

## **EXECUTIVE**

**15 NOVEMBER 2023**

## **PRESENT**

Leader of the Council (Councillor Tom Ross), in the Chair.

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| Councillor C. Hynes      | Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Leisure, Arts, Culture & Heritage |
| Councillor S. Adshead    | Executive Member for Highways, Environmental & Traded Services / Labour Group Secretary |
| Councillor K.G. Carter   | Executive Member for Children & Young People  |
| Councillor J. Harding    | Executive Member for Finance, Change & Governance                                       |
| Councillor E. Patel      | Executive Member for Economy and Regeneration   |
| Councillor J. Slater     | Executive Member for Health and Care  |
| Councillor R. Thompson   | Executive Member for Communities and Safety   |
| Councillor A.J. Williams | Executive Member for Climate Change   |
| Councillor J.A. Wright   | Executive Member for Housing & Advice   |

### Also present

Councillors Acton, Butt, Cordingley, Eckersley, Ennis, Evans, Frass, Holden, Jerrome, and Welton.

### In attendance

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Sara Todd        | Chief Executive   |
| Sara Saleh       | Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources |
| Richard Roe      | Corporate Director of Place   |
| Jill McGregor    | Corporate Director of Children's Services                               |
| Nathan Atkinson  | Corporate Director of Adults and Wellbeing                              |
| Graeme Bentley   | Director of Finance and Systems   |
| Emma Malpas      | Head of Legal and Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer              |
| Joe Slade        | Communications Officer  |
| Alexander Murray | Governance Officer  |

## **APOLOGIES**

No apologies for absence were received.

## **43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations were made.

**44. MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023 be approved as an accurate record.

**45. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The Head of Legal and Governance read out four questions which had been received from a member of the public and the Executive Member for Finance Change and Governance provided responses at the meeting which would be provided in writing to the member of the public and captured below.

Question 1 - On page 52 of the report in the following paragraph

"The Council has a budget from Business Rates income of approximately £80m and due to the complexities in the system such as the uncertainty surrounding a potential downturn in the general economy along with the forthcoming business rate reset, the importance of maintaining a suitable balance in this reserve cannot be **underestimated**. The underlying balance of £5.66m will be used to mitigate against these significant risks."

Should the word underestimated read overestimated?

The Executive Member Executive Member for Finance Change and Governance responded.

"The use of the term is to emphasise the importance of maintaining the reserve at a prudent level sufficient to mitigate the risk of a shortfall in this significant income stream. In comparison with other reserves, the estimated balance of £5.66m although material, is considered to be the lowest required balance given the significance of the income derived from business rates."

Question 2 - Given the perceived current difficulties of the Government to bring down the various measures of the Rate of Inflation, despite the projections made by the ONS please could the Executive Member for Finance give an opinion of the level of confidence being placed on the assumption for General Inflation as applicable to 2024 – 2025?

The Executive Member Executive Member for Finance Change and Governance responded.

"The assumptions underpinning the rates of inflation in these budget figures for general and contractual inflation range between 3 and 7% and reflect the range of increases dependant on the type of contract and the agreed contractual terms specific to each contract. Some contracts contain increases measured at CPI/RPI using specific times (e.g. Sept CPI) whilst others are based on estimates of forecast inflation. The Bank of England forecast assumes their target of 2% will be reached by late 2024. The assumptions in the draft budget will be updated based on latest forecasts during the preparation of the final budget report."

Question 3 - Turning to Pay Inflation given the continuing pressure on Public Sector Pay by the awards being made in the Private Sector coupled with the re-emergence of significant action by the unions could the Executive Member for

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Finance give an opinion of the level of confidence being placed on the assumption for Pay Inflation as applicable to 2024 – 2025.

The Executive Member Executive Member for Finance Change and Governance responded.

“Estimating the level of pay inflation has been recognised as a risk in the preparation of the draft budget. Average pay awards over the previous two years were in the region of 6%, largely reflecting the increases in the national and real living wage rates. The current assumption for 2024/25 is 3% and reflecting the downward trajectory in the inflation rate. The assumptions on the pay award have also been benchmarked against GM authorities and are aligned with the assumptions being made by the other districts. Estimates will be updated in preparation of the final budget report and will take into account latest forecasts and possible announcements released as part of the Autumn Statement.”

Question 4 - Given the statement at 7.6.5 of the report i.e. "There appears to be little headroom for any further substantial release of resources to support the budget gap and at the same time provide sufficient robustness to absorb the major financial risks over the short term. However, as in previous years and in line with good practice a detailed analysis of all reserves and adequacy of balances will be concluded and reported on as part of the final budget report." Could the Executive publish their final budget report in a sufficiently timely manner to allow property scrutiny by any residents wishing to do so. Indeed, please could they now indicate an appropriate latest date for publication.

The Executive Member Executive Member for Finance Change and Governance responded.

“It is acknowledged that there had been several points raised around the timing of Budget Exec/Council meetings – generally those points linked to a request for more time to consider the proposed budget ahead of the deadline for submission of amendments.

Based on that feedback, we have agreed the following change in the approach to Budget Exec/Council:

- We will keep both the Exec and Council meetings scheduled for the same evening – 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024
- We will bring forward the agenda send out (for budget related items) for 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> February.

