

**The Oldham Partnership recently met with Government officials to illustrate the exciting initiatives it is working on, and to examine areas for improvement.**

February 8<sup>th</sup> 2005

On January 20<sup>th</sup> the Oldham Partnership (OP) was visited by Yvette Cooper MP (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) and representatives from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) and Government Office North West (GONW). This gave OP a fantastic opportunity to illustrate to both the Minister and the NRU the improvements that have been made, and the ambitious plans of the Partnership over the coming months.

The Minister was given a tour of the area whilst her colleagues received an update on the capabilities of the OldhamInfo website ([www.OldhamInfo.org](http://www.OldhamInfo.org)) – both of which received excellent feedback. Included in the tour of the Borough was a stop-off at the Junior University at the Sixth Form College (pictured, right). The Junior University targets the 14-19 years age group and provides co-ordinated support to make the transition into ongoing education as easy as possible. The Minister was “very impressed” and said that “the ideas they are trying here are very innovative and very interesting”. The Junior University is crucial in OP’s drive to have a highly-skilled workforce, and the Minister said the ideas used may well be employed throughout the country. “It could well be that Oldham is leading the way,” she said.



The visitors then met with the OP Executive Group, and were given a presentation by Gail Richards (Chair of OP, Chief Executive of Primary Care Trust) and Andrew Kilburn (Chief Executive of Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council), before a discussion was chaired by Gail that gave the Minister the opportunity to find out more about the regeneration in the area, and the plans for the future.

The presentation highlighted three challenges facing OP and three OP success stories, and how they have been addressed by working together.

## Challenges

- Employment – Whilst Oldham has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest Economic Activity Rate in Greater Manchester and a higher employment rate than the North West average, inequalities exist in specific hot-spots. 4 Oldham wards are in the worst 50 unemployment wards in Greater Manchester. A number of wards have very high unemployment rates for young people.
- Health – The mortality rate is 30% higher than the national average, although life expectancy has been steadily increasing over the last 10 years. A range of lifestyle initiatives such as Energize and the smoking ban in the Shopping Centres of Oldham have been introduced to support this.
- Community Cohesion – Whilst a lot of progress has been made, community cohesion remains as one of our greatest challenges and needs to stay high on the Government agenda.

## Achievements

- Education – Excellent OFSTED inspection results for LEA, Sixth Form College and Oldham College. The percentage of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs A\* to C has risen year-on-year since 2000/01.
- Crime Reduction – Reduction in the number of vehicle crimes by almost 50% since 1999/00 (per 1,000 population), and burglaries from 36 in 1999/00 to 24 in 2004/5 (per 1,000 population).
- Teenage Pregnancy – Teenage conceptions per 1,000 fell from 66.1 in 1998, to 55.8 in 2002, which equates to a ranking move from 17/148 to 32/148.

Attention was also drawn to the fact that clear common goals unite the members of the OP, which can be seen by such publications as The Community Strategy and Oldham Beyond.

The discussion covered a variety of topics around the work of OP, but some common threads could be found throughout. OP acknowledged that there were still inequalities within the Borough, but it was committed to finding solutions to these through cross-Partnership working and the accurate targeting of specific problems. The Minister was reminded that one initiative could underpin a lot of the work of OP, and that was the extension of the Metrolink network. The Executive was assured by the Minister that the message had been taken on board, and would be fed back through the appropriate channels.

**In a final summary, the Minister said that the work of the OP is definitely on the right track, although it would help if it could “go faster”. With the location of the Borough in relation to Manchester and the Northern Way, Oldham is in a fantastic position – the challenge now is to make the most of this.**

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