city-region stakeholders, including the Combined Authority, to ensure that partnership arrangements, missions and targets, and accountabilities are robust enough to deliver Oldham's ambitions.

The subsequent chapters of this Review, which look, in turn, at boosting productivity, spreading opportunity, and restoring civic pride, will add practical detail to these five general recommendations.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Breaking Oldham's dependence on "foundational economy" employment should be a central target in reshaping its long-term economic purpose. And Oldham needs to set out clear plans for how it intends to achieve this.**
- **Relentlessly anchor all future activity and projects back to the delivery of Oldham's long-term transformation, that it is organised through a set of coherent sub-strategies, with missions and targets which are directly connected to the delivery of that transformation.**

CHAPTER 3. BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

Oldham's business base has transformed over time, with the high level of technical skills and manual dexterity in the workforce making it a perfect place for technology companies through the late 20th century. Improving productivity, pay and living standards are a core theme of the LUWP, with a strong emphasis on growing the private sector, innovation, transport and broadband connectivity.

Section 3.2 summarises the evidence that was presented by expert witnesses, which focused on Oldham's potential income from goods and services. Section 3.3 focuses on the challenges of increasing private sector growth in Oldham and the role of private, public and voluntary sector partners in supporting employment and local enterprise. Section three considers some case studies of employers already established in Oldham and makes recommendations for 'levelling up' Oldham's economy.

3.2 SUMMARY OF EXPERT EVIDENCE SESSIONS

Steve Fothergill (Sheffield Hallam University)

A report published in June 2021, 'Plan for the North',[37] sets a context for what post-industrial places like Oldham should do to regenerate their local economies. Oldham is part of the GM economy, with a shared labour market. Oldham jobs will go to non-Oldham residents, and vice versa. Westminster holds some levers, such as the Levelling Up Fund, while local places hold others. For example, the training of individuals for the local labour market – making sure labour supply is matched with demand.

Assisted Areas (see map[38]) cover a quarter of Britain. Support from the Shared Prosperity Fund should go to the less prosperous areas. However, the competitive bidding process used in other government funding bids will not work in Oldham as central government is not able to determine good bids.

The local authority should lead on accessing land and premises for local business. Older industrial sites will need to be remediated by the local authority, and there should not be a focus on high quality office space (as in Manchester).

In the wake of the pandemic, a report for the Coalfields Regeneration Trust called 'Beyond the Pandemic: Older industrial Britain in the wake of the crisis'.[39] In terms of employment, most old industrial towns are back to where they started before Covid. They have been through a rollercoaster ride, but now there are labour shortages. The ratio of unemployment/vacancies is back to pre-pandemic levels, though more people are on unemployment benefits. Levels of hidden unemployed remain high and this still needs levelling up.

Sarah Longlands (Centre for Local Economic Strategies)

Oldham's economy has changed over time. It grew rapidly during the Industrial Revolution, but then declined along with many of its industries. New capital arrived and then disappeared. The orthodox view of economic growth is that as property development leads to rising costs private companies, investment in transport infrastructure should follow. What is the point of a growth strategy if it does not benefit local communities?

Community Wealth Building (CWB) has evolved from conversations in the US/UK over the last 10 years and is a people-based approach to local strategy. It aims to minimise 'extractive' economic activity.

The five key levers of CWB are: finance; workforce; land and property; spending (procurement), and inclusive ownership. Change happens with the small stuff, helping a neighbourhood.

There is a need to understand how to unlock the potential of the long-term unemployed and the inactive population. Rather than encouraging new people in, the focus should be on helping those already living in an area.

The economy will only work with a decent private sector, with the public sector leading the way by paying the Real Living Wage. As 99% of businesses are SMEs, with high levels of start-ups, employment premises provided by the public sector could help firms. A priority should be to shape and make the market for green/energy jobs.

Economic governance plays a huge role in the relationship between Oldham and Manchester. On its own, agglomeration has serious flaws as it stops people thinking about the economy in a more diverse way. There is a need to ask if the relationship between places serves both places?

Andrew Gossage (Ultimate Products, Global Sourcing Holdings PLC)

The history of the company begins with Barry, who ran a retail business, Frank, who had a successful career in Oldham market, and Simon, who had a small place in Bury, importing window blinds. When the business moved to Manor Mill, Chadderton, in 2005, it was turning over £3m. By 2010 that had become £50-60m, and the business was employing 200 people. Ultimate Products are currently expanding – and renovating a nearby Heron Mill.

In 2013 there was a change of business strategy. During the financial crisis (2007-09) it acquired struggling brands, going from being a sourcing business to become a branded consumer goods business. The business offered branded home products at a price that competed with own-label alternatives.

37. See https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/plan-for-the-north.pdf.
38. See http://www.ukassistedareasmap.com/.
39. See https://www.coalfields-regen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/BEYOND-THE-PANDEMIC.pdf.

The business then persuaded retailers like Tesco to give it space, offering a wider range later. The business was listed it on the London Stock Exchange in 2017. Now, 350 people are employed in Oldham, and another 40 are based in China. There is also a showroom and sales team in Germany.

Panel Discussion: Giles Wilkes (Global Flint); Richard Jones (Innovation GM); & Paul Swinney (Centre for Cities)

Opening the discussion, Giles told an anecdote about his time working in government. A big tech company complained to Vince Cable, the then Business, Innovation and Skills Secretary, that did not know who to speak to when investing in a place. By contrast, when they went to Leipzig in Germany all was 'sorted' in two weeks (including planned road infrastructure and the provision of nursery places). High skills and good infrastructure are important, but knowing the local point of contact is essential. Industrial strategy can become manufacturing strategy, when really R&D may be more relevant. Services are more 'sticky' and enduring in a place.

Richard noted that the services sector was very broad, including some subsectors producing very high added value, and £9bn of R&D activities are carried out by services. There is a tendency in the UK to see science policy as a substitute for industrial policy, and when thinking of R&D to focus too much on very upstream science - think about bodies like the Francis Crick Institute and graphene).

But R&D happens when any organisation devotes manpower or equipment to solve challenges, Richard said. He gave the example of how a company in Middleton fitted a mattress in a box for delivery.

It's value generating business that are essential and there isn't a sharp division between manufacturing and services. In fact, many high value services exist to support manufacturing (for example design and technical consultancy - see "Inside the Black Box of Manufacturing" by Hauge and O'Sullivan). The key thing to focus on for Oldham are any firms that produce tradeable goods and services, many of which will be SMEs.

Giles described his work on a confidential survey on innovation, which he classed as anything that improves the way things work. What do consumers need? Constantly changing policy, conflation of innovation, and invention. Why are British companies not doing R&D? British managers are more risk averse, Giles said, and they take a long time to shift. How to get producers to speed up their uptake of new techniques?

The panel was asked how Oldham companies could be rated for innovation, and how innovative thinking could be encouraged? Richard said that cluster theory is important, citing Sheffield as an example. There the gathering of manufacturers in Cutlers Hall helped in forming the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. He also said collaborative working with companies like Rolls Royce was important for Derby, where it bring in high wage jobs.

History is important. Richard discussed in a blog how bleach was important for the Lancashire textile industry and led to the formation of a local chemical industry. More recently, Oldham has moved into electronics and has a cluster of skills and companies. Key to understanding what makes a cluster (due to the US academics Gary Pisano and Willy Shih) is the idea of an "Industrial Commons". A successful industrial commons is rooted in large anchor companies and institutions, together with networks of supplying companies; it is characterized by both informal knowledge networks, and formal institutions for R&D, training and skills. Lombardy has a very successful advanced manufacturing SME base that has formed despite, rather than because of, any effort on the part of the Italian central government (as noted by Mike Emmerich).

The best data source for an analysis of R&D is patent data, Paul said, although it is difficult to determine all R&D activity. In the absence of innovators, it is important to work out how to attract those businesses in. The skills of the population can be a barrier for businesses. For example, North Manchester has lower skills, and is not attracting in companies.

However, Paul expressed caution about the development of clusters, arguing that moving jobs around in the past has not been successful. Companies may innovate in 10 years' time, but what to do now? Paul said jobs in Manchester city centre or Oldham are separate points. He said GM is punching below its weight, although the city centre has gone through a renaissance. The centre of Manchester is too small; it has lots of high-paid jobs, but not enough to supply the whole of GM.

A questioner, Andy Westwood, asked how policymakers should intervene? Pointing to the planned Advanced Machinery and Productivity Institute (AMPI) in Rochdale, he asked: Would it be crazy to be more like Rochdale?

Giles responded that there is a need to use innovation to get more output from less input, so gaining total factor productivity. Clusters work to encourage innovation, he said. High demand and constrained supply, force companies to change. It is all about competition, he said.

He noted the economist Paul Ormerod's "Good Lad Theory", where bad companies hang around.

Greater culture can be shared in clusters and also helps with people moving between places. The export-led model for national growth is more productive. To get more productivity, the local state needs to be confident to ask for things, as noted in Lord Heseltine's 2012 report, 'No Stone unturned: In pursuit of growth' . Companies should be made to join a pro-active Chamber of Commerce when they start out, so interplay can happen. Institutions are needed to make people interact and have an initial spark as they are meeting, he said.

Paul noted that transport and good planning policy is also important. Re-regulation of GM buses is good. Civic pride should be separate from economy.

In places like Oldham it is too easy to think of things as a supply problem, said Richard. With a more innovative economy, there is higher demand, and greater rewards, for high skills.

What skills look like for what you aspire to? AMPI, created from Strength in Places and Towns Fund, is genuinely business lead by Holroyd Precision Ltd, a machine tool manufacturer and supplier. The companies that got involved with this were part of the Made Smarter pilot (Jurgen Maier Industry 4.0). Not all companies can do this overnight. University of Manchester are involved in AMPI but not everywhere can have this.

Most publicly-funded R&D happens in universities, but then there is a gap where translational institutes are needed, like the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft in Germany and Imec in Belgium. Another example is Taiwan's Industrial Technology Research Institute. It was founded to support a medium-tech industry base in the manufacture of textiles and bicycles, but 30 years on it is now at the world technology frontier for semiconductor manufacture. The process innovation, and display centre, that takes place in translational institutes are essential. The Catapults are a good initiative, though they need a more explicit focus on building regional manufacturing and innovation capacity as well as applied research.

Finally, John Wrathmell asked if there should be less focus on frontier sectors and more on the foundational economy? Giles said it is best to concentrate on the foundational economy. With tighter labour markets, the focus on innovative software for scheduling of care visits has potential for productivity gains. He noted that there is survivor bias, in that we only hear about successful places innovating, and growing their productivity.

3.3 OLDHAM'S BUSINESS BASE

There is evidence of an entrepreneurial culture among Oldham's communities in terms of business start-up rates and the numbers of small and micro businesses in the borough. In 2021 Oldham was home to around 7,210 business enterprises employing roughly 80,000 people.[40] The number of enterprises has increased from 6,880 (4.8%) since 2020, increasing 4.6% in 2020 after a contraction in 2019, see Figure 3.1. These are primarily micro enterprises (88% of the share employing between 0 to 9 people), 10% of enterprises are small (with between 10 to 49 employees), 1.5% are medium sized (between 50 and 249 employees) and 0.3% are large enterprises (with 250 or more employees). This is a similar share of companies to Greater Manchester and the North West.

Figure 3.1: Percentage change in Business Counts, 2010-2021 (Nomis, UK Business Counts from ONS Inter Departmental Business Register, 2021) [41]

Figure 3.2 shows the shares of enterprises in each sector, with the largest sector at 19% share is wholesale and retail trade. Enterprises in the construction sector account for 13.4% share and the professional, scientific and technical activities are 11.8%. Figure 3.3 shows the value of each sector to the Oldham economy. In 2019 we see the largest value sector in Oldham was manufacturing at 15.3% share of output or Gross Value Added (GVA), this has declined over time with the highest share within this sample in 2000 at 25%. The next largest sector in 2019 was wholesale and retail trade at 13%, then real estate at 13%, human health at 11.3% and education, 8.1%, Transport and storage has increased over time (matching the increase in enterprises in Figure 3.2) and now accounts for 7.8% share of output. The share of the remaining sectors in 2019 were: construction 6.8%, public administration and defence 6%, agriculture and utilities 4.7%, professional, scientific and technical 3.8%, other services 2.6%, accommodation and food service activities 2.2%, information and communication 1.9% and financial and insurance activities 0.8%.

40. This is the 2020 estimate from Business Register and Employment Survey, accessed from Nomis. This is a workplace estimate of employment, Chapter 1 discussed the resident measure of employment.

41. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/report.aspx?town=oldham

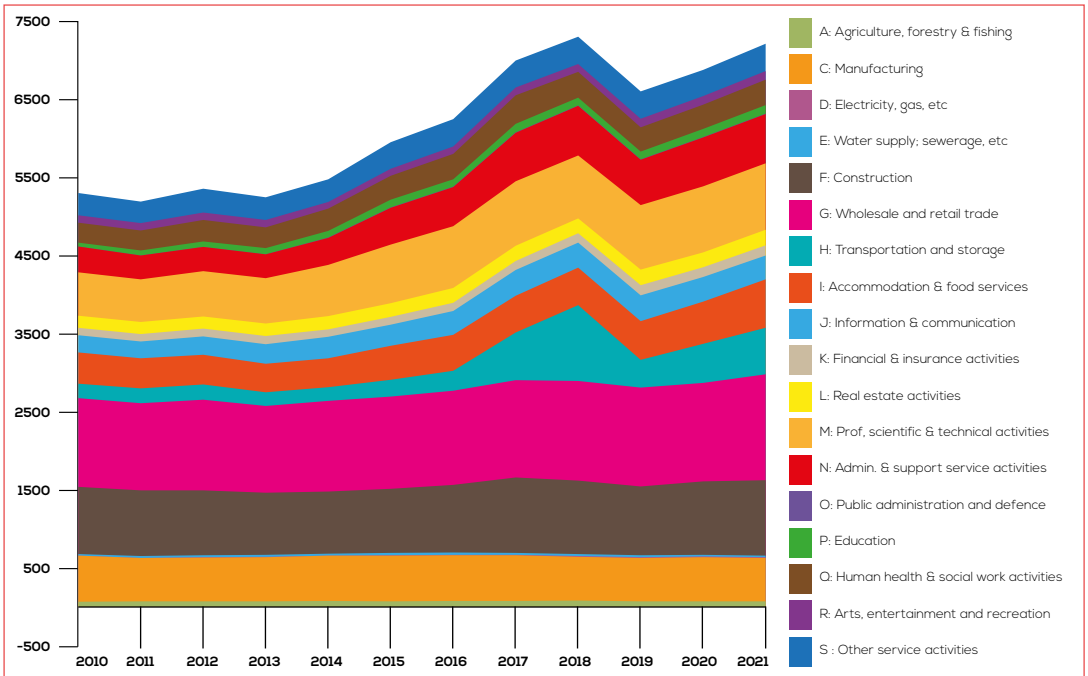

Figure 3.2: Oldham Business Count, 2010-2021 (Nomis UK Business Counts from ONS Inter Departmental Business Register, 2021) [42]

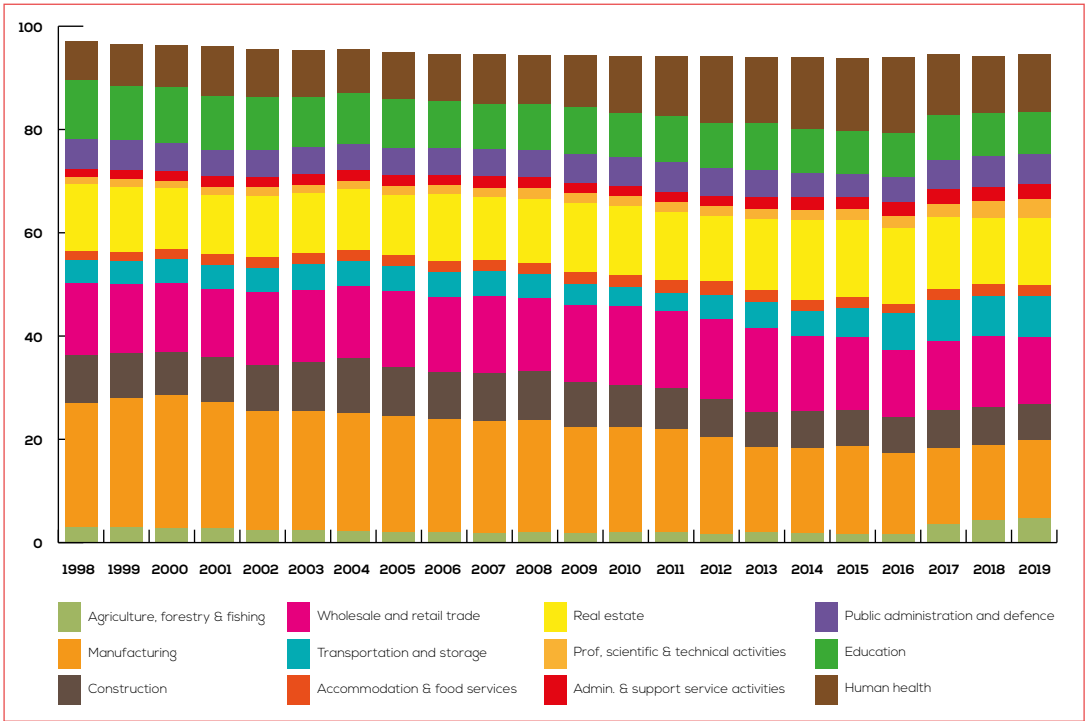

Figure 3.3: Oldham Gross Value Added by Industry, 1998-2019 (ONS, GVA (balanced) by industry, 2021) [43]

To be more prosperous, Oldham needs to grow the value produced by those sectors that produce tradeable goods and services. The OECD (2018)[44] define tradeable sectors as "those that produce goods and services that can traded across regions and international borders". Firms can operate in sectors that are tradeable, although they may not actually engage in trade, but they are exposed to competition from abroad. The OECD (2016)[45] found that regions with larger tradeable sectors were able to catch up to the frontier regions quicker than those with lower shares that were diverging.

42. Data from Nomis https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?-mode=construct&version=0&dataset=189
43. See ONS https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossvalueaddedbalancedbyindustrylocalauthoritiesbyitl1region.
44. See Chapter 2, page 59 in OECD (2018), Productivity and Jobs in a Globalised World: (How) Can All Regions Benefit? OECD Regional Development Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264293137-en.
45. OECD (2016), OECD Regional Outlook 2016: Productive Regions for Inclusive Societies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264260245-en.

The OECD (2018) classify tradeable sectors as the following: agriculture (A), industry (BCDE), information and communication (J), financial and insurance activities (K) and other services (RSTU). The remaining sectors are then classed as non-tradeable. Using the GVA sector shares in 2019, 25% of Oldham's sectors were classed as tradeable. This has fallen from 33% in 2000 which has mirrored the declining share of the manufacturing sector. It is the tradeable sectors that bring money into the community, together with the wages of residents who commute to other parts of the city-region.

Identifying Sector Specialisations: ONS Town's Industry Structure Analysis

Town Name	Town Size	Job Density	Income Deprivation Percentile	Population Growth	Employment Growth	Krugman Index
Oldham LA		0.63		6.42%	7.95%	
Oldham centre	Large	0.38	1	13.80%	2.50%	0.47
Chadderton	Medium	0.45	19	5.80%	10.70%	0.65
Royton	Medium	0.32	50	-3.20%	3.30%	0.75
Failsworth	Small	0.26	23	-0.70%	2.10%	0.73
Uppermill	Small	0.24	93	3.80%	16.80%	0.67
Shaw	Small	0.31	29	-2.00%	5.50%	1.08
Lees	Small	0.16	48	-2.30%	-3.40%	0.75

Figure 3.4: Key Variables for Towns within Oldham, growth between 2009-2019 (ONS, 2020)[46]

ONS (2020) produced analysis on employment and population growth by towns. In Figure 3.4 we present the analysis by towns within Oldham including information on job density (this shows the number of jobs in the town as a proportion of residents aged 16 to 64 years), income deprivation percentile, population and employment growth between 2009 and 2019. We can see that Oldham, Chadderton and Uppermill (including Delph, Diggle and Dobcross) have experienced population and employment growth. Shaw, Royton and Failsworth have had declining population but increasing employment. Lees has had declining population and employment over 2009-2019. The ONS (2021) released town level data on the industry profile of towns, within this there is information on location quotients (if the share of employment in an industry is the same as GB the location quotient is 1, greater than 1 signifies a greater share than GB) and Krugman similarity indices (see Figure 3.4 – this shows how similar the town is the GB industry structure, 0 is very similar up to values close to 2 which is dissimilar). Oldham Centre has the most similar industry structure to Great Britain as it has the lowest Krugman for index of 0.47, Shaw is most dissimilar with an index of 1.08.

46. See ONS (2020), Understanding towns in England and Wales: spatial analysis https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/understandingtownsinenglandandwalesspatialanalysis/2020-12-07.

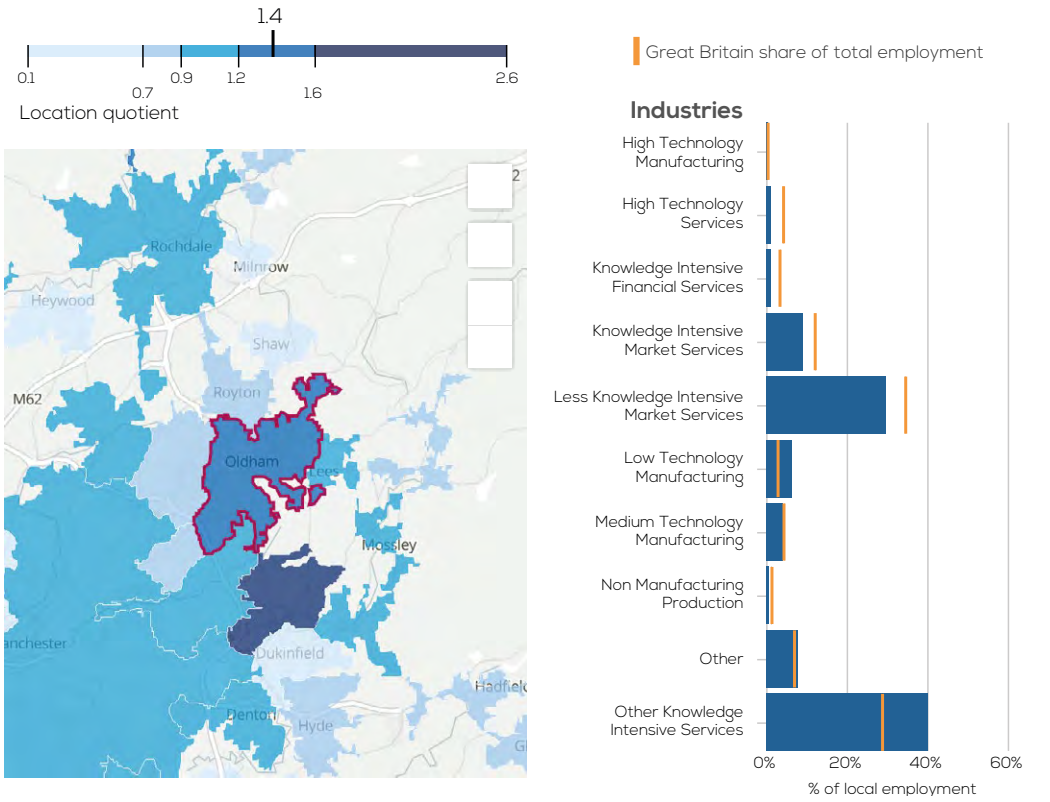

Figure 3.5: Oldham Town's Location Quotients by HTEC industry groups showing Other Knowledge Intensive Services (Figure 6 in ONS, 2021)[47]

The ONS (2021) have created high-tech and knowledge-intensive services (HTEC) industry groupings which shows the concentration of jobs in those groupings within towns. This helps us to understand the industrial strengths of the towns within Oldham borough. For example, Figure 3.5 shows that Oldham town has 40% of employment in Other Knowledge Intensive Services (greater than the 28% GB average) with a location quotient of 1.4. This category is made up of mostly services including arts, entertainment, human health, social work, education and public administration (so will include Oldham Royal Hospital, Oldham Council and Oldham College). Oldham town also has a larger than GB average 7% share of employment in the Low Technology Manufacturing grouping (including the manufacture of food, beverages, textiles, apparel, paper and wood products), here the location quotient is 2.2 (a value of 1 indicates the same as GB average).

