

Oldham Cultural Strategy

2022-2030



Introduction

Oldham has a distinctive and high-quality cultural and heritage offer that far outstrips what would be expected for a borough of its size and location.

Culture and heritage have a central place in the borough and in Oldham Council's future vision for Oldham town centre and growing thriving communities.

The council and its partners are keen to ensure the sustainability of the borough as a place to work, visit and enjoy.



Despite being developed entirely within the devastating context of COVID-19, this strategy set outs a positive, ambitious shared vision, values and priorities for culture in Oldham.

It reflects evidence and insights from research and consultation conducted online with over 800 local residents, workers and other stakeholders between July 2020 and March 2021.

These stakeholders include Oldham's newly formed Cultural Partnership Board, who will be responsible for driving forward this strategy and monitoring its successful delivery.

Vision and Values

Our vision

"Our long-term vision is for cultural engagement to be a cornerstone of future life in Oldham.

We want culture in Oldham to be more visible, accessible, inclusive, innovative and exciting.

We want our distinctive heritage and dynamic cultural offer to bring diverse residents, audiences and visitors from all backgrounds together in Oldham – entertaining, inspiring and enabling them to lead more creative, equitable, healthy, happy and prosperous lives.

We want to celebrate this unique and proud borough of Greater Manchester: a place where artists, cultural organisations, businesses and communities are able to work closely together and are supported to develop and thrive."

Oldham Cultural Partnership Board





Values



Current Position

Strengths and opportunities

Place and Space	<p>‘Selfless spirit, proud heritage’: with innovation, ideas, industry and enterprise in its DNA, Oldham values tradition, entertainment and heritage and has produced many inspirational figures, creative talents and cultural leaders.</p> <p>Strong creative and cultural assets: such as Oldham Libraries, Gallery Oldham, Coliseum Theatre, Shaw Playhouse, Saddleworth Museum, Oldham Theatre Workshop, Oldham Music Service, Peshkar, Mahdlo Youth Zone, 1853 Studios, great parks and landscapes, and a varied history and heritage.</p> <p>Ambitious new projects: including Northern Roots, a new £16m performance space, new flexible workspace and The Space at Mahdlo Youth Zone.</p> <p>Location and connectivity: low costs of living; good road, rail and tram networks which support audience and workforce mobility within the region and beyond.</p>
People and Partnerships	<p>‘Broad, vibrant, creative community’: artists, musicians, performers, crafts, digital makers and more.</p> <p>Committed local authority and partners: Oldham Council is working with Arts Council England, GMCA and others to develop and promote creative and cultural assets, talent, programme and strategy.</p> <p>Thriving, varied offer for young people: including University Campus Oldham, Oldham College, Oldham 6th form college, Oldham Local Cultural Education Partnership, good schools and youth-focused cultural organisations.</p> <p>Diverse and growing population: being an industrial town with a large, growing BAME community (22.5%) creates a diverse multicultural mix with potential to enliven the offer.</p>
Programme and Productivity	<p>Positive perceptions of Oldham’s cultural offer: varied, independent, innovative, family-friendly, vibrant.</p> <p>Sector strengths: in particular, theatre and outdoor events are seen as well-served in the borough.</p> <p>Large audience catchment: 1.7 million in a 30-minute radius.</p>

Our Heritage

Oldham's rich cultural history finds its roots firmly within Old Time Musical Hall theatres and folk music. Famous cultural icons from the borough include Christopher Biggins, Dora Bryan, Cannon & Ball, Dr Brian Cox, Shobna Gulati, Eric Sykes, Olivia Cooke, Phillip Schofield, and Bernard Cribbins. The town is also the birthplace of fish and chips, first served on Tommyfield Market in the 1860s.

Music

There have been many great musicians and their music from Oldham. During a 60 year career Sir William Walton, wrote symphonies, coronation anthems, opera and even music for wartime propaganda films. Soprano Eva Turner, DJ Carl Cox and bands with Oldhamers in, such as Barclay James Harvest, N-Trance, The Inspiral Carpets and Take That have attained fame.

