PLACE, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY BOARD
07/10/2026 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillor Brooks (in the Chair)
Councillors Barnes, Charters, J. Hussain, Kouser, Rustidge, Shuttleworth and Williams.

Also in Attendance:

Alex Bougatef	Director of Legal (Monitoring Officer)
Neil Consterdine	Director of Communities
Nasir Dad	Director of Environment
Simon Shuttleworth	Service Manager - Strategic Housing Recovery Service
Edward Rigby	Housing Projects Manager
Victoria Wood	Assistant Director of Housing
Peter Thompson	Constitutional Services
One member of the press	

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ghafoor and Sharp.

2 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Brooks declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6 (Regulator of Social Housing – Improvement Plan).

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions for this meeting of the Place, Economic Growth and Environment Scrutiny Board to consider.

5 **MINUTES**

Resolved:
That the Minutes of the meeting of the Place, Economic Growth Environment Scrutiny Board, held on 19th March 2026, be approved as a correct record.

6 **FOOD SAFETY - SERVICE DELIVERY BRIEFING**

The Scrutiny Board considered a report and presentation of the Director of Environment which updated members on issues relating to Food Safety. The Director advised the meeting that the Council had a statutory duty to enforce food law and, in this regard, the Council's aim was to protect the health of residents, visitors and those working in the Borough through the efficient and effective enforcement of food safety laws.

The report submitted outlined the key challenges the service faced and the control measures that were in place to ensure that Oldham Council currently meets and will continue to meet in future years its statutory duties in relation to the delivery of official food controls.

The meeting was informed that Oldham had approximately 2,025 registered food businesses. The Council's Commercial Protection Team were responsible for both food safety and food standards enforcement in food businesses.

In accordance with Food Standards Agency (FSA) Statutory Codes of Practice, food safety and food standards inspections were carried out on a risk priority basis with higher risk premises being inspected more frequently. After each inspection, the food business received a risk rating. The frequency of inspection was determined by these risk scores. Food officers carried out both safety and standards inspections during the same visit where possible to ensure the most efficient use of resources.

The performance of the Council, in this regard, was monitored by the FSA. Authorities were required to submit twice yearly returns. During 2024, the FSA contacted Oldham Council and commenced performance engagement due to the number of overdue interventions. Subsequently, an action plan was put into place for the authority to realign to the inspection frequencies in the code of practice. The authority had been progressing well through the delivery of the intervention programme and in June 2026, the FSA reduced the status of engagement with the Council from Level 1 engagement, to monitoring. The action plan remained in place, with an objective to ensure full realignment to the code of practice by 31st March 2027.

Since the onset of Covid-19 restrictions, in March 2020, the service had been dealing with an ongoing backlog of inspections. Demand for the service was increased due to a continual rise in newly registered food businesses, and there were significant resource pressures due to recruitment difficulties and staff vacancies. Recruitment efforts had proved to be unsuccessful and alternative measures, including agency staff and overtime, were being used to maintain service delivery. To combat an industry shortage of qualified Environmental Health Officers, the service has introduced a career graded Environmental Health Officer position to attract graduate students and currently have a Regulatory Compliance Trainee in post, due to working with the Greater Manchester Regulatory Centre for Excellence.

The service continued to face significant resource pressures due to recruitment difficulties and staff vacancies. However, during 2025/2026 the number of food hygiene inspections increased by 40%, with 891 carried out at premises due/overdue for an inspection. In comparison 638 inspections were carried out during 2024/2025.

There was a total of 1,249 premises that were due a food hygiene inspection during 2026/2027. Considering current resources and vacant posts in the team, the delivery of all due interventions posed a significant challenge, however, the service

is striving to complete all interventions in 2026/2027 to ensure realignment with the Food Law Code of Practice.

The volume of inspections and other associated work could not be met with the allocated resources available (particularly as 1.7 FTE Food Environmental Health Officer posts in the team were currently vacant. Therefore, funding via the vacant posts would be utilised for agency staff and overtime for qualified food officers, to ensure that the work detailed in the submitted report could be completed. Alongside this, recruitment was undertaken to fill the vacant positions.

