

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Accounts and Audit Committee
Date: 5th February 2025
Report for: Approval
Report of: Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Report Title

Annual Governance Statement – 2023/24

Summary

The preparation and publication of an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is necessary to meet the statutory requirement set out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. This report provides the final version of the 2023/24 AGS.

The Committee previously received a report in June 2024 setting out the Draft AGS. Draft versions of the AGS had also previously been shared and reviewed by the Corporate Leadership Team.

Since the draft version was presented to the Accounts and Audit Committee on 26th June 2024 the significant issues for 2024/25 have been updated. Any further issues arising in 2024/25 impacting on governance and developments in relation to governance issues reported to date will be considered as part of the process for compiling the 2024/25 AGS.

Once the AGS has been approved by the Accounts and Audit Committee, subject to the completion of the 2023/24 audit, and approval of the Final Statement of Accounts by the Accounts and Audit Committee, the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement will be signed by the Chief Executive and Leader and published on the Council's website.

Recommendation

The Accounts and Audit Committee is asked to approve the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Harry Callaghan – Senior Democratic Support Officer

Background Papers: None



TRAFFORD COUNCIL

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24

Executive Summary

Governance is about how local government bodies ensure that they are doing the right things in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. This includes complying with legislation, making evidence-based decisions within a clear framework, displaying a healthy culture, behaviour and values, whilst ensuring transparency, equity and accountability, engaging with and where appropriate, leading their communities.

Trafford Council is committed to improving the lives of all residents and creating opportunity and prosperity for local people and businesses. This commitment is set out in the council's Corporate Plan and describes Trafford Council's strategic vision, outcomes, and priorities for the borough, with the priorities being key to its delivery. It includes an overview of what the Council will do and how we will work with our residents, communities, businesses, and other partners to deliver sustainable change to Trafford in line with these commitments.

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is a public report by the council on the extent to which it complies with its governance code, legislation, directives and regulations and its performance and effectiveness of its governance arrangements during the year, and any planned changes in the coming period following assessment by external bodies including auditors, other regulators and peers.

The council expects all members, officers, partners and contractors to adhere to the highest standards of public service with particular reference to the Officer and Member Code of Conduct, Constitution, Corporate Vision and Values, and Corporate Priorities as well as applicable statutory requirements.

This document describes our governance arrangements and their effectiveness. This document is drawn from a number of assurance mechanisms which includes external audits of accounts and funding arrangements, our overall governance and decision-making framework, the Scrutiny function, the work of advisors and regulators, the Governance and Audit Committee and the Internal Audit Function.

The AGS shows that in many areas the Council has very effective arrangements in place. We will continue to review, streamline, and improve our processes to ensure these arrangements remain effective, now and into the future to reflect the ever-changing needs of the organisation.

1. Scope of Responsibility

- 1.1 Trafford Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. The Council are also responsible for ensuring that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently, and effectively. Trafford Council has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to continuously improve how its functions are exercised, with regards to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.2 This overall responsibility requires Trafford Council put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 Trafford Council has approved and adopted a corporate governance code, consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. A copy of the Authority's code is available at: <http://www.trafford.gov.uk/about-your-council/budgets-and-accounts/downloadable-documents.aspx>. This statement explains how Trafford Council has complied with the code and meets the requirement of Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 6, that all relevant bodies have to prepare an annual governance statement.

2. Purpose of the Governance framework

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the Authority is directed and controlled. The framework covers the Council's activities through which; it is accountable to, engages with, and leads its communities. It also enables the Authority to monitor performance against strategic objectives and evaluate whether those objectives are fit for purpose.
- 2.2 The system of internal control forms a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk. However, it can only reduce risk of failure and provide reasonable, not absolute, assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise risks to the achievement of Trafford Council's policies, aims and objectives. The system also ensures that identified risks are evaluated, according to their likelihood and potential impact, and managed efficiently, effectively, and economically.

2.3 The governance framework has been in place at Trafford Council for the year ending 31 March 2024 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

3. The Governance Framework

3.1 The Authority has adopted a local governance framework consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' 2016 edition. Trafford Council's Corporate Governance Code details how the Authority meets the requirements of the framework and is aligned to the principles of good governance in local government set out in the CIPFA framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA, IFAC, 2014):

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of the law
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.
- Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of leadership and the individuals within it
- Managing risk and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.

3.2 The Annual Governance Statement sets out how the Authority has complied with the Code and meets with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (as amended). The Authority also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control through the publication of the Annual Governance Statement. It is subject to detailed review by the Accounts and Audit Committee when they consider the final Statements of Account but before they approve the Statement of Accounts.

3.3 The Authority's financial management arrangements are consistent with a number of the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016). The key principles for which there is compliance are that the Chief Financial Officer (Corporate Director of Finance and Systems):

- is actively involved and is able to bring influence on the Authority's financial strategy;
- leads the whole Authority in the delivery of good financial management;
- directs a fit for purpose finance function; and
- is professionally qualified and suitably experienced.

In addition, the Statement requires that the Chief Finance Officer should report directly to the Chief Executive and be a member of the leadership team, with a status at least equivalent to others.

The Corporate Director of Finance and Systems (the Chief Finance Officer and designated Section 151 officer) is a member of and attends the meetings of the Corporate Leadership Team.

- 3.4 The key elements of the system and processes that comprise the Authority's governance framework are outlined in this Annual Governance Statement. The Statement demonstrates the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements during 2023/24 in line with the seven governance principles.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle A.	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution • Members Code of Conduct • Register of Interests • Standards Committee • Corporate Governance Code • Employee Code of Conduct • Disciplinary Policy • ICT Acceptable Use Policy • Anti-Fraud & Corruption Strategy • Confidential Reporting Code
How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2023/24	
<p>During the 2022/23 Municipal year a review of Councillors' remuneration, covered in Part 6 of the Constitution, was undertaken by an independent remuneration panel. The outcomes of the review were submitted and agreed at the Annual Council Meeting held Wednesday 24th May 2023. These recommendations were implemented during 2023/24 and the Constitution was updated accordingly.</p> <p>The Council's IT policies were updated during 2023 including the Trafford Council Acceptable Use Policy; M365 Acceptable Use Policy; Information Security Policy; Multifactor Authentication Policy; and Network Security Policy. The policies are awaiting SIRO sign off and will be shared with the workforce via a series of communications. The intention is to bring the policies to life and raise awareness with high-risk areas via engaging bulletins and the IT Security training modules. A similar approach has been successful with raising awareness on phishing e-mails.</p> <p>The Council's Disciplinary policy was reviewed and amended in April 2023. There was a particular focus around our approach to suspending employees. This was in response to new guidance from ACAS and developing case law. Any possible suspension should be fully considered, and alternatives explored. Where employees are suspended, we need to ensure the need is reviewed during the investigation and appropriate support is put in place.</p> <p>The Council continued to undertake counter fraud work, in line with the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, Strategy and supporting guidance. The 2022/23 Annual Report for the Counter Fraud Team was presented to Accounts and Audit Committee on 27 September 2023 outlining fraud prevention and detection activities and further planned work in 2023/24. During 2023/24, the Council's Counter Fraud</p>	

team have continued to undertake investigation in to suspected fraud and irregularities. These includes cases relating to council tax, business rates and social care finance. A report on work for the year is due to be provided by the Council's Counter Fraud Manager to the Accounts and Audit Committee in June 2024.