Analysing this data for other towns in Oldham borough we find that Chadderton has the largest employment category at 41% is in Less Knowledge Intensive Market services which includes wholesale and retail, land transport, accommodation and administrative activities. Chadderton also has an 8% share of employment in the Medium Technology Manufacturing grouping (this includes manufacture of machinery, equipment, motor vehicles, metals, mineral, rubber and plastic products), here the location quotient is 1.7. Royton has 42% employment share of Less Knowledge Intensive Market services, it also has a much larger than average 18% share of employment in the Medium Technology Manufacturing grouping, here the location quotient is 3.9. Shaw has 52% employment share of Less Knowledge Intensive Market services, it also has a larger than average 26% share of employment in Knowledge Intensive Market services (services including other forms of transport, professional, scientific, technical and administrative activities), here the location quotient is 2.2. Failsworth has 47% employment share of Less Knowledge Intensive Market services, with location quotient of 1.4. Failsworth has 24% share of employment in Other Knowledge Intensive Market grouping. Lees has 32% employment share of Less Knowledge Intensive Market services and 15% share of employment in the Other grouping (which includes construction and real estate activities), here the location quotient is 2.1. Uppermill has 42% employment share of Less Knowledge Intensive Market services, it also has a larger than average 8% share of employment in the Low Technology Manufacturing grouping (including the manufacture of food, beverages, textiles, apparel, paper and wood products), here the location quotient is 2.7.

47. See ONS (2021), Understanding Towns: industry analysis https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/understandingtownsindustryanalysis/2021-12-13

Identifying Sector Specialisations: Complexity Analysis

As part of the GM Independent Prosperity Review Mealy and Coyle (2019) estimated the industrial strengths across boroughs of GM. In Figure 3.6 the green dots and text represent Oldham's current industrial strengths, while grey dots are industries in which it is not yet competitive. The horizontal axis shows the distance (calculated as 1 minus proximity density) between a given industry and Oldham's existing industrial strengths. The vertical axis plots each industry's product complexity index. Industries shaded in purple represent new industrial possibilities that could be advantageous areas of competitiveness in the future. These include the manufacture of electric motors, repair of fabricated metal products, sale of motor vehicles, insurance, reproduction of recorded media and sound recording and music publishing activities.

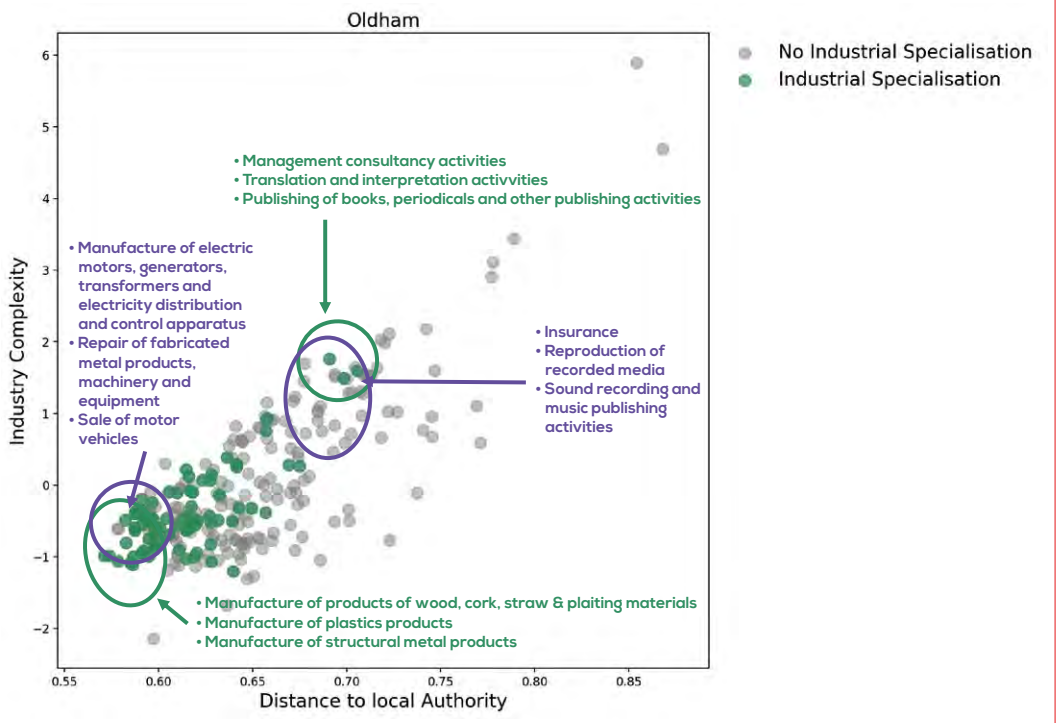

Figure 3.6: Oldham Complexity Analysis (GM Prosperity Review, 2019) [48]

Figure 3.7 shows the location of innovative firms with their registered address in Oldham. This data has been compiled by Data City for GMCA using an algorithm that scrapes information from company websites. To identify firms, Data City used a training set of companies with known R&D investment to identify keywords that showed that a firm was "innovation-intensive" (which was defined as £5,000 of R&D investment per employee per year). This was then fed into a machine learning algorithm which looked for these keywords in the rest of their database. The result of this algorithm found 258 firms that are likely to be innovation intensive in Oldham.

48. See https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1913/gmipr_tr_economic-complexityanalysis.pdf

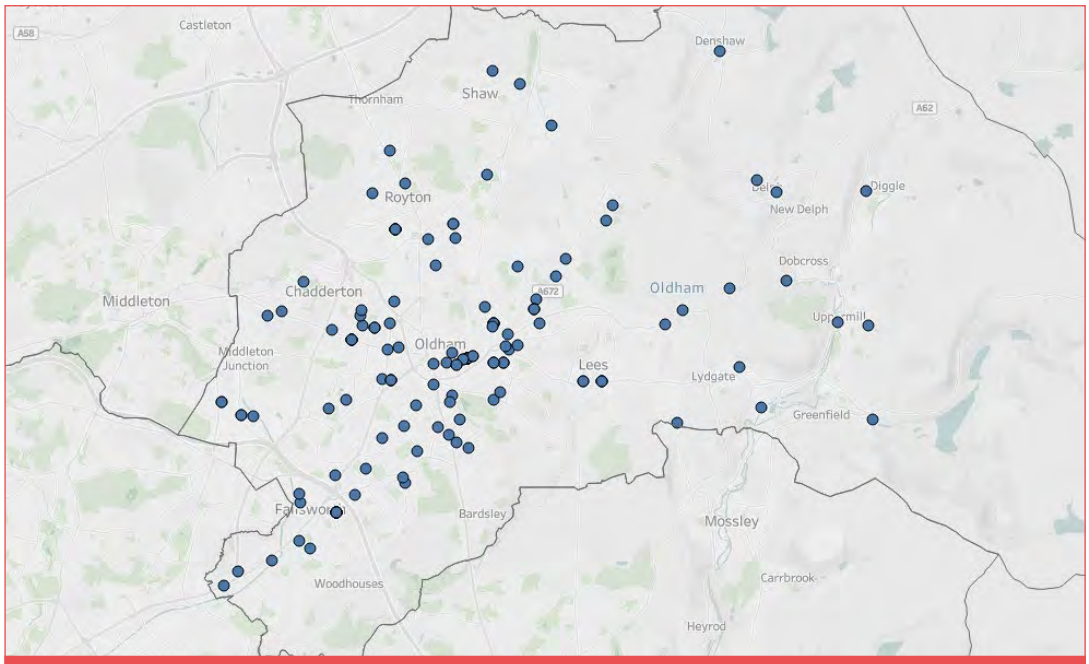

Figure 3.7: Innovation Intensive firms with registered address in Oldham (GMCA analysis of DataCity data, 2022) [49]

Oldham's Public Sector

The public sector plays a fundamental role in Oldham's economy, within the Local Authority and NHS, which together provide more than 20% of jobs in the district. With the third highest rate of public sector employment in Greater Manchester, Oldham has a clear vulnerability to any future public sector contraction. Figure 3.8 illustrates the change in employee numbers in the public sector and private sectors between 2017 and 2020. Oldham's number of public sector employees has contracted by -4.3%, when at the same time public sector employees grew by 3.7% in Greater Manchester, 3% in the North West and 3.1% in England. By way of comparison, the private sector employees in Oldham fell by -10.8% between 2017-2020, where they increased in GM (0.6%) and fell in the North West (-0.1%) and England (-0.7%).

Overall these changes in employment structure has had a hollowing out effect on Oldham's labour market and on the levels of wealth and pay in the borough overall. More public sector jobs have been lost – these are typically higher paying and more secure jobs – and private sector job growth over the same period has not compensated in either employment or income. In both the public and private sector, job loss and job growth have been at lower rates than GM and the NW, increasing overall detachment and inequality between Oldham and other places nearby.

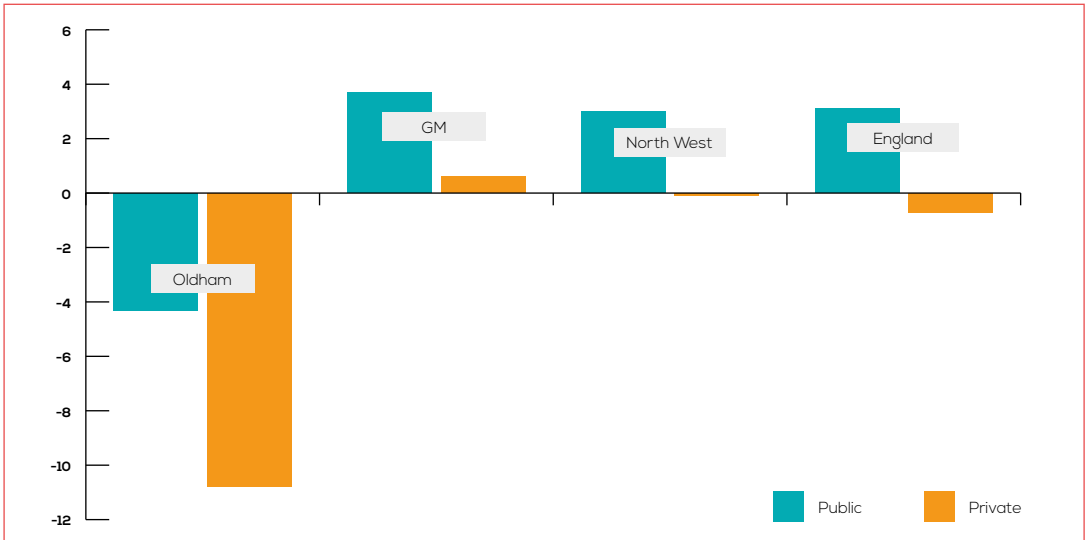

Figure 3.8: Oldham Public and Private Sector Employee Growth 2017-2020, (Nomis, 2021) [50]

49. See a blog on the Data City methodology: https://thedatacity.com/insight/working-out-loud/introducing-our-company-innovation-measure/

50. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=189

Oldham's Foundational Economy and Community Wealth Building

The largest share of workers in Oldham are workers that work appears to be within the 'foundational economy'. This refers to the first layers of the economic structure, including jobs and services in health, care, education, housing, utilities and food supply.[51] Such activities exist across public, private and voluntary sectors providing basic services and goods to all citizens, including those in and out of work, the elderly and to those with low incomes. Jobs tend to be low paid and contracts relatively precarious, but at the same time these roles perform an essential foundation for other economic activities – as other workers and activities still require the 'everyday infrastructure' of food, care and other essential services in order to function. We have estimated that in 2020 the share of the local workforce working in the foundational economy could be as high as 70% of all workers in Oldham[52].

Community Wealth Building has become a growing focus of ideas and activity in Oldham, neighbouring boroughs, and across Greater Manchester as a whole. In her evidence, Sarah Longlands (Chief Executive of the Centre for Local Economic Strategy) set out for the Review a helpful summary of what Community Wealth Building involved. She described it as a people-based approach, which increases the flow of wealth and power to local people and places through five key levers: land and property; finance; procurement and spend; workforce; and inclusive ownership. She described how approaches based around these levers can drive change from small successes, disrupting inertia, acting as an inspiration rather than a model.

Across Greater Manchester there are examples of how this approach is successfully building local capacity and new organisations and enterprises, including in Oldham. This is one practical approach to improving conditions in the foundation economy and in wealth/income levels in the area by supporting higher local spending from local 'anchor institutions'[53] and the creation of new 'socially focused' organisations for service delivery. The Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission[54] also explored this model in some depth and a range of recommendations have been incorporated into the new Greater Manchester Strategy as a result. This is to be welcomed and provides further evidence of how such an approach can be adopted and driven at both Greater Manchester level – with its institutions, budgets and political will – as well as in individual local authorities such as Oldham. For example, there is now a GM plan for developing a Community Wealth Building Hub for the city-region.

We recommend that voluntary organisations and social entrepreneurs in Oldham be engaged in the co-design process as well as accessing support from the Hub and the GM Growth Company.

But at the same time, we know that such an approach can only go so far in helping Oldham achieve its longer-term economic ambitions. Many of the 'anchor institutions' in Oldham and in similar places elsewhere, have had their budgets and headcount significantly reduced in the last decade (see analysis above and further details in Chapter 6) and these reductions look unlikely to be replaced in the future. Furthermore – and as the GM Inequalities Commission notes – the social economy which should play an active part in a thriving economy overall – is currently small in size and even in towns and cities elsewhere in Europe and the US with more well-developed social sectors and firms, these activities rarely make up more than 10-15% of their local economies. The real benefits then are where this important approach combines with and supports a broad range of complementary growth strategies, increasing overall levels of wealth and incomes in local economies.

Future Investment Opportunities: Playing a Full Role in the 'Northern Gateway'

The 'Northern Gateway' growth location, was regularly raised in the evidence to the Review as both an opportunity and a learning point for Oldham. The Northern Gateway is largely located in Rochdale and Bury, but also reaches across to Oldham. Its proximity provides job opportunities for Oldham residents, and business opportunities for Oldham enterprises, as well as the networks and cluster of manufacturing and engineering firms that operate across all three boroughs and beyond, if the right infrastructure and institutions are put in place. But there was also compelling evidence that the purpose and focus provided by the development has already been a benefit to and in neighbouring Rochdale. The business-led development of the Advanced Machinery and Productivity Institute (AMPI), supported by the Rochdale Development Agency (RDA)[55], has drawn in private and public investment, including £22.6m from the Government's 'Strength in Places' programme. It has given momentum to growth

51. See https://foundationaleconomy.com/ for further information.
52. Using the Foundational Economy Collective (https://foundationaleconomy.com/activity-classification/) industrial classifications we calculate the share of the material foundational economy (FE) in Oldham to be 18.1%, the providential FE to be 31.1% and the overlooked FE to be 20.8%.
53. See Chapter 6 for a full description and discussion of 'anchor institutions' and 'community wealth building'.
54. See https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/equalities/independent-inequalities-commission/.
55. See https://investinrochdale.co.uk/.

in the area, and enabled links to be developed, through Innovation Greater Manchester, to the world-class Research and Development assets in other parts of the city-region. This also demonstrates a clear, long-term vision for the future of Rochdale's economy and has seen the borough build it into successful bids for other Government funding including the Towns Fund.

Oldham should learn from this example. That does not necessarily mean replicating Rochdale's specific approach, but does mean making full use of links to the Northern Gateway and developments such as AMPI, and learning from the ingredients which have made it successful – an understanding of local strengths, leadership from local businesses backed by other institutions and the local authority, the identification of future business opportunities, goals which are ambitious but obtainable, all setting a direction and vision for future growth[56].

Exploiting the opportunities from the Northern Gateway is possible because key sectors such as textiles, materials and chemicals spread beyond individual boroughs. Economic relationships and supply chains are not restrained by administrative boundaries and greater scale and networks create greater economic benefits for the firms involved. It is therefore necessary to build a supportive environment for clusters in those – and other – sectors across the whole of the North-East of Greater Manchester, including Oldham. **We therefore recommend that formal links are made between Oldham and the Northern Gateway as it evolves and with the Rochdale Development Agency (RDA) and the Advanced Machinery and Productivity Institute (AMPI). This should be both a partnership between strategic bodies and institutions in GM, Rochdale and Oldham and also a network of formal support for firms in Oldham so that they can fully engage and benefit from these initiatives.**

Leading Town Centre Innovation

The Board heard also heard more detailed evidence about the development of Innovation Greater Manchester[57] – the network led by businesses and universities in the city-region which is looking to strengthen the Research & Development areas of excellence in the city-region, but ensure that new inventions and innovations can be applied by businesses in order to create more new, well paid, jobs.

As work by Richard Jones (one of the members of the Board) and Tom Forth demonstrates, the UK's geographical imbalances in economic performance are exacerbated by regional imbalances in R&D spending.[58] Since this evidence session, the Government announced in the Levelling Up White Paper that Greater Manchester would be one of three city-regions to pilot 'Innovation Accelerators' – a new approach to supporting three UK city-regions to become major, globally competitive centres for research and innovation, backed with an initial £100m of Research & Development funding across the three areas. In GM this work is to be led through Innovation GM.

Embedding innovation in town centres across Greater Manchester has been a theme in the development of Innovation Greater Manchester and in the evidence collected by the Board. But, so far, that work remains relatively undeveloped. With the establishment of Innovation GM and additional R&D funding coming to the city-region, there is a significant opportunity for Oldham and GMCA to further develop that model and test new approaches which can then provide lessons, models and new insights for other towns in Greater Manchester and beyond.

The entrepreneurial strengths of Oldham, and its large number of small and medium sized enterprises, provides an opportunity to show the direct contribution which innovation and R&D can make to its local economy. This is relevant to those firms in Oldham engaged in manufacturing and engineering supply chains as described above but also to the majority of small businesses in Oldham that are not currently in high productivity sectors. Here innovation can be just as important (and potentially easier) in more foundational sectors such as retail, hospitality and leisure, and social care. This might involve the adoption of new technologies or higher skilled working practices for example. In both cases, more support could be extended to Oldham firms as a way of connecting them to these opportunities, clusters or technologies and working practices. Some of this support may be through improved management skills (see chapter 4 below) and some through improved business support and engagement structures organised and delivered at the GM level.

56. More discussion of these lessons and what it could mean in Oldham are in Chapter 6.
57. See https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/innovation-greater-manchester-provides-blueprint-for-boosting-rd-investment-and-levelling-up-north/.
58. See Forth and Jones (2020). The Missing £4 Billion: making R&D work for the whole UK, https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/the-missing-4-billion/.

We therefore recommend that Oldham should be the location for piloting an Innovation GM town innovation centre, with an initial investment in an assessment of the innovation needs of local businesses, what methods of innovation diffusion are likely to be most effective, which sectors or types of business activity should be prioritised, and what sort of institutional structure should be put in place to make it effective.

This should be commissioned and established within the next 12 months, so that the right institutions and structures can then be put in place. The assessment should be carried out as soon as possible within that time as a strand of Innovation GM, with support and involvement from GM Universities and Oldham College playing a leading role, so that local R&D and higher-level skills priorities can be better aligned in the borough and across GM as a whole. This work would fill a gap in GM's current thinking, be of direct relevance to Oldham businesses, reinforce potential strengths in Oldham and give a focus and ambition to future activity and economic growth.[59]

Opportunities to Access Business Support

Evidence gathered by the Review shows that Greater Manchester has one of the most advanced networks for business support in the country. Through bodies such as the GM Chamber of Commerce (represented on the Review) and the GM Growth Hub (run by the Growth Company, largely funded by Central and Local Government) there is a strong network of advice, collaboration and funding.

However, the evidence to the Review shows that enterprises in Oldham – both private businesses and social enterprises – might not be making full use of those opportunities. Businesses in the core of the city-region disproportionately engage with services and networks, while businesses in Oldham are often unaware of the opportunities available.

This gap offers a significant opportunity especially alongside our proposed recommendation on innovation above. Services and networks operating across the city-region need to better understand and engage with Oldham businesses, while enterprises in the borough and the institutions they work with need to widen their horizons and ambitions to take the opportunities available in Greater Manchester and beyond. Furthermore, the organisations offering business support, including those focused on skills and innovation, will also benefit from the setting out of clearer long-term priorities and institutions/networks established in Oldham. As explained in Chapter 6 below, this will enable greater and easier co-ordination between the objectives, priorities and activities in Oldham and in Greater Manchester.

Examples which have been raised include the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter,[60] and the Peer Network programme, where businesses involved in the Board have had positive support and are keen to spread that further. Further networks for business in Oldham include:

- This could build on existing business networks including the Oldham Business network GM[61] and the GM Chamber of Commerce in Oldham[62], which together could help extend and deepen support and engagement amongst local businesses
- An increase in the amount of engagement with Oldham firms through the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter – especially in the 'foundation economy' - encouraging and supporting them to join as Charter Supporters to access the resources and networks made available.
- Increasing awareness of, and engagement with, service provided by the Greater Manchester Growth Hub, such as the Made Smarter programme[63] and Bee Net Zero programme which supports firms to make progress on their journey to Net Zero.[64]

59. See also recommendations in Chapter 4 on skills.
60. See https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/.
61. See Oldham Business Network: http://www.oldhambusinessnetwork.co.uk
62. See https://www.gmchamber.co.uk/about-us/in-your-area/oldham/.
63. See https://www.madesmarter.uk/about/what-is-made-smarter/.
64. See https://www.businessgrowthhub.com https://beenetzero.co.uk/.

Box 3.1: The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter

Is a voluntary membership and assessment scheme that aims to raise employment standards across the city-region, for all organisations of any size, sector or geography. The Charter describes seven key characteristics of good employment: secure work, flexible work, pay (including the real Living Wage), engagement and voice, recruitment, people management, and health and wellbeing. It is closely linked with the campaign to make Greater Manchester a real Living Wage city-region. The development of a Good Employment Charter for Greater Manchester was first proposed in Andy Burnham's manifesto for the 2017 Greater Manchester mayoral election. Following extensive consultation, the Charter was introduced in July 2019, with the launch of the Supporter tier and followed in January 2020 with the announcement of the first six members.

The charter has three levels in which any organisation that employs people can get involved: – Supporters have made a commitment to improving practice in all characteristics of good employment; Members have made the Supporter Commitment and meet the membership criteria in all characteristics of the Charter; and Advocates excel in characteristics of good employment and share their expertise with others. The Charter is committed to creating a community of likeminded businesses and organisations who can work with one another to share good practice and influence peers within their sector. The Charter Unit deliver networking events and webinars throughout the year to highlight and disseminate best practice, in addition to recording a popular podcast series with high profile guests from across Greater Manchester.

The Charter has been operational for over 2 years and has over 400 supporters and members across the city-region from the public, private, and third sectors, covering close to 300,000 employees.

Oldham Levelling Up Indicators

The LUWP and its twelve missions offers further focus for the Review's recommendations. Specific targets can be constructed with reference to the ONS (2022) sub-national indicator dashboard. Figure 3.9 below shows Oldham's comparative position on this dashboard with other local authorities across Great Britain. Oldham is represented by the blue dot and the line is the median for all authorities. Oldham's Gross Value Added per worker (productivity measure), median pay and employment rate are below the median level for GB.

