

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 MARCH 2023

PRESENT

Councillor D. Acton (in the Chair).

Councillors D. Butt (Vice-Chair), J.M. Axford, G. Carter, G. Coggins, W. Frass, K. Procter, L. Walsh, B.G. Winstanley, S. Zhi and M.P. Whetton (ex-Officio)

In attendance

Councillor Ross	Leader of the Council
Councillor Adshead	Executive Member for Environmental Services
Sara Saleh	Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources
Richard Roe	Corporate Director of Place
Adrian Fisher	Director of Growth and Regulatory Services
Simon Davis	Head of Customer Service, Libraries and Culture
John Addison	Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. Thompson and D. Western.

33. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 11 January 2023 be agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

35. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions were received.

36. INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Leader introduced the report that was circulated as part of the agenda. The Committee were asked to note that it was a concise report which accompanied the latest version of the strategy. The strategy gave a facility for up to £500M but informed the Committee that the Council was currently investing £330M so had a large amount of available capital to invest. The strategy had delivered over £4M in returns during the year despite it coming under projections by £2M.

Councillor Procter welcomed the impact of the strategy and asked whether there was a greater level of due diligence on developments outside of Trafford and GM. The Leader welcomed the question and handed over to the Corporate Director of place to provide an answer. The Corporate Director of Place asked Members to

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note that the Strategy had changed over the years to have a focus upon local investments and the focus of the due diligence was upon mitigating risks to the Council. The Council no longer looked at investments outside of GM and attempted to invest as much within Trafford as possible. The Corporate Director of Place assured the Committee that extensive due diligence was carried out prior to any investment wherever it was situated.

Councillor Winstanley asked about the risk reserve, which was being used to meet the shortfall this year, and what level of risk reserve would be of concern. The Leader responded to Councillor Winstanley that the Council had been conservative in their approach since the fund had been created and had built up a large risk reserve and the amount during the year was not a cause for concern. The Corporate Director of Place added that the risk reserve was different to other reserves as it linked directly to investments, so it was easier to calculate the risk and level of reserve needed. The Committee were informed that the Council continuously reviewed the risk of the investments and the Corporate Director explained how funds were allocated to the reserve to ensure risk to the Council was minimal.

Councillor Carter asked how the Council increased the level of property development. In response to Councillor Carter the Leader explained the way that the Council identified and invested in opportunities and that the Council took a low-risk approach to investment.

Councillor Carter asked whether Trafford could be benchmarked against other authorities. The Leader responded that the Council was not benchmarked against other authorities although he would be interested in doing so, especially against authorities who had gotten into financial difficulty due to investments to avoid the same pitfalls. The Corporate Director added that due to the changes to the rules of how Councils were able to invest it was difficult to benchmark with other authorities as many had investments which were no longer permissible.

Councillor Carter asked whether the Council were able to invest in projects to help with the climate change priorities. In response to Councillor Carter the Leader stated that the Council did look for investments that would help meet the Council's climate change priorities and that the reports on potential investments did provide information on the environmental impacts of the development. The Corporate Director of Place added that the Council looked for opportunities but had to compete with other investors, could not undercut the market, and had to invest within the investment strategies parameters regarding risk and rates of return. The Committee were asked to note that the Investment Management Board did not get involved with projects until after planning permission for a development had been granted to avoid conflicts of interest. This limited the influence the Council could have upon developments, but they did try to encourage developers to maximise their green efforts.

Councillor Coggins recommended CIPFA training to get an understanding of the investments made by Council's. The training provided tools for comparing your Council's investments with what the Councils who had struggled had done. Councillor Coggins noted the success of the investment programme but stated

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that she felt that Councils should not have to do this type of work to generate revenue.

The Leader agreed with the points raised by Councillor Coggins and noted that the authorities that had gone bust had a lack of challenge and he assured the Committee that was not the case in Trafford. The Leader agreed that the Council should not have to do this to bring in income but that it was delivering a large amount of regeneration into the area and he hoped that would continue.

Councillor Walsh asked whether the Council ever looked to providers other than CBRE for advice. The Corporate Director of Place responded that the Council were currently going through a tender process for an investment advisor.

