

Questions Submitted for Council – 29 January 2025

Note: 7 questions have been submitted and are numbered in the order they were received, however, in accordance with Procedure Rule 10.4, they are listed for the meeting one question from each party at a time and in order of political balance.

Question 2 - Submitted by Councillor G. Carter

“Can the Executive Member responsible please confirm whether Trafford Council is axing any School Crossing Patrol roles, as recently alleged by Trafford’s Conservatives?”

Response

Trafford Council are not axing any school crossing points.

We recognise that school crossing patrol staff make a valuable contribution towards pupils’ safe and sustainable travel to schools, and we remain committed to continuing to fund the current 71 crossing points in the service.

What we are doing is looking at options to help sustain safe travel, especially considering recruitment challenges (which is a national problem), and so we are looking at light controlled crossings as an alternative in some cases.

The two crossings in scope for automation are at Old Hall Road, Sale Moor (Holy Family School) and Stretford Road/Clifton Street (Old Trafford Community School).

Question 1 - Submitted by Councillor Duncan

“Children’s services, particularly for children with SEND, have been failing for six years under this Labour administration. Children with SEND within Trafford stand at 4,449, with 2,237 children requiring EHC plans. Alarming, only 52% of these plans meet the 20-week completion target, with some taking up to 30 weeks. This delay is deeply concerning knowing an academic year is around 39 weeks. With EHC plan delays, inadequate after-care support, and vulnerable young people at risk of exploitation and homelessness, what urgent measures will you implement in 2025 to ensure resources are used effectively, deliver clear improvements, and prevent a seventh year of failure in supporting Trafford’s most vulnerable children?”

Response

Timeliness of the issuing of plans was much improved last year and has been published as 58.6% for the year in SEN2 and currently stands at 52.3% above the national performance figure of 50.3%.

A timeliness action plan is in place to ensure this is maintained which is managed by the EHC Manager and Seniors.

Monthly reports are provided to identify barriers and reasons for delays which inform practice and next steps. We have seen that the main reasons for delays relate to sourcing the correct form of provision due to sufficiency issues both in-borough and out of Trafford and agreement with parents around the content of the plan.

There has been a redesign of the EHC team to enable the co-ordinators to work more effectively and efficiently in a bid to manage increased demand. Practice standards for the team and partners across education, health and social care will also be developed to ensure consistency of practice and outcomes of decision-making.

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Panel processes have also been revised so that more are triaged within the EHC team and only those requiring discussion come to the multi-agency EHC Panel for new assessments. This has created more space within Panel for Annual review decisions to support timeliness. The recently formed Post 16 Panel is supporting annual review and resource decisions around most for that age range and will extend to decisions to issue and assess

In relation to after-care support we have a refreshed Ambitions for Children plan which incorporates the findings from the OFSTED focussed visit inspection findings of June 2024. We take our corporate parenting responsibilities seriously and have Preparing for Adulthood as a fifth priority area in the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan. We have a business leaders event planned for February 2025 which is an exciting opportunity to partner with local businesses to create further opportunities for care experienced young people and adults. We have high numbers of our care experienced young people and adults going on to do well at university and have strengthened our approach to those unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers and those who are/have been in custody.

With regards to the Complex Safeguarding area Children and Young People's Scrutiny have received two Annual Reports from our SHINE team which have been well received. We have strengthened our governance arrangements significantly in this area. Children and young people at risk of all forms of exploitation are identified, offered support, clear safety plans are in place which are regularly reviewed. We work closely with partners in this area. We undertake an annual peer review across Greater Manchester and have implemented recommendations – HMIC have recently reviewed these arrangements and identified a number of strengths in the approach.

We do not currently have any historic child exploitation cases under investigation in Trafford.

Our approach to youth homelessness in partnership with our colleagues in Housing Support have been strengthened to ensure timely joint assessments of need and support is provided quickly. Where appropriate young people are becoming cared for and are eligible for leaving care services.