Elsewhere amongst the LUWP missions, Oldham fares better. For example, broadband capacity is at the median and measures to represent accessibility to jobs are above the median, with the time to take public transport/ walk to employment centre with between 500-4999 jobs at 9.1 minutes, with cycle accessibility at 8.5 minutes and drive accessibility at 7 minutes. This corresponds to work of Onward on their study of job accessibility.[65]

65. See Onward (2021) Network Effect https://www.ukonward.com/reports/network-effects/

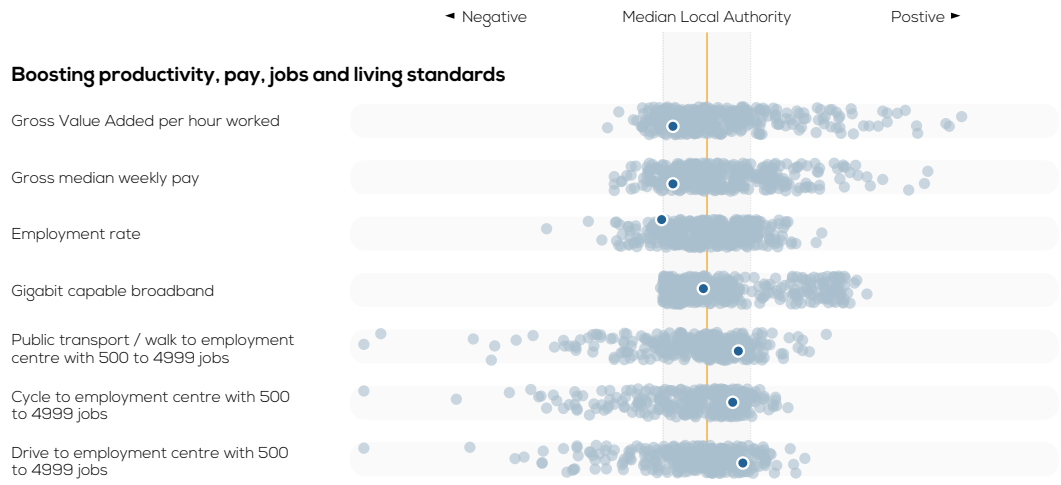

Figure 3.9: Oldham position in the ONS Subnational Dashboard, (ONS, 2022) [66]

3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- A clear strategy for productivity and business, which includes manufacturing, business support, enterprise and innovation, all within a single strategic framework, with a clear set of missions and targets around improving productivity, increasing wages and boosting standards of living.
- Proactive engagement with neighbouring authorities in the Northern Gateway, and in particular the AMPI project to support manufacturing.
- Liaise with Innovation GM for Oldham to play a leading role in extending the emerging innovation network in Greater Manchester, into Oldham town centre.
- Develop a "best practice" programme for anchor institutions.
- Develop a broader strategy for social enterprise, including its engagement with Greater Manchester initiatives to build capacity, share and develop expertise.

66. See ONS (2022) Subnational indicators explore, selecting Oldham https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/subnationalindicatorsexplorer/2022-01-06

CHAPTER 4: JOBS AND SKILLS

The creation of opportunities for good quality work is primarily driven by economic growth and innovation, with the primary challenge for Oldham, and places like it, being to grow private sector wealth creation. However, this is both linked to and influenced by the challenge of skills supply.

The LUWP rightly brings together the need for stronger educational performance in pre-16, and better outcomes for adult skills, as priorities for "levelling up". This chapter considers the implications of this, given the fairly sizeable and persistent disparities in skill levels between Oldham and elsewhere – and the link between this and employment and income.

Section 4.2 summarises the evidence that was presented by expert witnesses, which focussed on Oldham's current and potential jobs of Oldhamers, the skills they need and lessons from innovation and industrial strategy policy. Section 4.3 summarises the key available data on skills and employment in Oldham. Section 4.4 summarises the analysis, conclusions and recommendations of the Review Board.

4.2 SUMMARY OF EXPERT EVIDENCE SESSIONS

Jonathan Simons, Public First

Public First has run focus groups, polls and surveys on levelling up. One survey found that 83% of people surveyed in Greater Manchester think that universities are economically important in the region. However, Oldham had the lowest score of the boroughs in GM (59%). People who live in Oldham are the least likely to understand the concrete benefits of universities.

Lots of people do not really understand what levelling up means. Local/civic pride is a much stronger concept – people really like their local area.

People want to learn new skills to get them into the labour market, and this is usually why they choose to go to university. Lower income voters are more sceptical about going to university as they do not see such a strong link between the cost and benefit.

People like the idea of intra-company transfers, but would not necessarily move for another job – even just 10 miles away to centre of Manchester. People like apprenticeships, BTECs and night school.

More practical routes into professions would open up new opportunities. For example, working part-time and upskilling to become a teacher.

The White Paper published in response to Philip Augar's review of post-18 education may shift funding towards further education and training.

Universities need to devote time and money to civic work. And where possible, education providers should collaborate rather than compete to recruit an ever-decreasing number of students.

Oldham has relatively low attainment at Level 3, which must be improved. Investment is needed in this area.

David Goodhart, Policy Exchange

There has been scepticism with agglomeration theory as places like Oldham and Rochdale have not benefitted from growth in Manchester.

In Oldham, many higher level jobs in health and education are occupied by people who do not live in the town. It should be a priority to retain well-paid professional jobs for those who live in Oldham.

Following the pandemic, the spread of working from home could help these historic divides, which are exacerbated by higher education taking the brightest young people away from poorer towns.

Reskilling people for green jobs, like insulating older homes, could help with levelling up. People would also benefit by being moved into middle skilled jobs in this area.

Is Oldham benefitting from the way that re-structuring of the economy is pushing up wages at the bottom end of labour market? Not everyone can be a skilled professional, and it is important to raise the status and pay of jobs that will always be required.

Lots can be done within Oldham to help with civic pride, working on eyesores and boarded up shops. This review will help increase focus on Oldham.

Should there be a specific institution in Oldham that could drive forward a levelling up agenda? It would have to have a much broader focus than the narrow view of education in the Government's Opportunity Area policy.

Jon Bloor, Oldham Council

There had been many strategies and polices over time that pull and push in different directions. It is important to know what level of geography these policies target, if they support individual, or are business-facing policies (like Train to Gain). Currently, skills policies seem to be more employer-led.

With the LUWP, clarity is needed on the role for local leaders. Also, on the scope of the funding. There needs to be a step change in programmes to support social infrastructure. GM has accessed £4m of Community Renewal funding, but was anticipating £12m.

There has been a change in the language used over time. For example, there is no longer discussion of inclusive growth. Oldham has been aligned with the North East Manchester growth plan, but how will this benefit residents?

Moving people from basic to intermediate skills should be a priority, especially with digitisation within all sectors. Key sectors in Oldham are green tech, health, and social care. The Career Advancement Service project has seen 55% of participants complete a new qualification but fewer than 5% applied and secured an advanced learner loan. Of 107 people tracked the average (annual?) wage uplift was £5863 per person.

Ofsted measures may not be suitable for progressing into employment. Growth locations are outside of Oldham, and not always affordable to commute to.

Neil Thomas, Dudley College

A town in the Black Country between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, Dudley is near the bottom of socio-economic demographics and struggles to attract capital. There was a lack of faith in the college.

However, Dudley College has gone from being a small college to become a large provider that has been rated as outstanding and won a Queen's Anniversary Prize for Education in 2019.

The college now collaborates with five universities, the local authority, training providers, and employers.

Dudley College used regeneration as a catalyst for growth, adding a new building every year, helped by an understanding bank. Collaboration has increased in Dudley. Building construction has happened with employers who would then utilise the trainees.

The college has also purchased neighbouring buildings. The college now encompasses Dudley Aspire for work skills, Dudley Enhance for art skills, and Dudley Advance for manufacturing. Employers specified equipment, and helped create the curriculum.

Dudley Advance 2 then became an innovation hub that businesses can use as development space. A large hangar can also be used by local businesses. If businesses innovate they will employ more workers and increase Dudley's productivity.

Dudley College has also created an Institute of Technology to help with the challenge of Level 4 qualifications and above. The local area does not have enough young people who aspire to university, or employers who recognise that is something that is needed. University partners are invited in to deliver the high-level curriculum. It means local people can get higher level skills without leaving the region, and do not have to pay debt as the employer's apprentice levy is used to fund learning.

Two more new buildings are planned to create a university park in Dudley. One building will focus on health and care careers.

Gemma Marsh, Director of Education, Skills & Work, GMCA

Oldham, GM Skills and Work programmes now focus more on the role of employers and what people need to succeed. They work with colleges and training providers.

Employers ask for specific skills and they drill down to work out the practicalities. Devolution is allowing greater flexibility.

Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) are also in the programmes' remit. They open up opportunities and help young people see a line of sight to future careers.

There are many strategies and more needs to be done. See the chart below for the range of strategies.

GMCA gets £250m to support programmes in adult education across GM. Funding comes from the European Regional Development Fund and the Department for Education. In Oldham there has been a significant increase in the numbers of people learning digital skills

In tackling inequalities, data and evidence from projects and programmes help to inform smarter policy and commissioning.

Sometimes things are overly complicated working with national and devolved policies. It is important to work with what we have, and use data and evidence more and to ask what more can be done to help with social mobility.

Figure 4.1: How GMCA connects jobs and skills through strategy (Gemma Marsh, 2021)

Stephen Evans, Learning and Work Institute
Oldham's claimant count spiked at 10% during the pandemic, and the employment rate fell. More recently there are stories about labour shortages.

Despite shortages, there are still people out of work. So, how to link them to the jobs that are on offer?

In Oldham the proportion of population who have no qualifications is falling; it is now 10%, down from 20% in 2004. There has been an improvement in share of population who have Level 3 and Level 4+ skills. Those from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to learn.

There is an opportunity to make learning the golden thread through public services. So, when the council interacts with citizens it should offer training/upgrading employment opportunities.

Link regeneration plans, inward investment, growth and skills plans together, and make a skilled workforce a key selling point for the area. In addition, make tackling inequalities the centre to all of this.

4.3 OLDHAM DATA – EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

There is a detailed body of available data which illustrates the challenge of improving skills, and the links between this and the task of improving opportunities for better employment. There is a case for a much greater drilling down into the issues which sit behind the headline data, in order to better understand the situation and arrive at better policy solutions and interventions.

Figure 4.2 illustrates the gap between Oldham and the other local authorities in Greater Manchester, and demonstrates that it is significantly below the average for both the city-region and national picture, in terms of qualifications held at all levels, from Level 1 to 4 and above.

Oldham has the third highest number of adults with no qualifications at all – with one in 10 adults in this category, compared with 1 in 25 in Trafford (which is the other extreme in the city-region). Less is known about the extent to which these qualification levels are acquired while living in the borough, and how much is influenced by patterns of migration. It is likely that the Trafford figures, for example, include significant numbers of graduate employees who work in Manchester and move into the borough as adults. Oldham may be experiencing an opposite process – of graduates leaving, even if this is only to move to Manchester. It may also have more new arrivals into the borough, who come with lower levels of qualifications, for a variety of reasons. These are important considerations in shaping a local skills strategy, but further work is needed to test out this hypothesis.

Qualifications of the working age population (16-64) - 2020

Local Authority	NVQ 4+ (%)	NVQ 3+ (%)	NVQ 2+ (%)	NVQ 1+ (%)	Other Qualifications (%)	No Qualifications (%)
Bolton	33.1	52.7	71.9	83.7	6.2	10.1
Bury	41.3	61.6	81.5	91.4	4.1	4.5
Manchester	48.4	64.4	75.3	84.9	7.7	7.4
Oldham	**28.3**	**51.0**	**71.8**	**83.5**	**7.0**	**9.5**
Rochdale	30.3	50.8	69.7	83.4	6.7	9.8
Salford	42.3	60.1	75.3	86.2	6.5	7.2
Stockport	45.6	60.8	77.8	90.1	3.1	6.7
Tameside	27.0	49.0	72.2	86.3	6.0	7.7
Trafford	51.3	66.5	82.6	91.6	4.1	4.3
Wigan	30.7	50.9	74.6	85.4	5.2	9.3
GM	39.2	57.6	75.2	86.3	5.9	7.7
Great Britain	42.8	61.2	78.0	87.9	5.9	6.2

Figure 4.2: Skills across Greater Manchester Boroughs (Nomis, 2021) [67]

What does stand out, is that skill levels in Oldham, as with many other disparities, are not evenly spread, see Figure 4.3. There are parts of the borough which appear to be more like Trafford, for example, and a heavy concentration of low levels of qualification in particular parts of Oldham. The links between this low level of adult skills and the associated challenges of those neighbourhoods does need further exploration, particularly the cross over between levels of adult education and the achievement of children in those areas, potentially from the same households and families.

Figure 1.13 shows how Oldham's employment rate has been lower than GM and the England average since 2006. This aligns to the lower level of skills attainment in Oldham over time. More detailed analysis is required to understand the link between improvements and fluctuations in the acquisition of better qualifications and the extent to which this is improving employment opportunities. This is an important issue in understanding how best to prioritise adult funding,

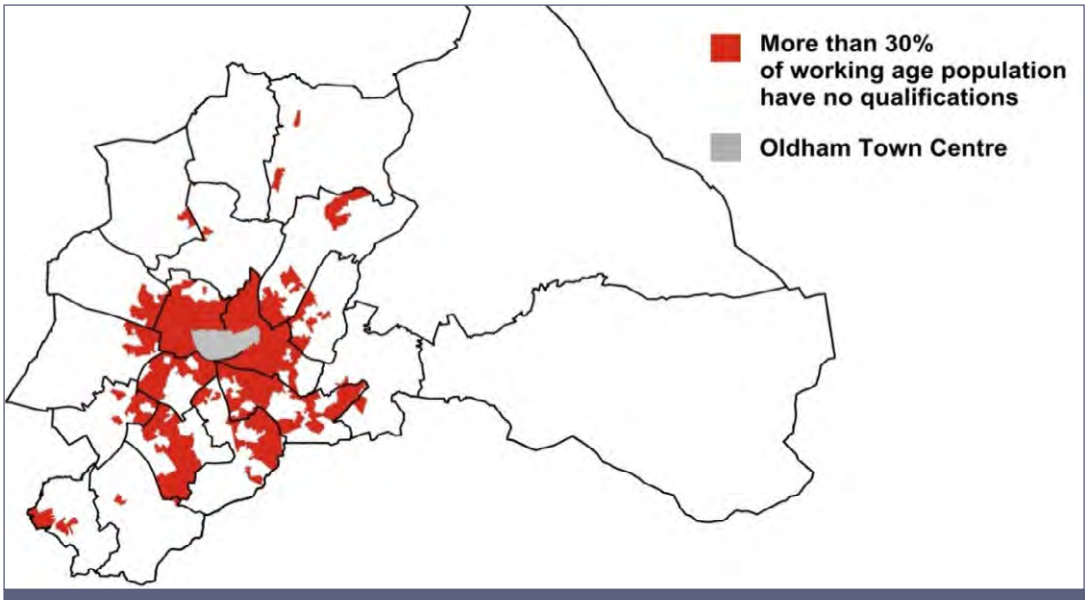

Figure 4.3 – Oldham residents with no qualifications (Labour Market Survey, Oldham Council, 2019) [68]

67. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1967128590/report.aspx?town=Greater%20Manchester#tabquals

68. Oldham Council Labour market analysis provided to the Review

if improving the position of individuals in the labour market, so that they can improve the quality of their work and their income is the primary focus. However, there are also wider issues about the links between improved skills and the "social fabric" issues discussed in later chapters, given that there is a high level of adult delivery focussed on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and on there is also a case to be made for improving adult skills because it helps to improve the outcomes for their children, rather than just focussing on individual competitiveness in the labour market. The other important issue is to understand how far the performance shown in this graph is shaped by the supply of good quality work, and access to it, rather than just skills supply.

Figure 4.4 suggests that this latter point is worth further exploration, as the employment rate in Oldham compared to other areas of Greater Manchester is relatively low. The data suggests that there is a geographical aspect to this, with Oldham, Rochdale and Manchester performing less well than most other areas. Given the analysis of transport accessibility referred to in Chapter 1, this issue needs further exploration. A key theme in the analysis section of this chapter, is how to build a skills system which creates clear pathways to work in neighbouring areas, not just in Oldham. This also needs further data led analysis.

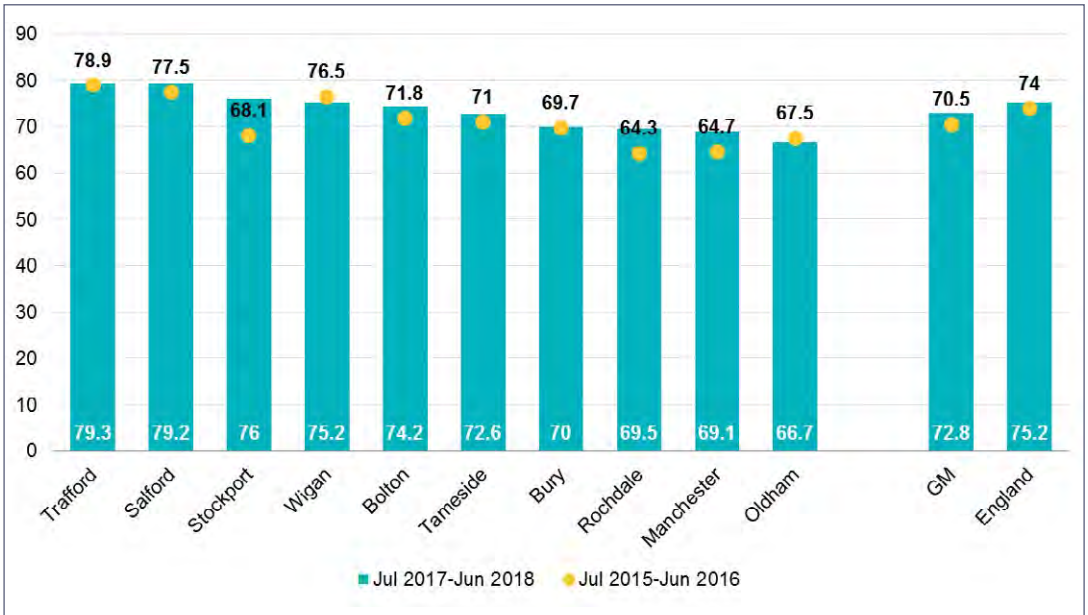

Figure 4.4: Employment rate by LA (Labour Market Survey, Oldham Council, 2019) [68]

One specific issue which does stand out for Oldham is that rates of youth unemployment have also been consistently above those of the Greater Manchester and England averages. There are complex aspects to this issue. Oldham's youth unemployment rate started to recover from the 2008 recession in early 2012, which saw youth unemployment drop in half in just three years. There seems to be seasonal effects which have a stronger effect on youth unemployment levels. During the ending of autumn and start of winter periods, youth unemployment levels decrease, most probably due to fixed term employment contracts spanning the Christmas period. This seasonal trend breaks as Universal Credit Full-Service causes youth unemployment to rise. During the same seasonal period in 2017 we can observe a cancelling out period as unemployment rates do not fall and instead stay level. All of this is illustrated by Figure 4.5.

68. Oldham Council Labour market analysis provided to the Review

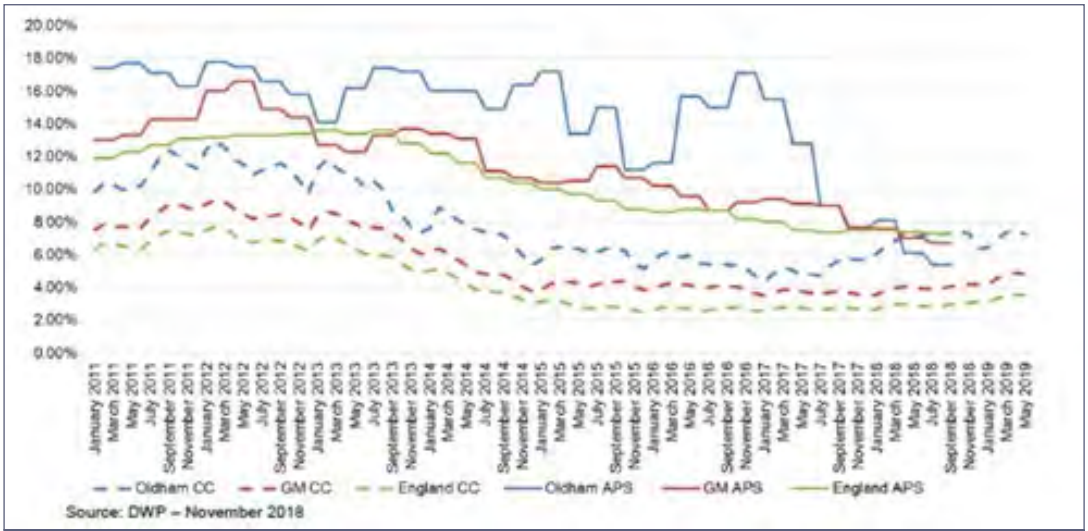

Figure 4.5: Youth unemployment rate % (aged 18-24) (Labour Market Survey, Oldham Council, 2019, analysis of DWP, 2018) [68?]

It is also evident that the youth Claimant Count Unemployment rate in Oldham (which is being skewed by Universal Credit Full-Service) stood at 7.5% in 2018, then the highest rate across Greater Manchester and significantly higher than the national average (3.1%). Youth unemployment has increased considerably in Oldham over the last 12 months (29.6%), a larger increase than Greater Manchester (13.3%) and England (12.3%) averages. Youth unemployment in Oldham is back to being higher than pre-recession levels. The continued rise in youth unemployment has been one of the determining factors causing an increase in the overall unemployment rate across Oldham.

Local Authority	Youth Unemployed	% Youth Unemployed	% Monthly Change	% Annual Change	GM Rank (1 = highest)
Bolton	1,085	4.6	-4.4	-12.1	5
Bury	575	4.1	2.7	-7.3	6
Manchester	2,565	2.9	4.3	35.4	10
Oldham	**1,465**	**7.5**	**0.7**	**29.8**	**1**
Rochdale	990	5.4	8.2	17.9	4
Salford	760	3.1	-5.0	-4.4	9
Stockport	600	3.1	0.8	-10.4	8
Tameside	1,055	6.1	4.5	22.0	2
Trafford	590	3.9	0.9	26.9	7
Wigan	1,335	5.5	4.7	10.8	3
GM	11,015	4.2	2.1	13.3	-
England	148,195	3.1	2.5	12.3	-

Figure 4.6: Youth Unemployment across GM Boroughs (Oldham Council, 2019, analysis of Nomis, 2018)

There is also an important theme around the quality of employment and the extent to which Oldham residents, even when in work, are dependent on wealth transfers through the benefits system. Latterly this takes place through the Universal Credit system, which is gradually superseding the previous system. Figure 1.17 in Chapter 1 illustrates the number of unemployed claimants, with a substantial fall over the last ten years, with an increase, during the same period, for Universal Credit. This is another area which needs further analysis and understanding.

68. Oldham Council Labour market analysis provided to the Review

It is also important to note that in Oldham there is a larger proportion of economically inactive residents who choose to look after their home rather than enter the labour market. Figure 4.7 shows that Oldham has a larger proportion than the GM and the national averages. The vast majority of residents who do choose to look after their home are female.