Food Standards inspections would be prioritised on a risk basis; therefore, all category priority 1,3 & 6 inspections would be completed, and unrated premises were to be inspected as they were due to receive a hygiene inspection. The premises overdue a food standards inspection will be completed alongside their food hygiene inspection.

Resolved:
That the Director of Environment's report and presentation on Food Safety in the Borough of Oldham, be noted.

7 **REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING – IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Members scrutinised a report of the Director of Communities, that provided background on the inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing, and an update on the current improvement plan process.

It was reported that the Council owned almost 2,100 homes within the Borough. These properties were not directly managed by the Council, with management functions delivered under four separate sets of contractual arrangements:
a. PFI 2 – Oldham Retirement Housing Partnership (Housing 21). A 30-year contract covering 1429 homes for older people, including Extra Care accommodation.
b. PFI 4 – Inspiral Partnership (Great Places and Wates) – 25-year contract for 615 general needs homes.
c. Primrose Bank – a non-PFI arrangement covering 18 homes managed under an agreement with Great Places.
d. Holly Bank – a non-PFI arrangement, covering the management of a 20 flat adults' scheme, with care provision by MioCare

While the Council does not directly manage these properties, its legal status as landlord for these homes meant that it was responsible for compliance with statutory obligations, including under the Social Housing Regulation Act (2023). During 2025, the Council was subject to an inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing, to determine compliance with the new mandatory Consumer Standards introduced in April 2024. These standards comprise of:
1. Safety and Quality.
2. Transparency, Influence and Accountability.
3. Neighbourhood and Community.

4. Tenancy.

The Council received a grade of C3, indicating that the Regulator had identified “serious failings” in delivery of the Consumer Standards outcomes, and a need for significant improvement. Key areas of the judgement included: a lack of evidence that information around the delivery of the consumer standard outcomes that is reported to or considered by senior officers or Councillors; a general theme relating to the lack of sufficient assurance and verification of outcomes reported by providers; Particular failings relating to the Safety and Quality standard; Particular failings in relation to the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard; and some weaknesses in the approach around the Tenancy Standard and Neighbourhood and Community Standard.

The Council subsequently, in consultation with the Housing Regulator, developed an improvement plan process. The first meeting thereon, with the Regulator, was scheduled for 5th February 2027 and to be held monthly thereafter. Following this engagement, a draft improvement plan was produced. This has subsequently gone through a series of iterations, to ensure that it was sufficiently robust, and had recently received approval from the Regulator. Engagement with the providers on the key elements of this plan was, thus far, positive and a number of improvements were already under way.

Consultation had recently concluded on a service redesign, which will ensure the provision of additional staffing for the Service, in order to ensure that there will be sufficient capacity to both deal with the day-to-day contract management of the properties owned by the Council, while also ensuring compliance with the Consumer Standards, and readiness for future inspections.

A new Consumer Standards Improvement Board is being established, with the first meeting scheduled for late October 2026. The Improvement Board will include tenant representation and have responsibility for signing off each action as complete, at the appropriate time.

Members of the Scrutiny Board discussed the report in some detail, requesting that the Director of Communities forward a copy of the full Regulator of Social Housing’s report to members of the Scrutiny Board for information. Members also requested that the Director of Communities be requested to present a comprehensive report to the Scrutiny Board’s meeting, scheduled to be held on 21st January 2027, detailing actions being taken to address the items that were identified as requiring attention by the Housing Regulator in the Improvement Plan. Members of the Scrutiny Board also requested that a report on the wider provision of Housing Services, in the Borough be presented to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Board.

Resolved:

1. That the report of the Director of Community Services be noted.
2. That the Director of Communities be requested to forward a copy of the full Regulator of Social Housing's report to members of the Place, Economic Growth and Environment Scrutiny Board.
3. That the Director of Communities be requested to present a comprehensive report to the Scrutiny Board's meeting, scheduled to be held on 21st January 2027, detailing actions being taken to address the items that were identified as requiring attention by the Housing Regulator in the Improvement Plan.
4. That the Director of Communities be requested to present a report, detailing the provision of Housing Services in the Borough, to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Board.

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 7.35pm