

Public Document Pack



**TRAFFORD
COUNCIL**

QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL

Date: Wednesday, 15 March 2023

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This is an opportunity for Members of Council to ask the Mayor, Members of the Executive or the Chairs of any Committee or Sub-Committee a question on notice under Procedure Rule 10.2.	1 - 8

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Question 1 - Submitted by Councillor Myers

“The Trafford Labour Manifesto for 2018 pledged to keep Trafford’s council tax low. Can the Leader of the Council define what he believes low means in this context?”

Response

The context in this case is how our council tax level compares with the average for metropolitan councils, the average for other Greater Manchester councils and the average when compared with our statistical neighbours.

Despite Trafford Council facing a cumulative budget gap of almost £290 million since 2010/11, I am pleased to confirm that this Labour administration has balanced the budget each year since we presented our first budget in February 2019. I can also confirm that our Band D rate of Council Tax for 2022/23 is £232.68 below the average for all metropolitan councils, £204.64 below the average for Greater Manchester councils and £183.77 below the average for our statistical neighbours. I can also confirm that the gap between our Band D rate and all those comparative groups has widened since the last Conservative budget in February 2018, where the previous administration also took the decision to increase Council Tax by 4.99%.

Trafford Council continues to meet the other pledge we made in 2018 ‘*We will stand up for Trafford Council taxpayers and challenge this Tory Government to properly fund local councils*’ by leading the way with other councils as part of the F20 group of lowest funded local authorities.

Question 2 - Submitted by Councillor D. Western

“Could the Executive Member please advise what measures the Council has put in place to ensure that residents are made aware in advance that they will need to provide photo ID in order to vote in the local elections?”

Response

As Members will be aware from the 4th May 2023, voters across Trafford and the UK will need to show photo ID to vote in person in a polling station, following new requirements introduced by the Elections Act 2022. A new form of free ID, the Voter Authority Certificate, will be available for those who do not have another type of accepted ID.

Trafford Council are working hard to ensure that residents of Trafford are aware of this change, and to understand which forms of ID are accepted, and for those without, how and when to apply for free ID and we have put a link on our webpage to advise the elector (<https://www.trafford.gov.uk/about-your-council/elections/Voter-ID.aspx>)

The Council has also sent a Household Notification Letter to every household in the Borough, explaining the changes and what forms of Voter ID is acceptable and how to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate.

Furthermore we have included on the top of each poll card, that we will be sending to residents the following text: You will not be able to vote unless you show photographic identification to the polling Station. A full list of accepted photographic identification is set out overleaf.

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The Council will also be advertising Voter ID, different ways to vote and register to vote messages on Social Media, alongside supporting the TfGM campaign on Voter ID which started on 13 February 2023. There will also be a bus campaign across GM will be live from 20 March 2023.

Other than the Council, the Electoral Commission are also undertaking a national campaign with TV adverts, and newspaper adverts.

Can I remind Members that if any elector needs any help with applying for a Voter Authority Certificate or wants to request a paper application form they can email elections@trafford.gov.uk or alternatively they can contact the Electoral Services Department on [0800 0234 206](tel:08000234206)

Question 3 - Submitted by Councillor Morgan

“Please can the Executive member outline the steps taken by the Council to prevent and where necessary, remediate, damage to grass verges in the borough?”

Response

The issue of parking on verges and footways is currently high on the agenda nationally and the Government has recently updated the draft Walking and Cycling Investment Strategy and is committed to working with stakeholders ‘to examine the legal and financial implications of an alternative pavement parking regime and the likely impacts on local authorities. This issue will also feature in initiatives across Greater Manchester coming out of the new Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure.

There is no simple solution to preventing vehicles driving or parking on grass verges and causing damage. Parking on verges and/or footways is not an offence in itself (other than in London), although the police could class it as a highway obstruction and prosecute offenders under their Police powers. However, with the challenge of proving actual obstruction, limited resources and higher priorities this is not something the Police actively pursue unfortunately.

