

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 SEPTEMBER 2017

PRESENT

Councillor M. Young (in the Chair).

Councillors M. Cordingley (Vice-Chairman), R. Bowker, K. Carter, Mrs. P. Dixon, J. Holden, M. Hyman, A. Mitchell, D. Western, and A. M. Whyte.

Also Present

Councillor Myers	Executive Member for Financial Services
Councillor Whetton	Executive Member for Children's Services
Ms Sadia Khan	Co-Opted Member for Education Matters Only

In attendance

Graeme Bentley	Head of Financial Management
Anna Lomas	Strategic Lead for Children in Care
Cathy Rooney	Director of Safeguarding and Professional Development
Andrew Rennie	Corporate Lead, Property & Investment
Peter Forrester	Head of Governance
Alexander Murray	Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Boyes and J. Harding.

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting 5 July be agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by members.

15. 2018/19 BUDGET SCRUTINY PROCESS, CAPITAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP).

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources went through the presentation that had been distributed with the agenda. The presentation covered the 2018/19 Budget scrutiny process, the draft MTFP, and the Capital Investment Strategy. The Head of Financial Management (HFM) also gave a detailed description of the MTFP position. The HFM went through each element and explained what it related to in terms of the functions of the Council. The presentation showed that the financial gap was predicted to increase by £13m in 2018/19 which was why the Council were exploring alternative options such as the capital investment fund.

Following the presentation, the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions. One member of the Committee raised concerns about increased parking charges as they felt that the public were unlikely to be accepting of them.

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources agreed that the public were likely to have concerns at the increases. However, the Council felt that the services the additional money would fund were more significant to residents than the costs of parking.

The Chairman queried a number of the financial assumptions that had been made and the HFM explained how they had been formulated. The Chairman thanked the HFM for his answers and stated a number of factors that could have an effect upon the figures.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

16. OUT OF BOROUGH CHILD PLACEMENTS

The Director of Safeguarding and Professional Development (DSPD) and the Strategic Lead for Children in Care (SLCIC) presented a report on out of borough child placements which provided the Committee with information they had requested. In addition to the report, they had prepared a presentation for the Committee which they went through at the meeting. The presentation covered the profile of placements, the cost and budget of placements, how placements were monitored, how the Council would increase in house foster care provision and other work being done to reduce external placements.

The Committee were informed that the Council's main goal was to increase the number of in house foster care placements rather than depending upon external agencies. Part of the strategy involved creating a formal policy for the process by which a foster carer could apply for funding to make improvements to their home allowing them to take on more foster children. Another way that the Council was looking to increase the number of foster carers was by raising the rate that Trafford paid them so that it was more competitive with the rates offered by agencies and other authorities.

The SLCIC told Members that there was a national KPI around the number of placements that a child should have. Trafford continually strived to achieve this KPI and minimise disruption in a foster child's life by only moving them when necessary and the SLCIC detailed how Trafford supported those children that required transitions. The DSPD explained that in some difficult cases children cannot be placed with other children even though a foster carer is signed up to work with more children to ensure the stability of those placements.

The Executive Member for Children's Services noted that during the financial year there had been an increase in funding to match the demographic increase. Because the service is demand based it could fluctuate unpredictably and so the increase may not be adequate if there were a sudden increase in need. The Council hoped to increase the strength of in house services to offer children a range of options and provide greater stability and reduce the impact of additional demand.

The Committee thanked the DSPD and the SLCIC for an excellent presentation and requested that it be sent to all Members of the Committee after the meeting.

Committee members then posed a series of questions including what was the expected impact of the increased rate paid to foster carers, how many high security placements Trafford was funding, and the number of residential homes available within the borough. The DSPD, SLCIC and Executive Member for Children's Services provided detailed responses to the Committee's questions and the Members were satisfied by the answers given.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That the presentation be sent to the members of the Committee after the meeting.

17. HIGH RISE CLADDING UPDATE

The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services (DGRS) presented an update to the report delivered at the previous meeting following the tragedy at Grenfell Tower. The DGRS informed the Committee that there were a low number of high rise buildings within Trafford and only a few of those had any cladding. Trafford have offered the use of testing facilities to all organisations which have cladding on their buildings. Trafford were working with the other Greater Manchester (GM) Authorities around measures to help prevent the occurrence of a tragedy like Grenfell and the GM response to the government inquiry.

The Chairman of the Committee asked the DGRS what was being done to inform residents who lived in buildings that were at risk. The DGRS responded that the organisations linked with at risk buildings were being very proactive. Another Member of the Committee asked whether the Council could be liable for any changes required to buildings which it had sold due to potential changes brought about by the Grenfell Tower inquiry. The DGRS informed Members that the Council could not be held liable for any changes required to bring a building in line with regulations which had come into law after the property had been sold.

The Executive Member for Children's Services informed the Committee of the changes that had been made across GM in reaction to Grenfell Tower. The changes included the opening of new training facilities in Bury which enabled firefighters to train in a high rise environment. However, there were only 20 inspectors across GM Fires and Rescue Service (GMFRS) area of operations compared to 55 previously. GMFRS were doing all they could to increase the number of inspectors back to previous levels.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That a further update come to the Committee before the end of the Municipal year.

18. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

19. EXCLUSION RESOLUTION

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from this meeting during consideration of the remaining items on the agenda, because of the likelihood of disclosure of “exempt information” which falls within one or more descriptive category or categories of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, as amended by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, and specified on the agenda item or report relating to each such item respectively.

20. CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND

The Corporate Lead for Property & Investment (CLPI) gave a brief overview of the Capital investment Strategy to the Committee. The Committee were informed that the work in this area was still in the early stages as it had been agreed in July 2017. Since its inception, a summary investment strategy had been created and additions had been made to the Council’s capital programme. The next stage of the programme was to produce a more detailed strategy that would go to the Executive meeting in September.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted

21. REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Committee asked a number of questions about the investment strategy and the Council’s approach.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That a further update be brought to the Committee in 6 Months’ time.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.20 pm