

Present: Councillor McLaren (Chair)
Councillors Harkness, Ibrahim, Iqbal, Kenyon (Substitute),
Moore, Lancaster and Rustidge

Also in Attendance:

Shelley Kipling- Assistant Chief Executive Officer
Chris Kelsall- Assistant Director of Finance
Nasir Dad- Director of Environment
Steve Hughes- Assistant Director Strategy & Performance
Fran Lautman -Head of Customer and Digital Experience
Kirsty Adderley- Complaints Manager
Durga Paul- Constitutional Services

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hughes and Williamson.

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 public questions for the meeting to consider.

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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st March 2024 be approved as a correct record.

6 **HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY - MAY 2024 UPDATE**

The Director of Environment presented the Updated Health and Safety Policy to the Committee.

This policy identifies the essential elements of Oldham's Health and Safety management system and details the commitment the Council has for maintaining and improving the health, safety and wellbeing of the staff, and others who may be affected by their activities. So far as is reasonably practicable, the Council will provide a safe and healthy work environment that meets statutory requirements.

The Policy outlines the structure and legal responsibility of the Council for staff, but also in their role as a corporate Landlord.

Oldham requires each service to examine their own work activities and make suitable and sufficient assessments of any health and safety risks. These assessments will determine

service priorities and set objectives for eliminating hazards, reducing risks and achieving a progressive reduction in injury, work related ill-health and other types of loss. Appropriate training is provided to individuals to reflect their level of responsibility.

Members queried whether the Policy was equipped to consider the safety concerns to Councillors and Officers during Council Meetings. Officers advised that safety concerns and plans were picked up through a separate meeting and procedure and concerns regarding relocating the meeting if the need arises have already been addressed following incidents at last years meetings.

Members queried whether increased Health and Safety precautions were being taken in our schools and communities following the tragic events that transpired in Southport last week. The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that Security assessments and additional guidance has been provided to all appropriate venues.

Members questioned the process of risk assessments for services based outside of the office and Officers confirmed that a site visit would take place and specific risk assessments would take place for each service. When questioned on the number of Safety Representatives Oldham currently has, Officers advised that most areas will have one, but specific numbers are not known. The Director of Economy to review this and feedback to members.

Resolved that

1. The Health and Safety Policy is noted and Endorsed by the Committee.
2. The Director of Environment is to review and feedback to members details of the number of Safety Representatives the Council has.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN - INITIAL DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT

The Head of Customer and Digital Experience and the Complaints Manager presented on Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review of Complaints for 2023/24.

During the period 1 April 2023 to 1 April 2024, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) completed 14 investigations in relation to Oldham Council. Following these investigations, the LGSCO upheld 12 cases and found 2 to not be upheld, giving an uphold rate of 86%. This compares to an average uphold rate of 80% in similar organisations.

In 42% of upheld cases, Oldham Council had already provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman. This compares to an average of 14% in similar organisations. Where the LGSCO upholds a complaint, it will

often make recommendations to put things right or help to prevent similar situations arising in the future. Oldham Council complied with 100% of the recommendations put forward by the LGSCO. This compares to an average of 99% in similar organisations.

Over the last 2 financial years (2022/23 and 2023/24), the average uphold rate for Oldham Council has been 70%. This compares to an average of 78.5% in similar organisations.

Over the last 2 financial years, Oldham Council has identified satisfactory remedies in 21% of upheld cases before they have reached the LGSCO. This compares to an average of 12% in similar organisations.

Overall, although the uphold rate has increased for Oldham Council in 2023/24, this upward trend has been seen across similar organisations. When looking at the Council's performance over the last 2 years, the uphold rate is below average and the percentage of cases whereby the Council has identified suitable remedies through its own complaints process is above average.

Members questioned whether any trends have been identified with the types of cases that go to the Ombudsmen. Officers advised there are a higher number of cases linked to Adult Social Care but will be due to the nature of the work and assessments may need to be made which could cause delays. 4 of the 12 delays were due to things not being implemented in a timely manner and Members requested details for the cause of the delays- Officers did not have this information to hand but will share the delay reasons with members.

Officers explained to the Committee that there is ongoing work being done within the service to improve training, create a staff guide and a report of ongoing complaints. Officers to share a more detailed outline of these steps at the next meeting.

Resolved that

1. The Local Government Ombudsman Draft Annual Report is noted by the Committee.
2. Officers to share with members reasons for response delays in 4 cases that were not resolved in a timely manner.
3. An update be provided at the next meeting scheduled for 9th October 2024 where Officers will share an outline of the steps taken to improve dealing with complaints and timescales.

**CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24
QUARTER 4**

The Committee heard from the Assistant Director Strategy & Performance on the Corporate Performance Report 2023/24 for Quarter 4. The Officer gave an overview of the report and highlighted some key successes including;

- The highest uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers yet which is a Public Health Success
- Positive report from Ofsted rating Children's Services Good in all areas
- Incredibly close to the target number of new homes built
- Improvements in Customer Service with complaints below target and an increase in service and calls answered

Members commented on the length and substance of the report and indicated that not enough information has been provided and 1 page per service area is not adequate. Officers explained that reports have been amended to make them more accessible and suitable for the various meetings they are presented at. Members also requested that these reports be printed in colour in the future where a traffic light colour system is being used to indicate performance. This was supported by the Assistant Chief Executive.

The Committee also discussed some of the compliance figures that have been provided, specifically for Street Lighting. 100% compliance has been indicated in the report, but this is not accurate as there are several exceptions to this figure. The Assistant Chief executive is to request the full figures including exceptions from the relevant parties.

Members noted that the report indicates that recycling continued to be a challenge and questioned what steps were being taken to improve the rates. Officers confirmed that a full response could be provided to the Committee by the Director of Environment.

Members queried why there were no complaints targets for Adult's and Children's Services, the areas which receive the most complaints. Officers explained that due to the changes to the service a full review is being completed. A link between the number of complaints and lack of a target has been identified but it is a complex issue that would need to be investigated further. Officers can bring this back to Committee in October and provide updates following investigation.

Resolved that

3. The Corporate Performance Report is endorsed and noted by the Committee.
4. Officers to request exceptions to the compliance figures from relevant parties for street lighting.
5. The Director of Environment to provide a full response on steps being taken to improve recycling rates.
6. Corporate Performance Reports to be printed in colour for future meetings.

The Assistant Director of Finance presented on the Draft Annual Statement of Accounts. The Committee heard the salient points on the major categories of expenditure.

1. Revenue Account- Additional £16.1m of earmarked reserves required to fund the annual overspend. The total use of earmarked reserves was £29.5m. The General Fund Balances remain at £18.9m.
2. Capital Programme- Annual expenditure £81.2m, £1.7m above the M9 forecast
3. Housing Revenue Account- Annual deficit of £1.4m, in line with forecasting leaving balances of £21.1m
4. Dedicated Schools Grant- Annual surplus of £5.6m leaving balances of £3.7m
5. Collection fund- £2.7m used to finance 2023/24 expenditure. Balance remaining is £1m.

There has also been reductions in earmarked reserves- reduced by £29.5m from £79.1m to £49.6m.

The Committee heard about the Annual Governance Statement. There is a statutory requirement for councils to review governance arrangements at least once a year . This enables the authority to monitor achievement of strategic objectives, consider whether these objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services and demonstrate to the public that it has effective stewardship of the public funds it is entrusted to spend.

The Annual Governance Statement identified six significant governance issues;

1. Financial Resilience
2. Procurement regulations
3. Creating a Better Place Programme
4. Health Integration
5. Partnership Governance
6. IT Security

The biggest issue facing the Council is Financial Resilience.

The Committee discussed the use of reserves and the implications that would have for a balanced budget. They were particularly concerned with why overspending hadn't been foreseen. The Assistant Chief Executive Officer explained that every council is facing overspend issues due to the significant increase in Placement, Temporary Accommodation and Social Work costs. Work is being done to mitigate the cost of these services such as the work to build residential care homes within the borough, but projects take time to deliver.

Resolved that, the Draft Annual Statement of Accounts is noted by the Committee.

WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair confirmed the work programme for the remainder of the year would be restructured to accommodate items that were scheduled for the meeting on 19th June 2024 which was cancelled.

Members suggested adding Contract Management as an item to the Work Programme. The Chair in agreement with the Assistant Chief Executive advised that this would be best suited to a separate workshop rather than a Committee meeting where they could look into Contract Management Skills in more detail.



Resolved that,

1. That the work programme will be restructured to accommodate items missed due to meeting cancellation of 19th June 2024.
2. Workshop to be arranged for members to look into Contract Management Skills in more detail.
3. That the Work Programme be noted by the Committee.

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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 was nothing to report under Rule 13 and 14.

The meeting started at 6:00pm and ended at 7:39pm