Minutes of: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 16 July 2026

Present: Councillor J Rydeheard (in the Chair)
Councillors J Southworth, M Rahimov, T Pilkington, A Chaudhry, N Bayley, S Haroon, C Birchmore, J Sheppard and G Martin

Also in attendance: Kate Waterhouse Executive Director Strategy and Transformation
Neil Kissock Director of Finance
Sian Grant Director of Housing
Councillor S Thorpe Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services
Councillor A Arif Cabinet Member for Housing
Jacqui Dennis Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Josh Ashworth Democratic Services

Public Attendance: No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor L Ryder and Councillor J Roith

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OSC.110 APOLOGIES

Apologies stated above

OSC.111 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declaration of interest were made…

Councillor Sheppard declared an interest in relation to the Housing Services Update

OSC.112 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

OSC.113 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

OSC.114 MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29th June 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.115 HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Councillor Arif, presented the report and accompanying appendix and provided a brief overview of performance during 2025/26. The report was taken as read.

Councillor Birchmore questioned the decision to commission Housemark to undertake reviews of the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Complaints Services rather than relying on internal review processes and sought clarification regarding the cost of the exercise.
In response, the Cabinet Member and officers advised that Housemark had been commissioned to provide an independent and objective assessment against nationally recognised housing sector standards and accreditation frameworks. Whilst internal audits and service reviews remained an important component of performance management, the external review provided additional challenge, benchmarking opportunities and independent assurance. Members were informed that a recent internal audit of the complaints service had provided a high level of assurance. The cost of the Housemark reviews was confirmed as £39,995 and the findings would support service improvements and progression towards recognised accreditation standards.

Councillor Birchmore referred to the report's reference to low-level nuisance issues being recorded as tenancy support rather than formal ASB cases and sought clarification regarding the classification process. He further asked whether reported reductions reflected genuine improvements or the reclassification of incidents.
Officers explained that a distinction was made based on whether the behaviour met the threshold for anti-social behaviour. Issues such as noise transference resulting from normal household activity would generally be addressed through tenancy support rather than enforcement action. The Committee was advised that ASB case numbers had not reduced as a consequence of reclassification and had in fact increased due to earlier case logging and improved reporting arrangements. Members were informed that the approach ensured tenants received the most appropriate response whilst allowing enforcement resources to remain focused on genuine ASB.

Councillor Birchmore sought assurance regarding the future of sheltered and extra-care housing following references within the report to a review of existing schemes.
The Cabinet Member advised that sheltered and extra-care housing provision was not under threat. The review was intended to ensure that accommodation remained suitable for meeting future demand and reflected modern standards of accessibility and independent living. Officers explained that some existing accommodation, including bedsit properties and aspects of older extra-care schemes, no longer met the expectations and needs of tenants. The review would inform future investment decisions and support the development of a modern housing offer for older residents.
Councillor Birchmore questioned whether current call-answering performance reflected an acceptable standard of service for tenants.

Officers acknowledged that performance required improvement but advised that waiting times had reduced significantly during 2026/27. Members were informed that recent performance data demonstrated continuing improvement and that the longer-term ambition was for 80% of housing calls to be answered within 60 seconds, in line with widely recognised sector standards.

Councillor Birchmore sought clarification regarding repair completion times and how they compared with other housing providers.

Officers confirmed that the reported target of 20 related to working days and was broadly consistent with performance standards used by other social landlords. Members were informed that average completion times had improved to approximately 21 working days during the first quarter of 2026/27. It was further explained that emergency repairs related to situations presenting an immediate risk to health or safety, where the priority was to make the issue safe as quickly as possible before any permanent repair could be completed.

Councillor Sheppard referred to the Council's fire safety performance and sought clarification regarding the number of outstanding high-risk fire safety actions and the timescales for completion.

Officers advised that, as of 14 August 2026, there were 74 outstanding high-risk actions. These were largely associated with supported living and sheltered housing schemes, where assessments considered resident vulnerability, independence levels and evacuation arrangements. Members were informed that remedial work was progressing and that, in a number of instances, risks had already reduced as actions were completed and reassessed.

