

Minutes of: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 9 September 2025

Present: Councillor D Vernon (in the Chair)
 Councillors J Southworth, M Rahimov, A Arif, T Pilkington,
 D Green, T Rafiq, E Moss, C Birchmore, G Marsden and
 J Rydeheard

Also in attendance: Kate Waterhouse Executive Director (Strategy &
 Transformation)
 Neil Kissock Director of Finance
 Councillor S Thorpe Cabinet Member for Finance and
 Transformation
 Robert Summerfield Director of Regeneration and Project
 Delivery

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

Apologies for Absence:

OSC.62 APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

OSC.63 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OSC.64 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

OSC.65 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by Councillor R Bernstein.

“What action does the Council feel is appropriate to respond to the results from the GM Crime Survey where more than one third of people are not confident of getting help from GMP in an emergency”

OSC.66 MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd July 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.67 2025/26 CORPORATE PLAN - QUARTER ONE UPDATE

A report from Councillor Thorpe, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, was circulated ahead of the meeting. Councillor Thorpe was invited to present a brief overview, highlighting the Council's Q1 performance. The report demonstrated strong alignment with corporate performance indicators, particularly those linked to core priorities

such as reducing inequalities and promoting inclusive growth. Councillor Thorpe noted that delivery across services had been substantial, with minimal slippage, and that councillors had been actively engaged in key areas.

He drew attention to the significant progress made in Children's Services, where all areas previously rated as "Requires Improvement" had shown advancement. Notably, leadership had moved from "Inadequate" to "Good," reflecting the impact of targeted improvement efforts. Financial transformation was reported to be on track, with the implementation of zero-based budgeting progressing well, although there were some delays in specific areas such as the MAP programme. Councillor Thorpe also mentioned ongoing efforts to secure a permanent site for the PRU, with alternative locations currently being explored.

During the discussion, several councillors raised questions. Councillor Moss queried the reduction in HMOs from 80 to 10, referencing page 26 of the report. Councillor Thorpe and Robert Summerfield responded, explaining that the decline was reflective of market conditions and the high cost of construction. They noted that developments with fewer than 10 units often fall below the threshold for affordable housing contributions, although the number of affordable homes built is expected to increase in 2023–24. The Brownfield Housing Fund and Homes England grants were acknowledged as helpful, but insufficient to fully offset rising construction costs. Developments in Radcliffe and Seedfield were cited as examples of ongoing work, with support from GMCA and other partners.

Councillor Rydeheard asked about the Milltown Street bridge, which was destroyed in 2015, and whether there were plans for its reconstruction. Robert Summerfield advised that a response would be sought from Highways, and Neil Long would provide an update. Councillor Rydeheard also raised questions about the Elton and Walshaw sites, which were addressed by Councillor Birchmore.

On housing delivery, Councillor Birchmore referred to page 13 and asked about the timeline for the housing register delivery pipeline. Kate Waterhouse responded that the Homeless Strategy outlines a delivery period of approximately 18 months.

Councillor Moss raised a question regarding EHCPs, noting that while the number of new plans issued within 12 months had decreased, the number of children with EHCPs in schools had increased. Councillor Thorpe explained that this reflected a more realistic and targeted approach, with improved assessments and robust input from educational psychologists. He acknowledged that while fewer plans were being issued, those who needed them were receiving appropriate support, and the right to appeal remained in place. Councillor Marsden expressed concern about a potential backlog and questioned whether the reduced issuance might be due to increased stringency. Councillor Thorpe responded that the process had become more objective and rigorous, and that previous practices may have been overly generous. Councillor Marsden asked whether this could leave the Council open to scrutiny, and accepted the premise of a more balanced approach.

Councillor Pilkington commented on the evolving landscape, suggesting that some parents view EHCPs as a "silver bullet." He asked whether the work of Children's Services and strategic partnerships with schools could help mitigate pressures. Councillor Thorpe agreed, highlighting the importance of the graduated approach within schools, which enables early interventions and support without necessarily requiring formal plans. He emphasised that while partnerships are critical, they do not replace the need for appropriate interventions where necessary.

Councillor Rydeheard asked for clarification on the risks addressed in the Fishpool local transport strategy. A full written response will be provided.

The committee held a general discussion on the growing pressures around homelessness in Bury. Councillor Moss raised concerns about the increasing difficulty residents face in securing accommodation, which Councillor Thorpe attributed to limited funding and broader systemic challenges. The issue was described as serious and worsening.