The Council continued to participate in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data matching exercise. An update was provided by the Audit and Assurance Service to the [Accounts and Audit Committee on 7th February 2024](#) setting out work undertaken and outcomes from work completed in 2023/24. A further update will be included in the 2023/24 Annual Head of Internal Audit Report.

The Council's Corporate Governance Code which outlines how the Authority meets the requirements of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework is recognised as requiring a refresh. There are plans for this to have an update over the 2024/25 Municipal year.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle B.	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision Making Protocols • Access to Information Procedure Rules • Consultation, including Budget Consultation • Trafford Partnership Board & Strategic Boards • Trafford Locality Board • Public Service Reform Board & Operational Group • Trafford VCFSE Strategy • Joint Strategic Needs Assessment • Trafford Provider Collaborative Board • GMCA
How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2023/24	
<p>Consultation and engagement were undertaken on a number of key strategic documents and policy changes during the course of the year.</p> <p>Following the successful consultation on the facility mix for Altrincham leisure centre, in May 2023 consultation commenced on the refurbishment of Partington Sports Village. Final details of the facility mix were approved by the Executive in February 2024, and a planning application will be submitted early in the 2024/25 civic year.</p>	

Following extensive formal and informal consultation over a ten-year period, a planning enquiry and consultation on main modifications, the Council along with eight GM authorities adopted Places for Everyone, the strategic planning document for Greater Manchester (excluding Stockport) on the 21st March 2024. Places for Everyone sets the planning framework alongside the Council's Local Plan.

In July 2023 consultation commenced on the Council's Design Code, which is designed to improve the quality of new buildings in the Borough. The Council received £160,000 from the Office for Place in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to produce model design codes, that can then be used by other authorities to develop their own local codes.

Through 2023 the Council undertook a number of consultations in relation to active travel schemes on Talbot Road, the A56 and in Flixton and Davyhulme. Following these consultations work has commenced on Talbot Road with one phase complete and two others underway.

Specific consultation with key stakeholders, most notably social care providers, was undertaken when setting the updated fee rates for care providers for 2024/25 and this fed into the Council's budget setting process.

Trafford Locality Board brings together a range of expertise from senior leaders for the NHS (primary, secondary, community and mental health), local authority and the VCFSE (Voluntary, Community, Faith & Social Enterprise) to a collaborative forum/committee whereby more united voices can strengthen the achievement of shared visions for the benefit of Trafford residents. The role of Board members is to collaborate and actively support the delivery of shared priorities within the Trafford Together Locality Plan and, by working together successfully, improve health, wellbeing and care for the population of Trafford including tackling health inequalities across the borough.

The Board incorporates three elements/'forums' and thus carries out three distinct roles: A consultative forum; A Section 75 Committee; GM Integrated Care Board (ICB) Committee. The purpose of the Board is, therefore, to exercise those functions delegated to it by the Greater Manchester ICB and any other party and the duties contained within the agreed Section 75.

The Locality Board provides stewardship for the Trafford provider Collaborative Board (TPCB) which has its collectively owned delivery plan and priorities, of which the Council are an integral partner. The TPCB has supported the Trafford health and

care system, including the Council, to enhance its collaborative efforts to plan, design and deliver health and care services, resulting in the achievement of our Locality Plan aspirations.

The Trafford Partnership was reformed in July 2023, bringing key stakeholders across the Public, Private, and VCFSE Sectors together for the mutual benefit of Trafford. The Partnership agreed 4 pillars of activity to focus in on over the next year or two - Sustainable Growth, Climate, Poverty and Cost of Living, and Inequalities and Health. The Partnership meets at least twice a year to focus in on one of the Pillars, with events being held in October 2023 and February 2024 to update partners on activity and to develop cross-partnership actions. Across these events, 164 participants across 65 partner organisations have been involved. The Partnership links in with appropriate Partnership Boards, such as the Poverty Action Group, Trafford Employment, Enterprise, and Skills Board, and the Trafford Climate Network. The establishment of new Partnership Task and Finish Groups has been undertaken, including one focusing in on Communications and Branding, and another on Industry and Learning. As the Trafford Partnership evolves, so will its focus and governance arrangements.

The Trafford VCFSE Strategy 2022-2027 replaced the former Building Stronger Communities Strategy to provide a more dedicated approach to strengthening the VCFSE sector in Trafford and creating a foundation for a sustainable sector. Developed in partnership with the sector, with a dedicated partnership group, a 2023-24 action plan was delivered between partners, including Trafford Council, Thrive Trafford, Trafford Community Collective, L&Q, and the Trafford Community Hubs. The Strategy has 5 aims and a wider delivery group will set out to help deliver the strategy and ensure alignment with the ambitions for the sector at a GMCA level.

Trafford is represented at GMCA Public Service Reform Executive to ensure that as the GM Strategy refresh evolves Trafford's corporate plan, delivery strategy and associated initiatives are aligned to the direction of travel for PSR.

There are also a number of associated fora where Trafford Officers represent the voice of the Council in shaping solutions for how public services can reform and evolve to ensure we are work collaboratively and in partnership with stakeholders and strategic partners.

A comprehensive Trafford Drugs and Alcohol Joint Strategic Needs Assessment was completed in May 2024, with stakeholder engagement in 2023/4. The Trafford Alcohol, Substance Misuse and Gambling Partnership (TASMGP) brings together

over 20 stakeholders every two months to share learning, challenges and drive progress on a partnership action plan. Following initial discussions with TASMGP, further stakeholder engagement took place including the four neighbourhood networks, youth network, front-line teams from adult services, mental health, children's services. The Poverty Truth Commission lived experience panel was also consulted and a Healthwatch survey conducted with the general public. The recommendations and findings have been shared in senior boards and will be published and shared through TASMGP with staff teams to action.

The GM Strategic leads meeting is supported to ensure Trafford's participation in GM Strategy development.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle C	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Plan • Trafford Local Plan • Trafford Locality Plan • Physical Activity Vision • Medium Term Financial Strategy • Trafford Recovery Plan • Investment Management Strategy

How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2023/24

The Corporate Plan, supported by individual Service Business Plans, the work of the GMCA, and the Trafford Locality Plan set out the immediate and long-term vision of the Council. The 2023/24 budget delivered within the agreed resource allocation, supported this vision. The establishment of the 2024-27 Corporate Plan is being formulated currently and will be published in the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

The Trafford Locality Plan 2019-24 sets out one plan and one ambition for sustainable health and care in Trafford. The Plan forms the core work programmes of the Trafford Locality Board and Trafford Provider Collaborative Board, and delivery of the outcomes within are monitored and progressed through a set of shared priorities, achieved by working together successfully improve health, wellbeing and care for the population of Trafford including tackling health inequalities across the borough. A Locality Scorecard has been developed to support the monitoring and measurement of these outcomes.

The Plan presented outcomes with associated milestone plans for work that we agreed to take forward to 2024. The aim of the Locality Plan milestones was to ultimately enable our Trafford health and care system to increase collaboration,

enhance the public voice, and address our known challenges and inequalities which will result in the achievement of our agreed aspirations. These outcomes can be found below;

- Better connected communities
- Better wellbeing for our population
- Better lives for our most vulnerable population.

The commitment to refresh and update our Locality Plan was agreed by the Trafford Locality Board and Trafford Health Wellbeing Board in January 2024 with this work taking place throughout 2024 calendar year.

