

**Present:** Councillor McLaren (Chair)  
Councillors Arnott, Aslam, Azad, Cosgrove, Kenyon, Lancaster,  
Rustidge (Vice-Chair) and Shuttleworth (Substitute)

Also in Attendance:

Alex Bougatef	Group Solicitor
Fiona Greenway	Finance Services
Jack Grennan	Constitutional Services
Holly Harrison	Deputy Cabinet Member for Resident Focus
Abdul Jabbar MBE	Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate Services and Sustainability
Shelley Kipling	Chief Executive
Vickie Lambert	Finance Services
Heather Moore	Assistant Director of Governance
Leo Morgan	Complaints Management Service OMBC
Lee Walsh	Assistant Director of Finance

1        **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chauhan  
(Councillor Shuttleworth substituting), Councillor Ibrahim and  
Councillor Marland.

2        **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

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 30<sup>th</sup> July  
2025 be approved as a correct record.

6        **ESTABLISHING TASK AND FINISH GROUP FOR REVIEW  
OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES (CUSTOMER  
EXPERIENCE)**

The Chair requested nominations for the task and finish group.

The following members were put forward: Councillor McLaren,  
Councillor Arnott, Councillor Cosgrove and Councillor Rustidge.

Members queried what the terms of reference for the group and  
it was noted that they would be agreed in the first meeting of the  
group. Members also questioned the number of members  
required for the task and finish group and whether members

outside of the committee could be put forward. The Chair noted that there was not a set number of members who could be on the group and that whilst members outside of the committee could be members of the group, members of the committee were being asked first.

RESOLVED: That the following members be members of the task and finish group: Councillor McLaren, Councillor Arnott, Councillor Cosgrove and Councillor Rustidge.

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## **REVENUE MONITOR AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2025/26**

Lee Walsh presented the report. It was highlighted that there were a lot of assumptions in the report due to it being quarter 1 data. Planned mitigations were discussed, particularly around creating capacity on transformations.

It was noted that there was £33.774m in earmarked and reserved grants, and that the adverse weather reserve was an estimate. It was noted that, regarding the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Oldham was one of the few authorities still in surplus. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was in surplus of £3.34m at the end of 2024/25. An update was provided on the Capital Investment programme.

Members queried what practical actions would be undertaken to achieve the planned mitigations for Adult Social Care, and it was noted that the transformation team was looking at support packages and out of borough placements to see whether any could be brought back in borough, and that work was underway with the ICB to deliver those savings.

Members also questioned whether there were any common themes for the amber and red parts of the approved budget reductions. It was noted that packages were being looked at, making sure that there was best value for money and that reviews of packages require staff to carry out complex reviews, which presents its own challenges. It was highlighted that Place was moving in the right direction, due to optimising rounds. Workforce pressures were noted as being due to significant changes in leadership and transformation of work forces which had led to delays in delivery.

Members queried when fruition would be seen on back in borough placements. It was advised that Oldham Total Care had five vacant beds which the council was negotiating for to ensure they were occupied.

Members queried why the DSG is a national issue and whether there was any good practice that could be being learned from elsewhere. Members were advised that pretty much every local authority was in the same position, highlighting that Oldham was proactive when others weren't, but that Oldham was catching up, due to demand outstripping available resources.

Members noted that the budget in March 2025 planned to balance the budget without the use of reserves, and that £20m was a lot of overspend at the first reporting point. It was noted that the red and amber savings were part of the £20m overspend forecast, not additional to it. It was also noted that there is a structural problem in local government finance in that if demand is higher, the council still has to provide the services, as well as it being the right thing to do. It was noted that other authorities were in a similar position with similar issues. It was highlighted that the government spending review was expected to deliver more funding. The work of the finance delivery board, chaired by leadership, which had been set up was noted.

Members highlighted the overspend in Table 2 of the report, noting the demand in statutory services had been a constant refrain over years, and questioned why the council couldn't control these things. Members were advised that the transformation programme, particularly around changing services, the use of technology and grant monies would help alleviate some of the challenges, and that there were some success stories already in terms of savings. It was noted that the market in Children's services was being exploited and that Oldham opening several children's homes would help mitigate this problem. The work with Newtons around efficiencies and best practice was also highlighted. It was highlighted that there were challenging structural factors and that the new government recognised this need. It was noted that there was lots of work going on to find and keep variance reductions and that this was a day-by-day battle. Fair funding would help with this situation. It was highlighted that temporary accommodation was on budget, having previously been an enormous issue for the authority.

Members queried whether additional purchase of bins in the environment service meant that the savings from Don't Trash Oldham had been wiped out. It was advised that this was not the case and that the purchase of bins referred to domestic waste, and that some grants would help to alleviate the overspend.

Members requested that members could receive the value of each mitigating action along with the officer responsibility for delivering those savings. It was advised that this information would go through the steering group and that work was being done on mitigations. It was noted that mitigations were around funding streams and reallocations, and that any service changes would go through Cabinet.

Members noted the success on bins.

Members queried the four applications for reserves usage and asked why they weren't funded in the first place. It was advised that the reserves were crucial and that the new reserves policy has been kept. It was further noted that fluctuations had been funded historically from reserves. It was highlighted that some of the revenue grants were, in effect, grants not spent and offset.

Members queried why the surprise repairs and managements were an adverse variance. It was noted that the repairs were based on assets not disposed of yet, including delayed sales and one offs, noting a security issue for example. It was also noted that there were market issues with selling at price, and this was reviewed regularly, noting the longer process to sell. Members queried when buildings are sold, where does the money go and it was advised that funds go into the capital receipts, not capital.

Members asked whether the report could be changed to include a list of unactioned savings and a request for monthly delivery board meetings.

Members voted on whether to endorse the report and thank officers for their time in preparing it. Seven members voted in favour, one member voted against and one member abstained.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and endorsed with thanks to officers.

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## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN: ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS 2024/25**

Leo Morgan presented the report. It was noted that the draft had been presented to the board in June, and it had now been published by the Ombudsman.

It was noted that Oldham had seen a decrease in the number of complaints and that Oldham was performing significantly better than the national and regional average. It was highlighted that there was learning culture and that Oldham continues to prioritise early and effective resolution of complaints, and it was noted that the work is a positive story to tell.

Members queried the broader complaints landscape, asking about the 86% of complaints that didn't go to the Ombudsman and whether these were resolved or unresolved. It was noted that this would be part of an item coming to the next scrutiny board meeting. It was also highlighted that the service will always try to explain the outcome of a decision, but that datawise, at least, the service didn't know why some chose not to go to the Ombudsman.

Members queried one of the cases that was upheld, noting concern at the use of 'threat'. It was explained that this was not the view of the council and that the 'threat' part of the decision was not substantiated.

Members noted that most complaints were in certain areas, and queried what was being done around supporting vulnerable and excluded people. It was noted that there are advocates and support workers for vulnerable residents so that they didn't have to try to go through the complex system alone. It was noted that this was done on a case by case basis for corporate issues, and

that it would be assessed whether complainants would need support.

Members queried what counted as a complaint, when issues are logged as complaints and whether there is a formal threshold. It was noted that in social care, it was a more black and white, statutory process. In Corporate, there were grey areas and it was more the case if people wanted to complain, although the service tries to treat initial queries as service requests where they can.

Members queried whether the Children's Residential Home Complaints database would only include children in the home or neighbours as well. It was noted that the database would only include complaints from young people in the homes, but that neighbours could complain through the standard complaints mechanisms.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and received with thanks.

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### **WORK PROGRAMME**

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

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### **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

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 or 14 decisions to report.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.25 pm