

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

At a meeting of this Committee held on
3 February 2025

(Present) Councillors Hattersley, Hodkinson, McQuade, Mussell,
O'Connor, Pearl, L Preston, Tasker and Uddin (Chair)

(Not Present) Councillors Johnson, Richards and Sweeney
David Thorpe and Ben McMullen

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Johnson and Sweeney and Ben McMullen.

17 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 OCTOBER 2024

* Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2024 be approved and signed.

18 DECLARATION OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

19 DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of party whip.

20 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 2 2024/25

The Director for Policy and Transformation provided an overview of the performance indicators related to priority 6 of the Borough Strategy for Quarter 2 of 2024/25 municipal year. During the discuss questions were asked and the follow points arose:

- The percentage of Stage 1 complaints responded to within policy timescales (CS-002) was on target and had increased since the previous year.
- Responses to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests within timescales (CS-013) was below target. Oversight of the responses to FOIs was being enhanced with weekly reporting to case managers being implemented to increase visibility of cases; case reports were also going to be distributed to senior leaders for further oversight. A toolkit for responding to FOIs was being developed and expected to be available later in the year. To reduce the number of FOIs received, the Council was publishing information on its website to avoid multiple FOIs relating to the same topic.

* Resolved that the performance position at Quarter 2 2024/25 and the actions planned by the Corporate Directorate to address specific areas for performance improvement in relation to Priority 6 be noted.

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21 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT PERIOD 2 2024/25

The Director of Finance (S151 Officer) provided an overview of the Council's financial position as at the end of Quarter 2 2024/25. During the discussion questions were asked and the following points arose:

- Across all portfolios there had been a net overspend at the end of quarter 2 of £5.5m. At the time of the meeting the quarter 3 position was broadly similar to that of quarter 2.
- There was a lot of pressure on the Children and Young People Portfolio budget with cost of placing children in homes and agency staff, and unachieved savings, the main causes for the £6.1m overspend. Efforts were being made to realise the savings that had been budgeted in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and reduce demand for children's social care.
- There was also significant pressure on the budget for Adult Social Care with a £0.8m overspend attributed to a rise in demand for services. The £1.9m overspend in the Transport & Environment portfolio was attributed to a change in the recycling contract which had gone from the Council generating an income from recycling collected to having to pay for disposal due to changes in costs in the industry; a report was due to go to Cabinet in February 2025 about this matter.
- To mitigate the overspends a recruitment freeze, cessation of non-essential expenditure and continued review and reduction of agency workers was undertaken. Underspends in Corporate Services driven by returns on investments resulting from higher than expected interest rates also contributed towards the mitigation.
- Subsequent to the publication of the quarter 2 financial monitoring report the Government had announced additional grant funding in a number of areas such as children services and adult social care. This also supported the Council in balancing its budget.
- The Government had provided the Council with some additional grant funding specifically to contribute towards paying employers' national insurance contributions that was due to increase in April 2025. While this grant funding was not expected to cover the full cost of the increased contributions, the other grants the Government had provided meant the Council had more than enough additional funding to cover the increase in employer's national insurance contributions.

*** Resolved that:**

- 1) the severe forecast outturn revenue overspend position for 2024/25 summarised at Section 1 above and detailed in Sections 1 and 2 of the Appendix, and in individual portfolio positions detailed at Annex C be noted;**
- 2) the latest position with regard to the implementation of 2024/25 budget savings and those brought forward from prior years, as detailed in Section 3 of the Appendix be noted;**
- 3) the revised capital programme as detailed in Section 4 and Annex F of the Appendix be noted;**
- 4) the latest Reserves and Balances position as detailed in Section 5 of the Appendix be noted;**

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- 5) the Dedicated Schools Grant position as detailed in Section 6 of the Appendix be noted;
- 6) the Other Financial Monitoring Matters as detailed in Section 7 of the Appendix be noted;
- 7) the £0.538m of funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to support development work on the St Helens to Widnes Active Travel route be noted; and
- 8) the Interim Treasury Management Strategy Report 2024/25 at Annex G to the Appendix be noted.

22 BUDGET SCRUTINY TASK GROUP REPORT 2025/26

The Senior Scrutiny Officer provided an overview of the report that had been submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission following the review carried out by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for 2025/26. The Commission was recommended to approve the statement set out in paragraph 4.8 to 4.14 of the report and submit it to Cabinet and Council for consideration as part of the budget approval process.

* **Resolved that:**

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) the statement of the 2025/26 Budget Task Group in relation to the robustness of the budget setting process be approved; and
- 3) the statement be submitted to the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) for inclusion in the Budget Report to Cabinet and Council.

23 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES 2024/25

The Senior Scrutiny Officer provided an overview of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission's work programme including items scheduled for the next meeting on 31 March 2025. The Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee and the Chair of the Place Services Scrutiny Committee provided overviews of the current position of their respective Committees' work programmes included progress of ongoing and completed task and finish reviews. As the Chair of the Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Committee was not present at the meeting, the Senior Scrutiny Officer provided an overview of the Committee's work programme.

* **Resolved that the work programmes of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and three Scrutiny Committees be noted.**