

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 OCTOBER 2018

PRESENT

Councillor D. Acton (in the Chair).

Councillors C. Boyes (Vice-Chair), R. Bowker, J. Coupe, A. New, S. Taylor, S. Thomas, A.J. Williams and M. Young

Also Present

Cllr S. Adshead - Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality & Climate Change
Cllr M. Cordingley - Executive Member for Finance
Cllr M. Freeman - Executive Member for Constitutional Reform & Resident Engagement
Cllr. K. Proctor - Executive Member for Communities & Housing

In attendance

N. Bishop - Corporate Director, Finance and Systems
J. Le Fevre - Corporate Director, Governance & Community Strategy
R. Roe - Corporate Director, Place
C. Gaffey - Democratic & Scrutiny Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Holden, B. Shaw, R. Chilton (Ex-Officio) and D. Western (Ex-Officio).

12. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2018, be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interests were made by Members.

14. EXECUTIVE'S RESPONSE TO THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CRM SYSTEM

The Committee received a report of the Executive Member for Constitutional Reform and Resident Engagement. The report provided a response to the Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish Group report and recommendations following a review of the Council's Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) system, which was presented to the Executive at their meeting on 29 January 2018.

Following the appointment of a Chief Digital Officer, an IT strategy was being developed with the aim of improving the Council's digital services. Enhancements to the Council's intranet system were scheduled for the New Year, as well as improvements to the Council's website. An honest appraisal of the Council's CRM system was ongoing, with advice sought from key officers on how this could be improved. The objective would be to give residents confidence in using these digital interfaces. Members welcomed the suggested enhancements to the Council website, which would be conducted in house by Council staff.

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The report detailed the progress made against implementing the remaining services in the programme, set out on page 3 of the third supplementary agenda. Some of the service areas had recently gone live, whilst others were at the final testing stage. Although some areas had been de-scoped from the programme for the time being, the Council remained committed to the C360 system, and a programme of C360 awareness sessions would be offered to all Elected Members in the coming weeks. Dates for this training had not yet been agreed, but Members would be contacted in due course to canvass for availability.

When logging an incident on the C360 system, the Vice-Chair requested that more information be provided in the confirmation email sent to service users. These emails currently included a reference number only, which made incidents difficult to track if multiple reports had been raised. The Corporate Director for Governance and Community Strategy agreed to feed this back to the CRM Project Team.

The Chair requested that a further update be brought to a future meeting of the Committee, with the Chief Digital Officer invited to attend.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That a further report on the implementation of the CRM programme be brought to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

15. 2019/20 BUDGET GAP AND ASSUMPTIONS / PROGRESS AGAINST THE FINANCIAL RISKS IDENTIFIED AS PART OF THE 2018/19 BUDGET SCRUTINY PROCESS

The Committee received a presentation of the Corporate Director for Finance and Systems providing information in relation to the budget challenges and assumptions for 2019/20, as well as an update on the 2018/19 savings programme. The presentation was considered under the 'Overview Report' item, as it had been omitted from the original agenda in error.

The gross budget gap for 2019/20 was approximately £12m, and the Corporate Leadership Team and other Senior Officers had been tasked with submitting proposals to identify possible efficiency savings and income generation opportunities to address the shortfall. The 2019/20 Draft Budget Proposals would be presented to the Executive on 15 October 2018 before being presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 7 November 2018. Following the autumn statement and the Budget Scrutiny process, the final proposals would be presented to full Council at their meeting in February 2019.

Members discussed the 100% business rates retention scheme, which had replaced the revenue support grant previously provided by central Government. Although Trafford currently benefited from the scheme, a reset of the formula was scheduled for 2021, which could significantly reduce the amount of income Trafford receives for their business rates growth. It was also noted that a substantial amount of funds were

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set aside to cover ongoing business rates appeals, roughly 50% of which were lodged by businesses located at the Trafford Centre and Trafford Park. If an appeal was unsuccessful, the funds set aside for this could be released from the reserves for use in the wider budget.

Page 17 of the second supplementary agenda listed the savings programme proposed for the 2018/19 budget. Members were advised that the savings attributed with a red 'RAG' rating related to some savings at Sale Waterside which may not be achieved, as well as some potentially missed savings targets in the Adults budget. These were regularly reported in the budget monitor reports presented to the Executive and the Accounts & Audit Committee.

The Chair asked for more detailed information in relation to the reserves listed on page 18 of the second supplementary agenda, and how the decisions were made on how these were allocated. The Corporate Director for Finance and Systems advised that the reserves were regularly reviewed, but more detailed information could be provided if required. It was agreed that the Chair would meet with the Corporate Director for Finance and Systems following the meeting to review aspects of the reserves, and would report back to the Committee with any relevant information.