Councillor Sheppard sought clarification regarding the reported achievement of 100% compliance with fire safety checks and asked how this could be reconciled with reports regarding fire safety checks in other Council-owned buildings.
Officers explained that the indicator related specifically to Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) undertaken within the Council's social housing stock and measured whether assessments due during the reporting period had been completed. Members were advised that the measure related only to housing stock with communal areas and did not include wider Council-owned assets, which were managed separately through the Corporate Landlord function. Assessment frequencies varied according to building risk, with higher-risk properties requiring more frequent reviews.

Councillor Sheppard sought clarification regarding how tenant satisfaction was measured and used to drive service improvements.

Officers advised that tenant feedback was routinely collected through transactional surveys, often issued by text message following completion of a service request. Feedback was monitored and analysed by service managers to identify recurring themes and opportunities for improvement. Members were informed that tenant feedback played an increasingly important role in performance management and service development.
Councillor Sheppard referred to statements made regarding the future of specialist housing stock previously managed by Six Town Housing and questioned whether tenants had been adequately consulted prior to decisions being taken.

The Cabinet Member advised that the September 2025 decision related to the closure of Six Town Housing Ltd and not the future ownership of the housing stock. Members were informed that no final decision had been made regarding future ownership arrangements and that all options remained under consideration. A further report would be presented to Cabinet later in the year and tenant consultation would form a key part of any future decision-making process. It was emphasised that tenants' rights and protections would remain safeguarded under regulatory requirements regardless of the eventual ownership model adopted.

Councillor Sheppard noted that rent arrears remained above sector benchmarks and sought clarification regarding the causes of the increase, evidence supporting the Council's recovery strategy and the balance between enforcement and tenant support.
Officers advised that increasing living costs and welfare reform measures had contributed significantly to rising arrears levels. Members were informed that a refreshed rent collection strategy had recently been implemented, supported by additional staffing resources and new software designed to improve case management and tenant engagement. The strategy combined a positive payment culture with a supportive collection approach intended to maximise income collection whilst ensuring tenants experiencing financial hardship received appropriate support and advice.

Councillor Sheppard sought assurances regarding the Council's preparedness for an anticipated inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing and requested details of areas officers considered to be priorities for improvement.

Officers acknowledged that whilst substantial progress had been made since housing services returned in-house, further improvement work remained necessary. Particular focus was being placed on property safety and quality, stock condition information, electrical safety compliance, fire remediation actions, data governance and systems improvement. Members were informed that work was also underway to improve tenant engagement, repairs performance, ASB management and communication with residents. It was noted that progress against improvement plans was monitored through the Housing Leadership Team, Housing Portfolio Meetings and Housing Advisory Board. Officers expressed confidence that the Council had identified its key challenges and had robust plans in place to address them.

Councillor Martin sought an update regarding the Council's preparedness for implementation of Awaab's Law and requested information regarding compliance with the new statutory requirements.

Officers advised that implementation arrangements continued to develop following publication of detailed Government guidance. Members were informed that significant work was underway to strengthen damp and mould management processes and ensure compliance with the required response timescales. Officers noted that one of the principal challenges related to gaining access to properties to complete required inspections and repairs. It was agreed that additional performance information would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

Councillor Martin also sought assurance that instances of tenants refusing access to allow repairs to be undertaken were appropriately recorded and considered as part of ongoing repairs management and disrepair processes.

Councillor Martin noted that housing rent arrears were reported at approximately £2 million and sought clarification regarding performance targets for reducing arrears.
Officers advised that detailed arrears reduction targets formed part of the refreshed income collection strategy and undertook to circulate further information on targeted reductions and expected timescales for improvement.

Councillor Bayley referred to objectives within the Housing Service Plan extending to March 2029 and questioned why improvements relating to temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast usage would take a number of years to achieve.

