

Present: Councillor McLaren (Chair)
Councillors Azad, Harkness, Iqbal, Lancaster, Moores (Vice-Chair) and Rustidge

Also in Attendance:

Fiona Greenway	Finance Services
Wendy Jackson	Oldham MBC - HR Services
Fran Lautman	Assistant Director of Customer Experience
Andrew Mather	Constitutional Services
Chris Rawding	Technology and ICT services
Lee Walsh	Finance Manager - Capital and Treasury

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hughes.

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 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 29th January and 6th February 2025 be approved as a correct record.

6 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3 2024/25**

The Board received and considered the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 3, covering the period from 1 October to 31 December 2024. The report provided a summary of key performance indicators (KPIs), service-level updates, and challenges across the service areas Communications and Research (Strategy and Performance), Customer Experience (Customer Services and Complaints) Human Resources and Organisational Development and IT Operations.

In respect of Communications & Research the report highlighted significant growth in social media engagement, particularly on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. A successful campaign around Oldham's 175th birthday and festive events increased town centre footfall by 10%. A service redesign was conducted with successful staff consultation; the new structure was to be implemented from April 2025. The service faced the challenge of maintaining service performance despite reductions in team capacity due to restructuring and voluntary redundancies.

Members requested that they be sent further information on the 175th Birthday events and other events in the District.



In respect of Customer Services, the report highlighted several performance improvements. Average call wait times reduced to 5 minutes 44 seconds (12-minute target). Call answer rate improved to 88.48%, just below the 89% target, with December's performance exceeding 90%. Complaints response rates showed marked improvement: Adults' services rose from 29% to 69%, and overall performance increased from 50% to 64%.

A new self-service dashboard (via Power BI) is being implemented to improve real-time complaint performance tracking. Feedback from the new central 'Working for You' centre at Spindles had been positive. It was noted that complaint response rates, while improving, still fell short of the 75% target and would require ongoing attention.

In respect of Human Resources & Organisational Development (HR & OD) it was reported that sickness absence remained steady at around 5%. Induction completion for new starters reached 96.3%. The apprenticeship levy was being increasingly used to upskill staff. The recruitment freeze impacted the creation of new apprenticeship vacancies, though the council remained on track to meet its yearly target of 20. Ongoing efforts were being made to improve attendance management and absence reporting.

In respect of Information Technology (IT) it was reported that 100% uptime for all core infrastructure and critical applications had been achieved. Customer satisfaction remained high at 98.63%. First-contact resolution rate declined slightly from 82.24% to 79.35%, attributed largely to resource constraints. . New Wi-Fi upgrades and migration to the GMAOne network are progressing and on track to complete in Q4. A rise in breached IT tickets was noted, due to reduced resources and legacy hardware challenges.

In respect of Finance & Revenues it was reported that Council Tax and Business Rates collection stood at 80.44% and 80.28% respectively by the end of January 2025. Housing Benefit processing times improved significantly, with new claims averaging 7 days (target: 27 days). Council Tax Reduction claims averaged 22 days, improved from 30 days in Q2 but still above the 20-day target.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Board:

1. Notes the progress in implementing business plan objectives across Council services.
2. Commends areas showing strong or improved performance.
3. Acknowledges the service challenges, especially in complaints handling and workload management.



The Scrutiny Board received a presentation on staffing trends and workforce retention strategies at Oldham Council, with data benchmarking the organisation against national and sector-wide patterns.

In a national context the report noted that Local government has lost around 40% of its workforce over the last decade. 28% of early-career local government employees planned to leave the sector within four years. Both nationally and regionally retention was a growing concern, particularly in roles such as social work and frontline services.

In Oldham Council the detailed breakdown of Council leavers showed higher turnover in certain service areas. Leaver feedback was generally positive, with many praising the culture, diversity, and supportive environment. Common themes behind staff departures included: career progression opportunities elsewhere, organisational restructures, and capacity pressures in high-demand roles.