Local Authority	Looking after home aged 16-64	Number of Males	Number of Females	(%) Looking after home aged 16-64	
	Jun 18	Jun 18	Jun 18	Jun 17	Jun 18
Bolton	26800	10700	16100	21.4	24.7
Bury	44300	18900	25400	30.4	22.5
Manchester	103100	42600	60400	22.2	25.7
Oldham	**42300**	**15900**	**26400**	**30.0**	**29.8**
Rochdale	34800	13900	20900	26.1	25.9
Salford	33000	12200	20800	16.8	21.1
Stockport	31900	13300	18600	24.6	23.0
Tameside	33000	12600	20300	27.2	25.7
Trafford	25900	9500	16400	24.2	24.9
Wigan	44400	18800	25600	22.8	22.3
GM	419500	168600	250900	24.3	24.7
Great Britain	7428000	2833500	4594500	25.5	24.9

Figure 4.7: Economically Inactive Population across GM boroughs (Labour Market Survey, Oldham Council, 2019 analysis of Nomis,2018)[69]

It is likely that this is related to the composition of the Oldham community. Oldham has a larger proportion because of its large South Asian population (Figure 4.8), where culturally it is more common for women to choose not to take paid employment. It is noticeable that over the decade prior to 2011 proportions of people choosing not to work are decreasing across all ethnic groups.

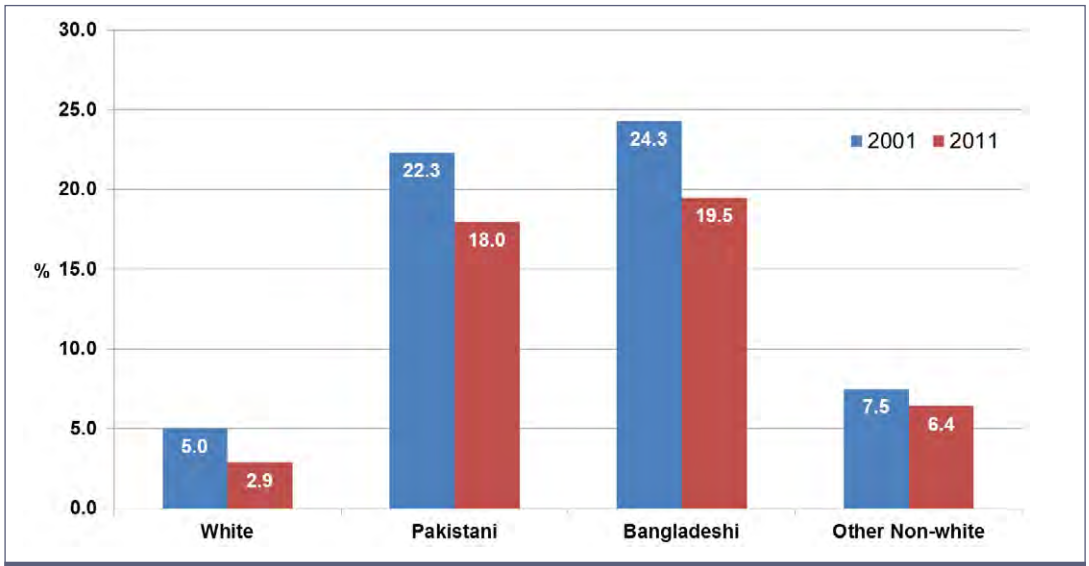

Figure 4.8 -Percentage Looking after home by ethnic group aged 16-74 (Labour Market Survey, Oldham Council, 2019 analysis of ONS Census, 2011) [70]

69. See (Insert weblink on Monday)
70. See (Insert weblink on Monday)

A final theme relates to relatively high levels of disability and sickness affecting capacity to work. People who are unable to work due to long term illness or disability are able to claim an out of work benefit known as Employment Support Allowance (ESA). ESA replaced Incapacity Benefit (IB) / Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) in 2008. In Oldham there were 11,260 residents (12.7%) in receipt of ESA in 2018, a lower rate than that off Greater Manchester average (15.6%) but slightly higher than the England average at (11.6%). Within Greater Manchester, Manchester has the highest rate (21%). Figure 4.9 below shows Oldham having the largest drop in ESA cases because of individuals on ESA shifting to Universal Credit Full-Service and an increase in the overall cohort size.

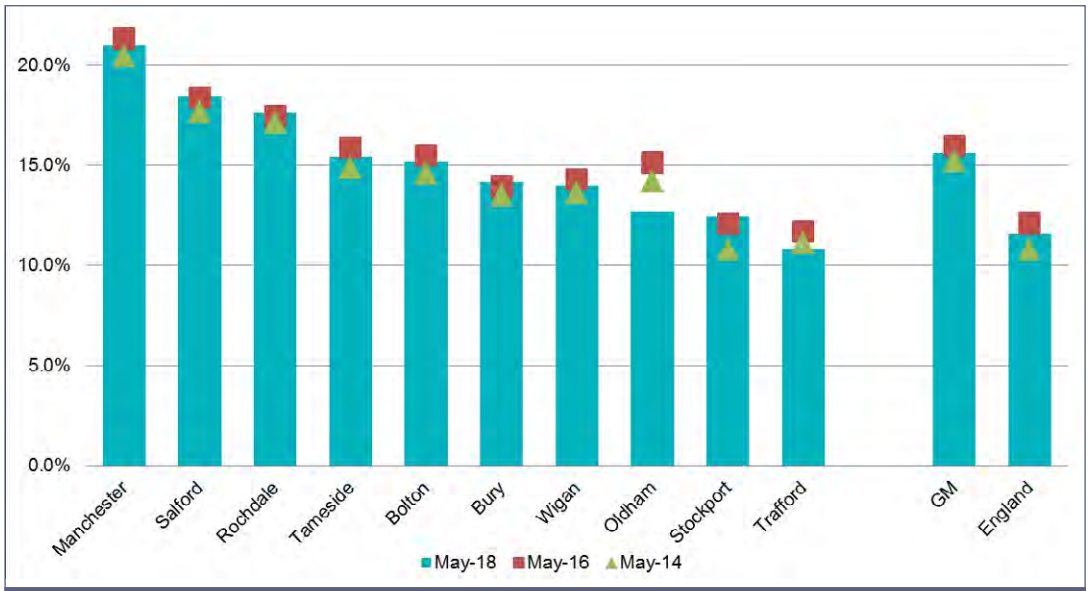

Figure 4.9: Employment Support Allowance Claimants by Local Authority (Labour Market Survey, Oldham Council, 2019, analysis of DWP, 2014, 2016, 2018) [71]

Finally, as with qualification levels (and a number of other factors) there is concentration of ESA claimants within particular neighbourhoods, typically in areas of high deprivation. These are often areas which large proportions of social housing, but also other disparities, including around health. See Figure 4.10 with concentrations around the Barker Street Estate, St Mary's Estate and Greenacres.

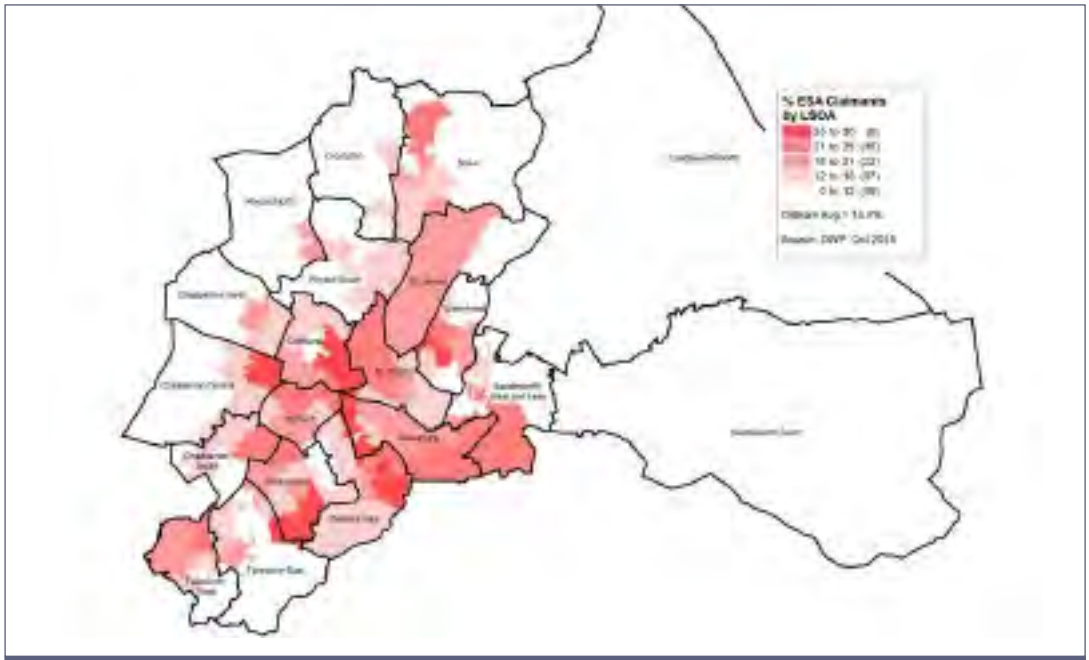

Figure 4.10: Employment Support Allowance Claimants in Oldham (Oldham Council, 2017) [72]

71. See (Insert weblink on Monday)
72. Analysis provided by Oldham Council

4.4 ANALYSIS

There is a substantial amount of data available on jobs and skills, and better use of this is driving policy choices is a common theme of this Review. This also includes building better quality data on some areas which are less well understood currently. In particular, there is an absence of good quality evidence on the detailed progression routes into higher skilled qualifications and occupations. This is the dominant theme in current debates about education and skills and there is an emerging consensus that past policy has focussed too exclusively on the academic route to success (marked out mainly in terms of GCSE-A level-residential three year university degree) without acknowledging the impact of this on place, or on those people who do not or cannot follow that route. A related theme is the lack of alignment between the education and skills systems and the expressed needs of employers and the labour market.

For the most part, this debate has focussed on the need to reshape post 16 options, including 16-18 programmes of study (Wolf Review 2010); apprenticeships (Richards Review, 2014); post-16 pathways (Sainsbury Review, 2016) and the quality of technical qualifications; and the reshaping of post-18 funding and qualifications (Augar Review, 2019).[73]

Then main focus of this Review has been on the post-16 system. This is not because pre-16 education is not important, but because a fuller analysis of the issues attached to it, in Oldham, is beyond the scope of this Review. It is important to acknowledge that education does feature strongly in the LUWP, not least because outcomes in the pre-16 system have such substantial implications for later lifetime chances and for the shape and nature of post-16 delivery. And given that Oldham is likely to become an Education Improvement Area, within the Levelling Up proposals, it is important to note some issues in the pre-16 and post-16 phases which are worthy of further consideration. These include close analysis of differential performance across the borough, not just in terms of institutions, but by place, neighbourhood, and families (intergenerational); gaining a better understanding of current performance in terms of how well the system currently works in providing progression routes to high skills, including the conventional three year residential degree; a strategy for improving English and maths achievement by 16, including an analysis of the knock-on effect for learners in post-16 settings; and the improvement in performance in terms of qualifications acquired by the age of 19, contrasted with high levels of 16-24 year old unemployment. **It is recommended that these, and related issues around educational underachievement, are considered in future Education Investment Area planning in Oldham – and that any such future improvement work actively considers the links between pre-16 and post-16 outcomes.**

The main focus of this Review has been on the low-skills/low-pay dilemma which characterises the position of much of the adult population in Oldham. Low levels of adult skills are clearly a problem, but there is more to the challenge than this. Between 2005 and 2020 there has been a marked reduction in the numbers of adults who have no qualifications. However, it is not clear that this has made any difference to employment or income patterns. Comparative skills performance at all levels remain low compared to other boroughs in Greater Manchester, and employment remains a problem. There is a higher proportion of economically inactive residents and above average numbers on incapacity benefit. As with many other indicators, this is not evenly distributed throughout the borough. There is a strong concentration of lower levels of skills achievement, and low incomes, in specific neighbourhoods. Pay levels and household incomes are also low in those places.

The LUWP makes commitment to improve adult skills, referring to the commitment in the Skills Bill and the Skills White Paper, around enhanced investment in adult learning through the Lifetime Guarantee and related initiatives. These are welcome, and will certainly improve the prospects of some adults seeking to upskill or reskill in areas of the economy where there are real employment opportunities. However, the findings of this Review suggest that the adult skills challenge will require much more than this.

First there is a problem of scale. The ambition to increase skills with 200,000 people getting 'high quality training' and 80,000 from the least well qualified areas, is good but seems disproportionate. According to Stephen Evans (who gave evidence to the Review) of the Learning and Work Institute, over 800,000 adult learners have been lost over the last decade

73. See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-18-review-of-education-and-funding-independent-panel-report

and an analysis of local ONS data shows that 80,000 places would not go very far in 'left behind' towns, cities or regions.

The LUWP picks out Blackpool as a low skilled area with 19,400 (24%) at L4+ compared to GB average of 43%. So in Blackpool, to illustrate this, an extra 15,439 people would need to get L4+ to get to this average level.

In Oldham, the figure is larger (though the proportion and challenge is similar) with 40,700 (28.3%) at L4+ and therefore a need to get 61,984 people to the national average – involving an increase of 21,285 people getting Level 4+

	Blackpool (level)	Blackpool (%)	North West (%)	Great Britain (%)
NVQ4 and above	19,400	23.9	38.6	43.1
NVQ3 and above	37,000	45.7	57.9	61.3
NVQ2 and above	57,300	70.7	76.6	78.1
NVQ1 and above	67,700	83.5	87.2	87.7
Other qualifications	7,500	9.2	5.1	5.9
No qualifications	5,900	7.3	7.6	6.4

Figure 4.11: Qualifications levels in Blackpool aged 16-64 (ONS Annual Population Survey, 2021) [74]

	Oldham (level)	Oldham (%)	North West (%)	Great Britain (%)
NVQ4 and above	**40,700**	**23.9**	38.6	43.1
NVQ3 and above	**73,400**	**45.7**	57.9	61.3
NVQ2 and above	**103,400**	**70.7**	76.6	78.1
NVQ1 and above	**120,300**	**83.5**	87.2	87.7
Other qualifications	**10,100**	**9.2**	5.1	5.9
No qualifications	**13,600**	**7.3**	7.6	6.4

Figure 4.12: Qualifications levels in Oldham aged 16-64 (ONS Annual Population Survey, 2021) [75]

By way of illustration, the numbers to get Oldham to the national average at other levels it would also require 14,824 more people at L3 (up from 73,400 to 88,224) and 4,438 fewer adults without any qualifications to go from 13,600 to 9,162 (if in line with national average ie from 9.5% to 6.4%).

The point is that, just taking two places with acute levels of need - Oldham and Blackpool – almost half the national target would be met, if they improved to the average level.

A second issue is complexity. There is no national strategy for adult skills priorities, apart from, perhaps, to devolve management of the funding. The assumption behind devolution is that the adult skills system is flawed because of the mismatch between the supply (providers) and demand (what employers want). The reality is that the adult education budget covers one small aspect of the adult skills system as a whole (employer provision, apprenticeships and higher education would need to be included in a full adult strategy). It is also the area that has suffered most cuts over the past decade. In addition, it covers a wide range of different skills needs, from ESOL through to basic skills, and technical and professional learning to Level 3 (including higher education access programmes).

Devolution of funds at local level does not change the complexity of this system, which has a range of competing demands and no basis on which to make good decisions about prioritisation. In practice, devolution has bought about a change in who manages the commissioning process, but no greater clarity about what to prioritise or how adult education spend fits within a wider strategy for adult skills. If anything, the funding system has become

74. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157070/report.aspx?town=blackpool#tabquals
75. See https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157084/report.aspx?town=oldham#tabquals

more complex, with adult education budgets, European Social Fund, and new Lifetime Guarantee allocations (including national and local priorities) sometimes overlapping in terms of eligibility criteria. It is not clear that there has been much change in the methodology used to allocate the main funding, and little consistency between this process and other commissioned activity, with tenders let over such a wide geographical area that integration with local delivery can be problematic.

What the issue of scale and complexity mean for Oldham, is that there is not clear understanding about the overall level of activity delivered or whether it is focussed on the right priorities. This is partly because there is no data broken down to the Oldham level which measures or assesses the volume of funding (not just the adult education budget) delivered in the borough – or its alignment with Oldham priorities. This is compounded by the fact that, faced with such complexity, Oldham has struggled to produce a coherent plan of its own. The two main providers, Oldham Council and Oldham College, deliver their contracts to a high standard, but in parallel with each other rather than as part of an agreed set of priorities linked to the key challenges of the borough as a whole.

The introduction of the proposed missions and targets will, in this respect, be a step forward. **It is recommended that Oldham take a lead in setting its own missions and targets for adult learning, with negotiation with local providers (the two main ones are Oldham Council and Oldham College) and engage the Combined Authority in this process, in order to shape the distribution and use of adult funding in the borough to 2030.** In so doing, it will need to separate out the local authority's strategic role in setting the aims and ambitions for the transformation of place, with its role as a skills provider. If this matter can be addressed, and effective targets set, then these can serve to focus local providers and the devolved authority on priorities and hold them all to account.

Beyond adult skills, the LUWP is very positive about the need to "strengthen locally accessible institutions, notably the national network of further education colleges" and the wider proposals for an employer led skills system, as set out in the Skills Bill which is currently going through Parliament. This is a welcome recognition of the need for strong further education institutions, because of the role they place in the community, both in terms of skills delivery in the round and their wider contribution. The Review received an excellent presentation from Dudley College of Technology, which could be taken as a metaphor for the renaissance of the further education system as a whole. Starting from a position of relative neglect and underfunding, Dudley College had transformed its physical facilities and the quality and range of its offer, to become established as a central institution in the regeneration of Dudley. This has partly been due to its own efforts locally, and latterly the changes in national policy toward technical and professional learning and further education, which have enabled it to accelerate progress.

The national strategy for reconstructing a clear and understandable system of technical learning which offers an alternative to the three year residential degree, and which brings opportunities to non-university places, is still not mature.

The Review board observed that Dudley's was a similar journey to that of Oldham College, but that the project in Oldham was not yet finished. Investment in the campus has exceeded £45m, but another £30m is still required to complete the job, and considerable progress has been made in establishing the relationships, partnerships and reputation which recognises the central importance of technical education and training to Oldham's regeneration – but there remains more to be done to complete the journey. **A clear recommendation is that Oldham make a commitment to supporting its general further education to play it full role in the locality, and that it works with Greater Manchester partners and national government to implement the national strategy for a reformed technical education and training system, as this will help secure the role of the College in the long run.**

Although the LUWP is very positive about the role of further education, it is less clear about explaining why this is important in terms of the overall skills system and the direction of travel in terms of qualifications and funding reforms. At the centre of this work should be a clear strategy for delivering a coherent alternative set of pathways, both work-based and classroom based, for those young people and adults seeking to progress into careers without following the residential three year degree route. This is particularly important in places, like Oldham

(and Greater Manchester as a whole where the majority of 18/19 year olds do not go into higher education) which do not have their own university, and where there is a potential high demand for a coherent set of alternative pathways. And it is especially important that these are communicated clearly to the individuals and communities most in need. **It is recommended that in setting the missions and targets for adult skills, special consideration is given to the role of Oldham College and other FE and HE partners in delivering these pathways, and ensuring that Oldham residents have a clear understanding of the opportunities available to them.**

In considering this wider approach to post-16 skills, it is important that Oldham creates the best possible environment for a reformed technical and professional education and training system to develop. This includes T levels, apprenticeships, Level 4 and 5 provision in the classroom and workplace, as changes to HE access rules and potential changes below Level 2, amount to a system shift for technical education and training. This also means addressing two related issues: first, competition and second employer engagement.

In terms of competition, there are a number of providers – in all phases of post-16 delivery – who are potentially working at cross-purposes and it is questionable whether this always produces the best outcomes. This is not to say that the market in post-16 provision is in principle problematic. The market should support choice, innovation and improved quality. However, there is evidence that - in a risk averse system - this may not always be the case, and there are challenges around how to manage the terms of the market so that it can work to best effect.[76] There is an emerging body of evidence that the intensification of competition in the apprenticeships system, is leading to unintended consequences – with outcomes favouring large levy paying employers and older, better educated learners, in already successful economic geographies, over and against small to medium sized enterprises, less high achieving learners, and weaker economic geographies.[77] There are concerns as to whether the Institute of Technology, which is working well in the Dudley setting, promises to deliver an equally effective HE-FE partnership which works for all parts of Greater Manchester, although there is promising collaborative work on Level 4 and 5 provision, involving the further education college and the Combined Authority. These 'marketplace' issues need to be better understood in Oldham, and **it is recommended that the strategy for skills should include consideration of the positive and negative impacts of competition between providers throughout the post 16 phase (16-18, adult, apprenticeships and higher education), whether this is helping or hindering the pursuit of more effective provision to meet the ambitions of Oldham, and what can be done to improve the situation.**

In terms of employer engagement, this aspect of technical and professional education and training is often misunderstood and misconceived in policy terms, both locally, regionally and nationally. The LUWP does propose, drawing on proposals in the Skills Bill, to create a stronger relationship between providers and employers through the introduction of Local Skills Improvement Plans. These are a positive move, but still very experimental. The current pilots are focussed on relatively small areas, and it is not clear that LSIPs would work at the level of a geographical area as big as Greater Manchester. As currently defined, moreover, LSIPs are relatively one dimensional. They conceived the problem of skills as a mismatch between supply and demand, with the plan helping to articulate what employer need, so that skills supply can be reformed to better meet demand. This potentially works well in areas where the economy is strong. In "levelling up" places, however, this is not the case. As the OECD[78] and others have shown, local economies such as those in Blackpool and Oldham (as well as much of Greater Manchester) are stuck in a 'low skills equilibrium' where poor skills and low productivity are locked in to firm and organisational working practices. Oldham's high numbers in the foundational economy reflect this issue. Breaking out of this will require more than simply meeting the needs of local employers.

There is a profound problem of demand, and a need to work with employers in myriad ways (many discussed in the previous section) to stimulate demand. Skills supply is a key aspect of this – but not just a passive respondent to a fully formed requirement. This makes the relationship between specialist providers and employers a more profound partnership challenge, with a "two way" street between what is taught and how it is practiced. The current levels of competition arguably don't help achieve this, because employers are confronted with multiple providers pursuing largely transactional relationships to deliver the parts of the skills

76. See "The impact of competition in post-16 education and training" (Association of College, December 2020) https://www.aoc.co.uk/system/files/AoC%20report%20-%20sufficiency%20efficiency%20and%20effectiveness%20FINAL%20publication%20v2_0.pdf

77. See "Runaway Training, Why the Apprenticeship Levy is broken and how to fix it" (EDSK, January 2020) https://www.edsk.org/publications/runaway-training/; "Apprenticeships and social mobility" (Social Mobility Commission, June 2020) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-and-social-mobility-fulfilling-potential; and "Course Correction – Why apprenticeship reform is necessary to level up opportunity" (Onward, forthcoming)

78. https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/skills%20for%20competitiveness%20synthesis%20final.pdf

system relevant to them.

The current Local Skills Improvement Plans to not address these issues, but the model could be adapted to see what solutions it could bring. **It is recommended therefore, that Oldham adapts the LSIP model, addressing skills supply and demand in a much broader economic context including business support and innovation. As in other LSIP pilots, it is recommended that this work is led through a partnership between employers and providers – and in this case, this should include Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Oldham College.**

This approach to skills planning should ensure that there is a strong synergy between improvement to the skills system, and stronger employer engagement, business support and innovation, described in the previous chapter – and this should include existing and future private sector employers, and the current "anchor institutions" already present in Oldham. Strengthening these partnerships, so that skills are central to job design, and curriculum design and delivery, will secure the dynamic "two way street" required to bring supply and demand together more effectively.

The skills strategy for Oldham, however, also needs to recognise the challenges around employment and business growth described in previous chapters. Although much can and should be done to improve employment within the borough, much of this employment will tend to be within small to medium sized enterprises and with enterprises in the "foundational sector". This makes the challenge of delivering strong skills solutions in places like Oldham very different to the challenge of doing this in a different economic context. It is important that Oldham stakeholders understand this, but that the Oldham strategy also helps city-region and national partners to share this understanding too – in relation to funding allocation and performance measurement.

