

Oldham a  
Co-operative  
council

Co-operative Innovation: The Oldham Approach

We can all make a positive difference to our communities by choosing to take more responsibility



## A message from

Councillor Jim McMahon, Leader of Oldham Council

Since we launched our Co-operative Oldham ambition in May 2011, we've become a co-operative pioneer on a local, regional, and national scale. As a founding member of the Co-operative Councils' Network, we've played a leading role in this growing movement. Indeed, we've even attracted interest at an international level from co-operative colleagues in Europe.

For me, Oldham's co-operative approach is about making the most of the strengths that lie in our communities and starting from the assumption that people are able to play an active part in solving their own problems. As a local resident myself, I know that we can all make a positive difference to our communities – from giving our time to support local community groups, to helping to keep our neighbourhoods clean and tidy by putting our litter in the bin. I believe that everyone who lives or works in Oldham has a stake in what happens here, and everyone can do their bit – big or small – for the benefit of our borough.

That's true for us as a council too – we need to lead by example in doing our bit for Oldham. This means using our power and influence as a commissioner, employer, and provider of services to enact positive change, whether that's through the Living Wage, which means that people earn a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, or through our campaigns on fair energy and fair public transport costs, which are seeing us champion positive change on behalf of residents and communities whose voices are all too often left unheard.

This exemplifies how we're leading innovation as a Co-operative Council – not by treating local people as passive recipients of our help, but by empowering residents to actively address the issues that matter most to them and by capitalising on the power and influence that we as a council can leverage on their behalf.

*Jim McMahon*





everybody  
doing their bit  
and everybody  
benefitting

## Co-operative Innovation in Oldham

Oldham is committed to developing a co-operative future; one where citizens, partners and staff work together to improve the borough and create a confident and ambitious place. We want all members of the community to be able to play an active part in building our co-operative borough. Put simply, becoming a co-operative borough is about everybody doing their bit and everybody benefitting.

The public sector faces unprecedented financial challenges, with budgets being reduced rapidly and significantly. In Oldham, this will see the council's net budget reduced by 50% over a period of just five years.

As we face a perfect storm of shrinking budgets and increasing demand for services, there is a risk that a gap will be created between the services that residents expect to receive, and the services that we are able to deliver. This means that both public services and residents will have to change the way they operate. Public services will need to work to reduce reliance on services by giving away more power and responsibility to residents, and residents in turn will need to be positively enabled to solve more of their own problems; to do more to help themselves and each

other; and to work in collaboration with the council to actively design and deliver local services that are relevant and meaningful to them.

This is our opportunity to fundamentally reshape the relationship between public services and residents. That's why we're strengthening our civic leadership role, leading by example and enabling residents and communities to become more self-reliant. It's why we're working together with communities and partner agencies in ways which give residents the opportunity to shape how services are run, how decisions are made, and what happens where they live. And it's why we're empowering local people to take greater control over their own lives by making positive decisions for their families and their neighbourhoods. Underpinning all of this, we will endeavour to run our own business in a way which delivers the greatest possible social value for our borough.

Most importantly of all, far from simply managing decline in a context of exceptional economic and social challenges, we're leading co-operative innovation by thinking creatively and working collaboratively far beyond the confines of our own organisation.



## What we're doing differently as a business

As an organisation, a co-operative approach provides us with the opportunity to find positive and sustainable solutions to the ongoing financial challenges we face. Ours is a values-driven approach which underpins the way we do business. We believe in the importance of fairness and responsibility. In practice, that means maximising the positive social, economic and environmental impact that we can achieve through everything we do. From our procurement practices to our pay policy, we're using our influence as a commissioner, service-provider and employer to deliver added social value through our business practices.



Neighbourhood Team volunteering to clean up a community centre garden.

### Case study: Ethical Framework

Our Ethical Framework is our enhanced approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR). As well as encompassing conventional CSR schemes like payroll giving and a commitment to environmental responsibility, our approach goes much further. Our Co-operative Oldham Fund, for example, enables us to invest in innovative community ideas that deliver lasting and sustainable benefits for local people, whilst our commitment to the Living Wage means that no full-time member of council staff earns less than the local cost of living. Through our Employer-Supported Volunteering scheme, each member of council staff can spend three days each year supporting local voluntary organisations with their specialist skills and expertise. On top of these initiatives, we're constantly working to use our own power and influence to lobby for change on behalf of our communities through our campaigns for fairer public transport prices, fairer access to credit, fairer energy costs, and fairer support for local business start-ups and SMEs. Through these initiatives and many more, our Ethical Framework gives us the opportunity as a business and as an employer to do our bit for Oldham.

### Case study: Our Campaign for Fair Energy

As fuel costs rise and family incomes fall, we're doing our bit to help Oldham's communities secure affordable energy through our Fair Energy Campaign. As well as conventional programmes such as subsidised home insulation, we're engaged in innovative solutions such as community mass-purchasing to secure the fairest deal for local people. Through a collaboration with our partners iChoosr, we've already launched the Oldham Energy Co-operative. Once we reach our target of 3,000 local households signed up to the co-operative, we'll run a collective energy auction, where energy companies will be competing to submit the best-priced bid to sell energy to everyone who joined. By working in close collaboration with our communities and our partners iChoosr, our Fair Energy campaign is delivering co-operative innovation that will make a real difference to families across our borough. This exemplifies how we're leading innovation as a Co-operative Council – not by treating local people as passive recipients of our help, but by capitalising on the power and influence that we as a council can leverage on their behalf.

