

**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR
COUNCIL**

Date: Wednesday, 27 July 2022

3. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

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

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Question 1 - Submitted by Councillor Thompson

“Could the Executive Member for Finance and Governance set out what in-year action officers are taking to mitigate the impact of growing inflationary pressures on our budget?”

Response

Thank you, Cllr Thompson, for your question - I know from previous exchanges we've had at Scrutiny and elsewhere that you've been keeping a close interest in the impact inflation is having on our council finances. After a long period of stability, inflation has become an issue for the first time in a generation- particularly as a result of rising fuel and energy prices. You will also be aware that without support from central government, this year's pay award will have an impact on our current (and future budgets). From a financial perspective, and in response to pressures emerging during this year's budget, I announced the creation of an Inflation Risk Reserve in June which now holds £6m. In respect of energy which costs us £1.6m in a normal year we are expecting this cost to double and we're about to launch an energy saving scheme across our council buildings. Where we can we are pre-purchasing materials to maintain supply and avoid increasing costs, an example of this being street lighting columns. We are promoting green travel and some electric bikes are now being used by social workers.

Question 2 - Submitted by Councillor Chalkin

“The recent record temperatures have reinforced the need to change how we impact the environment. In the UK, the built environment is one of the sectors that has the biggest impact, but the way Landlord and Tenant law is currently written means that landowners, more often than not, do not have the ability to influence change on their buildings or within their portfolios. Will the Executive Member for Economy and Regeneration commit to having Green Leases at all properties owned and rented out by Trafford, inserting clauses that give Trafford the ability, as a property owner, to influence the necessary changes needed during the term of a lease wherever possible?”

Response

The Council will commit to including green clauses in new leases and lease renewals that are appropriate/proportionate to each property where possible. For existing leases, the Council will commit to discussions with tenants where possible and at the appropriate time, noting that any changes to existing leases would have to be by mutual agreement.

In addition, the Council is currently reviewing its estate and decarbonisation programme to look at all of our property portfolio and where green measures can be applied. The Council is currently preparing a 10-year Estates Strategy and will incorporate plans and a programme for decarbonisation/green measures across the whole estate.

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Question 3 - Submitted by Councillor Brophy

“Please can I ask the relevant Executive Member about the issue of hedge cutting and the Amey contract. Residents in my ward are fed up with hedges that grow into the pavements in Timperley. A particular example is on Grove Lane, where the pavement is no longer safe to walk on due to a hedge that expands year by year. The hedge is cut in the appropriate season, only always leaving it slightly wider than it was the previous year.

My newly elected colleague Councillor Will Frass has persuaded Amey to do a site visit to see how dangerous this stretch of hedge has become and now they are going to “flail” the hedge to reduce its width so residents can use the pavement safely once again. I am certain that similar hedge issues impact on pavements all over Trafford causing a safety hazard and inconvenience for our residents.

Can I ask why the trimming back to maintain the line of the hedge at the original width isn't part of the regular contract with Amey? And why this “flailing” of hedges is such a difficult ask (since I have had no response from Amey after raising this issue over many years and only the site visit after weeks of Councillor Frass asking has got the issue addressed)?”

Response

The task of maintaining hedges can be challenging, with over 200 individual sites across Trafford requiring hedge cutting each season. Some of the hedges in the borough are surrounding council land but there are many other hedges across the Borough that are private and the responsibility of the adjacent landowner to prune. Where private hedges are overhanging Trafford via One Trafford (Amey) as the Highway Authority serve notice on owners to ensure that they do not cause obstruction to the highway. Sometimes the time that the owners take to prune can be longer than anticipated.

Hedge maintenance can be a time-consuming operation that needs to take into account ground conditions, wildlife and highway safety. Where road safety is not jeopardised, hedge maintenance will be carried out during **January to March** for the following reasons:

- It reduces the chance of disturbance to breeding birds.
- Nesting birds are given legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

One Trafford / AMEY's grounds maintenance teams are adapting their operations to accommodate and support wildlife within Trafford but at the same time take account of the growing hedgerows that require regular maintenance. Part of this adaptation has been to introduce a Tractor side arm flail which will allow for a firm cutting back on sites that are identified as potentially causing obstruction to the highway. Officers from the grounds maintenance team as highlighted above have met with Cllr Frass and Cllr Mimis at the Grove Lane site and agreed a scheduled date for the hedge to be hard cut back using the new tractor mounted flail.

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The challenge for the team will be allowing for none cutting of these hedges during the months **March – September** (nesting season). The challenge is that hedges experience their main growth during these months and striking the right balance and achieving sufficient cut back with handheld hedge cutters has caused problems in the past, but with tractor mounted side arm flail that is now available the teams are confident they can deliver better service going forward.

Question 4 - Submitted by Councillor Duncan

“Since the recent encouragement to residents in June 2021 to submit their requests for reduced speed limits in residential areas how many requests have been received and how many have been implemented and is there a plan to publish the proposed matrix of priorities?”

