

Appendix 1: Oldham

Local leadership in Oldham “Co-operative Council”

At a Borough wide level, Oldham has established a Leadership Board of key partners. This is supported by three “clusters” focused on Health and Wellbeing, Economy and Skills and Co-ops and Neighbourhoods. They have six **partnerships for areas of the city** made up of between 2 and 7 wards (there are 20 wards with an average population of 11,250).

The original partnership meetings consisted of open public questions, partner updates and a formal decision making element for the councillors (this means there are delegations to the partnership councillors and to the chair acting with officers). Recently the meetings have evolved into separate community forums, strategic working groups and a streamlined partnership executive meeting and this is still developing.

The partnerships are complimented by **networks** of community and voluntary organisations. These organise events, raise funding for projects and take action to respond to urgent community issues.

The council has established a **Local Leaders programme** for councillors. This consists of a series of workshops on themes such as “making the co-operative difference”, “using customer insights to engage with the community”, social media, personal resilience and asset based community development. The workshops are facilitated by external experts from North West Employers, other councils and universities. The workshops are held monthly in early afternoon and early evening slots.

Councillors in Oldham are given an individual budget to fund projects in their ward. This was £3,000 per year and has now been raised to £5,000. Councillors complete an annual declaration on their spending and it is monitored by officers. An attempt to link the budgets to agreed local priorities did not prove successful as was abandoned.

The council aims to become progressively more localised and bottom up. **Staff** will fall into three groups: Dedicated (full time in local areas, such as area co-ordinators and Neighbourhood Caseworkers), Designated (significant amount of time in local areas, such as highways officers) and Borough-wide/specialist (planning, strategic housing, finance, communications etc.). Dedicated and Designated staff work together in area teams. A Neighbourhood Services Directorate was created to oversee this work. Devolved funding and staff have been reduced but are still in place, working from offices (“town halls”) in the local area. The city centre office is in the Civic Centre, whilst the others form part of local hubs with libraries, community centres

They have established a process through which areas can bid to run a particular service in their area. This involves the submission of a business case to a Cabinet Committee. This is similar to the idea in Birmingham of enabling parish councils to bid for a “devolution deal” for their area.

Measuring the co-operative difference: Oldham's approach to measuring the impact of co-operative working

Oldham is keen to demonstrate that the co-operative approach makes real practical differences to people in the borough and is developing a methodology on behalf of the whole Co-operative Councils Innovation Network. Their approach starts from asking "what is co-operative about the solution proposed?" Co-operative solutions, it is argued create "ripple" impacts beyond the immediate service delivery outcome. It is important to measure those impacts as well.

This is divided into three types of impact:

- Place impacts, such as better networks, increased resilience, stronger communities and sustainable change
- People impacts, such as individual resilience, confidence and self-worth, better opportunities for change and
- Public service impacts, such as reduced dependency, changed relationships with communities.

"A Co-operative Place" is described as one with a strong economy and opportunities for growth, thriving businesses, sectors working towards a common vision, high levels of productivity and diverse and cohesive communities.

"Co-operative People" are described as confident and willing to work with others and services, skilled, productive, employable and healthy, able to find their own solutions and proud of where they live.

"Co-operative Public Services" are those which have a shared asset based understanding of needs, collaborate effectively, pool assets, find new ways of working and focus on delivering shared outcomes and maximising social value.

The co-operative approach to change

Oldham colleagues emphasise that the idea of the co-operative council is not about a blue-print for redesigning the council. It is more of an organic process of change, built from an ongoing process of generating ideas, implementing them, scaling them up and learning from them. This is a way of creating a positive, can-do culture and ensuring that all levels of the organisation and the community are engaged in the changes being made (something which is not possible with top down plans).

In 2011 when Oldham started their Co-operative journey, there was a lack of trust in the council and satisfaction levels with the council were poor only 22% satisfaction. Now reputation surveys are carried out every 6 months and satisfaction is at 70%.

Under a new Chief Executive they have up front, a set of 'Co-operative Behaviours':

- Work with a resident focus
- Support local leaders (councillors)

- Committed to the Borough (everyone is seen as an ambassador, communicating the positives about Oldham. This could include being an ambassador for your neighbourhood. Each employee has up to 3 paid days to work in the local community)
- Take ownership and drive change
- Deliver high ('getting the basics right').

Practical projects

Green Schemes

The Green Dividend Fund. A £100,000 one-off fund to kick start community action on gardening and landscaping projects. Community groups can apply for £500 or £5000 on a competitive basis, with the successful ideas being those that make a real difference now and can be maintained in the future. A Green Dividend Ambassador supports groups in working up their ideas. The universal phase of the fund was completed and a targeted fund was brought in for the second year linked to areas selected for private landlord licensing. The aim is to encourage people to work together in the community, so the “ripple” effect is not just the improved neighbourhood.

Street Trees Fund. A £100,000 fund which can be used to match funding from individual members budgets where local people want to see trees planted.

Generation Oldham. This is Oldham's community energy programme, which gives residents a chance to own shares in the Community Benefit Society (Oldham Community Power). Community groups can express interest in having solar panels installed on public buildings in their area. Oldham Community Power raises funding and installs the solar panels and the community group receives discounted electricity. The programme is now in phase 2 and involved training for young people in renewable technologies, with DECC and EU funding.

Co-operative Campaigns

As a co-operative council Oldham campaigns on issues that matter to local residents. Examples have included:

- **Fares Fair** – achieved a 28% saving on bus fares for Oldham that has now been rolled out across Greater Manchester
- **Fair energy** – A collective energy switching campaign which secured a better deal of 8,700 residents. Again this was rolled out across the met area.

Oldham colleagues emphasise that campaigns can often lead to real practical initiatives as well as impacting on public and political attitudes. The Fair Energy campaign led to Warm Homes Oldham, a partnership between the council, the CCG and housing providers to provide new insulation and heating systems to people at risk of fuel poverty. 3,000 households have been helped so far. Another campaign “Our House” was less successful but made its point. It was intended to give people

an alternative to the rent-to-buy providers of home appliances and furniture by opening a shop providing quality local products and services.

Housing

The co-operative offer on housing is that residents can afford to heat their homes, know how to manage their finances, do their bit and share resources, are proud of their neighbourhood and have fair access to appropriate housing.

Working Xtra. Working Xtra builds recognition of citizens that make a positive contribution into the allocation policy of RSLs. Households that are working, in work related training, caring or volunteering can apply to a range of homes available to those who qualify from this initiative. Every year around 300-350 homes are advertised as WorkingXtra, this includes at least 15% of re-lets and 50% of new builds. The aim is partly to reduce dependency and to create more resilient and diverse communities.

Employment

Fair Employment Charter. Similar to Birmingham's Business Charter for Social Responsibility. Signatories are expected to pay a living wage, offer fair contracts, training and support, support trade unions and enable employees to do voluntary activities.

Get Oldham Working. A strategic programme to increase skills, employment, business engagement and support activities. Run by a small team employed by the council. this is available to all ages and matches people looking for work with opportunities in apprenticeships and training. Over three years it has helped over 5,000 people into the labour market. It has recently been augmented by a Working Skills Strategy that aims to help people develop their skills whilst in employment.