

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 MARCH 2021

PRESENT

Councillor D. Acton (in the Chair).

Councillors J. Lamb (Vice-Chair), A.J. Williams, B.G. Winstanley, A.M. Whyte, Dr. K. Barclay (ex-Officio), D. Western (ex-Officio) and J.D. Newgrosh

In attendance

Councillor M. Freeman	Executive Member for Covid 19 Recovery and Reform
Richard Roe	Corporate Director of Place
Ian Wallace	Director of Property Services, Trafford Housing Trust
Deborah Ware	Chief Operating Officer, Financial Wellness Group
Chris Roberts	Chief Development Officer, Bruntwood
Pete Paton	Head of Building Safety, Trafford Housing Trust
Michael Ayre	Engagement Officer, Enterprise You
Hilary Centelghe	Growth and Start Up Lead, Enterprise You
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Holden, B. Shaw and R. Thompson

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

8. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

A number of questions had been received from a member of the public in relation to Grafton Court. The Chair read the questions out and it was agreed that a written response would be provided to the resident.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the question be noted.
- 2) That a written response be provided to the resident.

9. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 2 February 2021 be agreed as an accurate record.

10. TRAFFORD ECONOMIC RESET AND RECOVERY

The Corporate Director of Place introduced the item. The Committee had received information from Council Officers at their last meeting and had requested to receive views from other organisations from the Trafford economy who would be

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involved in its recovery. The representatives had been selected as they each represented a different aspect of the Trafford economy and would provide varied perspectives on the challenges and opportunities Trafford's economic recovery presented.

Each of the representatives then spoke to the Committee about their businesses, their place within the Trafford Economy and their views on how Trafford would recover following the COVID 19 Pandemic.

The Chief Development Officer from Bruntwood gave the Committee a brief overview of who Bruntwood were as a business. The Committee were informed that Bruntwood had been operating for over 40 years and were committed to developing assets within the Greater Manchester region to help build thriving cities and communities. Bruntwood worked with a wide variety of organisations including Trafford Council, Manchester Foundation Trust and charitable organisations. Bruntwood had built a strong working relationship with Trafford Council due to the strengths of the area, which included excellent transport links, strong leadership and a clear vision within the Council, excellent levels of education, and a skilled workforce.

Bruntwood felt that Trafford offered opportunities and solutions to the post Covid economic landscape, where people had a more local focus towards working, shopping, and taking part in leisure activities. While the nature of work would change in the wake of COVID 19, with a shift to more remote and agile forms of working, there were elements that could only be offered by an office environment, including the development of the next generation of employees and the social benefits of office working. This meant that the use of office space would change but Bruntwood were confident that demand would remain. It was felt that, in addition to the development of town centres, Manchester City Centre would continue to grow and spread to encompass parts of Trafford offering new opportunities for the area. Finally Greater Manchester had the largest number of degree educated workers in Europe and that talent pool would continue to attract business to the area.

The Chief Operating Officer from Financial Wellness shared a presentation with the Committee which covered who the Financial Wellness Group were, the impact of debt advice on the economy, and the challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID 19 Pandemic. The Committee were informed that the Financial Wellness Group had been based in Trafford for 27 years and were currently based in Trafford Park. Their aim was to aid people who were in financial difficulty and to support them in getting back to financial wellness. The Financial Wellness Group provided free debt advice and, where appropriate, offered debt solutions. They also provided wider more holistic support around generating income, offering discounts, benefit assessments, and online doctor and counselling services.

There had been a reduced demand for debt advice during the pandemic but this was expected to increase towards the end of the year as financial schemes, which had supported people throughout the pandemic, came to an end. The Financial Wellness Group had prepared for this increased demand by hiring and training additional advisers. The predicted increase in demand had been noted by the

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Financial Conduct Authority who reported that pre-Covid 11 million people had little or no financial resilience which had increased to over 14 million people by the end of 2020. It was also estimated that 7million people were likely to need debt advice by the end of 2021. Further, it was predicted that one out of every three employers would be making some redundancies during the year.

The Chief Operating Officer noted the challenges coming out of the pandemic. The return to work would require considerations of new ways of working and look at how office space would be used in the immediate aftermath and long term. The Financial Wellness Group had expanded their digital services team and debt advice team as these were two industries expected to grow following the pandemic. The importance of supporting young people was recognised by the Financial Wellness group, which had created a debt advice apprenticeship and supported the financial education of secondary school pupils through the Young Money Charity.