Cinema

Oldham's early cinemas included the Dreamland Picture House, The Palladium Picture House (1913) and the Grosvenor Super Cinema (1920). At their peak there was a run of cinemas along Union Street. The Roxy at Hollinwood was a landmark for many years. Films set in Oldham include *Yanks* (1979) and *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000). Lots more movies have been filmed here, doubling for other places, including *The Damned United* (2009), *Brassed Off* (1996).



Brian Cox

By Duncan.Hull - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=54362393>



Shobna Gulati



William Walton



Olivia Cooke

Image Copyright - Olivia Cooke by Gage Skidmore
Created: 24 March 2018

Our Heritage

Theatre

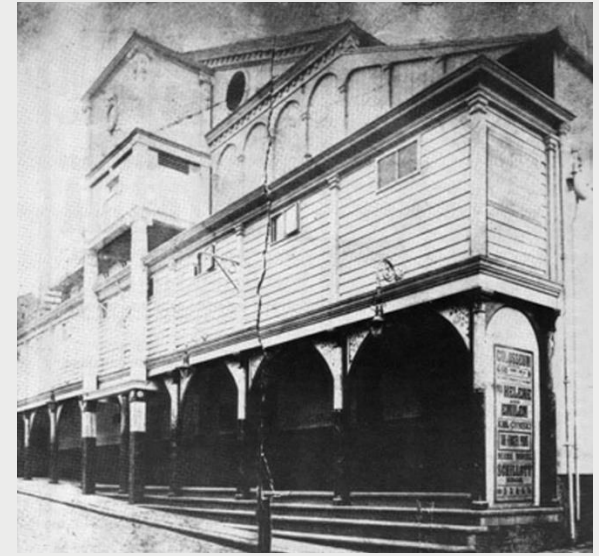
Music Hall and variety reached the peak of its popularity in the latter half of the 19th Century and Oldham was well served by theatres. The first recorded theatre performance here took place at the Red Lion Hotel in 1807. A number of purpose-built theatres were built including The Eagle Theatre (1810) and The Hippodrome Theatre (1868). Most notable is The Oldham Coliseum, which traces its history back to 1885 and is one of the longest-operating theatres in Britain. Charlie Chaplin, Dora Bryan, Eric Sykes, and Dame Thora Hird have all performed there.

Visual Arts

The Oldham School of Art opened in 1864, next to the Lyceum. Two of the most famous artists it produced paid tribute to the town in their names: William Stott of Oldham and Thomas Oldham Barlow. Barlow was a mezzotint engraver, who helped to popularise the works of John Phillip and Sir John Everett Millais. In the 20th century the school produced many artists and designers including Helen Bradley and Brian Clarke.

Literature

As well as Joseph Lees, writers and poets from Oldham include: Roy Fuller, Benjamin Brierley and Jane Walsh, textile worker and writer, whose autobiography, *Not Like This*, captured the life of an Oldham mill girl and means testing in 1930s.



Coliseum Theatre 1913



The School of Art and Lyceum building

Our offer

There are many established cultural institutions in Oldham. The borough benefits from a range of grassroots and community-led facilities such as the **Shaw Playhouse 2**, **Lyceum Players** and **Millgate Arts Centre**. There is also the widely acclaimed Saddleworth Band Contest with participants not only from the local area but also abroad.

A number of our venues and services are operated by Oldham Council. **Gallery Oldham** provides exhibitions, events, education, and outreach initiatives focusing on art, craft, digital media, social history, photography, and natural history. More than 106,000 people visited in 2019/20. More than 9,300 families and young people have taken part in activities.

Other local authority run venues that provide services to residents of all ages include **Oldham Arts Development Service**, **Oldham Local Studies and Archives**, **Oldham Theatre Workshop** and **Oldham Music Service**

Our library service is the second busiest in Greater Manchester and in 2019/20 more than 1.1 million people visited a library in the borough, with more than 600,000 of these visiting Oldham Library.