Councillor Walsh asked whether social value was considered as part of the investments. The Corporate Director of Place responded to Councillor Walsh that social value was taken into consideration, especially in terms of the wider impact of potential regeneration in the area.

Councillor Walsh asked whether Stockport had a similar approach to Trafford. The Corporate Director of Place Responded that Stockport had a different structure of how they managed their investments so while they carried out similar investment activity it fell within their main budget rather than a separate structure.

Councillor Butt asked whether there was a risk register for the strategy. In response to Councillor Butt the Corporate Director of place informed the Committee that the investment management fund was captured on the strategic risk register and there was a risk assessment for each development. As the information within those risk assessments was commercially sensitive it had not been shared as part of the report.

The Chair welcomed the report and noted how well it was written. Due to the size of the investment fund the Chair felt that the Committee should receive regular updates on how it was performing. The Corporate Director of Place responded that regular reports were made to the Accounts and Audit Committee, which could be shared with Committee Members, and that Members always had opportunity to scrutinise the strategy during the budget scrutiny process each year. The Corporate Director of Place Expressed that he would like to provide some reports to the Committee which focused upon the outputs of the strategy. The Corporate Director of Place noted the Chair's comments regarding the quality of the report and informed the Committee that was due to the work of the Council's Finance Manager. The Leader added that he was happy to bring further reports to Scrutiny and that he welcomed the challenge they provided.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

37. CORPORATE PLAN DELIVERY

The Leader introduced the report on the corporate plan and informed the Committee how the plan was monitored by the Executive with fifty-seven indicators tracked across all services. Of those fifty-seven indicators twenty-three

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were annual indicators, seven were red, eight were amber, and seventeen were green. The Leader picked out three examples (one red, one amber, and one green) to demonstrate the level of detail the level of detail the Executive were provided with and the actions the Executive took.

Following the introduction Councillor Axford noted that the level of depression which had increased which was a worrying trend. Councillor Axford commented that when looking at smoking cessation cannabis use needed to be included as she was aware of many instances of it being smoked in public spaces. The Leader agreed that cannabis should be included and he had also noticed a number of instances of cannabis smoking across the borough.

Councillor Axford asked for information about uptake of the Your Home Better programme. The Leader responded that he would have to take that away and provide the figures outside of the meeting.

Councillor Axford asked a final question of what was being done to support people in libraries. The Head of Customer Service, Libraries and Culture responded to Councillor Axford that the library support was around the digital offer and helping people to access digital services safely.

Councillor Frass asked about clean air monitoring, where it lay in the plan, and what was being done. The Leader responded that the measures were kept with the climate crisis section of the report

Councillor Carter noted the issues around active transport and the lack of progress in this area. The Leader recognised that the Council had to pick up the pace in this area and assured the Committee that both he and the Executive Member for Climate Change and Transport Strategy had been meeting with the Council's partners to look at ways to speed up delivery of active transport across the borough. Stated that would attend the Committee again in 12 months' time and hoped that he would be able to inform the Committee of a large amount that had been achieved in those 12 months.

Councillor Winstanley asked about the vaping strategy and what could be done to reduce the levels. The Leader responded that this was in the early stages and work had to be done with those who were using the vapes.

Councillor Winstanley welcomed the refresh of the domestic abuse policy and asked for more details on what the refresh entailed. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources responded that she would speak with the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure, and Strategic Partnerships about bringing an update on the domestic abuse strategy refresh to scrutiny.

Councillor Walsh admitted to the Committee that he was not aware of the Trafford data lab prior to receiving the report and how useful the information was that he found there. Councillor Walsh felt that that the Council should do more to advertise the data lab. Councillor Carter asked that it be recommended that the Trafford Data lab be covered within the Councillor Induction and it was agreed by the Committee.

The Chair noted that there were many positives within the report and felt that all Councillors should be made aware when the reports were available to view.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted by the Committee.
- 2) That figures on the uptake of Your Home Better programme to be provided to Members outside of the meeting.
- 3) That an update on the domestic abuse strategy refresh be brought to Scrutiny.
- 4) That the Committee recommend that the Trafford Data Lab be covered within the Councillor induction.