Councillor Birchmore asked whether the Council tracks homelessness caused by Section 21 evictions, and Kate Waterhouse agreed to explore whether this data could be reported. Councillor Rahimov inquired about seasonal patterns in homelessness, and Kate noted that rough sleepers often return in late summer, particularly around August, in anticipation of colder weather.

The conversation reflected a shared concern about the scale and complexity of homelessness locally, with members seeking greater clarity on data and trends to inform future scrutiny and policy responses.

Councillor Vernon asked how the significant financial gap would affect the Council's performance going forward. Councillor Thorpe explained that the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) requires the Council to find savings to ensure financial stability over the coming years. He acknowledged that this would impact delivery, as not all areas of the plan may be completed.

Councillor Vernon asked about the current stage of financial planning, and Councillor Thorpe expressed confidence in the re-profiling of the capital programme, noting that many initiatives are already underway. He added that economic forecasts would continue to influence future decisions.

It Was Agreed that:

- The Report be noted
- The Committee confirmed that scrutiny of the report had taken place and that Cabinet would be informed accordingly at the meeting scheduled for the following evening.

OSC.68 REGENERATION UPDATE

In the absence of Councillor O'Brien, Councillor Thorpe attended the meeting to provide an overview of the regeneration and housing portfolio. He began by outlining the scale of the current regeneration programme, which includes over 30 active projects with a combined value of approximately £140 million. These projects span a wide range of physical regeneration initiatives and intersect with the work of other strategic boards, including the Housing Growth Board and the Commercial Board, particularly in relation to the Millgate Shopping Centre. There is also significant crossover with highways and place-based workstreams, reflecting the integrated nature of the council's approach to regeneration.

Councillor Thorpe acknowledged the considerable challenges facing the delivery of regeneration projects, particularly in the current economic climate. He highlighted the impact of inflation on construction materials and labour, as well as the broader issue of high interest rates, which are affecting the viability of schemes. He referenced the Farmer Review, *Modernise or Die*, which critiques the inefficiencies of the construction industry and the urgent need for modernisation. Recruitment and succession planning were also noted as ongoing concerns, although the regeneration team continues to perform strongly under pressure.

The Committee was updated on a number of housing growth projects, many of which have been supported by external grant funding. This has enabled the council to bring forward brownfield sites for development and support wider housing objectives. Among the sites discussed were Seedfield, which is now progressing; Pyramid Park and Humphrey House, where safeguarding and decontamination work is underway alongside a design competition; and the Wheatfield site, which is being developed in collaboration with Adult Care to support integrated housing delivery.

The Elton Reservoir site was described as particularly complex, involving significant infrastructure requirements and legal work. Councillor Thorpe noted that while the site has potential, it remains contentious and is not yet at a stage where development can proceed. The Elms site is being explored for direct development without a delivery partner, which may improve viability. A number of smaller sites within the ALDP are also being progressed to maintain a steady pipeline of housing delivery.

The Committee was informed of close working between the regeneration and children's services teams, particularly in relation to proposals for new children's homes. Section 106 funding has also been allocated to support the acquisition of homes as part of the council's wider housing strategy.

In Radcliffe, several key regeneration projects are progressing well. The Radcliffe Hub and Market Chambers have moved past initial sewer works, with piling now complete. The Bury Market Canopies project is significantly ahead of schedule and has been delivered without disruption to traders. Similarly, the Flexi Hall is progressing rapidly, with structural works well underway and the project currently nine weeks ahead of programme. The Millwood site, being developed in partnership with Bruntwood, is in the masterplanning phase.

Councillor Thorpe also provided an update on education infrastructure, including the delivery of new pupil referral units. One such unit is being developed on Whittaker Street in Radcliffe, as part of the council's broader commitment to improving educational provision.

A discussion followed regarding parking provision, prompted by a question from Councillor Birchmore. Concerns were raised about the potential loss of parking in Prestwich and whether sufficient provision was being made in Radcliffe. Officers clarified that in Prestwich, two parking locations are being consolidated, but there will be no net loss of spaces. In Radcliffe, parking needs are being actively monitored, particularly around the medical centre. Modelling work is underway to assess future requirements, and recommendations will be brought back to the Committee once data collection is complete. It was noted that current provision stands at 222 spaces, but demand could exceed 300, indicating a likely shortfall.