There are currently 130 households with dependent children in Temporary and emergency Accommodation. This equates to 292 dependent children in temporary and emergency accommodation. We offer tenancy support to those households in temporary accommodation that are more vulnerable. Where there are any concerns about support that families need at this time appropriate referrals are made to Children's Services including Family Help.

Question 4 - Submitted by Councillor Frass

"In March 2024, Labour voted against plans from the Liberal Democrats to instigate greater use of the drain clearing machines at weekends, to maximize the productivity of the limited equipment we have.

Although the flooding on New Year's Day 2025 was exceptional compared to recent years, it is incredibly frustrating for residents that many houses could have been spared if the flood water was just a few inches lower. Once floodwater breaches the threshold of your house, whether you are flooded by 1 inch or 3 feet, the loss of electricity, heating and accommodation is the same.

If the street drains had been cleared, it would not have prevented all the flooding damage; but a sizeable proportion of homes that flooded on New Year's Day would have been spared because the extent and reach of the floodwater would have been significantly reduced if more street drains were not blocked solid.

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Will Labour look again at the plans to increase the productivity of the drain cleaning equipment we have – and clear more drains before the winter is over?"

Response

Currently we have 2 gully machines, one for cyclical and another for reactive maintenance for approx. 70,000 gullies. We have 6 crew members, inclusive of the dig down team. Our cyclical crew can be redeployed in response to weather events.

We estimate that we could increase our gully cleaning outputs by around 2000 gulleys per annum if cyclical maintenance continued into some or all weekend days (allowing for maintenance and annual leave). We currently clean and maintain approximately 13000 out of our circa 70,000 gully per year. The cost to the revenue budget of this is unsustainable at this moment in time for the output we would gain. Crews do work weekends when weather conditions and reactive works require it, and on a standby basis, working within existing budgets.

We know that both the public sewer and highway system were at capacity at various locations due to the intense storm event over New Year. This resulted in not only the surcharge of various gullies and manholes, but outfalls for these systems into both Timperley and Fairywell Brook were also throttled due to high water levels.

We are continuing to investigate possible alleviation measures, as is our duty under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. We also know that both main rivers exceeded their banks, conveying flows through private land and adopted highways.

In conjunction with the Environment Agency, who are the statutory regulator for main rivers such as Timperley Brook, we continue to explore potential flood alleviation solutions upstream. A link to the FloodHub's website can be found on the Trafford Flooding webpage and it contains information and resources to support householders, businesses and communities across the North-West in becoming more flood resilient.

Question 6 - Submitted by Councillor Jerome

"Is there a danger that the 10% biodiversity net gain on new developments could be lost to other areas outside the locality or even borough, if it can't be achieved onsite?"

Response

Biodiversity Net Gain is a requirement of many new developments within the planning system and the planning application process ensures that suitable provision is made. In many cases this will be done on site through the design and landscaping of the development. However where that cannot be achieved developers are required to purchase off-site BNG units (or failing that, Government statutory credits). Whilst it is desirable that these purchases are made locally, there is no certainty that this is the case.

The Council is working with the GMCA and other partners to identify potential sites for habitat banks in Trafford that could generate a supply of BNG units to local development projects, ensuring that revenues from the purchase of BNG units support biodiversity improvements in the Borough. We are engaging with third-party landowners and their representatives, to better understand scope for habitat banks to be set up on third-party land. The Council has also carried out ecological surveys of a few priority Council-owned sites to assess their potential as habitat banks, by calculating the scope of potential uplift on those sites and developing habitat management and monitoring plans.

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The sites surveyed so far are William Wroe, Longford Park, Sale Water Park and Denzell Gardens/Devisdale, and the Council is considering whether to conduct others. In parallel, the Council is working with GMCA and their consultants to review options for how the habitat banks could be set up, to ensure that any future arrangements remain sustainable for the long term.