Officers advised that the target reflected the scale of the challenge associated with increasing the supply of suitable temporary accommodation and reducing reliance on bed and breakfast placements. Members were informed that the Council was actively seeking to increase accommodation options through investment and acquisition programmes whilst also improving opportunities for households to move into settled accommodation. The timescale reflected both local housing pressures and wider national challenges affecting housing supply.

Councillor Bayley questioned whether improvements in housing waiting times reflected genuine service improvements or were primarily attributable to the recent housing register data cleansing exercise.

Officers advised that performance improvements reflected both better quality data and ongoing work to improve the management of housing applications and allocations. Maintaining accurate information was considered essential to understanding levels of housing need and improving service delivery.

Councillor Pilkington suggested whether sponsorship arrangements similar to those utilised through Homes for Ukraine could potentially support the provision of temporary accommodation for homeless households.

Officers acknowledged the suggestion and advised that whilst alternative approaches could be considered, there would be practical, financial and governance considerations requiring careful assessment. The Cabinet Member suggested that wider discussions with Government and local Members of Parliament may also be beneficial when exploring future options.

Councillor Chaudhry referred to the findings of the Housemark reviews and sought clarification regarding the principal shortcomings identified.

Officers advised that the reviews had highlighted opportunities to strengthen partnership working, improve case recording and data quality, and deliver greater consistency in service delivery. Members were informed that a programme of improvement work was already underway, including revised procedures, enhanced management oversight and further work to embed a positive complaints culture. Efforts were also being focused on ensuring lessons learned through complaints and service reviews translated into measurable service improvements.

Councillor Rydeheard referred to the report's indication that 82.9% of housing stock had received a stock condition survey within the preceding five years and sought clarification regarding the remaining properties, associated costs and anticipated timescales for completion.

Officers explained that previous survey methodologies had relied upon sample surveying and that the Council was now working towards a more comprehensive understanding of housing stock condition. Members were advised that an in-house team of building surveyors had been established and a new appointment system introduced to improve survey coverage. Existing information was already being used to support investment planning and identify priorities for improvement.

Officers advised that particular focus was now being placed on surveying the remaining properties without recent assessments. Any significant defects identified would be incorporated into investment programmes and addressed as part of planned maintenance and improvement works.

In concluding the discussion, Councillor Arif thanked officers and housing staff for their continued commitment to improving housing services. The Cabinet Member highlighted progress made across a range of performance areas, recognition received through housing sector awards and the growing role of tenant engagement in shaping service delivery. Members were assured that the Council remained committed to delivering further improvements in housing standards, regulatory compliance and outcomes for tenants.

It was agreed:

- That the report be noted.
- That written responses be circulated in respect of outstanding questions.

OSC.116 CORPORATE PLAN QUARTER FOUR 2025-26 PERFORMANCE & DELIVERY

The Committee considered a report and appendix presented by Councillor Thorpe, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, setting out performance against the Corporate Plan at Quarter Four 2025/26.

Councillor Thorpe reported that the year-end position presented a broadly positive picture, with approximately 60% of measures on track and a further 37% not currently on track but with mitigation measures in place. Key achievements included labour market performance of 95.7%, with 4.3% of residents not in employment, education or training, support for approximately 7,800 businesses across the borough, delivery of 312 new homes including 80 affordable homes, and strong collection rates for both Council Tax and Business Rates. Members were advised that staff sickness absence had increased during the year. Children's Services performance had continued to improve through delivery of the improvement plan.

Members heard that a number of projects remained amber or red. Regeneration activity in Radcliffe, including Market Chambers, remained on track and continued to progress positively. Delays had occurred to the Digital Strategy due to delays in appointing a Digital, Data and Technology Manager. The Pupil Referral Unit project had been delayed after the original site proved undeliverable, and elements of the Local Plan timetable had been impacted by the General Election. Concerns were also raised regarding delays affecting flood resilience and development work.