### Case study: Employer-Supported Volunteering

We ask our colleagues to share their skills, time and expertise by volunteering with charities and voluntary organisations across our borough. Indeed, we believe that working for Oldham Council means that our people have a responsibility to do their bit for the community. That's why we give our staff up to three days paid time away from their normal duties every year to volunteer locally. That means accountants advising charities on their finances; senior managers supporting community groups to plan for their future; and marketing officers assisting youth clubs with their advertising strategy. In 2012/13 alone, this means that our staff will give 10,000 hours of their time back to the community.

## What we're doing differently with our partners

In the face of unprecedented challenges – rising unemployment, significant health inequalities, and rapidly reducing public-sector resources – we need to work together in radically different ways. This means pooling budgets, co-producing solutions and thinking again about our relationship with partner agencies.

That's why we're encouraging our partners across the public, private and third sectors to take more of a leading role in driving positive change, and why we're working together to deliver innovation through collaboration.



### Case study:

Housing allocations:  
Recognising a community contribution

Working with Oldham's registered housing providers, we've introduced a borough-wide housing allocations policy that recognises the positive community contributions that many of our residents make. Our 'Working Xtra' allocations scheme positively rewards tenants who do their bit through, for example, volunteering with local groups or taking part in training and employment opportunities. Residents who make this community contribution are given preference when housing providers allocate tenants to 50% of the borough's new-build social housing stock – also helping to ensure a positive social mix of tenants in each area. By working in partnership with the local housing sector to develop a coherent approach to allocations which recognises and rewards positive choices and positive participation, we're making a co-operative difference by doing our bit for those who do their bit in communities across our borough.

### Case study:

Fuel poverty investment agreement

We're launching the country's first Investment Agreement with our partners in the local NHS and local housing sector. Together, we're collectively investing £200,000 to bring 1000 households in Oldham out of fuel poverty in the first year alone. Using the Investment Agreement methodology drawn from the community budgeting pilots – for which Oldham is the national exemplar – we've worked together with Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Oldham Housing Investment Partnership to agree shared aspirations, shared outcomes, and shared responsibility for radically transforming the lives of 1000 families in the space of a single year, whilst at the same time significantly reducing the longer-term impact of fuel poverty on the public sector purse. Recognising the radical impact this work will have in preventing high-cost adverse outcomes ranging from respiratory conditions to poor mental health, we're also embedding a payment-by-results approach which will see Oldham CCG contribute an additional £250 and Oldham Council an additional £50 for every single person successfully taken out of fuel poverty. By thinking creatively to drive public sector innovation as well as improved outcomes for residents, we're leading the sector through a pioneering approach to positive, preventative, collaborative action.

## What we're doing differently with communities

Working with communities at a neighbourhood level, we're enabling residents to take greater control over their own lives and over the services and amenities that matter most to them. We're devolving power and responsibility, and we're supporting people to do more to help themselves and each other. By building greater

resilience and self-reliance, we're enabling individuals and communities to make positive choices to change their neighbourhoods for the better – whether that means small choices that make a big difference, like putting litter in the bin instead of dropping it on the street, or making a big change, like taking control of local services.



### Case study:

Fulwood Rangers

We're giving local people control of Fulwood Nature Reserve in Sholver to help improve the site and open it up to the community. From October 2012, a local community group called the 'Fulwood Rangers' will be granted a peppercorn lease on the site for 30 years. By transferring stewardship of the site to this group of nature enthusiasts, we're enabling them to transform the run-down site into community allotments, shared gardens, a refurbished nature reserve, and outdoor sports facilities for the local community, all funded through a £45,000 grant which was secured through a partnership with Groundwork. Together with Voluntary Action Oldham, our local voluntary-sector infrastructure organisation, we're also supporting the group to become a sustainable enterprise by assisting them with business-planning and advising them through the process of becoming a limited company, ensuring that, as well as giving Fulwood Rangers control of the reserve, we're also supporting them to develop and grow into the future.

### Case study:

PASSinc (People with Autism Support Group, Siblings Included)

In Spring 2012, a small group of parents in Saddleworth approached their local Youth Development Officer to find out what support was available locally for people with autistic spectrum disorders and their families. Together, they agreed that their own collective experience meant that they were best placed to decide what type of support was needed and then deliver it themselves with support from the council's local team of community-based staff. Our Youth Development Officer offered the local youth centre as a venue for the parents' use and supported the fledgling group to become established, to secure funding, and to undertake necessary precautions around safeguarding and risk assessment. With our support, the group have been running successfully since June as PASSinc – People with Autism Support Group, Siblings Included – ensuring that families across rural Saddleworth and Lees can access support, activities and resources that are tailored for people with autistic spectrum disorders in their community.

# Co-operative Oldham

## **Our vision**

To deliver a co-operative future where everyone does their bit to create a confident and ambitious borough.

## **How to sum it up**

Everybody does their bit for Oldham, and everybody benefits.

## **What makes it different?**

Building a co-operative future is about fundamentally changing the relationship between public services and local people by enabling and encouraging residents to take more responsibility for making our borough a great place to live and work.

## **Our values**

Co-operative Oldham is a values-driven approach, underpinned by a belief in the importance of fairness, and a commitment to delivering it.

**Fairness**

**Openness**

**Responsibility**

**Working together**

**Accountability**

**Respect**

**Democracy**

If you'd like to learn more about Oldham's Co-operative Future please contact:

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**working for a co-operative borough**