Question 3 - Submitted by Councillor Eckersley

“Inadequate maintenance of gullies and drains, which has resulted in flooding and property damage for Trafford residents

The Conservative group outlined concerns around flood risk due to road maintenance and clearance of gullies at full council on 20th March 2024, but once again we see inaction from this Labour Council which has led to distress to residents and damage to property.

Given the reported issues with leaf-fall during the autumn resulting in surface-water flooding including on main roads such as the A56 how does the Executive Member explain and justify the following failings:

1. The council's inability to implement a comprehensive year-round gully clearance programme, particularly in known flooding hotspots?
2. The failure to conduct systematic inspections of drains and gullies immediately following the annual leaf clearance programme to identify and address blockages?
3. The lack of investment in additional gully clearing machinery and trained staff to expand drain maintenance capacity beyond the current limited 5 days per week schedule?
4. The absence of a proactive road and drainage maintenance programme utilising available "Local Road Resurfacing Funding"?

Furthermore, how does the Executive Member respond to concerns that these ongoing failures in basic infrastructure maintenance under Labour's leadership have directly contributed to increased flood risk and property damage for Trafford residents?"

Response

1. *The council's inability to implement a comprehensive year-round gully clearance programme, particularly in known flooding hotspots?*

We implement a 'risk based' year-round gully clearance and proving programme utilising the equipment and resources currently available. We estimate up to 20% of our gulleys receive an intervention in any given year. We have a fleet of two gully emptying machines, one on a primarily cyclical schedule and one reacting to issues across the borough. We have a list of priority sites to clean and prove that we attend prior to any known weather event in order to reduce the impact of surface water on neighbouring land, properties and the highway. During weather events the cyclical crew go on reactive duties, impacting upon their planned scheduled activities.

2. *The failure to conduct systematic inspections of drains and gullies immediately following the annual leaf clearance programme to identify and address blockages?*

We conduct inspections of our drains and gulleys prioritising known high risk areas. We have 1 wagon and crew undertaking cyclical maintenance and 1 undertaking reactive works permanently due to the number of enquiries received. Leaf clearance operatives and highways inspectors do flag problem areas which can be scheduled for quicker interventions.

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There are areas that require more serious interventions due to the age of the assets underground these are more complex than just using the gully machines and often require extensive jetting and/or costly excavation.

Residents can also report blocked gullies using our web-based form. Often, the gully grating can be blocked with leaves which have fallen following the completion of the leaf clearance programme, but the gully pot and outfall themselves are not blocked. With this in mind, the Council's drainage webpage does encourage residents to remove leaves from a gully grating themselves when it is safe to do so. This is a help to the Council as it means that our resources can be focused on cleansing gullies that require more advanced intervention elsewhere, and encourages social action and involvement in their immediate community.

3. *The lack of investment in additional gully clearing machinery and trained staff to expand drain maintenance capacity beyond the current limited 5 days per week schedule?*

Our 2 Gully emptiers are similar in number (and more numerous on some occasions) to our peer GM authorities. Our machinery and trained staff are split across cyclical and reactive maintenance works which work within existing budget resources. Operating primarily across a 5 day week, our call out rota does allow for weekend works when weather conditions require it. Any flooding events can result in the redeployment of our cyclical maintenance crew which may impact upon their planned works.

4. *The absence of a proactive road and drainage maintenance programme utilising available "Local Road Resurfacing Funding"?*

We have a proactive road and drainage maintenance programme. Our Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan informs our approach (available online). We utilise capital funding and seek external funding to safely improve our highways for all journey types.

Furthermore, how does the Executive Member respond to concerns that these ongoing failures in basic infrastructure maintenance under Labour's leadership have directly contributed to increased flood risk and property damage for Trafford residents?"