Councillor Sheppard raised a question regarding objectives described as "not on track but with risks addressed" and what mitigation actions had been implemented, including milestones and measures of success over the next six months. Officers advised that a detailed annex containing this information was available and would be circulated to Members. It was agreed that the appendix received by officers would be shared with the Committee.

Members discussed the challenge of demonstrating the relationship between Corporate Plan activity and long-term outcomes, particularly in relation to health and social care. It was noted that factors such as an ageing population, changing patterns of hospital discharge and wider demographic trends made it difficult to establish direct causality between interventions and outcomes.

Kate Waterhouse advised that performance was monitored through the Health and Wellbeing Board and Locality Board arrangements and that work was ongoing through Public Health programmes to better demonstrate the impact of preventative interventions, including reductions in hospital admissions. Whilst attributing specific outcomes directly to individual interventions remained challenging, efforts continued to improve understanding of impact and value for money.

Councillor Thorpe highlighted smoking cessation as one example where positive outcomes could be evidenced but noted that wider public health outcomes, including health inequalities and mortality differences across communities within the borough, could take many years to improve and were influenced by a range of factors.

Members were advised that further consideration of performance measures and outcomes would be undertaken through the Member Development Board.
In response to a question submitted in advance regarding the principal financial risks affecting delivery in 2026/27, Councillor Thorpe advised that these were identified within the Budget Report approved by Council in February.

The most significant risks related to demand pressures within Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care and the associated costs of meeting that demand, together with the Council's ability to deliver approved savings proposals. Given that Adult and Children's Services accounted for approximately 70% of the net revenue budget, any increase in demand above forecast assumptions presented a significant financial risk.

Members were advised that monthly budget monitoring was undertaken by the Finance Team and overseen by the Finance Board. Emerging overspends and financial pressures were identified at the earliest opportunity and mitigation plans implemented to minimise impacts on the Council's financial position and reserves.

Further discussion reflected wider risks facing local government including workforce challenges, an ageing workforce, income generation requirements and ensuring that robust information was available to support decision-making.

Councillor Haroon asked what had contributed to the reduction in agency social workers. Councillor Thorpe advised that Greater Manchester initiatives, work to make Bury a more attractive employer and investment in developing the Council's own social work workforce had all contributed to reduced reliance on agency staff.

Kate Waterhouse added that changes in national guidance had encouraged local authorities to reduce dependency on agency workers and focus on recruitment and retention of permanent staff.

Councillor Rahimov referred to the reported average of 14.1 days lost per employee through sickness absence and asked whether reducing agency staff had increased pressures upon permanent employees.

Councillor Thorpe acknowledged that workforce wellbeing remained a key priority and advised that the recently appointed Head of People was reviewing a range of workforce matters. He noted that moving away from agency staffing could not be viewed as a simple transfer of workload but remained preferable from both financial and organisational perspectives.

Councillor Martin queried when more up-to-date dashboard information would be available. Kate Waterhouse explained that some performance indicators relied upon nationally published datasets, resulting in unavoidable delays. Work was ongoing to improve data quality and benchmarking through use of local government data sources.

Councillor Martin also questioned how the report's conclusion regarding strong financial performance could be justified in the context of an overspend.

Councillor Thorpe explained that the overspend represented approximately 3% of the Council's overall budget and was largely attributable to continuing pressures within Adult and Children's Social Care. He highlighted savings delivery, treasury management activity and borrowing arrangements that had generated significant savings elsewhere within the organisation.

Neil Kissock added that stronger performance management arrangements had contributed to improved financial oversight and delivery.

Councillor Martin sought clarification regarding collection performance and was advised that collection rates were approximately 95%.

Councillor Bayley commented that comparative sickness absence data from the previous year would have been helpful and referred to figures contained within the performance report, noting an upward trajectory from February 2025.

Members discussed staff wellbeing and mental health support, including the availability of flexible working arrangements where appropriate. Councillor Thorpe stated that employees who were unwell should take sickness leave and confirmed that support arrangements were in place to promote staff wellbeing.