Response

Since June 2021 there have been 77 requests received for 20mph speed limits across Trafford. Investigation of the top 10 schemes that meet the matrix of priorities is underway and suitable measures will be designed and consulted upon following assessment of speed surveys that are being undertaken by TfGM.

Design will involve in the main lining and signing with potential physical measures if needed with consultation on the proposals and Traffic Regulation Order needed for each location thereafter. This process can take between 6 – 9 months or longer if there are objections.

The list of proposals will be published on the web site in the next month or so following speed survey assessments. It is likely that with the approved budget of £40k that 4 or 5 smaller schemes will be undertaken each year depending on size of the scheme and design requirements and hence there will need to be a rolling programme of schemes going forward.

Question 5 - Submitted by Councillor Ennis

“Can the Executive Member for Housing confirm how many people are currently on social housing waiting lists in Trafford?”

Response

The number of people at the Housing Register as of 30th June (end of Q2) = 7,092

A breakdown of bands and bedroom need is below:

APPLICANTS BAND	Total
Band 1	341
Band 2	828
Band 3	970
Band 4	3251

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Band 5	1702
Total	7,092

NUMBER OF BEDROOMS NEEDED	Total
1	3,916
2	1,938
3	940
4+	298
Total	7,092

Question 6 - Submitted by Councillor Whetton

“Given that we have just had national Cut the Clutter week where Councils have been asked to visit the whole issue of items such as A boards, overgrown hedges, pavement parking, etc which cause obstruction and unnecessary difficulties to pedestrians, wheelchairs users and the visually challenged will the Council consider implementing the six recommendations to Clear the Clutter published recently by Living Streets?”

Response

With reference to the 6 recommendations offered by Living Streets, Trafford are currently supporting these priorities to assist with clearing clutter from the highway by applying minimum clearway widths of 1.8m in footways.

This width is being used in design and placement of any new street furniture such as EV charge points, signs and street lighting columns. The guidance included in any licences for placement of any table and chairs also uses the 1.8m minimum width.

E-Scooters are not currently within Trafford however, the Bike Hire Scheme (rolling out from September) and any future E-scooter agreements will be working to a minimum of 1.8m but the majority of areas chosen to date for bike hire are placed in locations that have more than 1.8m and avoid high footfall areas.

Trafford are also looking to declutter the highway at every opportunity during design and maintenance of the highway to ensure pedestrian access is prioritised and this also reduces further maintenance costs. Examples of current practice include removal of redundant signs and relocating lamp columns to the rear of footways.

The trees and hedges that have the potential to overhang are monitored during routine highway safety inspections and enforcement action is taken where there is overhanging and encroachment onto pavements. Coupled with routine hedge pruning that is undertaken on council owned perimeters with the newly purchased flail should ensure that the footways are clear from obstructions.

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Banning of A boards would need to be considered as part of a policy agreement relating to obstructions. The use of A boards is a long-standing practice that is difficult to enforce in some locations due to shared land ownership in front of business premises. Within the highway the requirement currently is to ensure a minimum of 1.8m is available for pedestrians on public footways.

Question 7 - Submitted by Councillor Holden

“How many appeals against secondary school allocations have been lodged this year in Trafford?”

Response

The Figures I have are from Democratic services who support some appeals if schools buy in their services.

It is important to note that this is not a complete picture, as 11 of the 19 secondary schools administer their own appeals.

Equally, some of these numbers may be duplicates as the same pupil may submit appeals to multiple grammar schools and some of the grammar school appeals will be for children that have not qualified and are appealing against the assessment outcome.

Numbers of appeals from September 1st, 2021, until today are:

Appeals for year 7 places: 185

Appeals for in year places: 91 and these include applications for 6th form places.

Question 8 - Submitted by Councillor Holden

“When will the weed spraying programme, recently delayed for two weeks, be completed?”

Response

The weed spray programme ordinarily takes 8 weeks to complete, however, the contractor is looking to bring in additional resources if available to accelerate this programme to ensure it is on track for the original completion date.

All being well with the weather the programme should be complete by the end of September if not before.

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Question 9 - Submitted by Councillor Taylor

“In light of the cost-of-living crisis, please can the lead member for education tell council what provision has been put in place to support families over the summer holiday period?”

Response

The Council has received further funding via the Household Support Fund (HSF) to support vulnerable families and have extended the £15 per week, per child, award over the summer holidays to families in receipt of free school meals and/or council tax support.

The funding has been extended to 31st of March 2023 and therefore, support will continue in the October, December, and February holidays.

In addition, there is a school holidays activities and food programme also known as HAF and this is shared through the family information service and Trafford directory.

For the DFE funded Holiday Activity Programme (HAF) 21 providers have been commissioned to deliver holiday activities for school age children, at this point we anticipate providing approximately 2500 places, including some SEND provision.

The provision is primarily for children in receipt of free school meals. The provision is free at the point of entry and all participants will receive a meal as part of their attendance.