38. ACCESSIBILITY OF COUNCIL SERVICES

The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources introduced the report and apologised for the delay in bringing the report to the Committee, as it had originally been scheduled for the January meeting. The Committee were asked to note that the report did not include contacts for Amey as those went through a separate service.

The Head of Customer Service, Libraries, and Culture spoke of the various ways people could contact the Contact Centre, which supported 17 areas across the Council. The Report also listed the services which were not taken within the Contact Centre. The slide on performance provided an overview and compared pre, during, and post covid pandemic figures. The Committee were asked to note the large reduction of phone calls in 2019, which was in large part down to the Council not chasing for council tax. The volumes of calls had not reached the same levels as pre-pandemic, but the length of calls had increased by 10%. There were a number of contacts that the service could not help with, but they could signpost residents to the correct contact. In total the service received roughly 7000 emails per year.

The Head of Customer Service, Libraries and Culture informed the Committee of the work that the service did to support vulnerable residents. The Committee were asked to note that while Amey contacts were separate the One Trafford CRM sat with the Council and they were able to see the volumes of contacts through self-service and One Trafford portals. The Head of Customer Service, Libraries and Culture concluded the overview by informing the Committee that the Council were currently going through a procurement exercise for a new CRM system.

Following the Overview Councillor Walsh noted that the CRM was frustrating to use and that the new system would not be ready until 2024. The Councillor then asked if there were any quick fixes that could be implemented to improve the current CRM before the new one came online. The Head of Customer Service, Libraries and Culture responded that it was unfortunately not possible to make any further adjustments to the CRM as it was passed its support period.

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Councillor Procter noted that many of the calls that came through the Contact Centre were for other departments. Councillor Procter asked whether there was an issue around the information available to the public and whether there was a way people could be directed to the correct service directly. The Head of Customer Service, Libraries and Culture assured the Committee that the service was aware of the issue and there were possible solutions, but it required further work with teams across the council to implement them successfully. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources added that it was a priority to deal with this issue and that the new CRM along with an upgrade of the telephony system would go a long way to addressing the current problems.

Councillor Winstanley noted the call answering levels and asked what the targets were. The Head of Customer Service, Libraries and Culture responded that the goal was to answer 95% of all calls and for 70% of all calls to be answered within 30 seconds, which the Council was not achieving. The Committee were informed that small changes delivered a large impact and currently there were not enough members of staff available to be able to answer the volume of calls received, which lead to further problems.

Councillor Winstanley noted the issues and asked what Councillors could say to residents who contacted them who were unable to get through to the Council. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources drew the Committees attention to the increased length of calls which reflected the increased complexity of the contacts the team were having. While the service recognised the issues around calls not being answered they were committed to providing quality support to those who did get through to the service. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources assured the Committee that solutions were being sought and that the CRM and telephony service upgrades would improve residents' experience. Councillor Winstanley noted that the options Councillors could tell residents were to either contact their ward Councillor, to use the Council's online portal, or to keep trying the Contact Centre.

Councillor Carter asked whether the automated response to pothole queries could be adjusted. The Executive Member for Environmental Services responded that the system was outdated and that he was not sure how much could be changed but he would take it up with the Corporate Director of Place to see what was possible.

Councillor Frass noted that licensing was not listed within the numbers and asked whether it was included within any of the figures. The Head of Customer Service, Libraries and Culture answered that it was not captured within the data apart from when someone rang the Contact Centre asking them to connect them to licensing.

Councillor Frass shared an email from a resident expressing their dismay in trying to contact a team within the Council. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resource asked Councillor Frass to forward on that email and she would ensure it was addressed.

Councillor Axford asked whether webchat could be used by the Council. In response the Corporate Director of Strategy and Resource informed the

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Committee that the Council was looking to add that feature as part of the update of the Council's systems.

The Chair asked whether the Welfare Rights team were coping. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resource responded that the number of calls had increased from just over 60 to over 100 and she would get back to the Committee with the number of staff within the team.