The incident over New year involved a huge amount of rain falling across GM and resulted in rivers bursting their banks leading to floods and property damage. The level of the Mersey and the Bollin rose to almost record height, Sinderland Brook broke new records, and the Bridgewater Canal broke its bank, this was the major cause of the flooding issues, not the maintenance of the Council's gullies.

There are three main reasons for increased flood risk across Trafford and indeed the UK as a whole. Climate change is altering the environment of the borough from a flood point of view, more frequent storms and extreme rainfall are becoming the norm. An aging water infrastructure network allied to reduced investment in assets plus a legacy of an increased urbanised environment with increased run off into these networks, are the primary causes of flood risk in Trafford. This is supported by the potential future changes in legislation such as Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 which promotes the approval and adoption of Sustainable urban drainage systems as one of a number of future solutions. As a local authority we have limited resources to combat these overwhelming issues.

Our residents should be reassured by our visibility and action across all sites and the work we've led to bring together the Environment Agency (EA) and United Utilities (UU) to offer a holistic approach

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We encourage all parties to work with us to improve our service offer for the benefits of our residents, businesses and visitors to the area. We're working within our existing resources and funding to maintain and improve our highways for all users. Following any event, we undertake internal reviews to learn lessons to continually improve our offer. We also seek enhanced budgets and external funding to make this possible.

Question 5 - Submitted by Councillor Newgrosh

“With the take-over of THT by L&Q, Trafford Council lost our only seat at the Directors Table, and with it a substantial amount of influence and control over the future of our residents housing provision.

What additional measures have Trafford Council since put in place, with L&Q, to replace or mitigate that significant loss of representation?”

Response

Some twenty years ago the Council took a strategic decision to divest itself of its housing stock and convey those to a Housing Associations. There were certain benefits in that approach in terms of management and investment in housing in Trafford – but inherent to that decision was the fact that the Council would lose control over the homes it previously owned. That was one of the inevitable consequences of that decision – and was carefully weighed and evaluated at the time.

Since then, the Council has been fortunate to have close involvement with Trafford Housing Trust, including for many years a seat on the board. However there was never any guarantee this would continue – and we need to be clear that the Council nominees on the THT Board had a fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interests of the Trust and not to represent the Council.

The takeover of THT by L&Q reflects a national trend for consolidation within the housing sector – with many smaller Housing Associations merging or being subsumed into larger organisation. This trend brings with it greater resilience and financial stability – but clearly the relationship that the Council has with L&Q is different to that when Trafford Housing Trust was first established.

L&Q remain the largest social housing provider in Trafford and we recognise the vital role they play in lives of thousands of our residents. They remain a key partner for the Council – and we continue to work effectively together in bringing forward new homes, refurbishing existing ones and on tackling anti-social behaviour and other management issues. To cement this partnership we are working up a formal Memorandum of Understanding with L&Q which will come to the Executive in due course.

Question 7 - Submitted by Councillor Leicester

“Following the recent period of extremely cold weather, please could you share the details of pavement/pedestrian areas that were gritted and cleared?”

Response

During the period of cold weather, we had up to 5 teams from our Street Scene department gritting the below sites and in regular contact with their supervisors:

- Altrincham Town Centre
- Sale Town Centre
- Urmston Town Centre

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- Timperley
- Sale Moor
- Stretford
- All cemeteries
- Shop fronts

Upon review, it was identified that Hale centre had no team deployed and we're sorry it was missed. Please be assured that an internal review has been undertaken and we will work to ensure it is included, as it was during historic cold weather events. Whilst our Street Scene Operatives were undertaking gritting across Trafford, our other teams were ensuring other key routes were prepared. Works included:

- Gritting primary routes and some secondary routes around Altrincham, Timperley, Urmston and Stretford.
- Filling grit bins around Ashton on Mersey, Hale and Lancashire Cricket Club
- Pot hole works
- A gully wagon undertaking standing water duties

To help us continually improve, we'll be undertaking a review of our winterisation plans, inclusive of the above learning for 25/26 with any updates published on our website.