The representatives from Enterprise You went through a presentation. The Committee were informed that Enterprise You was created in 2019 and was designed to support self-employed people. The programme was delivered by the Growth Company and People Plus and was available to Greater Manchester residents.

The Engagement Officer provided the Committee with an overview of the programme. Everyone who signed up to the programme received around six months of support from a business coach, peer mentoring, a personal finance specialist, and a health and wellbeing specialist. Those on the course also received access to a digital employee platform, access to co-working sites across GM, careers advice and guidance, and fully funded training and personnel development. The Engagement Officer then gave the Committee a breakdown of the training and development offered by sector specialists. To be eligible for the Enterprising You applicants needed to be from Greater Manchester, have been trading for over four months and have a UTRN, be self-employed, and must not have an income greater than £27,000 after expenses.

The Growth and Start Up Lead informed the Committee that the programme had been running for just over a year and had over one thousand clients. Feedback from clients had been extremely positive with an increased income of £500,000 across all clients. Clients' profit margins had increased and their turnover had increased by over £2,000,000. Clients had also reported increase in confidence and wellbeing from being on the programme. Trafford were performing well and were the top or in the top three out of the GM authorities for each of the outcomes measured as part of the programme.

Following the presentations from all the representatives Committee Members were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Councillor Winstanley asked the Chief Development Officer from Bruntwood why he felt optimistic about manufacturing in Greater Manchester following the impacts of Brexit and the Pandemic. The Chief Development Officer responded that the optimism came partly from the impact of the pandemic in reducing globalisation through the increased perceived risk around supply line integrity and security with

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the potential issues around the manufacturing of vaccinations highlighting some of those concerns. The North West area had some very strong areas with world class research initiatives, particularly advanced materials and the life sciences sectors. The government had shown support and a desire to bring manufacturing back into the country and Greater Manchester was well positioned as the area had a lot of the strengths around connectivity and land to deliver manufacturing on, which was close to where people wanted to live with access to distribution hubs.

Councillor Winstanley asked the Chief Operating Officer from Financial Wellness asked how debt management could support people who had no financial reserves and were waiting to receive benefits. The Chief Operating Officer from Financial Wellness responded that if people had no financial reserves they could use a debt relief order, which cost £90, to right off their debts.

Councillor Lamb asked if there were any forums through which organisations like the three at the meeting were able to come together and collaborate to come up with solutions to the challenges faced. The Growth and Start Up Lead from Enterprise You responded that they had many conversations with Bruntwood and had discussion around co-working space. In terms of additional finance support for clients Enterprise You made referrals to the other support areas. The Chief Operating Officer from Financial Wellness responded that they were not aware of Enterprise You prior to the meeting but this would be something that would be taken away and look at linking people with them going forward. The Chief Development Officer from Bruntwood added that the goal was to create an area which support new business starting up and the sharing and improvement of skills. There was an opportunity to increase cross selling between organisations through collaboration within Greater Manchester, which would strengthen the region's economy.

Councillor Williams asked whether there was a role for the Council to play in increasing awareness of financial support through organisations such as Financial Wellness and Enterprise You. The Executive Member responded that he had found out about Enterprise You through a Webinar for all Councils across Greater Manchester and would share the webinar to all Trafford Councillors. The Executive Member asked the Chief Operating Officer from Financial Wellness to send him information promoting their services to be shared with all Trafford Councillors. The Growth and Start Up Lead from Enterprise you added that they had regular contact with all Greater Manchester authorities and they would be looking increase knowledge of their services and welcomed the Council's support.

Councillor Newgrosh asked for a view from all the representatives on what the office requirements would be post Covid. Growth and Start Up Lead from Enterprise You responded that there would be a need for greater flexibility in office facilities to adjust to the new ways of working. The Chief Development Officer from Bruntwood noted that the impact of the increased flexibility in working arrangements would require a fundamental system review of transport in the area to accommodate the changes in peoples work patterns. The Chief Operating Officer from Financial Wellness responded that increased flexibility was needed but that there was still a need for face to face contact to support teams and build a

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culture within organisations. It was still too early to know exactly what the demand would be for office space but it would be a gradual process.

