

Present: Councillor McLaren (Chair)
Councillors Aslam, Chauhan, Kenyon, Lancaster, Rustidge
(Vice-Chair) and Shuttleworth (Substitute)

Also in Attendance:

Emma Barton

Fiona Greenway

Jack Grennan

Vickie Lambert

Fran Lautman

Elaine Taylor

Lee Walsh

Finance Services

Constitutional Services

Finance Services

Assistant Director of Customer
Experience

Assistant Director of Finance

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Arnott, Councillor Cosgrove (Councillor Shuttleworth substituting) and Councillor Ibrahim.

Apologies were also received from Councillors Shah and Jabbar as Cabinet Members, with Councillor Taylor attending as substitute.

2 URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that two agenda items had been withdrawn from the agenda, Revenue Monitor and Capital Investment Programme 2025/26 Month 2, and Draft 2024/25 Annual Statement of Accounts. The Revenue Monitor and Capital Investment Programme item was withdrawn as the updates were going to be received by the Board quarterly going forward, and the Draft 2024/25 Annual Statement of Accounts was withdrawn due to the item being in the scope of the Audit committee.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions received from members of the public.

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS GOVERNANCE, STRATEGY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY BOARD MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th June 2025 be approved as a correct record.

6 ACTIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Fran Lautman presented the item, noting that it had been requested at the previous board meeting.

It was noted that the new centre in the Spindles had been open for a year. Call volumes had been significantly decreased over the last ten years, falling by 41% between 2014/15 and 2024/25.

There had been a 10% increase in emails between 2015/16 to 2024/25. It was noted that the difference between calls offered and calls handled is calls that were received compared to calls answered.

Members noted the improvements, and questioned whether the same services could be delivered more locally in the districts. It was noted that the centre in the Spindles had detailed support on council tax that wasn't currently available in the districts, but that there were free phones in the town halls for residents to ring up the centre if needs be.

Members also queried email handling times, noting that residents may have time sensitive issues that means that a 5 working day wait would be too long. It was noted that most emails are answered quickly, particularly those on environmental health where there are often time sensitive issues.

Members asked what was being done well regarding phone calls in the support centre. It was noted that capacity and demand mapping had taken place. Members also enquire into whether a ring back service was offered, and were advised that it was on offer on all lines when possible. It was noted that there was no point offering a call back service when the team would be unable to fulfil the request, so the call back service was only offered when practical to do so. It was highlighted that 20-25% of residents were opting to use the call back service, and that these calls would take place on the same day.

Members asked whether there was an out of hours service for phonelines. Members were advised that the phone lines were available from 9am-5pm, but that online out of hours options were available. Members also noted that different services had different times for telephone responses. It was noted that this was due to a variety of factors including skill gaps and staff training, and that work was being undertaken to improve consistency.

RESOLVED: To note the overview.

7

REVENUE MONITOR AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2024/25

Lee Walsh introduced the item. It was noted that the 2024/25 outturn position was £10.155m overspend for the year, an improvement from the £14.597m in the last reported position. It was noted that the pressures were in the areas identified previously, which were Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Strategic Housing, in particular Temporary Accommodation.

It was noted that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was £350m, and Oldham was one of the last few local authorities in surplus.

Members noted the DSG success, and questioned whether the authority can spend the surplus or whether it is being saved. Members were advised that the DSG was fuelling EHCPs to prevent a deficit, and putting resources into schools with a focus on nursery/reception as a preventative step.

Members also noted the impact of COVID, particularly around mental health, and asked what was the impact of this. Members were informed that this could be found out for the Board, but that the service was playing catch up on school readiness.

Members noted the success of reducing the overspend, but highlighted that the council only has so much reserves. It was noted that the decisions being made as part of the budget, there was not just a financial cost but a human cost as well, and that residents are at the heart of what we do. It was also noted that strict, robust monitoring was in place which is stricter than previous. It was highlighted that the fair funding model will help as well. Members noted the human cost, and suggested investing to grow, particularly around the work in the town centre regeneration.