Members discussed the Investment Fund and Strategy. The strategy aimed to provide the Council with more capital growth, which would in turn provide better returns on investments. The figures listed on page 19 on the second supplementary agenda were the net additional income expected from these investments, taking interest and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) into account. The Council was required to set aside funds to ensure any borrowing for investments could be paid back. At the end of the period, the funds built up in the MRP would be used to pay back the loan, with the Authority then owning the asset.

Members asked whether fees and charges could be considered for additional income generation. The Committee were advised that these were treated as 'negative costs', with most services only allowed to cover their own costs and could not legally make a profit (e.g. licencing fees). Also, the fees for some services were set at a level to ensure they were affordable and used by residents, with the Council only recovering the cost associated with providing these services (e.g. pest control).

The Committee thanked the Corporate Director for Finance and Systems for the report and looked forward to the presenting of the 2019/20 Draft Budget Proposals at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 7 November 2018.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That the Chair meets with the Corporate Director for Finance and Systems following the meeting to discuss aspects of the budget reserves in more detail.

16. REPORT ON COMPLAINTS DETERMINED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN 2017/18

The Committee received a report of the Executive Member for Constitutional Reform and Resident Engagement providing information on adverse outcomes of complaints formally investigated by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. The report set out a summary of complaints determined in 2017/18.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

17. FIRE SAFETY IN HIGH RISE TOWER BLOCKS - UPDATE

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director for Place providing a further update on Trafford's current position in relation to fire safety in high rise housing following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower.

The Executive Member for Communities and Housing presented the report. As reported previously, all five Trafford Housing Trust (THT) high rise buildings had been identified as having combustible cladding that would need replacement or other remedial treatment in order to reduce the risk of fire. Due to the significant works required, sourcing the funds to complete the work had caused a delay in commencing the remedial works. The Committee were assured that regular discussions with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) and THT would continue, and discussions with professional experts had been held to source the correct replacement materials.

The plans for the proposed panel replacement works to the tower blocks had now been submitted to Trafford Council's Building Control Service for review, and it was anticipated that the installations would commence before Christmas 2018 and would be completed during 2019.

The Chair recommended that the fire safety proposals in the report be extended to hospitals, care homes and schools, and noted that the lack of sprinklers in these types of buildings, along with high rise buildings, was an issue that should be considered. Concerns were also raised about the Grenfell Tower enquiry's decision to only ban combustible cladding on high rise towers of 18 floors or more, a ban which would not be applied retrospectively.

The Corporate Director for Place agreed to raise the issue of sprinklers with THT, however Members were advised of the difficulties and cost associated with retrofitting sprinklers. The Committee were assured that the Council was fully committed to implementing the recommendations made as part of the Grenfell enquiry, and were confident that the Council was compliant with all current fire safety regulations. The Chair suggested that GMFRS be invited to meet with Council Officers and Members to discuss the options available for retrofitting sprinklers.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted.

- 2) That a further report on the fire safety be brought to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

18. REDUCING SINGLE USE PLASTIC IN TRAFFORD

The Committee received a copy of a motion recently considered and agreed at a meeting of full Council, confirming Trafford's commitment to reducing the use of single use plastic. A supplementary report of the Executive Member for the Environment, Air Quality and Climate Change accompanied the original motion.

Members were pleased with the progress made and felt this was a good opportunity for the Council to lead by example on an important issue. A ban on the use of single use plastic cups in the Town Hall and at Sale Waterside was now in effect, and alternatives to other single use plastic items were being sourced. The Executive Member for the Environment, Air Quality and Climate Change personally thanked Phil Valentine, Environment Strategic Business Manager, for the work he had done so far to drive this forward.

Members suggested that these changes should be extended to all areas where Council services are provided, including schools. The Council should also try to encourage local businesses to adopt similar measures.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

19. OVERVIEW REPORT

The Committee received a report of the Scrutiny Committee Chair providing information on the work programme, task & finish group reviews, scrutiny recommendations, and a summary of Executive decisions.

It was noted that the Task & Finish Group conducting the review of the One Trafford Partnership had met on a number of occasions, and work would now begin on producing a report of the Group's findings. The final report would be brought to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Members' consideration.

Prior to the meeting, Committee Members had been asked to familiarise themselves with the Council's Housing Strategy. The Chairman recommended that a Task & Finish Group, chaired by Cllr Aiden Williams, be setup to conduct a review of housing in Trafford focusing mainly on affordability, allocation and social strategy. Any Members who wished to take part in the review were asked to contact Democratic Services to register their interest following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted
- 2) That a Task & Finish Group be formed to conduct a review of the Council's Housing Strategy.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 7.56 pm