The Trafford Local Plan passed a significant milestone with the adoption of the Places for Everyone Plan – a joint development Plan between nine of the ten districts in Greater Manchester. Places for Everyone forms the central document of the Council's Local Plan and includes two strategic allocations in Trafford – New Carrington and Davenport Green.

The financial position of the Council has continued to be challenging during 2023/24. Despite projecting a small underspend of £1.6m in the period 10 budget monitoring report presented to Executive in March 2024 this needs to be tempered by the fact that in setting a balanced budget for 2023/24 over £7m of reserves were required to achieve this position. Therefore, a significant level of Council reserves will still be required to support the budget in 2023/24 and the Executive are acutely aware this is a position that cannot be sustained in future years.

To achieve the long-term financial targets, the Council set a budget for the financial year 2024/25 at its meeting on 21 February 2024, which was supported by an appropriate assessment of risk by the Director of Finance and Systems. A full risk assessment and robustness review was undertaken during the budget process. Measures to address the budget gap of £17.80m and deliver a balanced budget for 2024/25 included a rise in the level of council tax by 4.99% (generating an estimated £6.0m in revenue), a one-off use of reserves of £5.6m, and a savings programme of £6.2m. A Finance and Change Board was established during the 2022/23 financial year with a dedicated focus on closing the budget gap. The risk assessment undertaken as part of the budget setting process reflected the uncertainty high levels of inflation were having on council budgets, which included energy, fuel, and food inflation as well as construction costs.

The financial resilience of the Council was supported by the agreed Reserves Policy, which is subject to regular review underpinning the long-term financial resilience of the Council. The reserves and balances available to the Council to support its

immediate financial resilience are therefore important in the context of managing a period of potential significant financial turbulence.

The Council adopted an Asset Investment Strategy in July 2017. The strategy sets out the Council's plans to enable economic regeneration and provide a sustainable income stream to support the Council's budget. The strategy is kept under regular review to ensure it remains aligned with Corporate priorities and the latest guidance, and an updated Strategy was agreed at Budget Council in February 2024. The Investment Objective is "to promote TBC's strategic priorities while creating a sustainable income stream to support local services", and the strategy has supported investment in our town centres, the Civic Quarter and Altrincham, and supported the development of residential properties, office space and commercial units in Trafford and the sub-regional economic area.

There are a number of building blocks to enable residents to move more, and these have been the focus for the majority of 23/24.

- Underpinning Trafford Moving - the Council's Leisure Investment Strategy has led the way, ensuring that the leisure estate is transformed from tired and dated centres into more sustainable hubs of local activity and movement. This accompanies the development of an Operating Agreement between the Council and Trafford Leisure, enabling the principles of place-based activity to be realised. The operating agreement sets out the responsibilities of each organisation, ensuring that outcomes relating to services and activities are achieved across the leisure estate. This place-based approach to leisure programming reflects local need and supports the development of the place-based activity plans. These place-based plans are further enhanced by a range of activity across the borough across 2023/24 including...
- Playing Pitch Strategy & Local Football Facilities Plan – greater emphasis on developing facilities that create opportunities for sustainability.
- Long Term Security of Tenure – empowering community sports clubs to with greater ownership of the sites they use through long leases.
- Holiday Activities and Food – Commissioned locally, with a focus on localities with highest number of benefits-related free school meals.
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund - Outdoor gyms in localities where inactivity is high, alongside activation from Trafford Leisure.
- Major Sporting Events – Hosted and facilitated a number of local regional and international events –across rugby, running, football. Large scale events with

<p>legacy programmes going back into local communities. Data and insight are being collated from a number of sources and informs development of these plans. The plans are being developed by local Move More partnerships, in collaboration with Trafford LCO (TLCO) as part of the neighbourhood programme. There are seven communities where inactivity is typically higher, and each will have a Move More partnership established.</p>	
CIPFA SOLACE Principle D	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernisation Programme • Corporate Plan • Medium Term Financial Plan • Efficiency Plan • Capital Investment Programme • Social Value Framework • Equality Strategy • Children’s Services Ambitions Plan • SEND Ambitions plan
How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2023/24	
<p>The Council’s capital strategy and capital programme were approved at the Budget Council meeting on 21 February 2024. The capital strategy set out the principles that underpin the programme, aligned to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, statutory service delivery, and the corporate objectives. The three-year capital programme included investment of £152m into the Council’s assets. The programme is funded through a combination of external resources, including government grants and developer contribution, capital receipts, and prudential borrowing.</p> <p>The capital programme is developed through the submission of business cases to an internal bidding process. Proposals are assessed based on deliverability and alignment with the capital programme priorities and are approved by CLT and the Executive. The total level of funding available is determined in line with the MTFs.</p> <p>A Capital Programme Board was established in 2022/23, with the Corporate Director of Place as chair and the Director of Finance and Systems as vice-chair, to improve delivery of the current programme and development of future years schemes.</p> <p>Bi-monthly updates are provided to the Executive on delivery against programme and scheme variations as part of the Finance update.</p>	

Trafford created a Social Value (SV) Charter in 22/23 which was signed off on [24th October 2022 by Trafford Executive](#). Trafford has a steering group which is driving SV improvement.

Trafford's Corporate **Equality Strategy (2021 – 2025)** was first published in 2021 and outlines four equality objectives of: inclusive leadership, improving the representativeness of our workforce, reducing health inequalities, and reducing hate crime.

We have adopted a system wide approach to addressing health inequalities in Trafford, through our Fairer Health in Trafford Partnership. LA, NHS, VCFSE and wider partners are working collectively to identify, co-ordinate and monitor action on health inequalities across the borough. Our three priorities are reducing the impact of health inequalities on people with learning disabilities, people with serious mental health and unpaid carers.

Ofsted conducted a 3-week inspection in November and December 2022 under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Framework (ILACS). The inspection took 3 weeks with the first week being held offsite which involved data and evidence submission by the Council. The onsite process involved meeting with practitioners and some managers. The inspection team also spoke with parents, carers, and to some children and young people, as well as some teachers. The inspectors looked at partnership working through the evidence presented by the Council but primarily through children's records and what the team could see about interventions and their effectiveness. The inspection covered every aspect of Children's Social Care from Early Help to Adoption.

The overall outcome of the inspection was that Trafford requires improvement to be good across all areas. The inspectors provided the Council with more detailed feedback which highlighted strengths and weaknesses with the report identifying the following six areas where the Council needed to improve.

- The quality of out-of-hours service provision to offer a more comprehensive and timely service for children.
- The support for homeless children over 16.
- The support to children in care to help them understand their entitlements and how they can influence the shaping and developing of children's services.
- The use of direct work and life-story work to gain the voice of the child and to support children's understanding of their life history.
- The support for care leavers in preparing for their transition to independence.

- The quality and frequency of supervision.

Other than the improved rating the main positive to be taken from the review was that each of the six areas identified were already known to the Council with plans in place for improvement, as demonstrated within the Ambitions for Children plan. The feedback from Ofsted has reaffirmed the Council's concerns and helped to focus efforts to achieve the desired improvement. In response to the report detailed action plans have been laid out to address the areas highlighted by Ofsted. Following the improved rating Trafford moved out of intervention but established an Ambitions for Children Board during 2023/24 (chaired by the Leader of the Council) to replace the Improvement Board which will help the Council to maintain the current level of improvement, and which will hopefully lead to further improvement culminating in the attainment of Trafford's ambitions for our children. A full update on the inspection, its findings, and the Council's next steps was delivered to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on the 14th [February 2023](#)

Ofsted conducted a Local Area Special Educational Needs & Disability inspection in October 2023. This inspection was conducted under the new Area SEND Inspection Framework introduced in January 2023, by a team of Inspectors from both Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) reflecting the system wide approach to SEND.