It also needs to recognise the additional challenge, of how to build effective partnerships with employers and other skills providers, given that much future employment (and many current opportunities) are not in Oldham, but in neighbouring areas. This raises the difficult question of how to build effective collaborations across further and higher education, which deliver effective solutions for employers and learners, within the context of competition (in the labour market, and between areas). **It is recommended that the Oldham skills strategy actively considers, and engages city-region and national stakeholders in the effective partnerships needed to improve access to employment opportunities, for Oldham residents seeking work in neighbouring boroughs.**

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Take a lead in setting the missions and targets for adult skills, with negotiation with local providers (the two main ones are Oldham Council and Oldham College) and GMCA, which will shape the use of adult funding in the borough to 2030. This should include its own analysis of the challenge of adult skills, and the levels of investment needed to make the borough competitive in the labour markets of Greater Manchester.
- Capacity build its general further education college to maximise its impact, including the delivery of a coherent alternative set of pathways, both work-based and classroom based, for those young people and adults seeking to progress into careers outside of the residential three year degree route, should be a clear policy priority.
- Undertake a review of post-16 provision which assesses the positive and negative impacts of competition between providers throughout the post-16 phase (16-18, adult, apprenticeships and higher education), whether this is helping or hindering the pursuit of more effective provision, and what can be done to improve collective impact.
- Oldham should pilot and adapt the LSIP model, addressing skills supply and demand in a much broader economic context including business support and innovation. It recommended that this work is led through a partnership between Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Oldham College.

CHAPTER 5: CIVIC PRIDE, HOUSING, HEALTH, AND OLDHAM TOWN CENTRE

Restoring and building civic pride – and its relationship to a strong sense of community, a sense of belonging (and a strong "social fabric") has - rightly - become an essential element of debates about "left behind places". It is also now central to the "levelling up" agenda with the White Paper's focus on social capital (as one of its six interlocking capitals) and on its missions to improve wellbeing and 'pride in place'.

In many respects, this is the feature of the "levelling up" debate which makes it different to previous policies designed to address regional disparities. It is specifically, the importance of 'civic pride' in smaller places, including in towns and coastal communities, that is so important and like the framework presented in the white paper, we agree that this interlocks and adds value to any economic strategy for Oldham.

During the course of the Review, it has been evident that Oldham has much to be proud about, and that Oldhamers are genuinely proud of many things about the town. But there is also a sense of anxiety, about the quality of the environment, public spaces, the condition of the town centre, and the extent to which people feel safe. These were all reflected in the recent focus groups conducted by "Onward", some finding from which are described later in this chapter. There are many similarities between these concerns and challenges in Oldham with other places in Greater Manchester and beyond, which may provide opportunities to think and act more creatively – especially where we consider the close relationships between these issues and the health and wealth of the wider economy.

The first part of this chapter (5.2) summarises the evidence from expert witnesses to the Review, covering the importance of and development of the town centre, housing, crime, community, industrial heritage and health. The second part (5.3) provides our analysis together with relevant data on housing, health, crime, civil society, the high street and Oldham's new Mill Strategy.

Part three (5.4) presents some conclusions and recommendations from the Review.

5.2 SUMMARY OF EXPERT EVIDENCE SESSIONS

Cathy Parker, Manchester Metropolitan University, Institute for Place Management

The Institute for Place Management (IPM) connects academics, policy-makers and place managers. It works with 20 local authority partners and has set up more than 200 Business Improvement Districts. The government[79] defines these as an area in which a levy is charged on all business rate payers in addition to the business rates bill, and the levy is used to develop projects which will benefit local businesses.

The town centre is important as a good public realm with shops and services. It is at the heart of what the Oldham economic review is looking at and is important also for public health. IPM has worked with a range of communities, including Bristol, Holmfirth, Altrincham, Aldershot and Shrewsbury. In Aldershot, the council bought a failing shopping centre and then Civic Voice[80] ran town hall events to work on a plan for the town, which is much improved.

People and partnerships are especially important for true regeneration. The work of leadership is more than administration, the council becomes a facilitator. Functional partnerships sometimes need refreshing. It is important to build on the strength of a place. It is too easy to have lots of priorities, but not think about how they will land in a place. Also, it is important to tackle weaknesses. Resources need to be put in to bring about change, especially to empower and educate.

The government's bidding process is not helpful. Places that have strong vision and partnerships should be funded rather than made to compete for funding. Oldham has engaged with the High Street Taskforce, which provides advice, training and data to local leaders. A gateway report was provided following a diagnostic visit. The report prescribed more expert support.

Cllr Hannah Roberts, Oldham Council

Oldham faces a significant housing challenge, with relatively low house prices that are still unaffordable to many, an undersupply of social housing relative to demand, and a mismatch between the types of houses available and the needs of the population. This mismatch is illustrated by the market in places like Royton, where demand massively outstrips supply, and Saddleworth, where children who grow up in the area are priced out, and Coldhurst where there are many large and extended families but most homes are traditional 19th century terraces. The age of many of the properties in the borough mean that there is also significant need for retrofitting, to reduce heating bills and address the commitment to becoming a net zero borough by 2030.

Oldham has a large number of private landlords, many of whom have only one or a small number of properties. The borough has an ongoing issue with the quality of this private sector rented housing, as well as high levels of transience in some areas. This transience challenge is exacerbated further by the use by Government contractors as a location for asylum seeker housing, owing to the relatively low cost.

Oldham has a lot of post-industrial land, but only limited amounts are viable for house building as a result of the high costs of remediation and low market rates. Much of the available land in the borough is reserved as greenbelt, and any significant housing proposals are met with fierce local opposition. The overall approach to house building in Oldham is to build as much as possible on brownfield sites, while making it as affordable as possible for local residents and reflecting the local needs in terms of size, location and accessibility.

Inspector Nick Derbyshire, GM Police

Crime hotspots include football crowds, the town centre during the night and metro stops.

The police have experimented by tidying up Waterhead. It reduced crime in that area, but the situation remained unchanged around the area's edges.

Street marshals, patrolling areas day-to-day would help to restore standards in the community, along with an increase in the presence of police officers.

Crime at tram stops is a particular problem in Failsworth. There needs to be an increase in police capacity in these areas to patrol tram stops as CCTV does not eradicate the problem.

79. See https://www.gov.uk/guidance/business-improvement-districts.
80. For example, see http://www.aldershotcivicsociety.org.uk/

Katrina Stephen, Public Health, Oldham Council
Inequalities impact on health through housing, education, family life, and income. People in poorer areas generally experience worse health outcomes.

On average, people born in Oldham, have a lower life expectancy than those born elsewhere. Average male life expectancy in Oldham is 81 years compared to 84.9 years in Westminster.

How long people live in good health is important too. People are spending years of their working life in bad health.

Catherine Dewar, Historic England
Mills in the North of England are robust spaces that can be used in a number of different ways, including cultural activities, homes and offices. In Greater Manchester there are 300 vacant and underused mills. Oldham has the lowest level of unused space. If all of GM's buildings were brought back into use it could account for 41,500 jobs, or 13,000 new homes.

Oldham has lost 40% of its 170 mills, 104 remain. In all, 45% of those that remain are vacant or under-used. Historic England has worked with Oldham Council on a mills strategy and assessed 60 unlisted mills.[81] There is a plan to make a realistic framework for the people of Oldham that highlights civic pride and identity. There are plans to bring the Prudential Assurance Building on Union Street, Oldham, back into use with support from the Future High Street Fund.

Professor Andy Westwood, University of Manchester
Civic pride and the high street are intertwined with prosperity.

Human well-being depends on a number of capitals: natural, built, human and social.

Social capital involves trust and networks, places and spaces where people meet, anchor institutions in the public, private and third sector, as well as sports leagues, facilities, and clubs. Consider bonding and bridging capital: bonding with others like you and bridging means making links to others not like you.

Chambers of commerce and other business organisations are important along with clusters of activity and strong supply chains.

Oldham has strengths in its social economy. Community wealth-building helps with the local multiplier effect, locking in knowledge, finance, income, resilience, and enterprise[82].

5.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF 'CIVIC PRIDE' AND 'SOCIAL FABRIC'

The LUWP proposes that restoring a sense of community, local pride and a sense of belonging should be a core mission. And it proposes three measures to drive this by 2030:

- **Pride in Place –** to improve peoples' satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture, with the gap between the top places and the other areas closing.
- **Housing –** renters will have a secure path to ownership, increasing the number of first time buyers, with a reduction in the number of "non-decent" homes reduced by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.
- **Crime –** reduction in homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime, focussed on the worst affected areas.

These are all important challenges that Oldham faces, and it should consider how it applies each of them locally as well as what they add up to as an overall aspirational target.

However, the deliverability of these ambitions and targets will be a considerable challenge in places like Oldham. Firstly, there are questions over resources and local policy processes and whether either will be sufficient to deliver meaningful change at a local level? Second, is how city-region institutions and leaders are able to adapt to and prioritise these types of issues when the focus up to now has been largely elsewhere?

However, the LUWP is right to draw attention to the importance of civic pride. It is also right to emphasise the inter-relationships between economic and social objectives in both its missions and six capitals. Furthermore, it is relatively honest to say that these are areas that are a little harder to quantify and in which to define material progress. But it is right to try and to include these issues as a policy priority.

81. Mentioned with the 2021 report https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/driving-northern-growth-repurposing-mills.
82. See https://www.nefconsulting.com/what-we-do/evaluation-impact-assessment/local-multiplier-3/.

Currently, the Think Tank Onward are undertaking focus groups and analysis in Oldham in order to investigate the nature and extent of the interrelationships between these different issues. This builds on earlier work and their construction of a 'social fabric' index.[83] As their findings show, Oldham like much of Greater Manchester falls in a bottom left quadrant of 'low productivity and low material welfare' (see Figure 5.1 below):

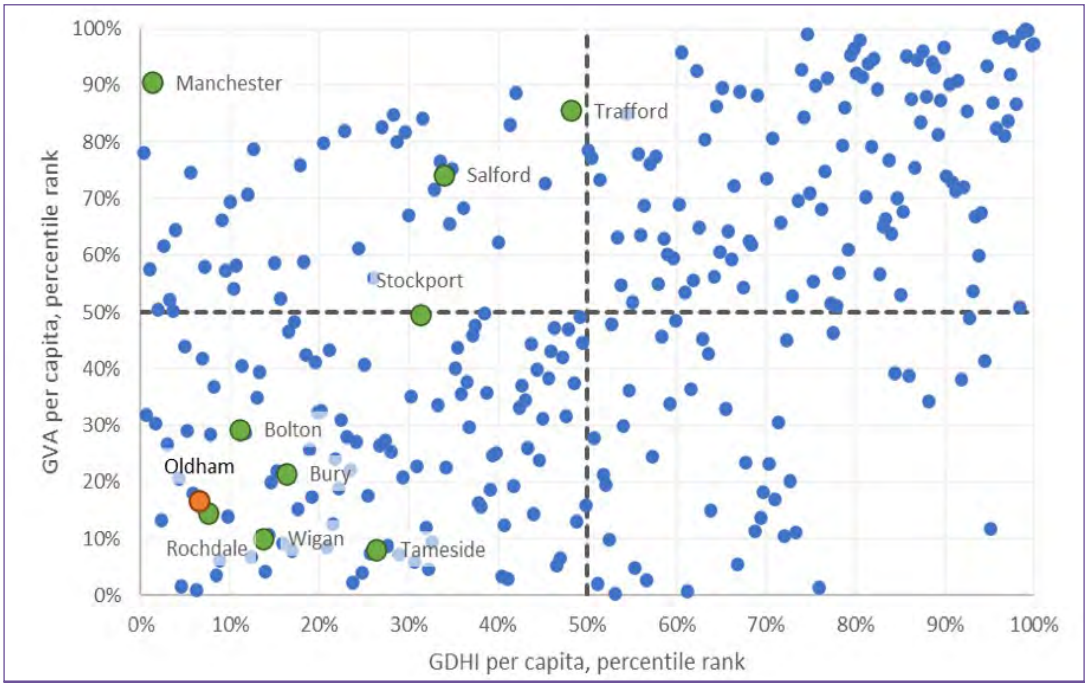

Figure 5.1: Oldham has a weak economy and low material welfare (Onward, Forthcoming) [84]

According to Onward's Social Fabric Index, Oldham ranks at the 18th percentile, which measures the strength of community across a range of metrics, including data on volunteering, membership of local groups, the physical infrastructure of places like shops and green spaces, trust in civic institutions, crime rates and marriage and family formation[85].

But Oldham ranks more highly (in the 63rd percentile) for its sense of belonging, which measures the extent to which people feel that they "belong to their neighbourhood". Onward find that much of Greater Manchester also fall in this 'low social fabric/high belonging' quadrant (see Figure 5.2 below)

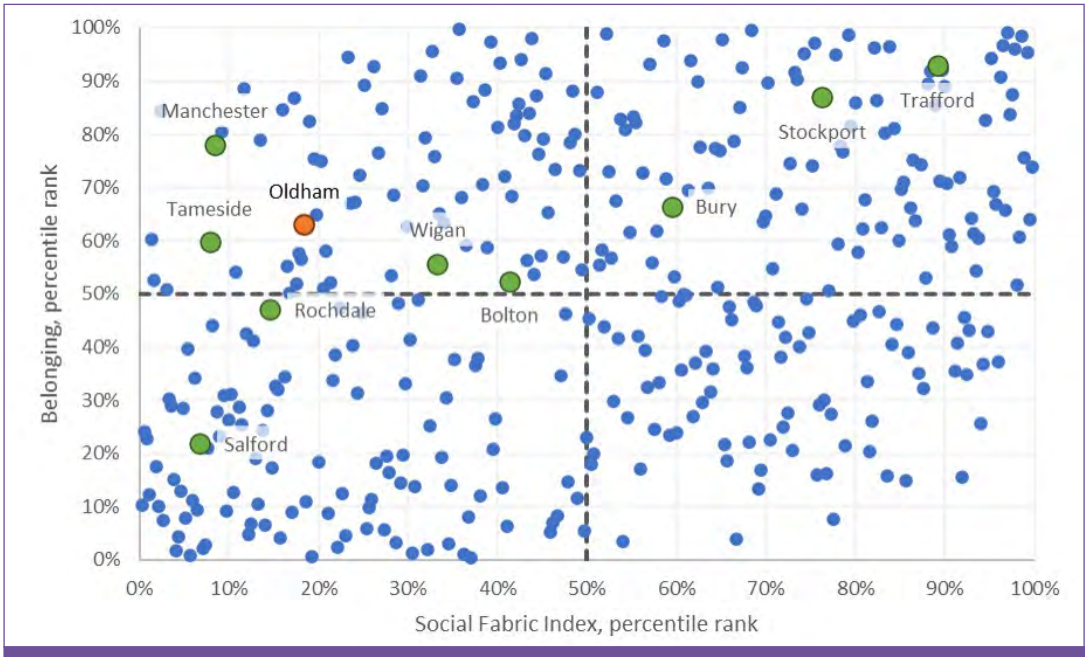

Figure 5.2: Oldham has a fraying social fabric but a stronger sense of belonging (Onward, Forthcoming) [86]

83. Onward Social Fabric Index (2020), O'Shaughnessy, Tanner, Krasniqi, Blagden: https://www.ukonward.com/reports/the-state-of-our-social-fabric/
84. Onward is due to publish this research in 2022. See www.ukonward.com
85. A full methodology and list of variables is available in Onward (2020) 'The State of Our Social Fabric'
86. Onward is due to publish this research in 2022. See www.ukonward.com

Oldham is a proud place. But part of the problem is that much of the pride in Oldham is about things which happened in the past. There is a great deal of pride about the town's history, including in its industrial and manufacturing heritage, and especially the mills and the big engineering companies such as Siemens, Ferranti and BAE Systems – and the role they served for the nation, as well as in providing jobs and economic impact locally. There is also a pride in heritage, including the mills but also the wider industrial past – and the historic buildings in the town centre (such as the Colosseum, the Old Town Hall, etc). There is pride in Oldham's celebrities, such as Brian Cox and Kevin Sinfield, its scientific contributions, such as the first test tube baby, and its sporting achievements, partly in Rugby League, but mainly its football team – which was a founder member of the Premier League only thirty years ago. With one or two notable exceptions, these are all from a previous age.

The need to address civic pride has been recognised by local leaders. But it is difficult to get right. The Oldham Old Town Hall development is an example of how to successfully regenerate and reuse old buildings as well as to provide services that Oldhamers want.

However, taken in isolation and collectively, there are four problems of the LUWP and to some extent, the Local Authority's approach, which are sizeable in how these important agendas are taken forward:

First, as the LUWP recognises, there are few reliable measures of civic pride – either in Oldham, in other places or nationally. If we do not have any reliable measures, then we might not focus on the projects what can make the most difference. So how will this be done and how will we prioritise in the meantime?

Second, the challenge is complex and cuts across many different policy areas and public services. This is demonstrated locally by the number of different projects in the 'Creating a Better Place' plan. There are risks that we can't join up and integrate our approach and a danger of 'pepper potting' across too many things – and not doing any of them very well.

Third, this problem is reinforced by the funding regime. As Steve Fothergill emphasised in his evidence, competitive bidding tends to create a speculative, short term delivery model – and chasing after several different pots of money will dilute local capacity as well any overarching strategic vision.

Fourth, it's not always clear at what point, and in what way, the private sector comes into play. It may be that approaches prioritising the social economy and the public and voluntary sectors such as in community wealth building underplays this importance, without sufficiently acknowledging the benefits of private sector investment and growth. As we've seen from Ultimate Products, the private sector can be a positive driver of local value – both social and economic. This was also acknowledged by Sarah Longlands from CLES who underlined that a Community Wealth Building approach should be viewed as underpinning principles that should work across the breadth of the economy.

Fifth, while there is much positive to be said for the progress made with many projects, there is a sense that what is given with one hand is taken away with another. The loss of the courts, and other public services such as local police stations have a cumulative impact. There have been three existential threats to the college remaining a locally named and run institution since 2010. The Review recognised that much of this running down of services and loss ok some organisations has been as a result of austerity or is from modernisation or efficiency drives in public services, but the resulting cumulative impact on Oldham (and local communities within it) have been devastating.

Does the LUWP help offer a solution to any of this? Possibly. However, in the context of the integration of health and care, reorganisation of police, constant changes to further and higher education policy, not all policy levers will be within Oldham's or even Greater Manchester's grasp. In fact, none of those mentioned above fall into these categories.

So, if the Levelling Up agenda is not sufficient, then how else can Government support places like Oldham? One further area of interest will come with the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), which the Government intends to offer as direct funding to focus on local priorities.

It is most likely to have a positive impact if it can:

a. Provide long term funding solutions, over a ten-year period, for example, subject to performance and delivery of key milestones and targets, rather than over a three year period.

b. Be linked to mechanisms for supporting more private sector growth – an issue which is key to the overall LUWP ambitions.

The Government is yet to publish how SPF will work – but in the area of town centre investment, housing and broader local infrastructure investment, this may be the aspect with the biggest potential to make a difference. But overall, there is no guarantee that Oldham (or any place) will get the necessary investment to really drive the renewal of local pride or a sense of belonging.

There is an important lesson in Oldham about how civic pride and social fabric require strong public, voluntary and private sector collaboration and investment. The story of Alexandra Park – one of Oldham's best known social and natural assets illustrates this. During the Lancashire Cotton Famine of 1861 – 1865 when raw cotton supplies from the United States were cut off, local mill owners formed a committee to employ their workers to construct the park.[87] This was an example of how Oldham delivered such amenities when it was nearing its peak as an industrial city. However, a key element was that funds were provided by a loan from the government. As we have seen from other initiatives, that even with strong collaboration, these such projects have only been achieved with security of funding.

The LUWP also outlines the National Youth Guarantee; locating more civil service jobs out of London, as well as new cultural funds; development of more football pitches, all of which are welcome, but should really be happening anyway. Our major criticism, however, is that it misses the opportunity to rebuild the voluntary sector infrastructure eroded though austerity measures and in crisis mode during the pandemic. Andy Haldane, currently Permanent Secretary for Levelling Up in the Cabinet Office and one of the authors of the white paper, wrote about the importance of 'reweaving the social fabric' in 2020.

> **"We need to invest the rich endowment of social capital created by the crisis, by rethinking and rebuilding the institutional immune system that is our social sector."** [88]
> Andy Haldane, 2020

5.4 THE TOWN CENTRE, HOUSING AND HEALTH

The Town Centre

As already explained, the relationship between Oldham's town centre and its economy is a complex one. In many ways it is a symbol of the town, its economic health and wealth as well as of its social fabric and civic pride. As set out in the LUWP and its 'six capitals' framework, these issues overlap and interlock. The town centre is made of private businesses and public spaces and institutions. Increasingly voluntary sector organisations are also based there either for service delivery or retail. Together they offer places to meet, to come together and to stimulate networks and social capital. But there are problems too. The levels of poverty and deprivation especially in nearby communities has reduced the level of demand and spending in town centre businesses whether in hospitality or retail. Transport infrastructure such as Metrolink that are essential to connecting Oldham's people and businesses to other places also have the potential to dilute that demand further because it is now easier and quicker to go somewhere else for shopping or a night out.

> **"The town centre was on the edge and when the tram came, it pushed it over."**
> Janine, stay at home mum, from research by Onward [89]

87. https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200393/parks_countryside_and_canals/676/alexandra_park
88. Andy Haldane, 'Reweaving the Social Fabric after the Crisis' Financial Times, https://www.ft.com/content/fbb1ef1c-7ff8-11ea-b0fb-13524ae1056b
89. From focus groups carried out in Oldham by Onward; Hawksbee, A, Blagden J, Tanner W (2022) 'Levelling Up in Practice: Oldham Research Summary'.

According to the latest ONS Business Register and Employment Survey data, the Oldham town centre accounts for around 45.9% of Oldham borough's total employment. However, Oldham's town centre has seen a decline in employment over many years. Even pre COVID-19, Oldham town centre had lost several national retailers such as BHS, Greenwoods Menswear, New Look and Gourmet Burger Kitchen. In addition, the Magistrates' Court, County Court, and other legal practices serving these activities have also closed. The proportion of vacant units is 23.8% and the proportion of vacant floorspace is 19.3%. Oldham town centre also lacks scale or profile as an office location that attracts private investment and speculative development. Manchester's city centre presence coupled with occupier trends towards major urban centres means that it continues to appeal to smaller office occupiers with strong local connections. Much of the existing town centre office stock is small and dated, which constrains achievable rental levels, and prevents the attraction of new occupiers from outside of the borough.

Oldham has been identified as one of the top 20 town centres in the country most 'at risk' from key consumer trends. Alongside this, the night-time economy offer is weak, with no overlap between day and night-time economy. The Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) 2040 Town Centre Perceptions survey reported that only 59% of respondents in Oldham rated places to eat and drink as good or very good, compared to the GM-wide average of 67%. The 2020 Oldham Retail and Leisure Study concludes that the town centre has strengths in terms of having an historic character and sense of place, but as the supply of commercial premises exceeds demand within the market, vacancy rates remain an issue.

At the time of writing this report, The High Streets Task Force had visited Oldham on 7th October 2021 to undertake an 'Unlocking Your Place Potential' diagnostic visit. After talking with representatives of Oldham a list of recommendations were offered. Overall, they suggested the town should look to reinvent itself noting that the first phase of regeneration of the Old Town Hall and cinema complex were a success but that "the contraction in retail in the town centre provides an opportunity to capitalise on low values in a second phase of reinvention and activation". They recommend building a network of local champions and involving local people so reinvention can address the needs of the population. Their suggestions for improvements in the second phase: **'Unlike the major regeneration plans, this phase should be led by the people, with an updated town action plan. Reinvention can be kickstarted by inviting others to reimagine Oldham through cultural intervention, art, performance, temporary commercial activity, and evening events.'**

More recently, Oldham has received funding through the Towns Fund and the Future High Streets Fund, which it is currently allocating resources to a number of projects within the town centre.[90]

And the Council has produced a strategic framework, in the form of the £285m 'Creating a Better Place' plan. This sets out its core development priorities of building good quality homes; providing opportunities to learn and gain skills; growing local businesses and creating jobs; improving residents' life chances, health and wellbeing; and, embedding sustainability to make Oldham the greenest borough in GM.