Feedback from Exit Surveys had shown that any staff expressed pride in working for the Council and appreciated the inclusive and respectful workplace. Challenges cited included work-life balance in demanding roles and uncertainty during periods of organisational change.

The Council was responding to workforce challenges in several ways including:

Wellbeing Support: Continued promotion of mental health resources, employee assistance programmes, and counselling.

Internal Communications: More structured feedback loops such as forums, peer support networks, and staff surveys.

Inclusive Recruitment and Early Careers:

Expanded apprenticeship and graduate opportunities; New partnerships with schools, colleges, and universities to build a stronger early careers pipeline; and Recruitment improvements aimed at ensuring greater diversity and inclusion.

Going forward the Council was looking at a refreshed induction programme and review of onboarding practices was underway. New strategic investment in upskilling internal staff via apprenticeship levy utilisation. The Council is working to ensure that early careers efforts directly contribute to long-term workforce resilience.

Scrutiny Board members welcomed the comprehensive report and the analysis of staff departures. Members particularly welcomed the apprenticeship programme. Members acknowledged the need to address recruitment bottlenecks in key services and endorsed the drive to improve organisational culture and internal communications.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Board notes the findings of the deep dive, welcomes the strategic actions already underway, and

recommends continued scrutiny of workforce data and development of innovative approaches to staff retention.



Oldham
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REVENUE MONITOR AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2024/25 MONTH 10

The Board received a detailed report from the Interim Director of Finance on the Council's financial position at the end of Month 10 (January 2025), including both revenue and capital forecasts for the 2024/25 financial year.

Revenue Budget Monitoring :

The forecast revenue overspend as of Month 10 stood at £12.164m, with a potential year-end forecast of £14.597m if no further mitigations were implemented. The position was being closely monitored and was a key factor in shaping the 2025/26 and 2026/27 budgets. The main pressure areas identified were: Adult Social Care – Forecast overspend of £8.122m due to continued demand for high-cost care placements, complexity of care needs and rising costs in the external care market; Children's Services – Forecast overspend of £10.171m due to increasing cost and volume of external residential placements; High use of agency staff due to recruitment difficulties; Strategic Housing (Temporary Accommodation) – Overspend of £4.632m resulting from growth in demand for temporary accommodation due to homelessness pressures.

A number of mitigating actions were identified including: Efforts to reduce expenditure across service areas, including management controls on non-essential spending, vacancy management, and project re-phasing. Management actions taken to date had already helped reduce the projected deficit from earlier in the year (a £26m forecast at Q1).

Capital Programme

The revised capital programme for 2024/25 was £87.460m (down from the original £99.683m). Actual expenditure to 31 January 2025 stood at £59.145m, which was 67.63% of the forecast outturn. The net increase of £0.200m from Month 9 reflects approved virements and re-phasing of capital schemes.

The main areas of capital investment remain:

Regeneration and infrastructure projects within the Place and Economic Growth directorate; Education and schools improvements; ICT investment and asset maintenance.

It was also reported that performance in the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates remains strong and is on target to meet collection rate goals (96.5% for Council Tax; 97.5% for NNDR).

On the use of reserves,

any overspend at year-end was proposed to be funded through general earmarked reserves. The report stresses this was not sustainable in the long term and highlighted the importance of achieving a balanced outturn.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Board:

1. Notes the current revenue forecast of a £12.164m adverse position as of Month 10, with a projected year-end overspend of £14.597m.

2. Acknowledges the areas of significant financial pressure and the mitigation strategies being implemented.

3. Notes the revised capital programme of £87.460m for 2024/25 and the updated forecast for future years.

4. Recommends the continued scrutiny of high-risk budget areas and requests further updates on progress with demand management and workforce stabilisation.

5. Commends the Finance team for their work in delivering audited 2023/24 accounts on time and supporting strategic budget planning for 2025/26.

8 **WORK PROGRAMME**

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.

9 **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.

10 **RULE 13 AND 14**

There were no Rule 13 and 14 decisions to report.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.45 pm