The inspection took 3 weeks with the first week being held offsite which involved data and evidence submission by both the Council and the Integrated Care Board (ICB). The onsite process involved meeting with practitioners and some managers from across Education, Health and Social Care as well as parents, carers, and to some children and young people. The inspectors focused on whether:

- Children and young people's needs are identified accurately & assessed in a timely & effective way.
- Children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support.
- Children and young people receive the right help at the right time; children and young people are well prepared for their next steps and achieve strong outcomes; children and young people are valued, visible and included in their communities.

The overall outcome of the inspection was that Trafford's, "local area partnership's arrangements led to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND." Inspectors recognised the strengths and the positive work that

is making a difference to our children and young people, but clearly recognises that there is more to do.

Whilst the inspectors provided the Council and ICB with more detailed feedback which highlighted strengths and weaknesses, the report identified the following areas where improvements are required:

- Leaders across the partnership should ensure that the SEND strategy is fully embedded across health, education and social care. They should tighten their strategic oversight so that all workstreams have equal clarity in how they are mapped out and organised. This is to reduce the disconnect and to improve accountability between strategy and practice.
- Leaders across the partnership should improve transitions for children and young people between children's and adults' services and within health, education and social care. They should improve their strategy and timeliness in relation to preparing young people with SEND for adulthood.
- Leaders across the partnership should develop, deliver and embed a clear approach to address how they will support children and young people with a range of mental health and neurodiverse needs. This includes identification, assessment and support for children and young people, with or without a diagnosis.
- Leaders across the partnership should increase the opportunities for children and young people's voices to be heard and acted on both at a strategic and individual level. They should also develop the range of, and access to, social opportunities for children and young people in order to reduce the current inequality across some areas within Trafford.

It is of particular significance that the Inspection team were clear that leaders from across the partnership were ambitious for children and young people with SEND and much work had taken place to strengthen the planning and governance to drive forward improvement. This, coupled with confirmation that as an Area Partnership we know ourselves well and this is reflected in our strategic planning, means that we are well placed to make further improvement. The Local Area Improvement Plan is detailed through the SEND Ambitions Plan and can be found on the Local Offer <https://www.trafford.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/SEND-inspection.aspx>

An independent Chair has strengthened the Strategic SEND Partnership Board which maintains the oversight of the delivery of the improvement priorities. A full update on the inspection, its findings, and the Local Area's next steps was delivered to the [Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on 23rd January 2024](#).

CIPFA SOLACE Principle E	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
<p>Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Strategy • Member Development • Members’ Induction Process • Employee Training & Development Plan • Corporate Induction Procedure • EPIC Check in • Health & Wellbeing Strategy • Health & Safety
<p>How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2023/24</p> <p>In late 2022 and throughout 2023 the Council started work on the refresh of the people strategy. To date this has comprised of collating intelligence and data alongside a period of engagement with Directorate Management Teams, Staff Forum Groups, Trade Union Members, Staff, and Executive Members. The outputs of this work will support the delivery of a refreshed strategy which is due to be launched in August 2024.</p> <p>During 2023/24 the Council offered a full calendar of learning events to all staff. The calendar included mandatory role specific training alongside optional learning sessions and courses to support colleagues with their personal and professional development in areas such as presentation skills, leading personal change, and digital upskilling. The council’s EPIC Manager programme continued to run throughout 2023 and 2024 with 26 cohorts having completed the programme to date. In total we have delivered 166 sessions and upskilled 210 managers in subjects ranging from managing and leading change to health and wellbeing and leading and motivating your team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In addition to the EPIC manager programme Trafford’s wider learning offer is supported through the e-learning platform Me-learn. In 2023/24 a total of 23,474 e-learning courses were completed by Trafford colleagues and partners. ▪ The learning and development team work closely with Heads of Service to deliver a calendar of training that supports colleagues with their on-the-job training and that also focuses on any legal and/or statutory training required to undertake their roles. There is a full calendar of events available to colleagues in Adults and Children’s Services. ▪ The council also provides staff with opportunities to gain a fully funded professional qualification through the upskill and apprenticeship programmes. In 2023/2024 we enrolled 74 Council colleagues on apprenticeship 	

programmes in a range of areas including project management, coaching, digital and technical and business and administration.

The council runs several internal programmes related to supporting aspiring and established managers to succeed in their roles. The Leap into Management (L3) programme, which is delivered in partnership with Salford College, is on its fourth cohort and a Level 5 in-house programme (Leap into Leadership) was launched in March 2023 and is now on its second cohort. We have also enrolled four colleagues on the Level 7 Senior Leadership Apprenticeship. The Council also facilitates programmes on coaching and offers the social work degree apprenticeship. The social work degree is an option for staff within Children's and Adults Services. Children's Services are starting their sixth cohort in September 2024 supporting a further 5 colleagues to undertake their social work degree Apprenticeship and Adult Services will be recruiting to their fifth cohort starting in March 2025.

All staff have access to the EPIC check-in process and should have an EPIC check in at least once every 6 months. The EPIC Check ins are designed to support discussions and conversations around colleague wellbeing, performance targets, values, as well as to support their personal, professional, and career development. Managers and staff are supported to have productive conversations through EPIC Check in Training, alongside a range of online support tools and guidance documents. A key supportive tool we have in place is the working well passport. This is a living document that travels with colleagues as they move jobs/roles within the authority to support their wellbeing and avoid them having to re-apply for support during their career with the Council. The passport and check in tools are all promoted and signposted through the virtual check in training sessions.

The Council offers a coaching service to all colleagues and managers. Colleagues can access one to one coaching with a professional internal coach to support their development and/or to support their wellbeing. A total of 62 colleagues have accessed this service to date.

A succession planning strategy is in place to ensure key skills are retained and staff are upskilled to enable them to take on higher graded roles. Successors have been identified at senior manager level and targeted development initiatives provided to ensure that the Council's workforce is equipped to meet new and emerging demands. The Council has developed several career graded posts to support managers in attracting, developing, and retaining talent for difficult to fill roles where specific skills/qualifications are required such as trading standards and project management.

The Council continued to deliver quarterly Let's Talk Engagement sessions for managers and colleagues. The face-to-face events offered staff and leaders the opportunity to hear from and engage with the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council and the Corporate Leadership Team. The events also provided staff with the opportunity to network with other colleagues and to share their thoughts and feedback on key subject areas.

The Council continued the delivery of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy 'EPIC You', which comprises of initiatives and activities aimed at improving organisational effectiveness and is organised around four key themes.

- Healthy Lifestyle
- Mental wellbeing
- Focus on Musculoskeletal (MSK) Health
- Health & Safety

The new internal health and safety initiative to focus and engage with services on the fundamentals of safety and wellbeing 'Your Safety, Your Wellbeing', continued to be promoted. As well as the dedicated intranet resource pages, the campaign was promoted at Operational Services for Education seminars and staff and leader 'Let's Talk' sessions including focus on computer workstation health and wellbeing. A programme of service self-assessments and subsequent health and safety auditing is now underway.

Work has been undertaken to improve the safety and wellbeing of colleagues in Council buildings from volatile and aggressive behaviour displayed by visitors and service users. We also introduced a 'Zero Tolerance' approach to inappropriate behaviour towards any staff working for us.

