

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**6 NOVEMBER 2024**

### **PRESENT**

Councillor F. Hornby (in the Chair).

Councillors J. Holden (Vice-Chair), J.M. Axford, G. Coggins, F. Cosby, W. Frass, K Glenton and D. Butt (ex-Officio)

#### In attendance

Councillor Tom Ross	Leader of the Council
Councillor Rose Thompson	Executive Member for Communities and Safety
Maria Bota	Director of Cultural Transformation
Adrian Fisher	Director of Growth and Regulatory Services
Graeme Bentley	Director of Finance
Harry Callaghan	Senior Democratic Support Officer

### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Hartley, D. Jarman, W. Jones, S. Thomas and D. Western

### **50. MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024, be agreed as an accurate record.

### **51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations were received.

### **52. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

No questions were received.

### **53. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair gave an overview of the Work Programme for the final two meetings of the year, with January focussing on housing association in the Borough. In the Scrutiny pre-meeting, the agenda item – Damp and Mould Response – had been amended to include repairs and maintenance more widely. Also, on void / empty homes, this had been changed to include how housing providers were maximising the social housing stock in Trafford.

The final meeting in March was to focus on highways, which was to be discussed at the next pre-meeting. Councillor Frass wanted this to touch on the priority matrix.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the work programme be noted.
- 2) That the plans for the final meeting of the year be discussed in the next pre-meeting meeting.

#### **54. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS**

The Director of Finance had provided a presentation for the Draft Budget proposals for the year 2025/26 and gave an introduction beginning with the headline numbers and the budget gap, which had increased to £25.59m. The presentation detailed the main areas of the Executive's draft budget proposals and the Director of Finance highlighted the key assumptions within those proposals. The presentation also touched on the budget approach and the draft savings programme for 2025/26. Like previous years, two further sessions were to come in November.

The Chair thanked the Director for the presentation, recognising the sobering reality of the situation.

Councillor Coggins asked about the reserves of the Council. A recent Manchester Evening News article had suggested Trafford had healthy reserves available (£53m), however, the Councillor had previously understood that Trafford had relatively low reserves. Councillor Coggins asked whether the Director could provide more detail on this. The Director of Finance highlighted the difficulty in comparing different districts positions, as different treasurers announce their accounts differently. Referring to the article, Salford stood out to the Director as when they had considered Salford's statement of accounts, there equivalent to Trafford's £53m was around a quarter of a billion. Concluding, the Director informed Members that Trafford was a relatively low reserve funded Council, not with the same resilience as the Council's neighbours.

Councillor Axford, on National Insurance, asked what the extent of the impact would be on employees. The Member also asked about the savings identified by CIPFA from work done by other authorities, and what this referred to. A further question on a possible Council tax referendum was also asked.

On the Council Tax referendum level, the Director confirmed this would be announced as part of the provisional settlement in December, with the Council discretion then to decide whether it goes up to that level or not.

As part of the CIPFA review, a list of considerations was provided to Trafford on what could be done, and this was being considered as part of finance and change, which was being worked on currently.

On National Insurance, the Director outlined the current and future positions, which will see it come in at a lower pay and be charged at a higher rate. For the

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Council's direct staff, a new burdens funding would support this, but the Director was concerned about what it could mean for the Council's providers such as Amey and those in social care. As such, the budget set it out with provisional estimates, which could significantly exceed any additional funding.

Councillor Axford asked further whether there were any predictions the Council had on the level of Council tax. The Leader of the Council recognised that it could go up or down, but they felt it would stay at 4.99%, with national government being mindful of the cost of living. The Leader asked Members to be mindful of the positive financial impact for the Council, every percentage point Council tax goes up, so if it does stay the same, savings would need to found from elsewhere.

Councillor Glenton asked whether there had been any progress on recovering any of the funds owed to the Council by Manchester Airport, following the support provided during COVID. The Director of Finance remarked that the Council was a shareholder in the airport, and up to the pandemic did received dividends from the airport, which were hit when the pandemic began. A number of shareholder loans had also been supplied to the airport to support regeneration activity, for which the Council earns interest returns on. The Director did however mention that the airport does not owe shareholder dividends until they are profitable, with forecasts suggesting that this will begin towards the end of the decade.