Legislation is available to create a civil offence of parking on verges; the introduction of a Traffic Restriction Order (TRO) will prohibit parking on the entire highway including any verge or footway behind the carriageway, either ‘At Any Time’ or during specified time periods. However, at the moment a specific TRO has to be made for each location, we are unable for instance to implement a boroughwide verge/footway parking ban as road markings and signs (in the case of limited waiting areas and Clearway Orders – where road markings do not exist) are required to allow enforcement by Parking Services to take place.

Placing bollards is a way to stop parking in specific locations but the cost is a consideration, is not suitable at all locations and can merely move the parking practice further along the road for verges to be damaged elsewhere. In addition, nationally there are moves to reduce the amount of street furniture to create a less cluttered environment both visually and to minimise obstructions to pedestrians, particularly on footways. We would not advise a resident to place an obstruction (e.g., post, rock etc.) in the verges outside their property to prevent damage. If they were to place such an obstruction and should a vehicle be damaged by driving into the obstruction, then the resident would be liable for the damage caused.

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The council can and does repair damage however, due to the continuous parking of vehicles on some verges the repairs are often not sustainable.

Question 4 - Submitted by Councillor Morgan

“In 2018, the Trafford Labour Manifesto stated, point 31, “We will establish 20mph zones around all primary schools”. 5 Years on, can the Executive Member please update the Council on the progress on achieving that?”

Response

There are 76 primary schools in Trafford, 21 of which do now have 20mph restrictions in place. A further 7 primary schools will be progressed in 23/24. There is high demand for introduction of 20mph streets and zones across the Borough and other primary school sites along with other sites are being prioritised and are reviewed annually in accordance with the agreed a 20mph policy criteria

<https://democratic.trafford.gov.uk/documents/s39569/20mph%20zones%20streets%20report.pdf> .

Due to the size and age of the road network the Council receives many more requests to introduce 20mph speed limits/zones and other highway improvements than resources enable to be processed. For this reason, we have to target our resources to where the greatest community benefit will be achieved. We will consider each application on its merits – however there is always a waiting list with a criterion based on safety, congestion or other benefits that that each request will be scored against.

Applications that score highly in terms of this criteria would then be prioritised for further investigations subject to budget availability through the Council's Capital Programme which is agreed each year as part of the annual budget setting process.

Question 5 - Submitted by Councillor Frass

“Local residents are concerned about the safety implications of the disintegrating wearing course on the road outside St Hugh's Primary in Timperley. The engineers say such a defect does not normally classify as a safety issue at this stage.

May I bring the Executive Member's attention to the context of the site:

1. The white road markings are holding the road surface together in places, creating sharp edges to the ruts and channels, which drivers are swerving to avoid;
2. These distractions are significantly more dangerous approaching a zebra crossing, which has seen fatalities in years past.

Can the Executive agree that, even if ordinarily the road surface would not qualify for such urgent attention, the location of the surface which is breaking down – just past the brow of Timperley Bridge, on an approach to the zebra crossing outside a Primary School means that an exception needs to be made for repair?”

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Response

The area is assessed annually as part of the annual condition surveys for all roads across the Borough and stretches of Park Road on the approach to the zebra near Westwood Avenue have been resurfaced in the last 3 years. There are a number of roads in similar circumstances across the Borough that do suffer from surface stripping that can be accelerated by cold and wet winters and this is evident on other stretches of Park Road that haven't been resurfaced.

In addition, and to reassure the road is also inspected on a regular basis for safety repairs hence as part of these ongoing inspections the road is being considered for patching repairs to improve the road surface along with others that meet the criteria. This is anticipated to be undertaken during school holiday period in the new financial year.

Question 6 - Submitted by Councillor Miss Blackburn

"If the disposal of Altrincham Town Hall via a lease is agreed, would this Council agree to opening Altrincham Library for at least two evenings a week up to 9.00 p.m. in order that community groups could hire their rooms for community meetings?"

Response

We have the Open Plus System at Altrincham Library which enables access after-hours. We would need to look at how this would work for meetings but in principle it is something that we could explore.

Question 7 - Submitted by Councillor Holden

"What processes does the council have in place to ensure that damage to verges, pavements and road surfaces caused by developers and contractors during building work throughout the borough is repaired to a satisfactory standard?"