During 2023/2024 the Council delivered several initiatives to further support staff members with their safety and wellbeing. Events were hosted by our Learning and Development Team and supported by our internal network of Mental Health First Aiders. These events include, but are not limited to, celebrating national walking month, volunteering week, national carers week, stress awareness month and our own EPIC Wellbeing Day. The Staff Active Travel Group continues to encourage staff to use more active and sustainable travel through participation in campaigns and by hosting local cycling/walking activities for staff.

Absence Management - a robust approach to managing employee absences including sickness absence is in place and the Corporate Leadership Team monitor

levels monthly. The HR Operations team support services in dealing with more complex cases in line with Council policies and guidance.

The contract for our Occupational Health provider and our Employee Assistance Programme was due to end in March 2024. We engage these providers via a Greater Manchester collaborative contract and a joint re-tendering exercise was undertaken towards the end of 2023. The contracts were awarded to the existing providers. During 2023 we arranged a session with our Employee Assistance provider to promote the scheme to staff – so they fully understand this benefit. Staff can access a free independent confidential helpline 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. They can also have several counselling sessions without any need for referral.

The Member Development Steering Group continued to meet in 2023 and 2024, and progressed items relating to Councillors’ development needs. A dedicated learning and development intranet page houses resources and learning materials for executive members alongside advertising any internal/external learning and development opportunities/events.

The programme of continuous professional development (CPD) has continued throughout 2024/25 with increased focus on improving the key skills of Councillors in Planning and Licensing. Members have continued to make use of resources from the Local Government Association (LGA) alongside a blended approach also including Northwest Employers.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle F	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
<p>Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Procedure Rules • Contract Procedure Rules • Treasury Management Strategy • Scrutiny Committees and Protocols • Risk Management Strategy & Policy Statement • Strategic Risk Register • Internal Audit Strategy • Accounts & Audit Committee
<p>How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2023/24</p>	
<p>Two new Authorities joined STAR in October 2023. They are in the process of adopting the standard Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs). The CPRs were recently reviewed and updated to incorporate The Health Care Services (Provider Selection Regime) Regulations 2023 which came into force in January 2024. It is anticipated</p>	

that further changes will be needed later in the year as a result of the introduction of the new Procurement Act 2023, which is expected to come into force in October 2024. This work has already begun, and a review is initially being undertaken by STAR and Trafford Legal Services.

The Council monitors and regularly reviews its Strategic Risk Register to ensure key risks are being managed. Update reports were presented through the year to the Corporate Leadership Team and the [Accounts and Audit Committee](#).

By the end of March 2024, the highest risks in the strategic risk register related to uncertainty over the Council's medium term financial position; addressing the climate change emergency; risks in relation to information governance; and risks in relation to delivering Leisure Services across the Borough. The strategic risk reports highlighted current risks and action being taken and planned to manage the risks identified.

The Internal Audit Plan 2023/24 incorporated coverage of various key financial systems and other business risks. Updates of work undertaken were provided to the Corporate Leadership Team and the [Accounts and Audit Committee](#) during the year. The Annual Report of the Head of Internal Audit for 2023/24 stated that based on findings from audit reviews undertaken during 2023/24, at least reasonable levels of assurance have been gained that the systems, procedures and controls in place to manage risks and deliver objectives are operating to a satisfactory standard.

There has been a range of audit work undertaken during the year across each of the main areas of the Audit Plan. Given ongoing developments, such as the implementation of new systems, at the request of relevant services, some planned audit work was rescheduled with the aim of providing assurance during 2024/25 and this has been reflected in subsequent audit plans. Outcomes from follow-up internal audit work of areas previously reviewed demonstrates that progress has been made in improving levels of control in those areas. This includes audits where previously limited levels of assurance were provided. Further improvement action was highlighted for some areas reviewed which will be subject to follow-up in 2024/25.

Given the above, based on assurance gathered during 2023/24, the Internal Audit Opinion is that, overall, a reasonable level of assurance can be given that the control environment encompassing internal control, risk management and governance, is operating to a satisfactory standard.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle G	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Website • Freedom of Information Publication scheme • Trafford Partnership Data Lab • Marketing and Communications Team • Annual Financial Statements • Annual Governance Statement • Annual Scrutiny Report • Corporate Plan
How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2023/24	
<p>Information on the Council’s decision making is open and transparent and continues to be published on the Council website. This includes publishing and extending the breadth of open data through the Council’s website, data.gov.uk and the Trafford Data Lab's website (trafforddatalab.io). Work has progressed with improving the quality of information the Council publishes via digital channels and the user experience. A revised set of digital content design principles form the basis of these improvements ensuring information and services are accessible and easy to use.</p> <p>As the Council’s External Auditors, Mazars LLP provided regular updates to the Accounts and Audit Committee through the year. The External Auditor’s Annual Report for 2021/22 was presented to the Accounts and Audit Committee by Mazars in November 2023. The report confirmed that an unqualified opinion was given on the financial statements for 2021/22. Work had been completed on reviewing the Council’s arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources and no significant weaknesses in those arrangements had been identified.</p> <p>The Council’s 2022/23 draft accounts were published in November 2023 and Mazars reported at the March 2024 Accounts and Audit Committee that the 2022/23 audit would commence after considering the outcome of the government consultation regards proposals to clear the national backlog of local government audits. In addition, it is the aim that work on assessing the Council’s value for money arrangements for both 2022/23 and 2023/24 would be covered at the same time. The Accounts and Audit Committee will be advised during 2024 of the agreed approach.</p> <p>CIPFAs external assessment of Internal Audit, reported to the Accounts and Audit Committee in 21 June 2023, concluded that the Internal Audit function operates in general conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.</p>	

Trafford Council's Communications and Marketing Team has been at the forefront of getting key messages out to residents, businesses and partners about what the Council is doing to help improve lives in the borough.

The last 12 months saw the Communications and Marketing produce internal and external communications about a wide range of services being provided including education for our children, care for the homeless and other vulnerable groups, safer streets, more affordable housing and food hygiene.

There was a priority on making sure communications around services were in plain English so the messages to residents and other key stakeholders were easily understood.

There was an emphasis on communicating the three corporate priorities especially around supporting people out of poverty as the cost of living continues to adversely affect thousands of people. Communications focussed on the help that was available to people who were struggling to make ends meet.

A dedicated communications campaign was launched to ensure transparency around the setting of the budget, so people knew the financial difficulties faced by the Council and the reasoning behind the decisions on how money was to be spent.

The team continued to produce reports outlining its work for the Corporate Leadership Team and for the Executive so its work can be properly scrutinised to make sure it remains in line with the Council's key corporate objectives. This has included analytics of its media coverage, whether that has been positive or negative, and engagements levels with social media output.

There is now a standing item on Executive briefing around communications to ensure key messages for the public and businesses are agreed at a senior level. This is supported by a weekly communications grid which contains the planned communications in the next seven days and highlights any potential issues that may face the Council.

The team will continue to work hard to ensure key stakeholders see for themselves the transparent nature of the work the Council does.

The council has a Freedom of Information Publication Scheme that sets out the classes of documents that are routinely published - [Classes of information \(trafford.gov.uk\)](https://trafford.gov.uk)

The Council also publishes Open Data to increase transparency - [Open data \(trafford.gov.uk\)](https://trafford.gov.uk) Some information here is in need of updating (e.g. Parking Spaces last updated June 2022)

We have considered publishing all responses to Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations requests with the personal data removed and will continue exploring this in the coming year.