The entrance to Galley Oldham and Oldham Library



Saddleworth Band Contest



The Illuminate Festival

Our offer

Oldham is also home to independent cultural venues such as **Oldham Coliseum Theatre** (OCT), an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. As well as staging live performances, including world premieres, it also holds accessible performances including audio-described, British Sign Language, captioned or dementia-friendly.

Peshkar – which receives council support is another National Portfolio Organisation. It works with hard to reach young people and delivers projects locally and internationally.

1853 Studios is a complex of artists' studios in Osborne Mill in Chadderton, Oldham founded by visual artist Rachel Nettles in 2019. The **Limehurst Arts Society** delivers community art programmes.

Mahdlo is a state-of-the-art Youth Zone in the heart of Oldham providing activities for 8 to 19-year-olds (and up to 25-year-olds for young people with a disability).

Grange Arts Centre is used extensively by students of Performing Arts and Technical students, both for training purposes and for showcasing their productions. Grange Arts is also used by a variety of companies including local theatrical societies and dancing schools.

Saddleworth Museum is a small community museum located in the heart of Saddleworth. Situated in one of the out buildings of a nineteenth century Victorian Mill (the only part of the mill to survive), it stands in an historic and beautiful location beside the Huddersfield Narrow Canal in the village of Uppermill.



Oldham Music Service



A Different Way Home – Oldham Coliseum

Issues and challenges

Place and Space	<p>Negative perceptions of Oldham as a place: some image and reputational problems, internally and externally; failure to share compelling, positive vision and stories.</p> <p>Asset gaps: a shortage of informal, independent spaces for emerging young talent; affordable artist and SME workspaces; music shops and venues; rehearsal and recording studios; and professional dance facilities.</p> <p>Infrastructure issues: existing buildings in need of repair and investment.</p> <p>Town vs borough: for example, Oldham town centre is seen by some as unsafe, with a weak leisure / night-time offer; the wider borough is not well connected; there is perceived to be too much focus on town centre.</p>
People and Partnerships	<p>Diversity gaps: insufficient diversity in Oldham's creative and cultural workforce (in particular, performing arts).</p> <p>Talent drain: lack of local opportunities for young people (post-18); relatively low income, employment and skills base; talent drain to Manchester.</p> <p>Wider social context: growing demand for public services, weak community cohesion, social deprivation, relatively low arts engagement.</p> <p>Collaboration gaps: perceived lack (so far) of signposting, sharing, reciprocity, collaboration, joined-up thinking, marketing and fundraising.</p> <p>COVID-19: negative impacts on cultural audiences.</p>
Programme and Productivity	<p>Negative perceptions of Oldham's cultural offer: limited, uninspiring, provincial, underfunded, poorly marketed.</p> <p>Strong regional competition: 22 venues and 17 cinemas within a 30-minute radius.</p> <p>Heritage vs contemporary culture: focus on tradition, potentially leading to lack of creative risk-taking and 'edge'.</p> <p>COVID-19: negative impacts on cultural workers and businesses.</p>

Strategic Priorities 2022–2026

Place and Space

1. Develop and share **compelling narratives** about Oldham, including more and better success stories.
2. Create and build an **alumni network** of successful Oldhamers, as advocates and ambassadors for the borough.
3. Develop a new home for Oldham Coliseum within a multipurpose creative and cultural venue that develops and showcases emerging talent, with strong links to industry and to other arts development, training and support organisations.
4. Develop a **town centre-based accessible collections store**, improving access to heritage and cultural resources for all sections of the community and safeguarding accredited status.
5. Improve the availability and quality of **creative workspace and facilities** in Oldham, with a focus on addressing gaps and ensuring spaces are inclusive, affordable and accessible.