The Chair thanked all of the speakers for attending the meeting and for their positive views on Trafford's economic recovery. The Chair recognised the need to take a collaborative approach to the economic recovery of the area and the role that the Council needed to play to help coordinate the response from all sectors.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the presentations be noted.
- 2) That all speakers be thanked for attending the meeting.
- 3) That the Executive Member for circulate the Enterprise You Webinar and Financial Wellness information to all Councillors.

11. ACM CLADDING

The Chair introduced the report stating that it had been written in response to a series of questions from Mr Stevenson. The Director of Property Services for Trafford Housing Trust (THT) went over the pertinent points of the supplementary update which was circulated. The Committee were assured that all residents were safe and that there had been regular communication between THT and their residents throughout the process. The work commenced early summer of 2019 and was originally scheduled to have finished before the end of 2020 however a number of issues arose which delayed the programme of works and was exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic. Princess Court and Empress Court were scheduled to be completed by in July 2021 with Clifford Court to be completed in August 2021, Grafton Court to be completed in September, and Pickford Court to be completed in October 2021. THT were confident that they would be able to complete by those dates as long as there were no other delays caused by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Following the overview Mr Stevenson was given the opportunity to respond to the answers received to his questions. Mr Stevenson expressed that he was satisfied with the response received but asked for clarification around some of the points. The first was around the fire alarm system within Pickford Court where there had been five times as many alarms raised due to a fault within the system. Communication had gone out to residents stating that the system was to be upgraded and would like to know when this would be completed.

Mr Stevenson noted that in January THT had spoken about advice from Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service not to remove the cladding until the replacement was ready. The cladding had been removed in Princess Court and Empress Court and asked THT to confirm that residents were safer with the cladding removed than with it on.

Mr Stevenson spoke about his experience as a resident in the tower blocks during the time since Grenfell and the impact the delays to the replacement of the cladding had. Mr Stevenson asked for more clarity from THT around the delays.

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Mr Stevenson asked about the heat retention of the flats which had cladding removed and whether THT were in contact with those residents to find out whether it had any impact.

Mr Stevenson offered to meet with THT to discuss the issues that he had. The Director of Property Services for THT asked Mr Stevenson if he would like to join THT's high rise living panel Mr Stevenson agreed and an invite was to be sent out.

The alarm system would be looked at and the outcome of the review would be shared with residents and the Scrutiny Committee.

The Director of Property Services for THT explained that after the programme had been delayed they had met with the contractor and had revised the process for replacing the cladding so that it would be able to be completed sooner.

Regarding heat retention no complaints had been received, but THT would raise the issue with the High Rise Living Panel and look at the impact of removing the cladding.

Councillor Williams noted that in the response to question ten there was mention of a balcony fire and residents having to report it to the fire warden. Councillor Williams asked whether balcony fires would not be picked up by the fire detection system within the tower blocks. The Head of Building Safety for THT responded that balcony spaces were classed as an outside space within the regulations and so would not have a detection system in place. THT were currently looking at the risk associated with balcony fire and what could be done to ensure compartmentation to prevent possible spread.

Councillor Williams asked whether the trust had any indication around the time frame for retrofitting sprinkler systems within the tower blocks. The Director of Property Services for THT responded that THT had consulted with residents regarding retrofitting sprinkler systems to the tower blocks but had not yet reached a decision. The Director of Property Services for THT offered to come back to the Committee to provide a more detailed update around the retrofitting sprinkler systems.

The Chair noted that THT had originally had stated that they would do the utmost to rehouse any residents who wanted to move, this had since been changed to residents would be provided guidance on how to be rehoused, and the Chair asked why the emphasis had changed. The Director of Property Services for THT responded that the first statement was made during the initial aftermath of Grenfell and the trust had provided that support at the time. As the situation changed, by THT making the tower blocks safer, so had the position around rehousing.

The Chair thanked Mr Stevenson and the THT representatives for attending the meeting and the questions and responses provided.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That Mr Stevenson and the THT representatives be thanked for attending the meeting.

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- 3) That Mr Stevenson is to be invited to the High Rise Living Panel.
- 4) That the outcome of the review on the fire system at Pickford Court be shared with Mr Stevenson and the Committee.
- 5) That an update on the retrofitting of Sprinklers come to a future meeting of the Committee.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.14 pm