Oldham Borough council has been awarded Towns and Future High Street funding from the Government. The plans for these funds are described in the box above with the 'Creating a Better Place' strategy.

90. See https://oldhammasterplan.commonplace.is/

Box 5.1: Plans from Oldham Council: Creating a Better Place

Oldham has invested in a series of policies and strategies developed to support the borough's growth and development, including the £285m 'Creating a Better Place' strategic framework introduced by Oldham Council in January 2020.

'Creating a Better Place' focuses on: building good quality homes; providing opportunities to learn and gain skills; growing local businesses and creating jobs; improving residents' life chances, health and wellbeing; and, embedding sustainability to make Oldham the greenest borough in GM.

This approach aims to build on our industrial heritage, civic pride and location as a town in the countryside, creating a sustainable future in a unique urban setting. The ambition is for Oldham to be a stronger economic contributor to Greater Manchester, providing a place where every resident is enabled to contribute to and benefit from the continued growth of the city-region. The productivity gap between Oldham and GM – as well as the wider UK economy – will narrow, supporting both a localised and a national levelling-up through the Government's Levelling-Up agenda.

The Oldham Town Deal Board has identified four intrinsically linked projects that reflect the needs of local communities and will simultaneously address local market failures and support economic recovery from COVID-19 and have receive £24.4 million from the Town's fund to deliver:

1. 'Northern Roots' – the UK's largest urban farm and eco-park is of national significance, creating 160 acres of high-quality green space and environment enhancement for community use
2. Relocating Tommyfield Market – from its existing site into Spindles Town Square Shopping Centre, supporting the existing masterplan set out in the Oldham Town Centre Vision.
3. Flexible Workspace – like the relocation of Tommyfield Market, the introduction of the town centre's first Grade A office accommodation to Spindles Town Square Shopping Centre will diversify the space into a thriving economic and social hub.
4. 'Making Space for Live Performance' – adds to the appeal and sustainability of the town centre, and particularly the night-time economy. Vacant listed buildings in Oldham's Cultural Quarter will become a net-zero carbon home for the arts to widen audiences and creative practice.

Underpinning these projects are a set of key targets which link to the 'Creating a Better Place' strategic framework and reflect several stakeholder engagement activities undertaken previously. These targets are that the projects will:

- Contribute towards narrowing the employment rate gap and productivity gap with GM, including through creating opportunities for skills development and labour market participation.
- Link with other key investments to make the town centre a thriving economic and social hub, supported by a diverse leisure and recreational offer.
- Capitalise on its location between Manchester and the Peak District National Park/ Pennine Hills by enhancing green infrastructure and ecosystem services which promote Oldham as the greenest borough in GM.
- Bring the countryside into the town and providing space for the community to work and spend leisure time in urban parkland.
- Actively promote opportunities for low carbon economic growth and sustainable energy production.
- Reuse, repurpose and revitalise Oldham's vacant and underused buildings.

The economic benefits expected to arise in the town centre from Towns Fund and other projects include:

- Up to 400 jobs created as a result of the new employment floor space to be delivered.
- This will increase local economic output by approximately £20m per year. The Present Value of this over a 30-year appraisal period is about £330 million.
- Constructing these schemes will support up to 100 jobs, producing around £50m of economic activity in the borough.
- The new town centre housing can increase the local population by approximately 2,400 new residents.
- The spending on comparison and convenience goods by these residents could be worth up to £20m per year to the Oldham economy.
- Many of the jobs created will be provide opportunities for Oldham residents, this includes direct jobs, as well as indirect and induced jobs (through the supply chain). Some of these jobs will be in new and emerging sectors, such as green technology, as well as business and technology-related jobs aligned with the GM Local Industrial Strategy. To ensure these jobs are accessible to Oldham residents, Oldham Council envisages an exciting collaborative programme with Oldham FE colleges, University Campus Oldham (UCO) and potentially some links to Manchester Universities' R&D functions (Innovation GM).

Housing Issues in Oldham

Oldham's housing stock is typically characterised by its 19th century red brick terraced properties, which make up a large share (41.2%) of the 96,132 households in the borough. Within Greater Manchester, Oldham has the largest proportion of terraced households as well as a notably higher proportion compared to the national average (24.5%). In contrast, Oldham has a small proportion of detached households (12.3%) and flats (12.6%). See Figure 5.3 for share of house by type.

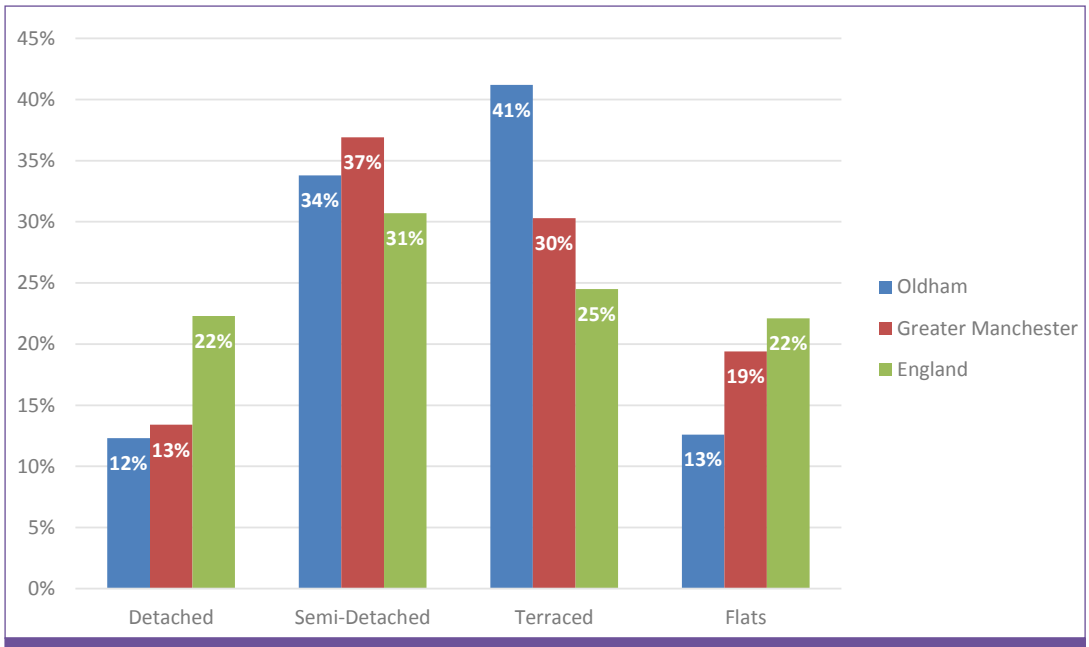

Figure 5.3: Housing Stock by Type in Oldham (ONS Census data, 2011) [91]

91. See http://www.oldham-council.co.uk/jsna/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Oldham_in_Profile_2019.pdf (page 38)

Figure 5.4 shows the house price index for Oldham compared to the indices for the North West, Greater Manchester and the UK. According to HM Land Registry the average house prices in Oldham in December 2021 was £177,507. House prices have grown strongly at over 10% per annum over 2020-2021 during the pandemic. In March 2021 house prices in Oldham showed the second highest annual growth rate in the UK at 15.7%[92] and then grew again in August 2021 at 16.7%.

In terms of relative affordability (ranked based on 2017 least-to-most affordable[93]), the Oldham borough is the fourth most affordable local authority area compared with other areas of Greater Manchester and neighbouring districts to Oldham. At a ratio of 5.21, Oldham is more affordable than the North West and England. The Manchester Evening News reported in March 2021 that according to Zoopla house price data, Coldhurst in Oldham came first as the most affordable area in Greater Manchester, with house prices averaging around £104,416[94].

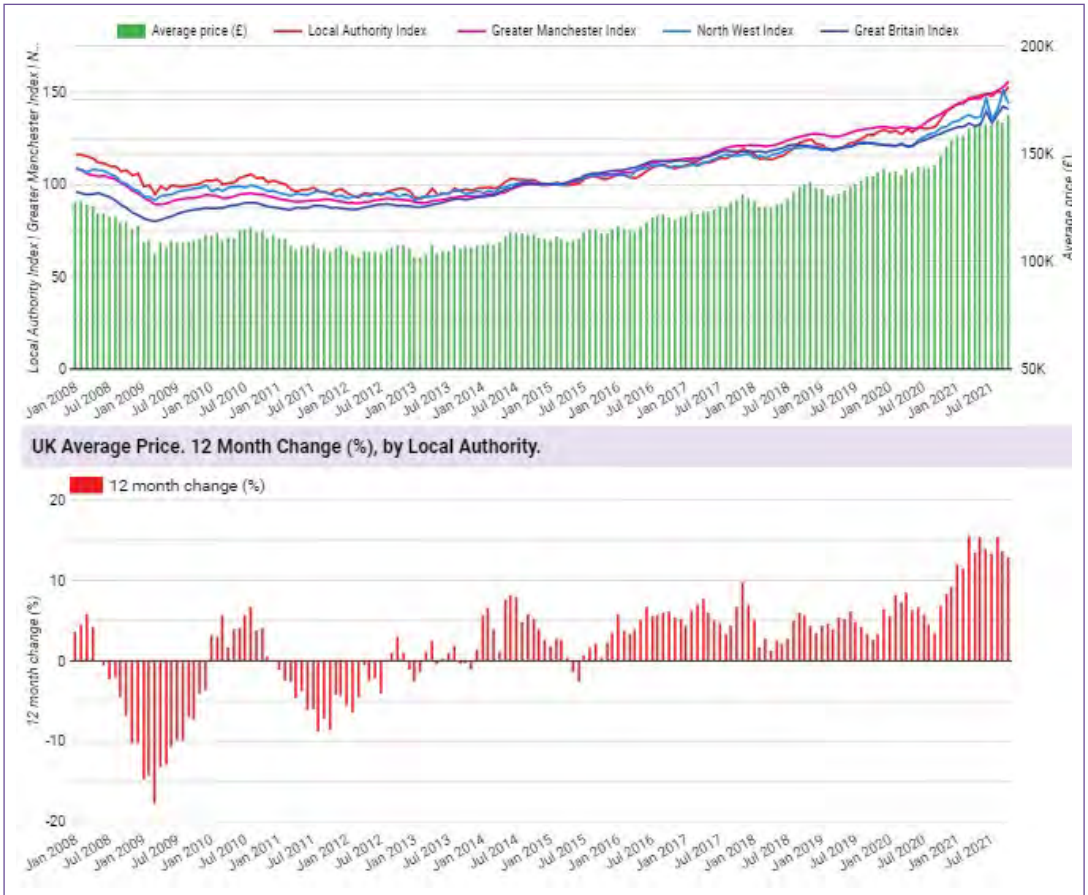

Figure 5.4: Average House Prices in Oldham, level and change (HM Land Registry, 2021) [95]

92. See https://www.theoldhamtimes.co.uk/news/19191568.oldham-house-prices-see-uks-second-biggest-rise/.

93. See Oldham in Profile, 2022.

94. See https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/property/oldham-property-house-prices-zoopla-20124350.

95. See https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/uk-house-price-index-data-downloads-october-2021.

Housing Challenges

Housing stock and quality is a major issue in Oldham, particularly in central and poorest areas. There are a series of significant housing challenges in the town and some of these also relate directly to housing issues across Greater Manchester and in the closest neighbouring areas too. These include:

- There is a glut of low value housing, and a low supply of social housing insufficient to meet increasing needs from a rising and changing population. In addition, homes that are available in areas such as Coldhurst that has numerous poor quality 19th century housing, do not match the needs of its residents.
- Overcrowding is an issue in some wards – particularly Werneth, St Marys and Coldhurst – where properties are small or terraced and cannot properly accommodate multigenerational families usually found in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi community. See Figure X for the location of housing with the highest amount of overcrowding.
- Net Zero there is also a major Challenge with Oldham's existing housing stock and business premises, in adapting them to higher environmental standards. The age and type of housing poses particular problems and retrofitting (including supplying the skills and investment required) as a contribution to lower energy costs and Net Zero must be a priority. This also offers opportunities to Oldham's future strategy and to local businesses and organisations such as the College.

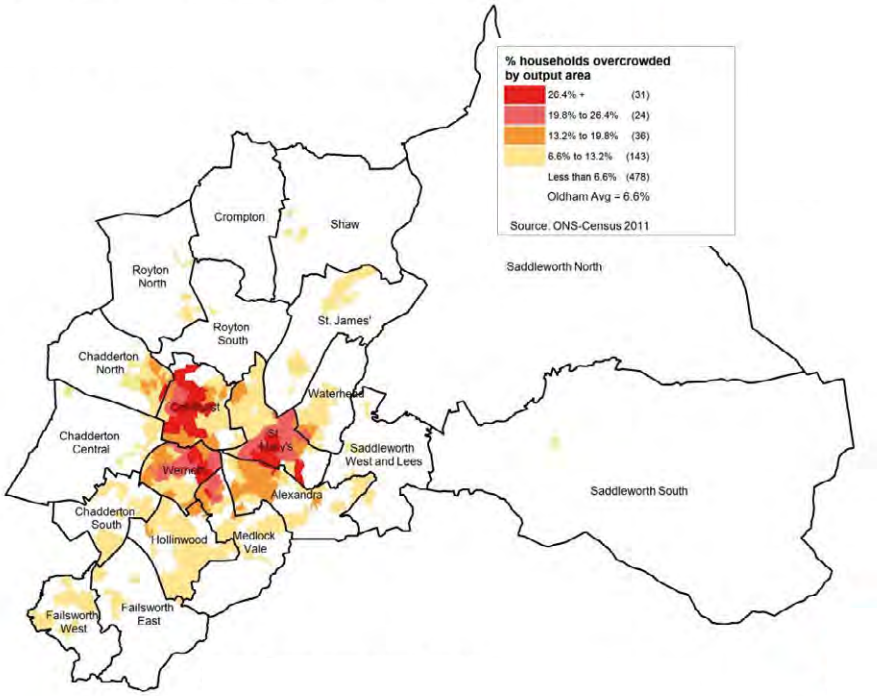

Figure 5.5: Overcrowding households in Oldham (Oldham in Profile, 2019) [96]

In a Policy@Manchester blog Dr Caglar Koksal[97,] he explains how housing inequalities are linked to poor health outcomes, which have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic:

"The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how housing inequalities can inhibit the capacity of households to adequately respond to lockdowns and changed patterns of work and leisure. Overcrowded households, defined as having more than one person per room in a household excluding bathrooms and kitchens, is a major factor for the spread of COVID-19. Poor house ventilation, which is a major cause of indoor air pollution and already has a disproportionate impact on low-income houses, is another major factor driving the virus's spread. The quality of design and the built form as a determinant of health and wellbeing have a lot of potential to improve health and wellbeing if the quality of buildings and open spaces is high. Good housing is key, but the planning for the area must also allow better access to employment, leisure and recreation opportunities to positively impact health and wellbeing."

96. See http://www.oldham-council.co.uk/jsna/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Oldham_in_Profile_2019.pdf (page 40)

97. See https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/urban/2022/01/incorporating-health-and-wellbeing-into-housing-developments

Dr Koksal advises local authorities to set high health and wellbeing aspirations for housing developments and set robust design standards, which could include the development of safe travel corridors, high quality open spaces and recreational green spaces.

The majority of **social housing** in Oldham was transferred from the council to First Choice Homes Oldham (a registered Housing Association) in 2010. There are several other Registered Housing Associations operating in the town see Figure X for the locations of social housing

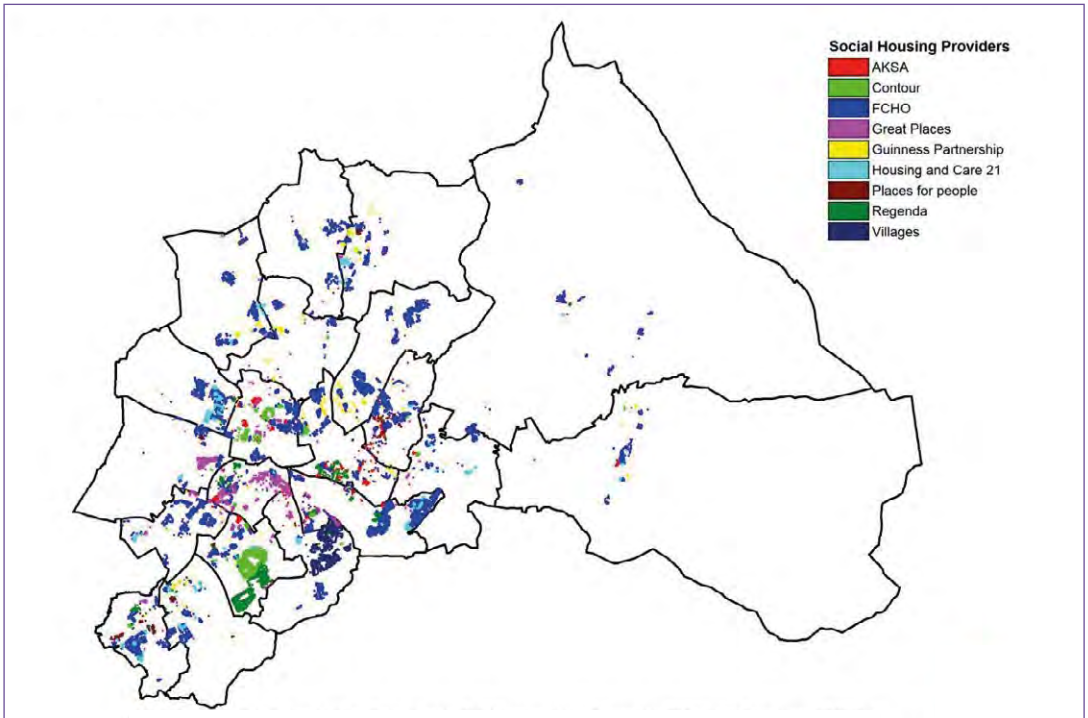

Figure 5.6: Social Housing Providers in Oldham (Oldham in Profile, 2019) [98]

There is a **limited supply of available land.** In some areas large swaths are marked greenbelt and any proposed plans for housing are met with fierce opposition. Significant brownfield sites are available but costs of remediation and redevelopment are prohibitively high. Many are former industrial locations including former mills and factories with major health and safety considerations as well as overlaps with heritage concerns (see the Council's Mill Strategy).

The placing of asylum seekers in temporary homes without sufficient resources and support around them can bring challenges to communities. This is a growing issue for Oldham as numbers increase and more come from other parts of Greater Manchester because of the availability of cheaper housing. The government has recently designated Oldham as a core area for asylum seekers placed into temporary homes through a contracted service companies eg Serco. Asylum Seekers are temporarily housed while asylum applications are processed. However, the contracts have little regard to the impacts on 'place', the transience of large numbers or on the quality of housing stock it uses. This undermines broader place based, community or housing objectives and prioritises contract delivery and processing numbers over some of the capitals and missions set out in the LUWP.

If there is no join up between care for an individual and the operation of a service, and the social capital and fabric of the communities they are placed or live in, then there are likely to be problems. These might manifest themselves in a number of ways from a lack of cohesion, to poor housing standards and falling 'pride in place'. There are further risks to health and wellbeing and to crime and safety. Authorities at both regional and national levels must do more to understand and manage these impacts in places like Oldham. It is not good enough to operate different policies in silos from each other with little care about the overall impact on a specific place.

.

98. Figure 5.6: Social Housing Providers in Oldham (Oldham in Profile, 2019)

Healthy Lives

In general, Oldham's residents have worse health than England's average: life expectancy in Oldham is more than two years less than England as a whole. Male life expectancy at birth in Oldham is 77.2 years compared to the 79.4 years England average and female life expectancy is 80.5 years compared to the 83.1 years England average[99]. There are strong links between deprivation and poor health, and high levels of deprivation in the borough have a significant impact on health outcomes.

There are also significant social inequalities within Oldham. As an example, 40% of the people living in Coldhurst belong to an income-deprived household - this is only around 5% in Saddleworth South. This leads to health inequalities. Indeed, the difference in life expectancy between the most and the least deprived wards is over 7 years.

The ONS (2022) subnational indicators have been collated to show opportunity and public services as mentioned in the LUWP are shown in Figure 5.7. Those relating to healthy life expectancy are negative for Oldham (for males and females the healthy life expectancy estimate is 58.3 years, this compares to 65 years in Trafford) along with the share of overweight children (a quarter of children are overweight at reception age) and adults (69.4%).

Early years' life chances (in communication, literacy and maths) are also below the Great Britain median levels, along with GCSE results in English and Maths and school and nurseries rated outstanding. Although life satisfaction is just below the median other well-being measures including feeling life is worthwhile, happiness and anxiety are on the GB median.

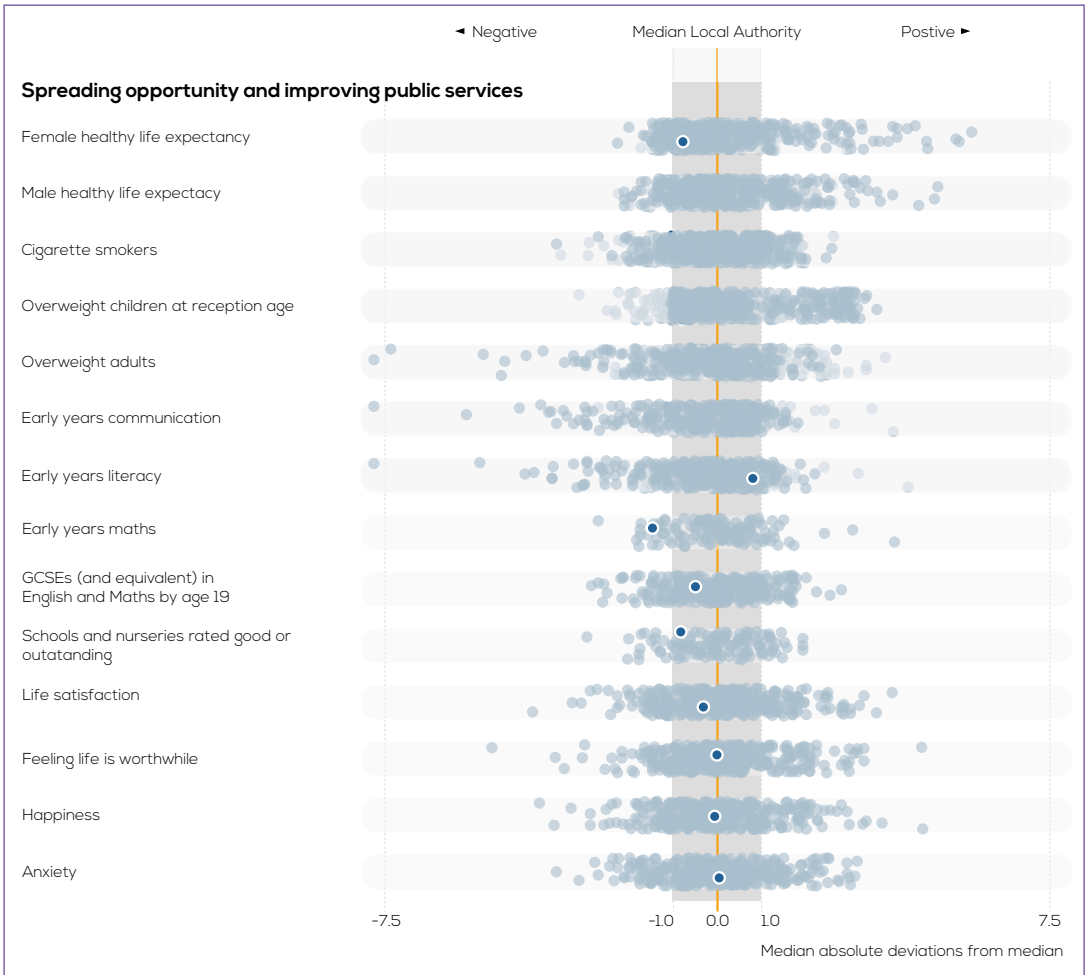

Figure 5.7: Oldham position in the ONS Subnational Dashboard, (ONS, 2022) [100]

99. See Public Health England dashboard at https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/public-health-outcomes-framework/data#page/1/gid/1000049/pat/6/par/E12000002/ati/401/are/E08000004/iid/93190/age/94/sex/1/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yrr/3/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/ine-yo-3:2018:-1:-1_ine-ct-71_ine-pt-0_car-do-0

100. See https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/subnationalindicatorsexplorer/2022-01-06

Crime

Comparing the crime rate in Oldham to other boroughs in Greater Manchester in Figure 5.8 (for the year ending June 2021), we see the crime rate was higher than average for the Greater Manchester police force area at 120 (recorded per 1,000 people) compared to 108 average. Crime rates were down slightly in Oldham from the year before where they have increased across Greater Manchester.