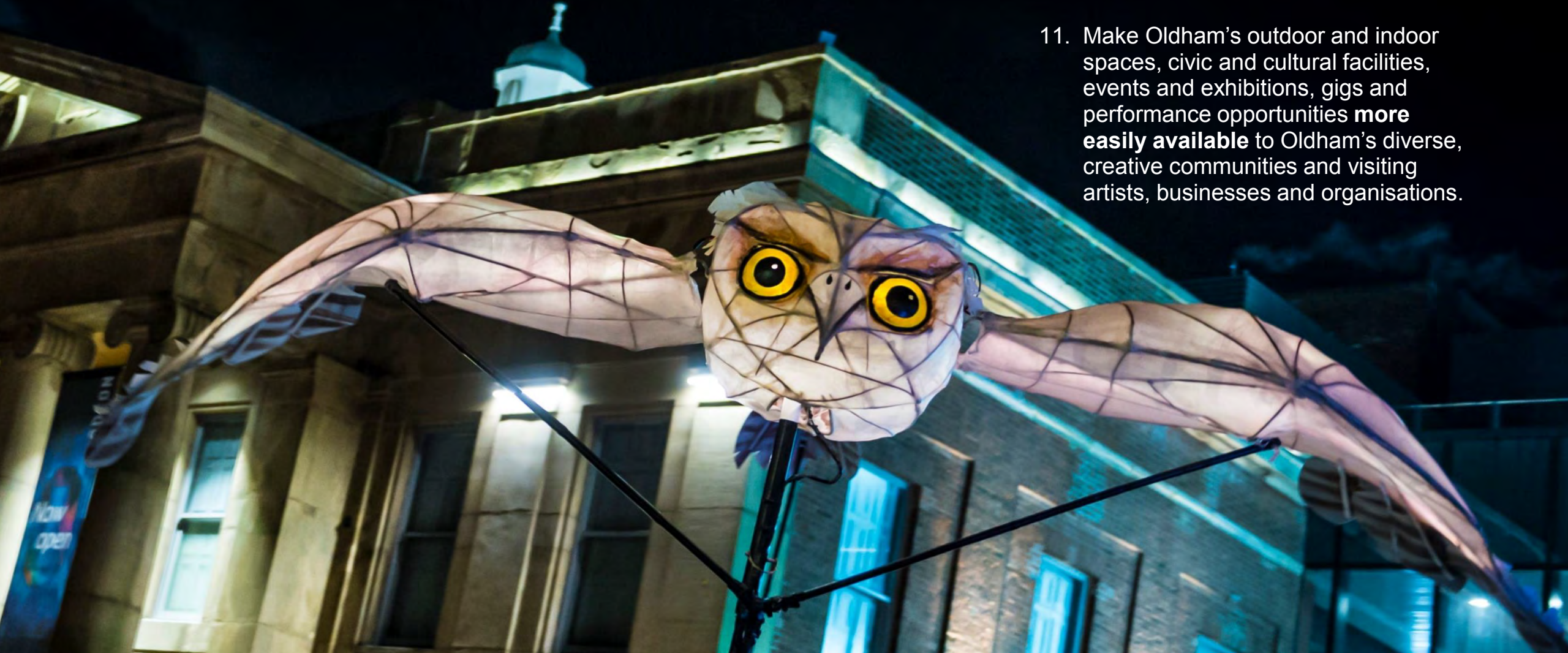
People and Partnerships



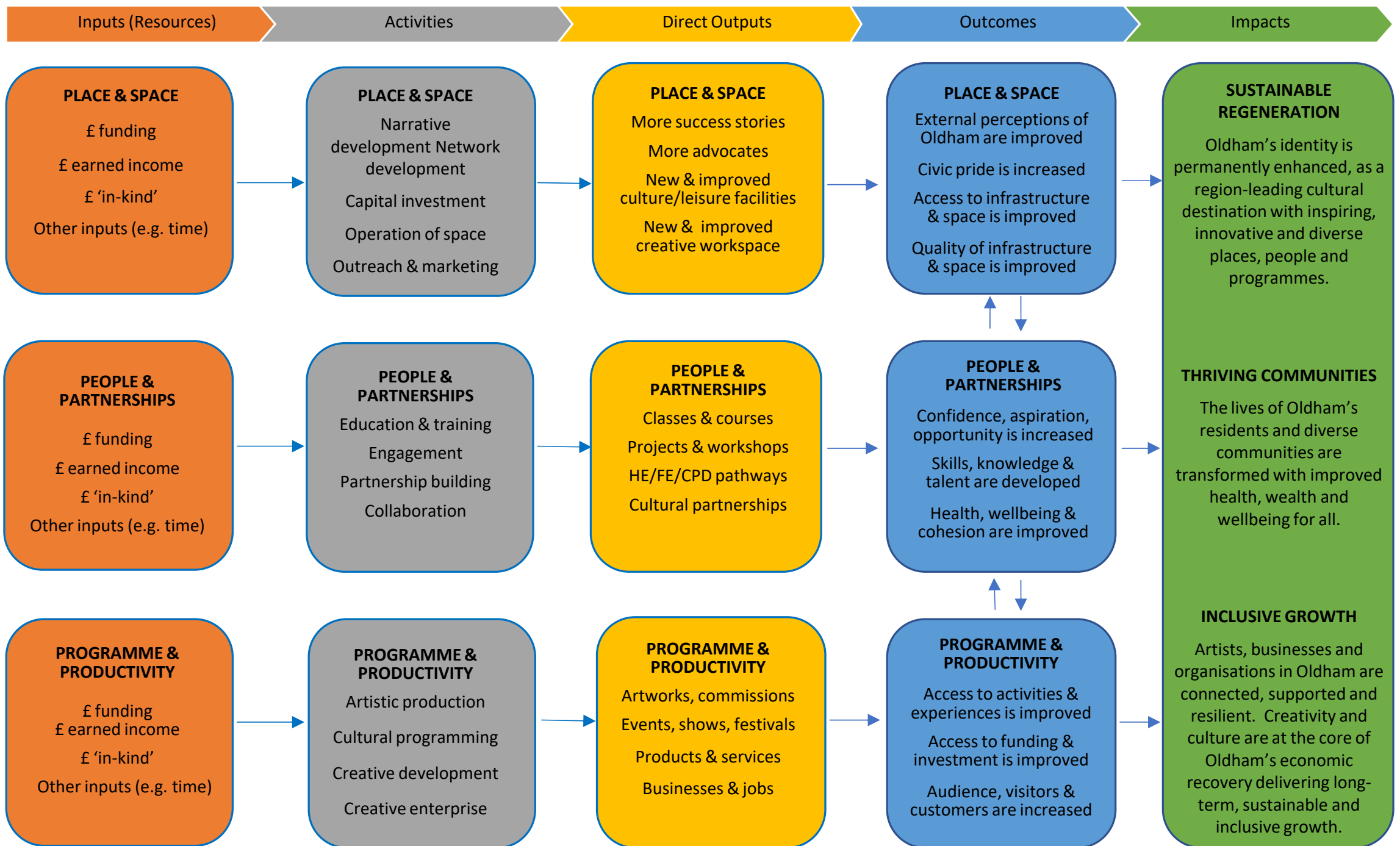
6. Develop a **strong, sustainable governance and partnership approach** to all aspects of cultural strategy and delivery.
7. Strengthen and extend Oldham's **relationships with Further Education and Higher Education institutions, training providers and intermediary agencies** locally and across Greater Manchester, to create better pathways and progression routes for creative and cultural talent and career development.
8. Strengthen and extend Oldham's **partnerships and collaborations with Greater Manchester's creative people, producers and promoters** as well as other regional and national organisations and networks.

Programmes and Productivity

9. Develop more innovative, effective and sustainable approaches to **marketing and communications**, helping raise awareness and inclusive engagement in cultural opportunities across the borough.
10. Develop a '**one-stop shop**' model (e.g. a physical and virtual hub with community-based satellites) for supporting and promoting cultural talent and activities taking place across the whole borough of Oldham.
11. Make Oldham's outdoor and indoor spaces, civic and cultural facilities, events and exhibitions, gigs and performance opportunities **more easily available** to Oldham's diverse, creative communities and visiting artists, businesses and organisations.



Outcomes and Impacts





#OldhamCulture

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