

Present: Councillor McLaren (Chair)
Councillors Aslam, Iqbal (Substitute) and Rustidge (Vice-Chair)

Also in Attendance:

Alex Bougatef	Director of Legal
Eleanor Devlin	Assistant Director of Workforce and Organisational Culture
Mark Edmondson	Assistant Director of Revenues and Benefits
Matthew Gratton	Director of Digital
Fiona Greenway	Director of Resources
Jack Grennan	Constitutional Services
Vickie Lambert	Finance Services
Fran Lautman	Assistant Director of Customer Experience
Lee Walsh	Director of Finance

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chauhan, Cosgrove (Councillor Iqbal substituting), Hughes, Ibrahim, Kenyon, Lancaster and 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 public questions received for the Board to consider.

5 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Governance Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board held on 28th January 2026 and 5th February 2026 be approved as a correct record.

6 **PERFORMANCE ASSURANCE REPORT Q3 2025/26**

The Report was presented by the Directors and officers of the relevant departments. Members queried the Customer Feedback report and it was highlighted that the report had been presented at a previous meeting of the Scrutiny Board. Members also sought clarity as to the difference between calls offered versus calls handled, and this was explained.

Members queried how Oldham performed on sickness absence in relation to other local authorities and it was highlighted that whilst there was not a local authority sickness absence rate to measure from, Oldham was not an outlier compared to available statistics. Seasonal trends between Q2 and Q3 were also discussed.

Members noted the drop in agency spending, highlighting that this was positive. Members also highlighted the differences between Freedom of Information requests, Subject Access requests and requests for disclosure.

Members queried around the setting of budgets, and it was highlighted that the multi-year settlement had been helpful. Members noted the changes in circumstances for those on universal credit and asked about the increase and whether there were any common themes that could be learned from. It was noted that these cases were mostly due to wage differences, highlighting that fluctuating wages need to be changed each time which creates a higher volume of work for the team. Members also asked about the impact of the Employment Rights Act, and it was noted that the legislation come into effect yet but that the work was ongoing.

Members noted the extra benefits that were being brought in for residents by the Revenue and Benefits team. Members also highlighted the average time taken to process claims and changes in circumstances, noting the difficulties that residents might face, and it was noted that these times included following up to ask for further information. Members also confirmed that changes in circumstances would be retrospective from the day of the change.

Members queried the percentage of council tax collected, and it was noted that this figure would be on target at the end of Q4 and that it was a cumulative figure. Members also queried member standards and asked whether there were any common themes. It was noted that the complaints were on a variety of issues and that the national framework for standards was weak. It was highlighted that the current date being given by the government for the new standards framework was near the end of 2026 or start of 2027, but noted that the Council is doing other work to be proactive in the meantime, such as the member/officer protocol.

Members welcomed the new cybersecurity programmes, and it was noted that this was security monitoring not only the council's own systems but any global threats and trends. It was noted that the Council faces between 200 to 1500 attacks a day, which required a constant and dedicated cybersecurity system. It was highlighted that there were a variety of themes for attacks, from financial to general disruption, and that the Council was resilient and were prepared for worst-case scenarios. Members highlighted the Red statistics on page 45 of the agenda pack, and it was noted that the Subject Access Requests (SARs) were a result of the complexity of the cases and the redactions required. It was noted that there had been an uptake in the number of FOI requests received which could be creating time issues due to the volume of requests.

Members queried the 'school activity' in relation to recruitments, and it was highlighted that this was in reference to the Council's

vacancy freeze which didn't cover schools. Members also noted the 'time taken to hire', and it was highlighted that this was from the date the vacancy was advertised and included the onboarding period and any notice period that new starters would have.

Members noted the 50% increase in employment relations cases, and it was noted that this was due to better reporting. Members also noted the low percentage of new starters completing inductions, and it was highlighted that this was due to a move from online inductions to in person ones, which was still being embedded.

Members highlighted 251 residents had been offered support to claim pension credits, asking how many of these had made successful claims. It was noted that 22 had received them currently but that not all the data was back in yet. Members also noted the warm packs and financial support work being offered by the service. Members also highlighted the success of the welfare provision support.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Board note the directorate outcomes identified, celebrate areas of good or improved performance and considered areas for review (good or poor) that could produce organisational learning.

7

REVENUE MONITOR AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2025/26 - MONTH 10

The Director of Finance and the Finance manager presented the Month 10 update, noting that there had been a significant reduction in the adverse variance of around £10.2m from Month 9, mainly due to the work having been done on the capitalisation of interest costs for assets under construction. It was noted that this would be a one-off payment. It was highlighted that reductions were mostly on track and that those that were not on track were being monitored.

Members thanked the Finance team for their work, particularly around protecting reserves. Members queried the reliance on mitigations and whether these were reviewed. It was noted that these were continuously reviewed with lots of work ongoing.

Members queried the mitigations around Children's Services and what the issues were around foster care. It was noted that the main issues were around competition but that this was a national issue. Members also asked what the risk of inflation could be, and it was noted that a buffer for inflation was built into the forecasting.

RESOLVED: That members noted the contents of the report, the forecast revenue position at the end of Month 10 at £4.946m and the general revenue usable reserves position for 2025/26.

8

WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Governance, Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for 2025/26 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 or 14 decisions to be considered.

The meeting started at 6.05 pm and ended at 7.10 pm