Kate Waterhouse advised that improvements had been made to sickness absence recording processes so that more meaningful information could be collected regarding causes of absence. Work was also taking place around performance management, wellbeing initiatives and Personal Development Reviews to ensure staff were appropriately supported.

Councillor Bayley reiterated that employees who were ill should not feel pressured to attend work. Councillor Thorpe agreed while noting that sickness absence could create additional pressures for colleagues and that sickness absence policies were under review.

Councillor Rahimov asked about the Family Safeguarding Model and the reported reduction in residential placements for children. Councillor Thorpe advised that residential placements had reduced from a previous peak to 39, compared with a budget assumption of 42 placements. Whilst recognising that demand remained volatile, he explained that the Family Safeguarding Model supported earlier intervention and reduced the need for more costly residential placements.

It Was Agreed:

- The Committee noted the report

Actions:

- Circulate the appendix detailing mitigation actions for measures not currently on track to Members prior to next update.

OSC.117 FINANCE UPDATE REPORT - 2025/26 OUTTURN POSITION

Councillor Thorpe, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, presented an overview of the 2025/26 outturn position. He advised Members received an update on the Council's financial position, noting an improved forecast during the year, although budget pressures remained and continued careful financial management was required. Progress had been made in delivering planned savings and managing service demand, while work to support long-term financial sustainability continued. Members also noted that some capital programme expenditure had been reprofiled into future years to reflect revised delivery timescales for major projects.

In response to a question submitted in advance by Councillor Birchmore regarding the £462,000 variance in business rates income, officers explained that £242,000 related to a lower-than-anticipated contribution from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority through the 100% Business Rates Retention Scheme, with the remaining difference arising from a number of smaller variances. Members were advised that collection performance remained positive, with the Collection Fund reporting an in-year surplus of £493,000.

Responding to a question from Councillor Birchmore regarding the £1.372 million underspend within the Place Directorate, officers advised that this was not solely due to project delays. The variance reflected a combination of increased income from traded services, higher service income levels and savings arising from vacant posts.

Councillor Birchmore asked for clarification on the £1.61 million unachieved saving linked to the reintegration of Six Town Housing into the Council. Officers explained that this represented the remaining element of a wider £3 million savings target. Some savings had already been achieved through reviewing costs chargeable to the HRA, while work continued to identify wider integration efficiencies. The remaining saving had been carried forward into 2026/27 and would continue to be monitored through regular financial reporting.

During discussion, members considered opportunities for increasing Council income. Councillor Pilkington asked about the Council's approach to revenue generation, including planning fee increases. Councillor Thorpe stated that opportunities to commercialise Council assets and services were being explored, including the use of green spaces and events, but noted that there were limits to the level of income that could realistically be generated.

In response to a query from Councillor Rydeheard, it was confirmed that Heaton Park remained under the ownership of Manchester City Council, having been gifted to Manchester in perpetuity.

Councillor Martin asked about contingency plans should the Council need to make further use of reserves. Councillor Thorpe highlighted the structural financial challenges facing local government, particularly the increasing costs of Adult Social Care and the limitations of existing funding arrangements. Officers added that the Council maintained a Budget Stabilisation Reserve and was working to reduce reliance on reserves over the medium term.

Members discussed the wider issue of Adult Social Care funding and whether further support could be secured through joint lobbying with other local authorities. Concerns were raised regarding the sustainability of the current funding system and the burden placed on councils by increasing care demands. Officers advised that discussions continued with Greater Manchester partners, the Integrated Care Board and NHS organisations to secure fair and consistent funding arrangements, particularly in relation to hospital discharges and mental health placements that create significant costs for local authorities.

Councillor Martin also raised a question regarding concessionary arrangements at leisure centres. Councillor Thorpe acknowledged the importance of maintaining accessible services and noted the health and wellbeing benefits they provide to residents.

It Was Agreed:

- The Committee noted the report.

OSC.118 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR J RYDEHEARD
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 9.30 pm)