The corporate plan is available on the Councils website and quarterly updates are prepared and shared to show progress on the plan.

4. Review of effectiveness

4.1 Trafford Council's Corporate Governance Code sets out the Authority's responsibility to undertake a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework on an annual basis. The review is informed by the work of the Council's executive managers, the Head of Internal Audit's annual report, by the external auditor's comments, and the results of reviews and inspections.

4.2 The processes applied, the sources of assurance obtained in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of governance arrangements, and, as part of that, the systems of internal control include the following:

Management Controls	Independent Assurance	External Assurance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial Management• Programme Management• Performance Management• Risk Management• Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal Audit• Scrutiny• Health & Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• External Audit• Other inspectorate e.g., OSTED, CQC• Sector led improvement e.g., LGA.

4.3 These governance functions are described in more detail within the Council's Corporate Governance Code and specific assurances or improvements delivered during 2023/24 are detailed in Sections 3 and 5 of this Statement.

4.4 The review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Accounts and Audit Committee concluded that the arrangements continue to be fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. The areas which have been addressed and those which are to be addressed with new actions are set out in Section 5.

5. Significant Governance issues

- 5.1 The Council takes its responsibilities and duties seriously with regard to ensuring continuous improvement in the way that its functions are exercised and in the consideration of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 5.2 In the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement a number of significant governance issues were identified. Below are the details of those significant governance issues followed by the action that the Council has taken in 2023/24 to address them.

2022/23 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2023/24
<p>Climate Change Emergency</p> <p>The Council is committed to meeting net zero by 2038, has an adopted carbon neutral action plan, and a multi-agency Climate Change and Air Quality commission. Two reports on greening Trafford Park were completed during the year, setting out a pathway to significantly reduce carbon emissions from the Park, improving the environment, enabling active travel, whilst maintaining economic output. Developing proposals to implement these plans will be a key focus of 2023/24. A new post of Head of Climate Change has been established to provide greater focus on this key priority, with additional posts also established to focus on Trafford Park.</p>	<p>With nearly half of Trafford’s carbon emissions coming from Trafford park alone, industrial and business decarbonisation is a key priority for Trafford. Working with GMCA and the Growth Company, the Council has set up the Bee Net Zero Trafford Park partnership, providing free decarbonisation support to businesses on the park.</p> <p>Good progress has been made on electric vehicle charging infrastructure through the Be.EV programme. Trafford’s Sale Water Park has now opened its state-of-the-art EV charging hub, equipped with 16 ultra-rapid charging bays. Work has started on detailed project design for a potential low carbon heat network in Trafford’s Civic Quarter.</p> <p>Refurbishment work has started on Altrincham Leisure Centre, which will include solar PV and replacing gas boilers with air source heat pumps.</p>

2022/23 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2023/24
	<p>A programme of work on active travel schemes also is underway, including new infrastructure, bike libraries, school street trials and TfGM funding for businesses for cargo bikes and adapted bikes.</p> <p>Trafford became one of the first local authorities in the country to install solar hybrid streetlights after five columns were installed on Woodbridge Road in Urmston.</p> <p>Programme of urban tree planting and woodland creation agreed with City of Trees for the 23/24 planting season under Defra and Forestry Commission funded programmes including Northern Forest, Trees for Climate and Grow Back Greener.</p>
<p>Medium Term Financial Position</p> <p>Despite setting a balanced budget for 2023/24 significant budget gaps of £7m and £10m exist for 2024/25 and 2025/26 respectively. It will be imperative that the Finance and Change programme continues in the short and medium term with a dual focus and supporting the delivery of the already identified savings programme whilst also focussing on new ideas that will be required if the Council is to have a sustainable financial position in the future. Reserve balances are at a low level and reliance cannot be placed on these to support the budget position. A large element of the savings programme in 2023/24 is comprised of “corporate” related</p>	<p>During 2023/24 the Council has continued to be faced with expenditure pressures in some key areas of the budget and most notably children’s placements and home to school transport. These areas are projecting a combined overspend of £3.9m, based on the latest in-year monitoring and this position necessitated significant additional investment being incorporated in the 2024/25 budget. During 2023/24 several mitigating management actions have been introduced to help offset this pressure such that the latest projection is showing an overall net underspend of £1.6m. Also, and on a positive, note the majority of the in-year savings programme has been</p>

2022/23 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2023/24
<p>savings which to a large extent have been exhausted and will not be an answer to balance future budget pressures with the focus likely to fall on front line services.</p>	<p>delivered. This overall position has meant that at this stage there is unlikely to be any unplanned use of Budget Support Reserve beyond the levels agreed by Council in February 2023.</p>
<p>Information Governance</p> <p>Two IT and Digital Cyber Security Officers are in place and are making good progress on improving the council's cyber security posture. There is a considerable backlog of improvement required but significant progress is planned for 23/24. Progress has been made and there is an action plan in place to resolve the unsupported software issue within the Council. This was the only aspect of the submission for the 2023 NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit which was not met, resulting in the Council approaching standards with an improvement plan in place to address this. The Council is expecting to achieve all of the mandatory requirements and to meet the standard towards the end of 2023.</p> <p>The Council plans to introduce a new Training IT system in May 2024, which will enable compliance to be more accurately monitored and promoted.</p> <p>The service redesign is continuing and in 2023/24 the Council will undertake recruitment activity to address the current lack of capacity. The project team will continue to develop the review of the IG team function and to explore the creation of IG champions</p>	<p>The Council was successfully assessed as meeting standards for the NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit as of October 2023 after submission and progress made with the improvement plan. Discussion and preparation have commenced with key stakeholders across the Council to assess the requirements and ensure prompt submission for 2024 and it is anticipated the Council will continue to meet standards.</p> <p>Good progress has been made with the service redesign. Recruitment activity is in the final stages for the information governance team and once complete this will stabilise the team and introduce resource at senior and administrative levels. Once the new structure of the team is embedded, a review will be completed, and a full programme plan developed to make improvements across the service and Council.</p> <p>Information Governance is aligning with the Insights & Intelligence Service in the implementation of the Data Strategy and exploring the possibility of forming a joint board rather than reestablishing the IAB. We have also worked</p>

2022/23 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2023/24
<p>across the Council to emulate the function of the IAB and the merits of its reestablishment.</p>	<p>closely with IT and Digital to support with the governance around the implementation of Microsoft 365, and on key policies and retention.</p> <p>The new training system is on track to be rolled out in the coming months.</p>
<p>Demand for School Places</p> <p>Primary Places:</p> <p>In the normal admissions round for entry into reception and in September 2022 there were sufficient places for our residents with surplus places in all areas. The admission round for September 2023 is still being finalised but there are sufficient places in all areas.</p> <p>However, the surge of in-year applications continues to have an impact on primary places and has created pressure in the secondary sector as children move up.</p> <p>Secondary Places:</p> <p>In the normal admissions round for entry into Y7 in September 2023 there was just enough capacity to offer a place to everyone who applied. However, 191 Trafford children, predominantly resident in Altrincham and Sale, could not be allocated places at any of their preferred schools and were allocated places at the nearest school with a vacancy. 110 of these places were in other areas of Trafford. At the end of the allocation every secondary school in Trafford was</p>	<p>The Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient places in schools and early years settings. To support the achievement of this duty, and to meet any risks in relation to school conditions and access, the Council has received Basic Need capital funding (for expansion of pupil places) of nil for 2024/25 and £19.177m for 2025/26.</p> <p>Demand for school places is influenced by a broad range of social, economic and demographic factors, reflecting wider trends within community and society at a given point in time. The selective education system in Trafford creates additional complexities, with a unique pattern of pupils in upper year groups in the primary phase moving into the area in preparation for applying for our grammar schools. Additionally, Trafford is not the Admission Authority for 18 of our 19 secondary schools where this responsibility lies with the school's governing body because they are an academy or faith school. Due to this complexity, providing a place for every Trafford resident child has not been easy to achieve but</p>