Response

Larger development schemes will have a S38/S278 Agreement associated with any planning permissions. Smaller scale developments such as a single dwelling these generally require alterations to the footway/verges are undertaken through a S184 agreement in accordance with the Highways Act 1980.

When planning applications are reviewed a formal response will highlight what form of agreement and/or licence will be required, these are often included on the decision notice, with links to who they will need to contact. Any damage which is caused will get picked up by the highway inspectors with any necessary action taken.

The monitoring of developer activities is also undertaken by the highways team in the One Trafford Partnership and when there is damage to highway, verges and any other infrastructure as a result of building work action is taken by the highway team using powers under the Highways Act 1980 to ensure any damage is made good. Other interventions such as sweeping of roads is often requested should a development have wider impacts as part of the above licences and agreements.

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Question 8 - Submitted by Councillor Holden

“Can the Spokesperson for Education tell us how many children failed to be offered a place at any of their listed schools during the recent allocation process and in which wards they were resident?”

Response

A total of 162 applicants, who submitted an on-time application, were unable to be offered a place at one of their preferred schools. Parents can select up to 5 preferred schools on the application form, although many choose to include less than this. Of the 162, almost a third only included one or two preferences.

69 of the 162 applicants have been offered a place in a local school, just not one they expressed a preference for on their application. This happens every year because we have some schools which are oversubscribed and some which are undersubscribed.

93 of the 162 applicants who did not achieve a place at a preferred school live in the Sale and Altrincham areas. Due to the expected levels of oversubscription in the Sale and Altrincham areas, tailored information was provided to these families, strongly advising them to apply for all their catchment schools to give themselves the best chance of achieving a local place. The advice was provided hard copy by post to every family, digitally as part of the application process and it was promoted through primary schools. These 93 applicants have been offered a place at an undersubscribed school in another area of Trafford. Of these, only 11 applicants followed the advice which was provided to them and applied for all their catchment schools.

A detailed communication providing advice on next steps, right of appeal and links to helpful guidance has been shared with all 162 families. It is also worth noting there are also 39 late applications, and these continue to be received. Regulations state these must be considered only after all on-time applications have been allocated a place.

The ward breakdown for the 162 applicants is as follows:

Altrincham – 1; Ashton on Mersey – 2; Bowdon – 8; Broadheath – 18; Bucklow-St-Martins – 23; Clifford – 3; Davyhulme East - 1; Davyhulme West – 3; Gorse Hill – 17; Hale Barns – 15; Hale Central – 6; Longford – 8; Priors – 7; Sale Moor – 5; St Mary’s – 15; Stretford – 20; Timperley – 1; Urmston – 3; Village – 6.

Question 9 - Submitted by Councillor Brophy

“A BBC report last month said that more than 60,000 adults with disabilities and long-term illnesses in England were chased for debts by Councils last year after failing to pay for their social care support at home, as they can't afford the charges amid rising food and rent prices, along with the additional costs of living with disabilities. Councils in England took legal action against 330 people in 2021-22.

Would the relevant Executive member confirm firstly how many claimants in Trafford with disabilities and long-term illnesses are being chased for debt, and secondly if any legal action has been taken against any claimants in in Trafford?”

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Response

Unlike the NHS, adult social care is not free at the point of entry. However, the Council carries out a means tested financial assessment to assess a person's contribution to that care so that their income does not drop below a minimum income level as determined by central government on an annual basis.

Expenditure such as payments towards rent and Council Tax is accounted for in the financial assessment as is disability related expenditure for people receiving care at home. The Council will reassess care contributions where a person's disability expenditure is higher such as for heating, electricity, for example if extra washing is required, and many other instances.

In addition to this support, Trafford has introduced additional checks in the recovery process. This includes making outbound proactive calls when invoices are sent at an early stage in the process to identify any issues with the invoices including disputed care hours, if someone is officially acting for the person receiving care and to see if the person has any other financial difficulties with paying due to expenditure we haven't been made aware of. The Council has also added in an further extra step to the recovery process where, before progressing to the enforcement stage, a full list of all clients is sent to adult social care managers to check and make contact if there are other issues we need to be aware of.