The Chair asked if there was any information on how lobbying for additional government support had been going. The Director referenced elements of positivity, however, suggested that it could never be enough. It had previously been expected that non-essential departments would experience cuts, but the Autumn statement had proved to not be to the extent as expected. The Leader referenced significant engagement undertaken with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on Trafford's specific financial situation. The Leader suggested that a lot of information still needed to be digested and understood, however, they felt areas were improving.

Councillor Butt asked whether the Government raising passenger duty on short and long-haul flights would affect the performance of the airport, and as such the rate at which the airport begins to pay back the Council. The Leader suggested that this would be unlikely to have an impact on the profitability of the Manchester Airport Group, as it was a tax more aimed at the flights themselves. The Director of Finance confirmed that any future impact would be considered at future meetings with the airport group.

Councillor Frass referred to the recent increase on what could be recycled in black bins, which would lead to a lower usage of the grey bin. The Member asked whether the Executive was aware of any savings possible which might be made from levies which could exist on landfill sites. The Director of Finance put the waste disposal levy at around £16m and suggested that he would take this away to consider. The Leader felt it could have a positive impact in the future,

highlighting the good working relationship between waste authorities and local authorities.

The Chair thanked both the Director of Finance and the Leader of the Council for the detailed presentations and responses.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the draft budget proposals for 2025/26 be noted.
- 2) That the Director of Finance consider the future possible impacts increased recycling could have on the waste disposal levy.

## **55. CULTURE, SPORT AND HERITAGE STRATEGY**

The Director of Cultural Transformation, who had arrived in post in December 2023 to lead the Cultural Strategy activation spoke through the report and slides which had been provided in the agenda. The Director introduced the different ways culture impacts residents with the strategy focusing on it in the broadest sense.

The Director touched on the existing provision in Trafford and highlighted the increased leadership in the space, with the cultural transformation hub contributing to the work which was ongoing.

On talent in the Borough, the Director raised the four key group set out in the report, which brought people in culture together to improve the space. The Director also referenced the 'Trafford is...' platform which positioned the Council to promote the Borough's cultural offer. Awareness was also given to the ten creative clusters established in the Borough, which enabled the Council to focus and engage with areas specifically.

The two key funding streams for the strategy – Arts Council's Place Partnership Funding and the National Lottery Heritage Fund – were mentioned which had been designed to support future funding bids.

Concluding, the Director of Cultural Transformation highlighted the challenges to the strategy, most notably, the small team aiming to deliver a large programme. However, the Director spoke positively of what success could look like in 2025.

Councillor Axford referred to the strategic aims included within the report and, noting the work ongoing with mental health in the borough, asked how high-profile health was in the culture strategy, recognising that it had been in discussions. The Director of Cultural Transformation informed Members that the Cultural Transformation Hub in December would be focussing on health and wellbeing, referencing work ongoing with colleagues in Public Health, as well as knowledge sitting within Trafford and at the Combined Authority level more widely.

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Councillor Coggins asked about a possible Year of Culture bid and asked whether that could support the other aims of the Council, especially in relation to the environmental impacts of any events. The Director reassured the Members that there was a range of ideas that could be associated with events, such as encouraging active travel and green transport when residents attend. The Director also emphasised the power of arts and culture to build a nature connection which could change residents' day to day practice.

Councillor Holden complimented the report and the plans within it.

Councillor Frass was pleased with the 'Trafford is...' platform but asked how residents will be informed that the platform is available. The Director underlined the importance of creating a strong brand identity, which would be embedded within communities and across the Council.

Councillor Frass felt it was important the Council reached out to residents who did not feel culture was for them. The Director agreed, citing the need for an inclusive approach, with work commencing with partners early to encourage this activity. The Leader of the Council had attended a creative cluster session and remarked on how helpful it had been to map out the places within wards which needed to be targeted. Members were also reassured that there was Corporate level support provided to the promotion of the strategy.

Councillor Butt asked whether there was any collaborative work ongoing with other local authorities. The Director of Cultural Transformation assured Members that regular work was ongoing with culture directors at Manchester and Salford Council, with leaders across all of Greater Manchester spoken with to understand what works well.