2022/23 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2023/24
<p>full and many schools allocated places above their published capacity.</p> <p>Projects have been completed or are planned over the course of 2023/24 to deliver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 College places per year group from September 2024. • 30 additional Primary places per year group from February 2023. • 45 additional infant/primary school places per year group from September 2023. • 135 temporary additional places in Y5 and Y6. • 30 temporary additional places in Y4 • 30 temporary additional places in Y2 <p>In addition to securing extra capacity, the Council will also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to update and review the most recent GP registration data, • Annually review catchment areas for primary schools to ensure that the available places are targeted most effectively. • Implement EYES Schools Admission module for enhanced monitoring and reporting on in-year applications and impact of inbound migration. • Hold regular meetings with DfE Place Planning Teams to monitor sufficiency and impact of inbound migration. • Explore provision of a new secondary school in Sale/Altrincham area. 	<p>Trafford continues to meet the statutory duty despite the challenges.</p> <p>In the 2023 admission round there were sufficient reception places in all areas. On national offer day (17 April 2023) every applicant was offered a place, with 94% of Trafford resident on-time applicants allocated their first preference school and 99% allocated one of their top three preferences. All primary in-year applications received in the 2023 autumn term, where residency has been confirmed, were also allocated a school place.</p> <p>In order to meet the demand for the growth in primary school places that were required, a number of both permanent and temporary expansions and developments were implemented, using the Basic Need capital funding.</p> <p>The unprecedented surge in demand for primary school places has gone on to have a significant impact on admissions into secondary school. However, on national offer day in 2023, all year 7 applicants achieved a school place. Work continues to achieve an expansion at Altrincham College to create additional places in the south of the borough.</p> <p>In addition, a Priority School Rebuild bid to rebuild two blocks at Sale High School was submitted to the DfE and was</p>

2022/23 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2023/24
<p>Deliver tailored application advice for Altrincham and Sale parents in the transfer cohort for September 2023 to help secure Y7 places for Trafford residents and develop a robust communication strategy.</p>	<p>successful. The project has been allocated to the second phase of the programme which is provisionally expected to enter delivery from April 2025 with an expected three-year project timeline.</p>
<p>Leisure Services</p> <p>The Council will ensure refurbishment continues at Altrincham Leisure Centre, scheduled to re-open in late 2024. The Council will also ensure that public consultation continues throughout 23/24 at each stage of the design process for Partington Sports Village. Independent scrutiny and validation of the business plans for each centre will be provided by a leading leisure consultant to support the Council in ensuring that investment in its Leisure estate provides value for money and delivers the Council’s Strategic Objectives, as set out in the Strategic Objectives Planning Model (SOPM) and the Councils Corporate Plan. The Operating Agreement between the Council and Trafford Leisure will provide a robust governance and reporting framework against agreed service standards, asset management and financial and legal agreements. Following approvals, the Operating agreement is being developed for agreement and implementation in 2024.</p>	<p>Altrincham Leisure Centre has been under construction throughout 23/24, and due for completion at the end of 2024. It is currently forecasted in line with budget parameters agreed with executive. The works will include a full refurbishment of the centre as well as the removal of gas from the building and the inclusion of air source heat pumps and solar panels.</p> <p>Partington Leisure centre – In 23/24 a series of key milestones have been achieved in the redevelopment of this centre and surroundings. RIBA stage 2 and 3 have been completed for the Leisure Centre. An additional third generation Astro turf pitch has been delivered on site and is now live as well as the resurfacing of the current pitch. A series of public engagement and consultation sessions have also been delivered.</p> <p>Operating Agreement – a service specification has been developed and agreed in 23/24 as well as a performance management framework and set of KPIs which are currently being implemented. Support has</p>

2022/23 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2023/24
	<p>been provided to Trafford Leisure as they progress work on their internal governance including work towards achieving Sport England's tier 3 governance framework.</p> <p>Business cases – business cases have been developed for each leisure centre and have been aligned to the approval processes. A 5-year business case has been developed which recognises the work across the leisure investment programme so that a clearer understanding of the short- and medium-term revenue position will be of Trafford Leisure.</p>
<p>Economic Uncertainty</p> <p>The Government target is to half inflation by the end of 2023, though it remained above 10% in April 2023. The prospect of further increases in interest rates threaten to remain a brake on the housing sector with house prices remaining generally static, which could see a slowdown in development activity. The economic outlook remains uncertain with predicted growth low, though unemployment rates also remain low. The Council believes that it has an important role to maintain confidence in the Trafford economy and to continue to enable inward investment. The regeneration of our town centres will continue, with works starting on the King Street and Kingsway in Stretford, the completion of the Foundations development in the Stamford Quarter alongside the</p>	<p>The UK saw two consecutive quarters of negative growth at the end of 2023, though the economy saw a return to positive growth in the first quarter of 2024. Despite this challenging background the Council continued to promote Trafford as place to develop, do business and invest. The Inclusive Economy Delivery Plan, approved by the Executive in February 2023 sets out the Council's overall approach to delivering an inclusive economy.</p> <p>These plans are supported by the utilisation of £1.76m of funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, with a key focus on town centres, supporting businesses, social value, and arts and culture.</p>

2022/23 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2023/24
<p>public realm improvements, and a new masterplan for Urmston being Commissioned.</p> <p>The Council will also continue to use its' Investment Strategy to support appropriate development. Subject to the final consultation on Main Modifications required following the Examination in Public, the anticipated adoption of Places for Everyone will establish the planning policy basis to enable development in our strategic locations alongside investment in critical infrastructure. Working with partners in GM the Council will ensure it maximises the potential of the Trailblazer devo deal to deliver inclusive economic growth for all our communities.</p>	<p>Investment into the Council's town centres, and key regeneration sites has been maintained. Work is progressing on the new King Street and Kingsway regeneration projects in Stretford, the Foundation development has completed in the Stamford Quarter in Altrincham, and development of the Lumina Village site has commenced.</p> <p>Places for Everyone was adopted in March 2024, setting out the development plan for GM (excluding Stockport), delivering housing and economic growth across nine GM LA's. Two key strategic development sites are in the borough, New Carrington and Davenport Green.</p>
<p>Amey Contract</p> <p>The seven-year review will complete in 2023/24, establishing an updated contractual basis for the contract, alongside revised governance arrangements and amended performance management framework. Work will also be progressed on Microsoft Dynamics, the new CRM system, which should improve the customer journey of reporting service requests. Maintaining and improving the uplift in performance will enable greater focus on service change, maximising the potential benefits of the partnership to support investment in infrastructure and green spaces.</p>	<p>The seven-year review process completed, with the agreed contractual changes to be formally signed in 2024/25. This sets out a new performance management framework and governance arrangements, alongside opportunities to enhance the partnership to deliver new commercial opportunities and investment in infrastructure in Trafford, supporting delivery of new development.</p>

Significant Governance Issues 2024/25

5.3 The Council is committed to achieving its objectives through good governance and continuous improvement. Going forward, the Council will continue to ensure the effective delivery of its objectives and manages its resources to meet the ongoing financial challenges being faced. Detailed below are significant governance issues and actions planned to address these in 2024/25.