Councillor Butt asked how many of the team worked from home and whether it impacted their performance. The Head of Customer Service, Libraries and Culture answered that 75% of the team were in office and the other 25% worked from home. All members of the team had access to the same equipment when at home as when in the office and so it did not impact their efficiency.

The Chair thanked the officers for the update and for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That Councillor Frass share the email from a resident with the Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources
- 3) That the Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources provide the Committee with the number of staff within the welfare rights team.

39. GYPSY, ROMA, AND TRAVELLER VISITS

The Chair stated that the report had gone to the Executive and had been well received and informed the Committee of the excellent feedback received from the Executive about the work of the Task and finish group.

Councillor Adshead gave a brief introduction to the report and spoke about how the developments had come about. The report identified a site for a temporary stopping site and noted that the new local plan would put forward some longer-term options.

The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services added that the Council had looked at several sites in Trafford, which was restricted due to the nature of the borough. Following the proposal of Boyer Street, the Council had begun consultation with local businesses, residents, and several groups who represented Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities; there was not a GM Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller group so the Council had liaised with groups and charities from further afield. The consultation had recently closed and received roughly 400 responses and officers were starting to interrogate the data. Within the executive report it did delegate decision making to officers with close working with the Executive Member and taking the views of the Committee onboard.

Councillor Axford noted that Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers usually went to rural areas and asked how they would be informed of the site. The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services responded to Councillor Axford that if the site was

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deemed to be acceptable then the Council would look at how to approach informing Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller groups of the site. Part of that would be when Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller visitors would be directed to the site when moved on from other areas of the borough.

Councillor Axford asked about suitability of the site around safety and access to water. The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services answered that the Council was aware of the issues with the site and were considering possible solutions.

Councillor Axford asked what the maximum level of stay would be and whether it was 28 days. The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services responded that the maximum length of stay was 28 days and that the council would look at what would happen after that following feedback from the consultation.

Councillor Axford asked whether the charity Friends, Families, and Travellers were being consulted with and the Director of Growth and Regulatory Services confirmed that they were.

Councillor Carter asked whether the site had capacity to cope with the level of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller groups who came to the area. The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services responded that it was suitable for most visits that were seen around Trafford.

Councillor Carter noted that the site was next to the old police station and asked whether it was possible to provide water to the site from there. The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services responded that he would take it back and look into the possibility.

Councillor Butt noted that the costs of the site would be on the residents who paid council tax and asked whether they would have chance to have input to the consultation. The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services assured Councillor Butt and the Committee that residents, local businesses and the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities would be consulted with. The Committee were informed that the visits already caused costs to the Council and the hope of the site was that it would cover the costs and possibly offer a saving.

The Executive Member for Environmental Services added that the current visits caused a large amount of inconvenience for residents and this site would reduce the impacts upon local communities.

The Chair welcomed the progress that had been made and asked for the results of the consultation to be shared with the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That The Director of Growth and Regulatory Services look at the possibility of accessing water for the Boyer site from the old police station.

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- 3) That the results of the consultation be shared with the Committee.

40. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION 2023/24

The Chair asked all Committee Members to put forward suggestions for items to be considered as part of the next municipal years work programme.

Councillor Winstanley suggested that further work be done around access to services following on from what had been heard at the meeting with additional data from the One Stop Resource Centre to be added in any future report. Councillor Carter asked for it to be broadened to include Amey responses.

Councillor Frass asked if the committee could look at action taken around damp and mould as councils had been asked to ensure that the housing providers were taking adequate action by the government. The Chair supported the addition of damp and mould to the work programme.

Councillor Axford asked about what housing providers including THT were doing around retrofitting.

Councillor Walsh stated that he would like to understand what friends of Parks groups thought about the services being delivered within parks.

Councillor Carter asked that the Committee look at housing development and what the Council were doing to stimulate housing development. Initially looking at brown field sites and whether all possibilities had been considered.

The Chair noted that the Committee had two Task and Finish Groups running which would continue into the next municipal year which had to be considered.

RESOLVED: That the suggestions be noted and put to next years Committee for consideration.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.21 pm