Figure 5.8: Crimes in Oldham compared with Greater Manchester boroughs (Police analysis of ONS data, 2021) [101]

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector

In Greater Manchester the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector makes a difference to people's lives by helping to improve wellbeing; working with communities to develop resilience; supporting and encouraging physical activity; empowering individuals through education and training; supporting the wider environment; enabling people to access the arts; and facilitating economic sustainability through supporting employment opportunities and key skills development.

Oldham has a thriving voluntary sector and Action Together's State of the Sector[102] 2021 report highlights the size, reach, spread, scale and diversity of the VCSE sector, with key findings including:

- There are 1,326 voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises making a difference in Oldham
- 70% are micro organisations, with an annual income under £10,000
- 12% of the sector identify as being a social enterprise
- £90.4 million is the total income of the sector (2019/2020)
- 84% of organisations have at least one source of non-public sector funds, bringing significant value to the city-region's economy
- 38% of organisations have used their reserves in the past 12 months
- 45,720 volunteers (including committee/board members), giving 166,910 hours each week
- Volunteer time in Oldham is conservatively valued at £82 million per annum (based on the Real Living Wage £9.50 per hour) but in reality is likely to be much higher
- 30% of organisations who employ staff indicated that they paid the Real Living Wage to their employees
- 85% of VCSE organisations have had some direct dealings with other VCSE organisations. This includes 83% with Oldham Council, and 49% with private organisations

101. See https://www.police.uk/pu/your-area/greater-manchester-police/performance/compare-your-area/?tc=QC10
102. See https://www.actiontogether.org.uk/SOS21/oldham.

The Importance of Heritage and Oldham's Mills

In previous sections, much has been made of Oldham's industrial heritage and its importance to the town. This has been emphasised in its sense of civic pride and also in the symbolism of Oldham's economic importance during the industrial revolution – such as through the evidence received from Catherine Dewar of Historic England. Oldham Council has recently published its own Mills Strategy[103], setting out the importance of the one hundred mills that still form a significant part of the town's business premises. It is hard to overstate their significance in the town dominating its skyline and visible to everyone approaching whether by car, bus or tram. They are a constant reminder of what Oldham did in the past, but like the town itself, their collective and individual futures are often uncertain. The Mill Strategy is therefore a very welcome step forward. It describes how some mills in Oldham and elsewhere in Greater Manchester, have been successfully converted into new business or residential uses, for example Ultimate Products refurbishing Manor Mill. Several more of the mills have the potential to be converted into housing, increasing the borough's quality housing stock and reducing pressure to build on the green belt, or to be used as productive employment and/or business space.

Oldham's mills are often centrally located with good access, reflecting their former use. Many are currently used for warehousing and storage. They are valued by residents for their aesthetic and the link to heritage. In many cases they could make attractive and valuable housing, or utilised more effectively as productive and sustainable long-term employment space.

The Mills Strategy highlights the mills in Oldham that have the most immediate potential for conversion to housing or for employment use, and makes recommendations for how that can be achieved. Funding presents a significant barrier – Oldham's relatively low house prices make the business case for private conversion challenging in most individual cases.

But construction is already an important sector for Oldham, and the ability of firms and individuals to apply this to the mills could be a major economic opportunity to grow it further. Oldham College already has a Construction Centre of Excellence and a brand new construction building. This has been partly supported by both the ESFA and the GMCA and the construction sector has been identified as a key priority by the college in its strategy[104].

Mill conversion has the potential to deliver significant returns for the borough in terms of employment, skills and jobs, but could also help address housing challenges, while also retaining a link to Oldham's heritage. In Chapter 3 we also wrote about the importance of innovation and technology diffusion and the need to support local and regional businesses. Construction is a substantial sector in Oldham accounting for nearly 7% of output and 5% of employment. In Wolverhampton, the university, with WMCA and other support, has recently opened a National Brownfield Institute, housed on a former Victorian industrial site where remediated land has formed a new campus for Construction and Architecture[105].

A 'Mill Skills and Innovation Demonstrator' might make a good initiative with which Oldham might explore at GMCA and national levels (eg through a 'Levelling Up' and/or 'Strength in Places' bid together with relevant partners). Converting mill(s) to homes and/or business premises (incorporating high environmental standards/materials) using high tech/spec skills and designs, materials etc in building, energy, remediation. Teaching relevant skills but also demonstrating techniques, materials, equipment, designs for firms engaging in building conversion

Crucially, Oldham has the highest concentration of such buildings and land/property prices are low compared to other boroughs/towns. However, the skills and technologies acquired or utilised can be applied far beyond the town/borough (Greater Manchester and the wider North West has a significant footprint of former industrial buildings so this has the potential to be a regional specialism).

103. Oldham Mills Strategy: To add link on Monday
104. See https://www.oldham.ac.uk/ccentre-handover/ and GMCA Retrofit Hub https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/more-than-1-000-people-to-learn-retrofitting-skills-to-help-city-region-achieve-net-zero-future/.
105. See Wolverhampton University: https://www.wlv.ac.uk/university-life/our-campus/springfield-campus/, WMCA: https://investwm.co.uk/2020/12/14/17-5m-national-brownfield-institute/ and Black Country LEP: https://www.blackcountrylep.co.uk/upload/files/Case%20Studies/Brownfield%20Institute.pdf

Box: Key elements of a possible a 'Mill Demonstrator'

- Skills training from entry to L4/5 (possibility for some L6/7 degree involvement)
- Apprenticeship and T Level placements with partner firms
- Potential links to specialist institutions within GM and beyond eg IoT and NBI.
- Applied Research in building materials, techniques including net zero (hearing, insulation, energy usage)
- Demonstrator of key technologies - including building materials, smart buildings etc, brownfield remediation
- Housing provision and links to Oldham Mills Strategy

Each of the above brings different opportunities for funding streams (both capital and revenue) alongside any potential 'levelling up' or similar bids. In all there is also potential for match funding from partners including construction /technology firms and from property developers/owners. There is also potential benefits from eventual property/business sales/ rent and from increases in land value.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Returning to the LUWP's three policy missions on Pride in Place, Housing and Crime, the Review makes a major **recommendation to Oldham that a local panel comprised of leaders from the voluntary, community, private and public sectors be convened for six months to make specific recommendations on Pride in Place, Housing and Crime targets (that are achievable and can be measured) for Oldham to deliver itself.** This panel can also act as a reference group and should be given sufficient analytical resource to make credible recommendations based on the evidence from Oldham. This panel might share membership with other groups, including the Town Centre Board, or the development of an anchor institutions network recommended in Chapter 6, however, this they should have deep expertise and understanding of Oldham's community, housing and crime challenges. To make a start on 'pride in place' we suggest beginning with the metrics and the 'practice playbook' being developed by Onward (and informed by detailed survey work and stakeholder interviews in Oldham).

The Review agrees that the Town centre is the heart of Oldham. Significant investment has been committed to Oldham Town Centre, and that is the right approach. **The Review recognises and commends the Local Authority for engaging the High Streets Taskforce and also recommends that in our view, their preliminary recommendations are sound and that they are accepted and implemented.** This does not exclude other town centres in the metropolitan borough of Oldham developing similar regeneration programmes or learning from the High Streets Task Force model – all of which should be supported by the Local Authority.

What is clear is that Oldhamers have pride in place. It is clear that there is no one solution and that the current pepper pot approach hasn't worked over the last 20 years. The expert evidence we heard shows that so many of the basic expectations for our public services aren't met. It should be noted that the Commissioners all made a breath of important contributions and recommendations on civic pride and social fabric. However, it was too ambitious to outline them all in the short time this review had to report without them seeming like a smorgasbord for policy makers to pick and choose from. It is key, in the opinion of the Commissioners that success can only be achieved by a coordinated and longer-term view of the various polices, projects and programmes. The next chapter on institutions aims to take a different lens on why and how.

- Establish a clear policy priority around growing civic pride, with tangible measures attached, to 2030.
- Place heritage at the centre of physical regeneration plans for the town centre and housing, including accepting and implementing the Oldham Council's Mills Strategy and combining this with new kills training for net zero construction and piloting Innovation GM space (at Oldham College or in a Mill?) with the University of Manchester.
- Develop a clear strategy for retaining and capacity building the aspects of Oldham's identity – including key buildings and locations, and organisations (including the football club and rugby league – but not exclusively focussed on them) – which have symbolic importance to the town's profile.
- Through the Oldham Leadership Board, to champion the interdependence between the creation of wealth and new opportunities and strengthening social fabric, in order to deliver the vision for Oldham
- To set challenging targets for Oldham and GM partners, in terms of reducing crime and improving preventative work, especially with at risk young people, through to 2030.
- Adopt a "neighbourhood effects" approach to understanding intergenerational underachievement in education and skills in targeted neighbourhoods and set up dedicated projects within the Education Improvement Area to pilot new approaches to improving these outcomes.
- Celebrate Oldham's achievements with an annual calendar of high profile events which reward ambition and achievement and reach out to communities and people who don't normally win anything.

CHAPTER 6: INSTITUTIONS

Improving Oldham's economic future will depend on many different layers of government ('multi-level governance') from delivery departments in Whitehall to local and regional authorities and also organisations in the public, private and voluntary institutions within the borough too. This is easier said than done, given that in England, most power and resource is centralised and concentrated in Westminster and Whitehall with institutions at the regional and sub-regional level typically weak, fragmented and subjected to frequent 'policy churn'.

"The UK is one of the most centralised states in the Western World, with fewest powers decentralised to regions and communities. It is no coincidence, then, that the UK is also one of the most spatially unequal economies in the Western World, regionally and sub-regionally. Through the metro Mayors, some greater degree of regional autonomy is gradually being distributed. But we are still miles away from the levels of devolution present in other, less spatially unequal, countries. The current approach to devolving powers differs significantly even across Mayoral Combined Authorities. And below that level, at the hyper-local level where the real problems often reside, the picture is more patchwork and piecemeal still. The current degree of centralisation and combined with the lack of consistency and comprehensiveness in devolved practices, leads to a patchwork quilt that inhibits local design and decision-making. A fundamental rethink of devolution practices is needed, with the upcoming White Paper on levelling-up offering perhaps the opportunity."

Andy Haldane Speech to Local Trust, July 2021

6.2 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INSTITUTIONS & WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

England's institutional ecology at national as well as at the local and regional level tends to be weak, fragmented and poorly co-ordinated particularly in its many attempts to boost productivity and local economic growth. Longstanding institutional and policy silos combined with a political process that produces a constant churn of new institutional and policy initiatives forms part of the institutional and policy challenge that places like Oldham (and the Oldham Economic Review) operates in.[106]

The LUWP seeks to redistribute more powers to local places and to improve the economic performance, skills, productivity and living standards everywhere – but this is against a backdrop of longstanding regional and local inequalities, a lack of joined up policy and constant policy change. Amongst other recommendations, it also seeks to create a series of new institutions, including in Oldham and Greater Manchester. It also comes after a decade where local councils have had to contend with a triple whammy of Austerity, Brexit and Covid – each of which has brought pressure on resources, more economic and social challenges and reduced capacity with which to address them.

Moreover, successive British governments have a poor track record of effective cross-departmental and national-local co-ordination, as highlighted not just during the Covid-19 emergency but also in relation to the repeated failure to put in place a robust industrial policy.[107] New Whitehall departments have been created and renamed, and industrial strategy recalibrated with every new incumbent in No 10. One of the most egregious examples of institutional or policy 'short termism' is regional policy which has been chopped and changed by successive governments with seemingly little effect on spatial inequalities. Furthermore, since 2019 there have been increasing geographical inconsistencies between programmes, powers and places leading to questions about how such arrangements might provide a sub-optimal basis for improving regional/local productivity gaps and/or 'levelling up'.

In the last decade, local authorities, including Oldham, have suffered a triple whammy of austerity, Brexit and Covid – with a cumulative impact on capacity, resources and services. In terms of austerity, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)[108] calculated that between 2009/10 to 2016/17 there were -42% service spending cut to Oldham's budget. In further analysis the IFS[109] note the inequity of these spending cuts as "between 2009/10 and 2019/20, spending on non-education services by the tenth of councils serving the most deprived areas fell by an average 31% per resident, almost twice as much (16% per resident) as among the tenth serving the least deprived areas."

Funding streams made available to local areas in the last few years have proliferated in number and focus e.g. 'levelling up' funds, Town deals, High Street funds etc but they are piecemeal and based on often opaque funding processes. There are also question about their effectiveness.[110] But local councils have little choice but to make bids if they are to gain any resources or investment for their places.

There is a similar story in further education with significant funding cuts to sixth forms and colleges. According to the IFS[111], even with additional funding from the recent spending review, college spending per pupil aged 16-18 in 2024 will still be around 10% below 2010 levels, while school sixth form spending per pupil will be a whopping 23% below 2010 levels. Additional funding for adult education and apprenticeships - because of the scale of the cuts over the last decade - means that spending in 2024 will still be one-third lower than 2010. This has a deep and sustained impact on education institutions in Oldham.

To again use the 'Levelling Up' white paper as a starting point, it acknowledges the importance of institutions to improving the economic and social conditions of a place.

> **"The role of well-functioning institutions in driving economic development has a long history in the work of Edmund Burke, Karl Polanyi and Elinor Ostrom. For them, this meant well-designed and effective formal institutions, like the legal system, and local and central government. But it also included well-functioning informal and civic institutions, such as schools and universities, trades unions, community and faith groups, and sports and social clubs."** Levelling Up White Paper (2022)

106. See 'All Change', The Institute for Government, Norris and Adam, (2017), https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/all-change.

107. Coyle, D. and Muhtar, A. (2021) 'Industrial Policy: Learning from the Past', The Productivity Institute, Cambridge: https://www.productivity.ac.uk/publications/uks-industrial-policy-learning-from-the-past/

108. See https://ifs.org.uk/publications/8781.

109. See https://ifs.org.uk/levelling-up.

110. See National Audit Office (2022). https://www.nao.org.uk/press-release/supporting-local-economic-growth/

111. See Farquharson, C., Sibieta, L. Tahir, L. and Waltmann, B. (2021) Institute for Fiscal Studies 2021 annual

In our thinking during the Oldham Economic Review, we agree with this view.

There is widespread consensus between economists, political scientists and policymakers that institutions are an important part of tackling both problems of widespread low productivity but with large regional differences.[112] However, there is further value in understanding how different institutions work, what they are tasked to do and how they relate to others also involved in pursuing these objectives.

> **"Such examples have now attained almost motherhood-and-apple-pie status among economic researchers, given the widespread acceptance that "institutions" are important for growth and development. But economists need to connect their analysis with an understanding of the political potential for change, the sociology of organisations, and the psychology of decision-making. Simply urging regions to "be more like Silicon Valley" is useless. The challenge for researchers and policymakers is to understand – in each specific context – exactly what coordination is needed to increase productivity, and what actions (and by whom) can achieve this."**
>
> **Diane Coyle** (Project Syndicate Blog, 2020)

This has been a key element of our thinking on the review – firstly that local institutions matter and secondly that they must come together as institutional assets and strategic players to help shape an economic strategy that builds on Oldham's distinctive features and context.

The central role of institutions in economic development at a local – or sub-national level – is evidenced in the work of Acemoglu and Robinson[113] and Rodríguez-Pose,[114] Barca, McCann and Rodríguez-Pose,[115] finding that good local institutions play a crucial role in sub-national development.

According to the white paper this can be traced to two factors. First, capacity and capability. With institutions come institutional memory and local capacity. The loss of institutional memory and capacity, if institutions are neglected, reduces local ability to design and deliver change. In the UK, the depletion of civic institutions, including local government, has gone hand-in- hand with deteriorating economic and social performance.

As we heard during our initial evidence sessions (see Mike Emmerich evidence in Chapter 2), there is real importance to stability over the long term – both in terms of an economic vision and the institutional framework that is able to deliver on it. That stability and purpose should ideally be shared at all relevant levels of government from that within Oldham, to those at a city-region level (GMCA) and where appropriate at national level too. Ideally this stability might apply to funding streams and resources as well as to the institutions most crucial to governing and supporting the economy.

This long-term vision also applies to trust and to sticking to and delivering promises.

As the LUWP also states, the importance of institutions is also enshrined in its 'six capitals' framework, see Figure 6.1.

112. See McCann, P. (2019). Perceptions of regional inequality and the geography of discontent: insights from the UK, Regional Studies, DOI: 10.1080/00343404.2019.1619928 and Coyle, D. (2020). 'The Key to the Productivity Puzzle', Project Syndicate, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/coordinated-collective-action-boosts-productivity-by-diane-coyle-2020-10

113. See Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J. (2019). The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty, New York: Penguin Random House.

114. See Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2020). Institutions and the fortunes of territories. Regional Science, Policy and Practice, DOI: 10.1111/rsp3.12277.

115. See Barca, F. and McCann, P. and Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2012). The Case for Regional Development Intervention: Place-Based Versus Place-Neutral Approaches, Journal of Regional Science, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9787.2011.00756.x

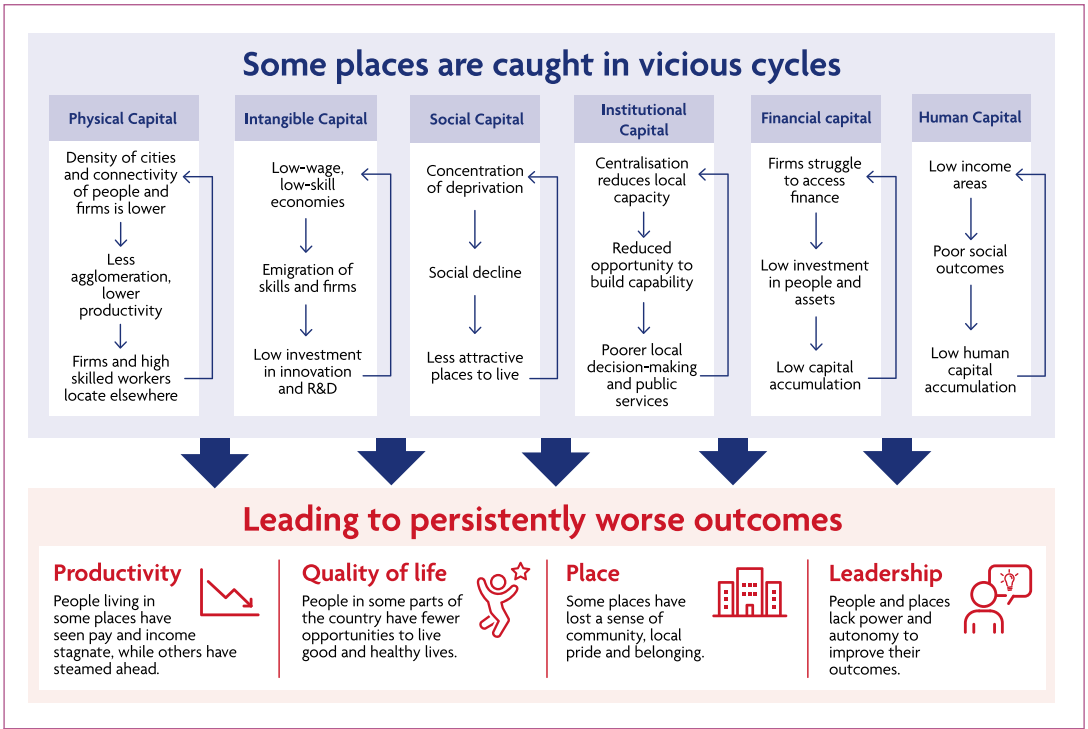

Figure 6.1: Levelling Up Capitals Framework (Levelling Up White Paper, 2022) [116]

As the white paper sets out, 'levelling up' requires a focused, long-term plan of action and a clear framework to identify and act upon the drivers of spatial disparity. Evidence from a range of disciplines tells us these drivers can be encapsulated in six "capitals". These are listed and defined as:

- **Physical capital –** infrastructure, machines and housing.
- **Human capital –** the skills, health and experience of the workforce.
- **Intangible capital –** innovation, ideas and patents.
- **Financial capital –** resources supporting the financing of companies.
- **Social capital –** the strength of communities, relationships and trust.
- **Institutional capital –** local leadership, capacity and capability.

The six capitals in this framework are individually important. But their real significance comes in combination, when they act in a mutually reinforcing fashion. The sum of these factors is then greater than its individual parts – and 'levelling up' is about restoring or rebuilding individual capitals so that this is able to happen. As the LUWP explains:

'Where endowments of these capitals are weak or depleted, places are unable to attract or retain talent, businesses are less likely to invest and innovate, civic institutions tend to lack capacity and capability, and pride in local communities is depleted. This vicious and self-reinforcing cycle in some places has seen a depletion of skills, businesses, finance and culture, with communities and town centres declining for decades. These cumulative forces – in some places positive, in others negative – have widened geographical disparities in the UK over time. Without policy action, they will continue to do so.

Levelling up is about aspiring for every place in the UK to have a rich endowment of all six capitals, so that people do not have to leave their community to live a good life. It means taking action to replenish the capitals where they are weak or depleted, transforming vicious circles into virtuous ones. With opportunity spread more equally across the UK, people in places that were once struggling would then fulfil their potential, living longer, healthier and happier lives. With each part of the UK achieving its potential, the economy as a whole would be both larger and more equal.'

116. See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom, page 88

6.3 INSTITUTIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPITAL IN OLDHAM

We would argue that existing institutions in Oldham are fundamental to any vision for the future. They must act together and co-ordinate their efforts over the long term in a stable policy environment. Key institutions include organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors and as described in work on community wealth building by CLES, these should be considered as 'anchor institutions' in the local economy.

Improving collective capacity, strategic leadership and better co-ordinating local, regional and national institutions will be critical to Oldham's economic future. This includes effective working and co-ordination with GM leaders and institutions and with neighbouring authorities.

What are the existing institutions that matter?

There are a range of important institutions in Oldham that have a major impact on – and form parts of the borough's 'six capitals'. They can be variously identified through recent work from both the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and by Onward. The list below is indicative of these rather than intended to be a comprehensive list. Most importantly they show a mix of different types and sizes of institution across private, public and voluntary sectors:

- Oldham Council and Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group
- Oldham College and Oldham 6th Form College
- Northern Care Alliance NHS Trust, which includes Royal Oldham Hospital
- Oldham Coliseum
- Oldham Art Gallery
- Oldham Athletic Football Club,
- Oldham Rugby League
- Oldham Netball Club
- First Choice Homes - Housing Association
- Ultimate Products
- JW Lees
- The Manchester Evening News (based in Oldham) and the Oldham Chronicle

Institutions in Greater Manchester

Institutions and organisations in GM are also critical such as its Mayor, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), neighbouring local authorities, large city-region employers and voluntary organisations as well as its universities and colleges. Some deliver services across Greater Manchester, including in Oldham, such as the Growth Company, MIDAS and Innovation GM, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSCP) and Greater Manchester Police (GMP) too. Others such as business organisations and networks including GMCC and GMCVO are similarly important.