The Committee welcomed the update and acknowledged the scale and ambition of the regeneration programme. Members expressed interest in undertaking more detailed scrutiny of individual projects at future meetings and agreed that ongoing oversight would be important, particularly in relation to funding, delivery risks, and cross-departmental collaboration.

Following the main presentation, members raised a number of specific questions and comments relating to ongoing regeneration projects and associated strategies. Councillor Birchmore queried the current position regarding the tendering process for the Bury Market basement. In response, Robert Summerfield confirmed that a market analysis is currently being undertaken by the Economic Growth team. This work is intended to identify viable and appropriate uses for the basement space, recognising the significant opportunity it presents. He noted that the Council is seeking external advice to ensure the space is used effectively and that mistakes are avoided. While there is no confirmed date for the procurement process, it is anticipated that this will progress in the coming months once the external advice has been received.

Councillor Birchmore also raised concerns regarding the provision of adult education space in Radcliffe. She noted that previous plans had included enterprise and adult learning space within the Hub, but this no longer appears to be the case. As a result, there is currently no adult education facility within the borough of Radcliffe, which is increasing costs and limiting access. Officers confirmed that a response had been provided by the adult education team via email, and it was agreed that this correspondence would be circulated to Councillor Birchmore. It was also noted that UK Shared Prosperity Funding had supported the inclusion of two designated teaching rooms within the Radcliffe Hub.

Councillor Moss asked whether the Council had sufficient resources to deliver the scale of regeneration activity underway. Robert Summerfield responded by highlighting the shift in how such initiatives are delivered, with a strong emphasis on leveraging private sector expertise and funding. He explained that many officers are funded through external funding streams, and that the Council has become adept at managing supply chains and commissioning external support. However, he acknowledged that the development environment remains challenging, particularly in relation to recruitment and retention. He referenced the Hackitt Review and noted that it is currently more lucrative to work as a planner than a surveyor, which is impacting the availability of key skills. He added that the delivery of regeneration is increasingly reliant on revenue sources such as BGI (Bury Growth Initiative), and that managing these resources effectively is “an art, not a science.”

Councillor Moss also asked about the viability of affordable housing delivery, particularly in relation to the Pyramid Park development. Officers confirmed that 24 of the 48 units on that site are designated as affordable, but that viability remains a key issue. Rising energy costs, increased business rates, and the requirement to deliver a 10% biodiversity net gain on large sites are all placing pressure on development budgets. In some cases, this is resulting in trade-offs between environmental and social outcomes.

Councillor Rydeheard sought clarification on how much of the £140 million regeneration programme is funded through borrowing. In response, Robert Summerfield confirmed that two major schemes — the Bury Market and Radcliffe Hub — had each received £20 million through the Levelling Up Fund. The Council has drawn down the full allocation for both schemes and is one of the first local authorities to progress from inception to construction. He also confirmed that Sport England funding had been fully spent on delivering specific outputs, with regular monitoring visits taking place.

Councillor Rydeheard also asked about the former fire station site, which had previously been earmarked for a hotel. Officers confirmed that the hotel deal had fallen through and that the site is now being considered for housing. A final decision will be made by elected members once the masterplan has been completed.

Councillor Marsden raised a question about staffing levels within the Radcliffe Hub, specifically how many council staff would be based there. Officers confirmed that a written response would be provided, but noted that the Hub will include office space for community-based staff cohorts. Traffic flow and parking surveys are currently being undertaken to inform future planning.

Councillor Rafiq requested clarification on the number of accessible homes being delivered within the 4–6 development. Officers confirmed that 34 apartments are being delivered as accessible homes.

Councillor Southworth asked what consideration had been given to improving children’s health and activity levels through regeneration. In response, Robert Summerfield explained that most developments include outdoor spaces and that these are considered as part of individual planning applications. Councillor Southworth followed up by asking about the provision of parks and recreation areas for children and young people. Officers acknowledged that this is

an area of focus and confirmed that discussions are ongoing with Public Health colleagues to ensure developments support active lifestyles and walkability. Councillor Thorpe added that the Council's wellness strategy is being aligned with the regeneration strategy to ensure a more cohesive approach to health and wellbeing.

Finally, Councillor Rydeheard asked whether it would be possible to meet with officers involved in the procurement of play areas. Officers agreed to facilitate a conversation with the relevant officer, to explore procurement processes and project delivery in more detail. It was also noted that further detail would be provided on the Elton Reservoir site as plans progress.

It Was Agreed

- The update be noted

OSC.69 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR D VERNON
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.30 pm)