<p>Medium Term Financial Position</p>	<p>Whilst balanced budget proposals for 2024/25 have been agreed by Council in February 2024 there is still a significant structural deficit in the budget with gaps of £15m and £14m in 2025/26 and 2026/27 respectively. It will be crucial for the Finance and Change Board and supported by the Executive to continue to look to identify and deliver on further income generation opportunities and service transformation and productivity initiatives that can help achieve sustainable budget proposals for future years. At the same time the Board will need to keep a close eye on the delivery of the savings programme for 2024/25.</p> <p>In addition to the risks posed by the growing demand for social care, inflationary factors, particularly how they impact of future pay growth (affecting both Council staff and providers) and other macro-economic factors could have an impact on the budget position and will need to be closely monitored. Also, there are a number of other key financial risks that the Council will need to closely monitor, including the risks associated with the Asset Investment Strategy, the growing financial deficit on the school's high needs block and the volatility in the level of funding the budget is reliant on from business rates.</p>
<p>Climate Change Emergency</p>	<p>Work has commenced to provide support to businesses on Trafford Park to decarbonise. What is needed is governance arrangements to support collaboration not just between businesses on the park but also with potential technology providers, experts, investors and so on. Discussions are ongoing about how the Council can best support such collaboration.</p>

Increasing the pace of emissions reductions from the Council's own estate and operations requires collaboration with various teams across the Council, including Estates, Schools, Leisure, Waste and the One Trafford Partnership, This collaboration is being taken forward through a Climate Crisis Officers Group and through regular one-to-ones between these teams and the Climate Change and Sustainability team. A first quarterly newsletter has been sent out (December 2024) to businesses on the park and other partners interested in the decarbonisation of Trafford Park. But more will be needed to bring relevant partners together to develop a pipeline of investable projects, and to seek funding.

More work is needed to increase awareness of climate risks in Trafford and how to increase climate resilience. Work is being carried out at the GM level, led by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and supported by all 10 districts and other key stakeholders, to develop a climate change strategy and action plan for the city region.

The planned Civic Quarter Heat Network had been successful in receiving Government grant and is now moving to the commercialisation phase. But further work will also be needed to assess the scope for low carbon heat networks elsewhere in Trafford covered by proposed heat zones – this includes other areas of North Trafford (e.g., Trafford Park, Wharfside, Stretford) but also in Trafford's two allocations under Places for Everyone (Pfe) – New Carrington and Davenport Green.

The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, which has already funded decarbonisation work in Trafford such as Altrincham Leisure Centre, has now been devolved to the GMCA to administer. This provides an opportunity for Trafford Council to work collaboratively with the GMCA to understand further opportunities to fund decarbonisation work on public sector buildings.

On the issue of nature and biodiversity, there are some key questions around funding of biodiversity-related work that will need resolving. One is the Government's proposal for a new

	<p>approach to developed contributions for discharging environmental obligations. The other is the Council's approach to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). If the Council wishes to use BNG money to fund biodiversity projects then it will need to assess the scope for setting up habitat banks in Trafford.</p>
<p>Information Governance</p>	<p>The Council has maintained the current compliance rates for Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations requests and Subject Access Requests over the last 12 months, but further improvement is required. The increased capacity in the team following the recruitment exercise will allow much more proactive work to be carried out in ensuring that deadlines are met. We have also identified that many of the SAR requests that we are unable to respond to within timescales are those for care experienced individuals as these are often complex and voluminous. We are implementing plans to provide a streamlined bundle in these cases, this will improve outcomes for the individuals involved and make workloads more manageable and increase the number of subject access requests that we are able to respond to within the statutory timeframes.</p> <p>There is an ongoing risk around retention of records and records management. The Council now has an up-to-date retention schedule in place; however, work is planned to create a Trafford specific retention schedule and policy, which will be developed in conjunction with the information collated for the SharePoint migration. We will also be considering the best options for the Council with regard to storage of hard copy records and a high-level business case has been drafted regarding this.</p> <p>We continue to be alert to data breaches and consideration of how we can minimise the risks of incidents occurring. In the next year we will be implementing specific targeted training for service areas, we will reinstate reporting of incidents at board level and ensure that regular root cause analysis is conducted. Audit Work has also been planned in this area for Q3/Q4 of 2024/25.</p>

<p>Leisure Services</p>	<p>The Council is working to reduce the ongoing subsidisation of Trafford Leisure through developing a revised operating agreement that will ensure the necessary governance and reporting mechanisms are in place including, legal and financial agreements, property leases and service standards. Service outcomes will be aligned to the wider strategic objectives of the Council.</p> <p>Work to progress the full Operating Agreement is ongoing with engagement of TL board. In November 2023, HMRC issued revised guidance on the status of VAT for Leisure Services. To ensure that the Council can fully realise any benefits from these changes, legal and finance services have commissioned expert external advice to consider the legal, contractual, procurement and subsidy implications.</p> <p>A key risk across the investment period has been the financial impact on Trafford Leisure and the ability to maintain business continuity of service provision during the works through a robust displacement programme. With phasing on the Leisure Investment programme now confirmed and using the 24/25 agreed budget position, an independent Leisure Consultant (Max Associates) have completed a 5-year business plan across the leisure estate. This will help provide assumptions on the subsidy required over this period.</p>
<p>Economic Uncertainty affecting residents and businesses.</p>	<p>The Trafford Inclusive Economy Delivery Plan (approved by the Executive in February 2023) is a focused and longer-term plan to complement Corporate and Directorate Priorities. The actions contained within the Plan are ultimately aimed at delivering the Council's Strategic Vision i.e., 'Trafford – where all our residents, businesses and communities prosper.' The Plan has been produced to clearly set out a number of key themes and related projects/activities in a delivery orientated approach. The Plan contains six themes as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Support • Town Centres -Regeneration-Shared Prosperity Fund

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and Skills • Communities, Social Value and VCFSE Support • Climate Change/Green Economy • Development Framework <p>To support delivery of the Plan, the Council was awarded c£1.8m of UK Shared Prosperity fund monies (to utilise by March 2025) which is a cross-Council approach to support communities and businesses in the borough. The areas of activity include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive and Vibrant Town Centres • Greening Trafford Park • Social Value Co-ordination • Creative Trafford • Active Trafford • Cycle Hubs • Trafford Heritage Programme • Public Health in Art • Libraries Community Engagement Programme <p>The focus continues on delivery of the IEDP, and the UK SPF projects which are monitored on a monthly basis. Employment and skills initiatives to support residents are being delivered, such as through the comprehensive job clubs programme and digital inclusion project.</p>
Reducing health inequalities	The Fairer Health for Trafford Partnership was established in March 2024 and is accountable to Trafford’s Health and Wellbeing Board. The partnership is taking a tactical approach to

	understanding, co-ordinating action to reduce the impact of, and monitoring health inequalities. An action plan is currently under development.
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The Council is committed to achieving its objectives through good governance and continuous improvement. Going forward, the Council will continue to ensure it delivers its objectives and manages its resources to meet the ongoing financial challenges being faced.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Councillor Tom Ross
Leader of the Council

Sara Todd
Chief Executive