There are also institutions and organisations in neighbouring authorities that are significant in Oldham. Rochdale, Tameside and Manchester all border Oldham (as does Kirklees in West Yorkshire). Institutions nearby in these authorities such as AMPI, GM Police HQ and the Sharp Project also play important roles in employment, procurement and influence.

These are all significant institutions – both 'anchor institutions' and a part of Oldham's and Greater Manchester's institutional capital. That's not to say that new institutions and organisations are not needed – new private sector employers, new public/state organisations and new voluntary bodies will all help to increase Oldham's institutional capital – even more so if they work well together and complement each other.

Institutional Capital – The Importance of Leadership/capacity

Together they make up Oldham's institutional capital. Though we would add that many play important roles across many of the other capitals too. Oldham College - for example – like FE Colleges in similar places – also supports intangible capital (supplying high level skills for R&D and technology application/diffusion) and social capital (improving networks across different communities – both 'bonding' and 'bridging') as well as in both human and institutional capital. This is worth restating because policies emanating from Westminster and Whitehall tends to see local organisations in just one function and subsequent performance management and regulatory oversight is as likely to seal them off from other institutions as it they are to help them come together.

Anchor Institutions and Community Wealth Building

An important idea that has been around for some time – particularly in the field of local economic development is that of 'anchor institutions'. Sometimes, including in recent economic strategies in GM and in Oldham (and in other parts of the country) this is associated with proposals for 'community wealth building'[117]. In line with the principle of 'institutional capital' in the white paper, this emphasises the roles and cumulative importance of local institutions working together to increase their economic impact and sustainability in their areas such as through more locally focused recruitment and procurement strategies. Increasing levels of wealth and income in Oldham will depend on the activities of the private, public and voluntary sectors and the coming together of existing and new institutions in the borough and nearby.

The term 'anchor institutions' is used to refer to organisations which have an important presence in a place, usually through a combination of being large-scale employers, one of the largest purchasers of goods and services in the locality, controlling large areas of land and having relatively fixed assets. Examples include local authorities, NHS trusts, universities, trade unions, local businesses and housing associations.

According to work in Oldham carried out by CLES, local anchor institutions include local and national public organisations Guinness Northern Counties, First Choice Homes Oldham, Voluntary Action Oldham, Northern Care Alliance NHS Trust, Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, The Christie NHS Foundation Trust and Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority.[118] Anchor institutions do not need to be large - so grassroots groups within the VCSE sector are also anchors in communities and therefore also have a role to play.

As CLES say, their 'footprints' are significant in terms of their existing and potential impact on local economies:

'While the primary objective of anchors may not always be local regeneration or tackling poverty, the scale of these institutions, their geographically fixed assets and activities as well as their links to the local community mean that they are 'sticky capital' on which local development strategies can be based'

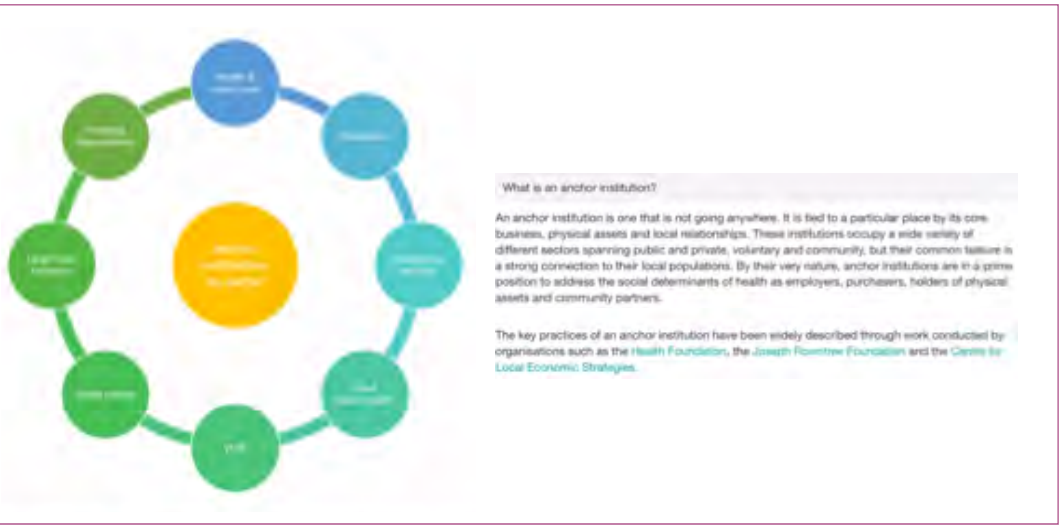

Figure 6.2: Overview of Anchor Institutions Key Practices and Principles (Yorkshire and Humber Public Health Network website accessed 2022) [119]

117. See the CLES Community Wealth Building Timeline https://cles.org.uk/community-wealth-building/community-wealth-building-timeline/

118. Oldham alongside Manchester, Preston and other towns and cities in the UK have been working with CLES on Community Wealth Building Strategies, including the identification and development of 'anchor institution' networks. See https://www.oldhampartnership.org.uk/anchor-institutions/

There are a range of ways in which different anchor institutions can leverage their assets and revenue to benefit the local area and local people. In short, this is about maximising the impact of an institution's activities beyond the direct service delivery role. It is about 'densifying' impact in the economy through creating more local suppliers.

An important part of the approach to 'anchor institutions' and 'community wealth building' is to acknowledge and support the social economy and voluntary and co-operative organisations within it. This also provides an important link to other capitals set out in the 'Levelling Up' white paper and the importance of social capital. Mike Kenny and Tom Kelsey[120] of the Bennett Institute at Cambridge have also described the value and importance of social and local institutions. Likewise, Andy Haldane of the Bank of England described the importance of 'reweaving the social fabric' after the pandemic.[121] This further broadens our thinking about institutions but also in our understanding of infrastructure capital too.

As a whole then, we can begin to see how local institutions, together with other complementary strategies might come together to build upward spirals in the economic conditions and wealth of a place. Crucially this includes the public, private and voluntary sectors and key local institutions within each.

Figure 6.3: How different sectors, Actors and institutions come together and the Local Multiplier Effect (Westwood adapted from New Economics Foundation, 2003)

The Importance of Co-ordination and Long-term Vision/Stability

Oldham, like many places has not suffered from a shortage of strategies, plans, or national and local policy interventions (LUWP, for example, creates the latest – an Education Investment Area along with the promise of a new institution i.e. a selective sixth form[122]). As we have noted elsewhere, the rate of policy churn and the chopping and changing of local and regional economic development arrangements is quite extreme.[123] Furthermore, there has been a proliferation of funding schemes for local economic development in the past few years that even the 'Levelling Up' white paper recognises is problematic.

'Spatial policy in the UK has, by contrast, been characterised by endemic policy churn. There have been repeated changes in the policy landscape over the past century, with each phase signalling shifts at the organisational, legislative and programmatic levels. The result has been a patchwork of policies and ever-changing organisational structures. By some counts, there were almost 40 different schemes or bodies introduced to boost local or regional growth between 1975 and 2015, roughly one every 12 months'.

120. See Kelsey, T. and Kenny, M. (2021). 'Townscapes: The Value of Social Infrastructure', Bennett Institute, Cambridge: https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/social-infrastructure/
121. See Haldane, A. (2020), 'Reweaving the Social Fabric after the Crisis' Financial Times 24th April: https://www.ft.com/content/fbb1ef1c-7ff8-11ea-b0fb-13524ae1056b?
122. 'Private Eton College to launch sixth-form centre in Oldham and 'open up world-class academic opportunities', Manchester Evening News, 10t March 2022: https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/eton-college-sixth-form-oldham-23354380
123. See Institute for Government 'All Change' (2017) and Westwood, Sensier and Pike (2021) for a fuller discussion, https://www.productivity.ac.uk/publications/levelling-up-local-growth-and-productivity-in-england/.

The Complex Funding Landscape

Since 2015, one county council reported that it had submitted 61 bids for UK Government funds, ranging from £16k to £41m, to support local economic growth, each with different bid conditions. Of these, eight were unsuccessful with decisions pending on a further six. In many instances, the council was only given 1-2 months to develop their bid.

The preparation of each bid, which can include drafting substantial business cases, requires the council to commit considerable resources for work that may not result in any funding. Some of these bids cost the council hundreds of thousands of pounds to develop. Due to the variance in the nature of funding streams and their criteria, the council has found that it has bid for funding and/or delivered schemes and infrastructure that are not necessarily the top priority for the area's growth needs.

Short bidding timescales have also provided challenges in ensuring elected Members are briefed, match funding secured and resources allocated to ensure that a high quality bid can be submitted. Short timescales have also resulted in the need to commission consultants, increasing the cost of preparing each bid. It has also resulted in some councils choosing not to submit a bid for the Levelling Up Fund and/or Community Renewal Fund.

Figure 6.4: Complex Funding Landscape articulated by HMG (Levelling Up White Paper, 2022)

As the 'Levelling Up' white paper admits, this is a situation that needs addressing. As it states:

'To deliver a more transparent, simple and accountable approach, the UK Government will set out a plan for streamlining the funding landscape this year which will include a commitment to help local stakeholders navigate funding opportunities. This review will be guided by the following principles:

- Reducing the unnecessary proliferation of individual funding pots with varied delivery approaches;
- streamlining bidding, and supporting greater alignment between revenue and capital sources;
- ensuring places have robust ongoing monitoring and evaluation plans for the impact and delivery of investments and spending; and
- tailoring investment and delivery to the local institutional landscape'

Scheme	Total Fund Amount	Timeframe	Places/Institutions targeted by scheme
Towns Fund	£2.6 billion	2019-	100 Towns mostly in North/Midlands
Future High Streets	£1 billion	2019-	Towns and Cities in England
Transforming Cities Fund	£2.45 billion	2018-23	18 City-regions in England
Levelling Up Fund	£4.8 billion	2021-	UK wide
Community Ownership Funds	£150 million	2021-	UK wide voluntary and community organisations
Local Growth Deals	£9.1 billion	2014-2020	LEPs
Getting Building Fund	£1.3 billion	2020-	England – LEP and CA areas facing 'biggest economic challenges'
Coastal Communities Fund	£229 million	2012-20	Coastal Towns in England
Community Renewal Fund	£220 million	2021-22	UK wide scheme
Shared Prosperity Fund	TBC	2022-	UK wide scheme replacing EU Social/ Regional Funds

Figure 6.5: Regional and Local Spending Schemes in England/UK (Westwood, Sensier and Pike, 2021) [124]

124. See To add source link on Monday

But this churn and instability have also applied within Oldham too. Area based initiatives have come and gone in several areas – in education the latest is as an 'Education Investment Area' promised in the LUWP, though in recent years there have been 'Opportunity Areas' and several other similar interventions.

This proliferation and churn also applies to initiatives and strategies within Oldham and Greater Manchester too. This is perhaps inevitable given the sheer number of different strategies and funding pots to which local authorities are now expected to bid. But nevertheless, this remains a problem at local level that also needs managing and remedying if a single, coherent and long-term economic strategy is to be adopted successfully.

There are many plans and strategies developed locally and many groups or bodies created to oversee them. Currently in Oldham there is a Town Deal Board, a High Street Taskforce, an Oldham Business Leadership Group and an 'Oldham Model for an Inclusive Economy, Co-operative Services and Thriving Communities'. There are also a series of plans and strategies including an 'Oldham Plan', a 'Business and Investment Strategy', a 'Mill Strategy' and a 'Town Centre Masterplan'. Whilst the formation of each strategy has made sense locally and the push/pull of central government funding initiatives has further shaped this, it is likely to be more beneficial to the long -term future of the town, if these are better co-ordinated within a single longer-term vision.

Within Oldham this has also been an issue with economic partnerships and groups meeting a few times and then never again. Some of these disappear because key people move on or because the purpose or national pot of money changes. But it reinforces the sense of a lack of permanence, a decline in trust and/or poor haphazard communication between key institutions and interests. Oldham can't afford for this to keep happening. Nor can it afford to lose touch with GM institutions and networks either – it needs to play a full part in decisions and strategic planning across GM as well as ensuring that its own processes are sound.

The challenge is to have the right strategy, to consistently apply it over the long term and–to create the right institutional infrastructure to support and enact it. Key organisations and institutions in Oldham and GM must play their respective parts and so too must a national government with its respective policy approaches to local government, education, transport, health and so on. Across all of these layers, initiatives and organisations there must be better co-ordination. That is the right way to develop, apply and demonstrate institutional capital.

There are some good examples of institutions in similar places that demonstrate either a more coherent overall approach or the contribution to it that individual organisations can make if fully involved. As we described in Chapter 4, Dudley College is one example of an 'anchor institution' operating across the 'six capitals' and participating in strategic planning and thinking in the town and in the wider region.

Dudley College Case Study – a Strategic Institution in Dudley and West Midlands? [125]

As described in Chapter 4 on Skills, Neil Thomas the Principal of Dudley College gave evince to Commissioners about the role of Dudley College in its town and broader city-region (West Midlands). There are many parallels between Dudley and Oldham – both are historically manufacturing/industrial towns that have struggled with the decline of employment and wealth from these sectors in recent years. Both have relatively low levels of educational achievement and both sit as towns within larger conurbations governed by Mayors and Combined Authorities (in Dudley's case Andy Street and the West Midlands Combined Authority).

But Dudley College has expanded its role and significance to the broader city-region as well as in its relevance to the town. It has an Institute of Technology cementing its role in the town and region's intangible capital. It also is a strategic player in the town's development and co-ordinates activities with local colleges and universities as well as key local/regional employers.

125. See https://www.dudleycol.ac.uk/Portals/0/downloads/strategic_plan_2020_2023.pdf?ver=2020-02-04-150035-450

Elsewhere in Greater Manchester, there are also examples of newer strategic institutions looking to develop specific aspects of their local economies. These are imaginative in scope and form as well as ambitious in terms of the specific objectives that they have been set. In Rochdale the Development Agency, with an injection of extra capacity has set a clear strategic goal and won considerable support and investment already. In Stockport a new Mayoral vehicle in partnership with GM and the private sector is looking to redevelop in its town centre.

Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation [126]

The Stockport Town Centre West Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC)is a radical new approach to tackling future housing need and the changing role of town centres. It provides a blueprint for how powers and devolved funding combined with strong local leadership and a compelling long-term vision, can set a new benchmark for town centre regeneration. Its guiding principles are community, sustainability and innovation. The vision for Town Centre West is credible and compelling – to scale up the delivery of new urban neighbourhood homes in Greater Manchester– and the MDC is ideally placed to bring together stakeholders to make the vision a reality.

Stockport MDC has an independent board including local councillors (leaders of three main parties) plus GMCA and Homes England representatives and is chaired by Sir Bob Kerslake.

Rochdale Development Agency [127]

In Rochdale we're really proud of our history, which is why we're doing everything we can to preserve and celebrate it. Rochdale was at the heart of the industrial revolution, and it's where working men and women started a global cooperative movement that thrives to this day. The town centre is home to stunning architecture, fascinating history and – in its Grade I listed town hall – a building of "rare picturesque beauty." But it's also a town centre for today, brimming with life, leisure and culture.

Rochdale Council has established a Development Agency responsible for economic development in the Borough. Partners include, MIDAS, the Greater Manchester Growth Hub, Homes England, GM Chamber of Commerce. It is wholly owned by – and reports to – Rochdale Borough Council, but is independently chaired by economist Professor Paul Ormerod with a board including local councillors, the Principal of Hopwood Hall College, the CEO of the Council and representatives from local and regional businesses and the University of Manchester.

Projects include various infrastructure, housing, heritage and high street/town centre developments and the Advanced Machinery and Productivity Institute (AMPI) – this recently secured £22.6m in funding with the intention to create over 30,000 high value manufacturing sector jobs. AMPI is focussed on developing world leading machinery innovation, advanced materials, automation and production capabilities, vital to the future productivity, security, prosperity of the manufacturing sector in the UK economy. This funding has been provided through UK Research and Innovation's flagship Strength in Places Fund (SIPF) with further funding coming from Rochdale's Town Deal.

AMPI is a partnership with the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) will be working in partnership with Rochdale-based precision machine tool maker Precision Technologies Group (Holroyd), Fives Landis, Wayland Additive, CR Solutions, Rochdale Development Agency, Advanced Machinery & Productivity Initiative Ltd, University of Huddersfield's Centre for Precision Technologies (CPT), University of Leeds' Institute of Design, Robotics and Optimisation, The University of Manchester's Departments of Materials and Electrical and Electronic Engineering and University of Salford's Centre for Autonomous Systems & Advanced Robotics (ASAR).

These models offer useful lessons to Oldham – not least for the possibility of its own Mayoral Enterprise Zone. But perhaps the most useful are that the offer new vehicles and new capacity to approach longstanding problems.

126. See https://www.stockportmdc.co.uk
127. See https://investinrochdale.co.uk

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS – DOES OLDHAM NEED NEW INSTITUTIONS?

In both the LUWP and the Oldham Economic Review's analysis, it is clear that existing institutions should be supported and strengthened where possible – but that this, like much else, will depend on 'multi-level governance' working well i.e. the co-ordinated actions of local, regional and national departments, agencies and bodies. As the white paper identifies the importance of institutional capital and economic development literature shows how much more important existing institutions are in less well performing places, this should be more straightforward than it is. Specifically, the white paper sets out some core principles for successful local growth policy:

- **Longevity and policy sufficiency:** Spatial disparities are long-lasting and history-dependent. So, reversing history requires long-lived, sustained and consistent policy efforts that are commensurate with the scale of disparity. This is a key lesson from international experience, where successful programmes have often spanned decades and have had clear and consistent medium-term objectives.
- **Policy and delivery coordination:** As an economic ecosystem, successful local growth policy requires strategic coordination across the different arms of policy, including transport, skills, health, business, finance, education and infrastructure. It also requires strategic coordination across the different sectors responsible for delivering growth: public, private and voluntary.
- **Local empowerment:** Whilst local devolution is no panacea, local decision- making has tended to generate better local economic performance, as local policies are tailored to local needs. There is an empirical correlation between the degree of decentralisation of decision-making and spatial disparities in economic performance, perhaps reflecting this fact.
- **Evidence, monitoring and evaluation:** The geographical allocation, and economic impact, of government spending and policy has the potential to either mitigate or amplify agglomeration effects. Rigorous evaluation of government spending and policy intervention is needed to understand what is working and the contribution policy is making to closing spatial differences.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Clear accountability for outcomes, at both a national and local level, is also critical to successfully addressing spatial disparities.

However, at national level, policy frameworks in education – for example in further and higher – are based on competitive frameworks and funding and this can easily undermine rather than strengthen local provision. Furthermore, reform agendas in other public services – e.g. health, police – can push 'value for money' and regional reorganisations that are as likely to rationalise and/or withdraw facilities and services as they are to strengthen them in towns or outlying places. Oldham Council is perhaps the single most important institution in our analysis and over the last decade its core funding/spending has reduced by some £230m since 2009/10 – at least 60%[128] - with significant further reductions already planned in 2022/23 and 2023/4. So, strengthening existing institutions is rather easier said than done, despite its importance as a recommendation.

There is a similar story in further education with significant funding cuts to sixth forms and colleges. According to the IFS[129], even with additional funding from the recent spending review, college spending per pupil aged 16-18 in 2024 will still be around 10% below 2010 levels, while school sixth form spending per pupil will be a whopping 23% below 2010 levels. Additional funding for adult education and apprenticeships - because of the scale of the cuts over the last decade - means that spending in 2024 will still be one-third lower than 2010. This has a deep and sustained impact on education institutions in Oldham.

But there are things that can be actioned at a local Oldham and GM levels that are more within our control. The first is a need for a new economic structure that better co-ordinates and brings together key institutions and strategies for the long term. Existing groups and organisations may need to be rationalised and better connected to each other. Oldham Council with its leadership and co-ordination role is critical to this – and should be clear where and how organisations report or are overseen by its own structures.

128. See https://www.oldhamlabour.org.uk/2020/02/26/cllr-fieldings-speech-on-the-2020-21-budget/
129. See https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15858

There are also strong arguments and recommendations elsewhere in this report for a new approach to supporting R&D or technology diffusion within firms and organisations in Oldham (see the recommendations in the business chapter). This might be connected to new skills organisations in FE/HE such as on the existing IoT model in GM or to the nearby AMPI initiative in Rochdale.

There is also a case for following the lead of other towns in GM and creating new economic development institutions such as the MDCs in Stockport and, possibly a Mayoral Development Zone in Middleton or the Economic Development Agency or Corporation model as established in neighbouring Rochdale. The newly launched Greater Manchester Strategy confirms GM Mayor Andy Burnham's commitment to set up a Town Centre Mayoral Enterprise Zone in Oldham, though precise organisational and delivery details are yet to be developed.

But there are possible lessons emerging from each of these models. For example, both Stockport MDC and the Rochdale Development Agency are independently chaired, with additional capacity for economic development activities supported by both councils. Such organisations could offer a long-term vision and co-ordination across key institutions and to be a focus/capacity for inward investment or bidding to central government for specific projects and activities.

An overarching strategic body with additional capacity and expertise might also be a vehicle for rationalising the many existing boards or bodies that overlap and might also better co-ordinate across others eg education, town centre, social fabric and how they relate to business and the economy. These interconnections as we set out in this report are increasingly vital to the way we think about Oldham – the economy and the place are interconnected.

We recommend:

- Recognise the mutual importance of the 6 capitals in driving improvements and develop a strategy to capacity build and support key institutions.
- Set up a new overarching strategic board, with an independent chair or independent representation, to oversee the delivery of a new 2030 vision – in time this might become an urban development corporation or a model similar to the Rochdale Development Agency, but in the first instance a co-ordinating strategic board may be a first step.
- Develop clear reporting around the local "levelling up" missions and targets, back to the Council and Oldham Leadership Board.
- Work with Greater Manchester Combined Authority partners to ensure transparency about the investment of resources and expertise into Oldham and the impact of these on Oldham's levelling up vision for 2030.
- Work with the University and the college, and other key institutions, to develop a bespoke leadership and training programme, to focus the "common purpose" of all stakeholders around the 2030 vision for Oldham.
- Oldham council will develop policy with the Co-operative Council's Innovation Network to explore how we create the environment in GM and Oldham for more co-operative businesses and social enterprises to thrive, helping boost local wealth and link in to the GMCA Community Wealth Building Hub for funding grants/ digital finance start up advice.

Acknowledgements:
The report can be citied as Levelling Up Oldham: the Oldham Economic Review of Economic Transformation and Civic Pride (2022) Oldham Economic Review Board.

This report is the analysis and recommendations of the Review board collectively and does not necessarily represent the views of individual commissioners or their organisations. Within the limited capacity and time of the Review, robust efforts have been made to limit errors and omission including linking source material to encourage transparency.

The Review would like to thank Oldham Council for commissioning this independent report and for providing seed funding of £15,000, technical assistance through Jonathan Downs, Guy Parker, Mahmuda Khanom and maintaining the Review website (www.oerb.org.uk). The Review was also supported by the University of Manchester through the CAPE project with assistance from Dr Marianne Sensier and Jay Amin. Secretariat was provided by Oldham College who also hosted the Review Board meetings.

Special thanks go to the Witnesses who provided invaluable and thought-provoking insight as seen throughout the report. We are also very grateful to the think tank Onward who worked in partnership with the Review to provide in-depth research through focus groups in Oldham and Action Together Oldham for convening an engagement session with the local Community and Voluntary Sector.

LEVELLING UP OLDHAM

The Oldham Economic Review of
Economic Transformation and Civic Pride

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A copy of the full report is available from

oerb.org.uk

OERB | Oldham Economic Review Board

MARCH 2022