Members queried the process for unplanned use of reserves, and it was noted that these have to be signed off by the director of finance and the Chief Executive. There is also RAG monitoring in place to ensure that any issues with overspend can be spotted earlier. Members also queried the 22% of savings not achieved, and whether there are consequences for not meeting savings targets. It was noted that these were largely responsible for the overspend, but it was highlighted that those savings had been factored into the budgets going forward so that the money out of the budgets for those savings had already gone in future years.

Members noted the overspend in both Adult's and Children's social care, and it was asked when will the residential homes see financial fruition. It was noted that one children's home was open already, with one due to open later in the year and one in the business case stage, although there would be a lag in savings to these. It was also noted that the work around Adult's social care was live in feasibility.

RESOLVED: That the Board noted the recommendations.

8

REVIEW OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES (CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE)

Fran Lautman presented the item. It was noted that the services in the scope of the review were in areas such as Local Welfare Provision, the Support and Inclusion Team (SIT) and Citizens Advice Oldham (CAO). It was noted that there were several problems with the current system, especially around multiple front doors to services creating confusion, a lack of a joined-up model, and a lack of strategic and preventative approach. It was highlighted that the new approach will include a focus on early interview and prevention, self-help and self-serve, one front door for residents and removing duplication. It was outlined that the project would be delivered in four phases: Discover, Define,

Develop and Deliver, and what each of these would entail was discussed with the Board.

Members noted the approach and highlighted that the process would make a significant difference if gotten right. Members also noted that previous consultations, for example on Live Well, had been more of a listening exercise, and asked how the consultation would look. It was noted that there would be more connectivity and a joined-up approach, ensuring warm handovers between services.

Members also praised the work of the Welfare Rights team, and it was noted that this feedback would be passed on. Members encouraged officers to ensure that the Welfare Rights team were protected and properly supported.

Members also asked what feedback the team were getting around self-help and self-service options. It was noted that there were lots of tools that weren't being utilised properly and that the authority were looking at what other Local Authorities were doing well, whilst sharing their own learning with other LAs.

Members noted that other outside agencies operate in this space too, and it was asked how it is ensured that they are not separated. It was noted that the mapping would be important to see the overlap in what services provide.

Members also requested a workshop for members on this review.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9

WORK PROGRAMME

Members highlighted that requests for a review of contract management skills had not been added to the Work Programme. The Chair advised that a review of the Work Programme was taking place, and that an officer would be in touch with the member about it.

In response to a question about the engagement of Cabinet Members in the work programme review, the Chair reported that the work was being done in consultation with Cabinet members to see what initiatives were coming forward that the Board could scrutinise. The Chair reported that the draft work programme would come back to the Scrutiny Board for members' consideration, at which point members could propose additional items for scrutiny or could propose to remove items from the work programme. The Chair highlighted pressures on the work programme and Members discussed prioritisation of matters. Members requested a clearly defined process to support the board in prioritising topics for scrutiny.

Members discussed what would happen if the committee agreed to additional items on the work programme. The Chair responded and explained alternative methods of scrutiny, including task and finish groups, one-off meetings; however, he

was mindful of the capacity implications on officers and Cabinet Members writing reports and presenting.



A Member referenced the style of minutes for the Scrutiny Board in relation to the naming of Councillors when asking questions or making statements, and the comments were noted. It was noted that an officer would follow up on this.

RESOLVED: That the update on the Governance, Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for 2025/26 be noted with comments.

10

KEY DECISION DOCUMENT

Members queried what the purpose was of the Key Decision Document, and it was noted that it was a forward plan of upcoming decisions for the authority.

The Scrutiny Board considered the Key Decision Document, which records key decisions that the authority is due to take.

RESOLVED: That the Key Decision Document be noted.

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RULE 13 AND 14

There were no Rule 13 and 14 decisions to report.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.20 pm