Ultimately, once satisfied that the charge is correct, the Council moves to recovery stage. In terms of the volumes, as at the last billing run, 27th February 2023, the number of reminders issued for outstanding charges was 319, with a combined value of c£2.2 million; this equates to just over 1% of the number of invoices issued in a 12 month period.

In terms of litigation cases, these mainly relate to deceased cases and/or property cases where there is someone officially acting and the debt is pursued against assets of the client and/or their estate rather than from their failure to pay from their weekly income. The number of cases where the defendant is the client in receipt of on-going care is 13 cases totalling £170,000.

Question 10 - Submitted by Councillor Newgrosh

"Both myself, and my colleagues, and our residents, have noticed a gradual reduction of street waste bins across Timperley Village.

Can the Executive Member inform me exactly how many street bins, across the whole of Trafford, were handed over to Amey at the beginning of their contract in May 2015. And exactly how many remain, being emptied by Amey, now?"

Response

At the onset of the One Trafford Partnership contract there was a wide range of different types of litter bins across the Borough in parks, open spaces, play areas and on public highway. They ranged from open to closed top litter bins and also included dog waste bins.

Since January 2018 to support recycling on the go, remove open top bins that could not contain the waste contributing the street litter problems and to remove the issue of manual handling of dog waste in those particular bins (as it is acceptable to place dog waste in the general waste bin) a programme of litter bin replacements was initiated.

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The total number of bins across the Borough as assessed in 2018 was 1665 with minimal provision for recycling and in 2023 it is now 1152. Whilst the actual sites have reduced to 1152, due to the trio bins having 3 separate receptacles for general waste and recycling the numbers of bin units are 2136. (See table)

Members at that time were consulted on the proposed changes within their ward where three individual litter bins in close proximity for example could be replaced by one trio bin.

An added advantage of the trio bin is that they also reduce street clutter and obstruction for those with accessibility needs and reduces the number of individual visits to a larger number of individual bin sites which given our climate emergency will now also be contributing to reducing fuel use impacts which is one of the largest contributors to CO2 emissions delivered by this service. Where a bin is not being used and there is sufficient supply then redundant litter bins will be removed and relocated or stored to assist with maintenance when a damaged bin needs replacing.

	Jan-18	Jan-23	Total receptacles
Field/Park/Open Space/Play Area	621	398	788
Close Top Litter Bin	1	0	0
Closed Top Litter Bin	137	107	107
Dog Waste Bin	157	30	30
Duo Recycling Litter Bin	4	4	4
Open Top Litter Bin	322	62	62
Trio Litter Bin (Three Compartment)	0	195	585
Other Areas (incl. highway)	1044	754	1348
Close Top Litter Bin	43	6	6
Closed Top Litter Bin	488	322	322
Dog Waste Bin	10	8	8
Open Top Litter Bin	501	121	121
Trio Litter Bin (Three Compartment)	2	297	891
Grand Total	1665	1152	2136

Question 11 - Submitted by Councillor Chalkin

"The new library in Hale is almost completed and the new houses on the site of the former library are also nearing completion, with a number of the units sold or under offer. We know there will be a small but not insignificant profit from this venture, and while I support the investment strategy of reinvesting any receipts into the Council's budget, as Hale Village has not seen significant investment in a number of years would the Executive be agreeable to investing some of the expected profit back into Hale Village?"

Response

The proceeds from the sale of the new houses will be used in a number of ways; these include repayment of the loan from Trafford, payment to the Council for the net value of land having taken into consideration the cost of the new library and community facilities and finally provide a grant to Hale Community Trust to fund the running costs of the new community centre. The capital receipt to the Council has already been included in the estimated proceeds from the land sales programme and already allocated to support the priorities in latest three year capital programme approved by Council in February. In the event that any additional profit is generated from the scheme to the Council, taking into

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account the overage sharing provisions in the contract, then it will be a decision of the Executive how to utilise these when reviewing future capital priorities. Given the capital programme is currently in an over-programmed position then the first priority to use any additional profit to the Council will be to make good this position first.