

Minutes of: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 8 September 2026

Present: Councillor J Rydeheard (in the Chair)
Councillors J Southworth, M Rahimov, T Pilkington, L Ryder,
A Chaudhry, N Bayley, C Birchmore, J Sheppard and J Roith

Also in attendance: Councillor Thorpe Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation
Councillor Smith Cabinet Member for Environment, Climate Change and Operations
Neil Kissock Director of Finance
Kate Waterhouse Executive Director (Strategy and Transformation)
Ben Thomson Assistant Director for Public Protection
Jacqui Dennis Director of Law and Democratic Services – Monitoring Officer

Public Attendance: One member of the public was in attendance at the meeting

Apologies for Absence: Councillor S Haroon

OSC.119 APOLOGIES

Apologies are noted above.

OSC.120 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OSC.121 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

OSC.122 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

OSC.123 MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.124 PRE SUBMITTED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Pages 7 - 18)

OSC.125 FINANCE Q1

The Committee considered the Quarter 1 Finance Monitoring Report and accompanying appendix. Councillor Thorpe Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, presented an overview of the report, explaining that it outlined the Council's financial

position at the end of Quarter 1, performance against budget assumptions, and the forecast outturn position. Members were advised that the report represented an early indication of financial performance and that forecasts would continue to be refined throughout the year.

Discussion took place regarding the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit and the Government's SEND reform programme. Members heard that significant financial pressures continued to arise from independent and out-of-borough SEND placements, with work ongoing to increase local provision and reduce reliance on higher-cost placements.

Councillor Birchmore sought clarification on the Council's plans to increase SEND provision within mainstream schools and whether academies would be expected to support this approach. In response, it was explained that additional funding was being used to build capacity across schools, enabling them to accommodate a wider range of needs and support more pupils locally.

Further discussion focused on the increasing demand for SEND support and the associated costs. Members were advised that the Council's strategy aimed to provide appropriate provision across the full spectrum of need whilst reducing expenditure on expensive external placements. It was noted that improved diagnostics, earlier intervention and increased local capacity would contribute to a more sustainable model over time.

In response to a supplementary question regarding anticipated savings and the location of new SEND provision, Members were informed that a new 60-place provision was intended to reduce out-of-borough placements and would deliver significant savings. Further details would be provided outside the meeting.

Members also considered expenditure relating to children's residential placements. Councillor Rahimov asked whether the Council was exploring the development of its own residential provision. The Committee heard that two projects were currently being progressed, including collaborative work across Greater Manchester, although not all children would be suited to internally provided accommodation due to the complexity of some cases. Officers advised that establishing residential provision required significant lead-in time, including Ofsted registration, but remained a key element of the Council's strategy to reduce placement costs and improve outcomes.

The Committee noted continuing financial pressures within children's services, including fostering and residential care costs. Members were informed that whilst some placement costs were beginning to stabilise, market conditions remained challenging.

Questions were also asked regarding project delays, additional costs associated with facilities within the Radcliffe Hub development, and whether the Council would benefit financially from commercial arrangements linked to those facilities.

Officers advised that project costs had been updated to reflect revised assumptions and changing market conditions. Whilst some costs were higher than originally expected, a number of these were one-off costs which would not impact long-term revenue budgets. Reference was also made to revisions within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Committee discussed vacancy management and staffing savings identified within the report. Councillor Rydeheard queried the level of savings being achieved through recruitment delays. In response, Members were informed that critical social care roles would continue to be prioritised, whilst recruitment to non-critical vacancies may be delayed to support financial management. It was acknowledged that challenges remained in recruiting to specialist roles, particularly within legal services and social care.

Jacqui Dennis the councils monitoring officer, emphasised that recruitment difficulties continued across a number of professional disciplines. The Committee noted that the use of agency and temporary resources remained necessary in some areas where recruitment challenges persisted.

Councillor Birchmore raised concerns regarding Housing Revenue Account procurement processes and delays in delivering repairs and maintenance work, referencing specific examples raised by residents. In response, Members were informed that procurement arrangements had improved significantly in recent years, with stronger contract management, more accurate contract registers and greater use of framework agreements to secure value for money.

Neil Kissock highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen procurement processes and improve contract oversight, whilst continuing to recruit to key procurement posts.

Members also discussed the recruitment and retention of social workers. Councillor Pilkington asked whether work had been undertaken to improve the Council's offer in comparison with neighbouring authorities. The Committee heard that improvements to pay, conditions and workforce support had resulted in a more stable workforce and reduced reliance on temporary staff. Members noted that this had contributed positively to outcomes for children and families.

Further questions were raised regarding the Housing Revenue Account and the potential for bringing more services in-house rather than relying on external contractors. Members were advised that this remained under consideration as part of wider service reviews, and that a separate HRA report would provide further detail on the issue.

Councillor Chaudhry queried the overspend identified in relation to corporate printing and postage. Officers explained that a number of factors contributed to the pressure, including election-related activity and the continued use of physical correspondence. Members were advised that work was ongoing to increase digital communication and reduce printing and postage costs through an invest-to-save approach.

It Was Agreed

- The report be noted

OSC.126 2025/26 TREASURY OUTTURN REPORT

The Committee considered a report and appendix presented by Councillor Thorpe, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, providing an update on Treasury Management activity during the first quarter of 2025/26.