Councillor Axford asked how the strategy could be made more visual and accessible. The Director was considering every art form as part of the strategy, conducting listening exercises to understand what stakeholders wanted from the strategy.

Councillor Cosby asked how the strategy was being managed, noting the strategic board with a range of Members. The Director informed Members that they personally reported into the Corporate Director for Strategy and Resources, with the strategy physically sitting within the Communications team. The Cultural Transformation Hub was also raised, which included the Executive Member for Leisure, Arts, Culture and Heritage, which met every month.

Councillor Cosby asked if there were any private partners. The Director spoke of Imperial War Museum North, Bruntwood, and Lancashire County Cricket Club, who were all engaged.

The Chair thanked the Director of Cultural Transformation for their attendance.

RESOLVED: That the progress in respect of activation of the Cultural Strategy, be noted.

## **56. TRAVELLERS UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Committee requested an update on visits by the Traveller Community in Trafford. The Committee presented a task and finish group report to the Executive in March 2022 following a number of temporary encampments in the Summer of 2021. It had been agreed it was now an appropriate time to receive an update.

The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services had provided a set of slides with the agenda which outlined the number of encampments over the years 2022, 2023 and 2024. The Committee were informed that 2022 was a busy year which involved interference from the Council. Of the five encampments in 2023, two needed to be referred to the Magistrates and two others needed interference from Bailiffs. Positively, in 2024 no intervention was required with the three encampments.

The presentation also updated Members on the provision of sites and any implications for the planning system. During the Summer of 2024, a temporary stopping facility was trialled, which hoped to encourage travellers to visit a specific area which would include the provision of bins and basic sanitary facilities. The site was Boyer Street in Old Trafford. However, this was not used with the future operation of sites such as this to be trialled.

The Director referred Scrutiny to the Council's Local Plan which had ensured that the Council make appropriate provision for travellers, with such sites normally being of two kinds. The first of these was residential, which would be a site of permanent residence, which might be the base from which families then move around the Country. The second of these was transit, which was a site for temporary residence intended for occupation for a few days or weeks.

The Executive Member for Communities Safety reminded Members of the numbers in 2021 which sparked the Task and Finish group, reassuring Members that these levels had since decreased to levels seen prior to COVID.

The Chair thanked the Officers and Executive Member, asking what the visits looked like on the ground and in the community. The Director responded that those that visit tend to be different each time, with the idea of providing temporary stopping facilities receiving good feedback from representative organisations yet went unused. Scrutiny was made aware that consultation on the site being used did receive negative feedback from residents.

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Councillor Coggins asked whether temporary stopping zones would continue, with 2024 being a quieter year for visit. The Member also enquired as to how the Council communicates the use of Boyer Street. The Member raised concern over some of the language used on the report such as gypsy and encampment and asked that this be considered in the future. The Director responded that the service was happy with how the stopping facility was communicated. However, when it was to be reviewed, the Director reassured that feedback would be gathered from all parties.

Councillor Axford asked if the Council understood the reason behind the reduction in numbers, asking whether the Police Crime Act might have had an impact. The Director affirmed that it was not so much a reduction, rather a return to normal. The Director added that increased police powers had not made a huge difference as the threshold for intervention was set at a high bar.

Councillor Butt asked whether the Boyer Street location was chosen due to the hard surface of the area. The Director confirmed this was the case, with other Boroughs who had provided stopping facilities, often operating them in quieter cul-de-sac areas. The Director admitted that the location travellers stopped in Trafford were not of the characteristic of Boyer Street, rather opting for parks, which was an issue for Trafford as the Borough does not have the rural land available compared to other areas.

Councillor Butt also enquired as to where Travellers tended to be heading when stopping in Trafford. The Director raised difficulties in generalising, however, associated it with traditional patterns of movement and availability of seasonal work.

Councillor Axford referred to recommendations from the task and finish group report, including the purchase of mobile facilities for rapid deployment and a rollout of cultural awareness training, which had been omitted from the presentation. The Director highlighted the modestly priced and quick opportunities to hire facilities meant that it was fiscally more sensible not to purchase the Council's own facilities.

RESOLVED: That the Travellers update be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.32 pm