Councillor Thorpe introduced the report, noting that Treasury Management is a highly technical area that includes monitoring prudential indicators, borrowing arrangements, investment activity and wider economic factors. He highlighted the ongoing uncertainty within global financial markets, including the potential impact of international conflicts and economic conditions on investment returns and borrowing costs.

Councillor Pilkington referred to the Council's investment activity and opportunities for revenue generation, seeking clarification on the associated challenges.

In response, Councillor Thorpe explained that national regulations surrounding borrowing to invest have been significantly tightened in recent years. Whilst local authorities had historically undertaken borrowing for commercial investment purposes, such activity is now subject to

greater restriction due to the risks involved. He advised that, given current economic conditions and the financial pressures facing councils nationally, the authority's focus remains on prudent investment activity, protecting public funds and securing appropriate returns without engaging in speculative investment. He emphasised that the Council continues to explore opportunities to improve investment returns where appropriate.

Neil Kissock added that the Council does not wish to increase its risk profile in pursuit of additional returns and therefore adopts a cautious approach to investment management.

Councillor Birchmore referred to Table 5 of the report and noted that a number of loans were due to mature during the year. She asked whether the financial implications of refinancing these loans had been factored into the Council's financial planning and whether this could create additional budgetary pressures.

Councillor Rahimov further asked whether refinancing arrangements generally maintain existing loan terms or whether repayment periods are extended where appropriate.

In response, Neil Kissock explained that the Council's borrowing portfolio is largely based on fixed interest rate loans. As loans mature, officers continually review the most advantageous options available in the market to refinance debt where necessary, taking account of prevailing interest rates and long-term affordability considerations. The timing of refinancing decisions is carefully managed to secure the best possible outcome for the authority.

Councillor Chaudhry referred to Table 8 and requested further information regarding the Council's non-financial investments, particularly the loans detailed within the table.

Councillor Thorpe advised that the Council had previously provided loan finance to Manchester Airport as part of its investment arrangements. He explained that returns are received through a combination of dividend income and loan repayments, which continue to contribute towards the Council's overall investment portfolio.

Councillor Roith sought clarification on the loan associated with Bruntwood referenced within Table 8.

Neil Kissock explained that the loan related to the acquisition of the Mill Gate Shopping Centre and formed part of the funding arrangements associated with that investment.

Councillor Rydeheard sought clarification regarding borrowing repayments and asked what measures are in place to prevent borrowing levels increasing unsustainably over time.

In response, Neil Kissock advised that the Council is currently developing its longer-term financial planning arrangements to ensure borrowing remains sustainable. He explained that financing costs are met through the Council's revenue budget, with income generated from assets contributing towards borrowing costs. This helps ensure that debt remains manageable and affordable.

Councillor Rydeheard also asked about the difference between borrowing undertaken through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and non-HRA borrowing.

Neil Kissock explained that HRA borrowing operates under different arrangements and can often attract lower borrowing costs. Different statutory and accounting requirements apply, including provisions relating to debt repayment and the treatment of housing assets. As a result, there are distinct differences between HRA and General Fund borrowing in terms of funding arrangements and debt management.

The Chair noted that advance questions had also been received from Councillor Sheppard and Councillor Birchmore and that responses had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting.

It Was Agreed:

- The report be noted

OSC.127 AWARD OF EVCI GM CONTRACT TO INSTALL EV CHARGEPOINTS THROUGHOUT BURY PART A

Councillor Smith, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Climate Change and Operations, presented a report seeking approval for TfGM to award a 20 year concession contract for the installation of electric vehicle chargepoints across the borough, supported by significant government funding.

Councillor Birchmore asked whether the cost of charging would be comparable to charging at home and suggested consideration of shallow-footing gullet chargers for residents without off-street parking.

In response, Ben Thomson, Assistant Director of Public Protection, advised that public charging costs would be set at market rates and that the aim was to provide affordable charging options. He added that pavement charging solutions could be explored in the future as technology and infrastructure develop.

Councillor Southworth Queried what controls would be in place to prevent the provider from significantly increasing charging costs.

Officers advised that charging costs would be monitored and contractual measures would be in place to ensure any price increases remain reasonable and proportionate.

It was Agreed:

- The committee noted the report

OSC.128 EXCLUSIONS FROM PRESS AND PUBLIC

OSC.129 AWARD OF EVCI GM CONTRACT TO INSTALL EV CHARGEPOINTS THROUGHOUT BURY PART B

The committee considered the Part B report relating to the procurement process and contract award.

A question was raised regarding the composition of the assessment panel and whether appropriate due diligence had been undertaken as part of the procurement process. Officers confirmed that the procurement exercise had been managed through TfGM's procurement service and that the necessary due diligence and evaluation processes had been completed.

Councillor Rydeheard sought clarification on the number of organisations involved in the procurement process and how they had been assessed. Officers advised that the procurement exercise had been re-evaluated and that four organisations had initially been involved. Following the final evaluation process, the recommended contractor achieved the highest overall ranking and was selected as the preferred bidder.

The committee noted the information provided and supported the recommendations contained within the Part B report.

It Was Agreed:

- The update be noted

OSC.130 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR J RYDEHEARD
Chair

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