The subtle but important change will provide members with additional time to consider the proposed budget, to consider an alternative budget proposal should they wish to and to liaise with the Council’s S151 Officer prior to the Executive and Council meetings.”

#### **46. MATTERS FROM COUNCIL OR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (IF ANY)**

Councillor Acton informed the Committee that the budget Scrutiny Committee had agreed two dates of the 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 to look at the budget proposals as part of the budget scrutiny process and welcomed all Councillors to attend the meetings and feed into the process.

Councillor Acton informed the Committee that the Scrutiny Committee had recently had a briefing on Access to Council Services which had raised some

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concerns and he informed the Committee that a short interim report with recommendations would be submitted to the Executive in December.

Councillor Butt informed the Committee that the Health Scrutiny Committee were continuing with the Task and Finish group looking at social prescribing and they were also looking at access to IVF treatments across Trafford.

**47. DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2024/25 AND MTFS 2025/26 - 2026/27**

The Executive Member for Finance, Change, and Governance gave an in-depth introduction to the report covering the details of the information and proposals contained within the report and providing a broader context to the proposals and the budgetary challenges the Council faced. The Committee were asked to note the national context with the rise in Local Authorities publishing section 114 notices and the local context with Trafford receiving the lowest funding within Greater Manchester.

The Executive Member for Finance, Change, and Governance drew the Committee's attention to elements of the report including; the proposed raise of Council Tax, the Council's duties listed in section 1.1 of the report, the rise in demand for Council Services, the projected overspend for the year, the Council's lobbying efforts for more funding, the loss of the dividend from Manchester Airport, the Council's level of reserves, and the key budgetary risks the Council faced.

The Executive Member for Finance, Change, and Governance noted the difficulties of digesting and understanding the information provided within the report given the technical nature and level of detail provided. However, the Executive Member stated that setting the budget was one of the key jobs that local Councillor had to do and urged all Councillors to invest their time and efforts in taking part in the budget process and welcomed all Councillors input into the process.

The Executive Member for Finance, Change, and Governance thanked the officers who had prepared the report for their hard work and dedication both in managing the budget and in communicating their work to the Committee. The Executive Member for Finance, Change, and Governance concluded the introduction by welcoming the levelling up funding that the Council were to receive and stating that the Council would be able to level up further if they received a fairer level of funding in general.

Following the introduction, the Executive Member for Leisure, Arts, Culture, and Heritage, the Executive Member for Children and Young People, The Executive Member for Highways, Environmental, and Traded Services, The Executive Member for Economy and Regeneration, The Executive Member for Health and Care, and the Executive Member for Climate Change all thanked the Executive Member for Finance, Change, and Governance and finance Officers for all the hard work they had done in preparing the budget proposals and the report for the Committee. The Executive Members raised a number of points around the financial challenges the Council faced including the need to meet the Councils

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duties to support children and adults, the impact of inflation upon the school cleaning service, how Trafford received the lowest funding per capita out all 150 local authorities in England, that Trafford was a very low spending Council, and that the removal of all discretionary services provided by the Council would not be adequate to resolve the budget gap the Council faced.

The Leader thanked the Executive Members for their contributions and expressed that Trafford had a unique story to tell around the borough's finances and the challenges it faced. The Leader informed the Committee that unique story would be utilised in the Council's lobbying efforts to secure fairer funding for the area. The Leader informed the Committee that if Trafford received funding in line with other GM authorities the Council would have an additional £35M per year.

The Leader then opened the floor for comments and questions from all Councillors in attendance.

Councillor Evans, as Leader of the Opposition, asked a series of questions relating to the likelihood of issuing a 114 notice, CQC inspections, the education budget, the opening hours of Trafford Town Hall, and potential losses of bus franchising in Trafford. The Executive Member for Finance, Change, and Governance thanked Councillor Evans for his questions before referring to the Corporate Director of Place, the Corporate Director of Children's Services, the Corporate Director of Adults Services, and the Director of Finance and Systems to provide responses.

The Director of Finance and Systems provided assurance around the Council's continued efforts to meet the budget gap and pointed to the Council's strong record of delivering savings. The Corporate Director of Children's Services and the Corporate Director of Adults Services both stated with confidence that the Council were well positioned for CQC, other external inspections, and the financial pressures their services faced due to work undertaken. The Corporate Director of Place provided assurance around the plans for School buildings and details of the plans for Trafford Town Hall. The Leader added that while potential losses were a concern regarding the bus franchise it had had a good impact so far.

Councillors Ennis, Welton, and Frass commented upon the report and asked questions relating to communications around the budget, the Greater Manchester Social Care Pledge, subsidies the Council provided, the opening of Regent Road car park, and the Council's lobbying efforts. The Executive Member for Finance, Change, and Governance thanked the Councillors for their questions, agreed with the points relating to the importance of communicating the work on the Council's budget effectively and informed the Committee of some of the work that was being undertaken. The Corporate Director of Children's Services provided a brief update on progress around the Greater Manchester Social Care Pledge. The Director of Finance and Systems gave examples of subsidies the Council provided and stated that work was ongoing to ensure they were minimised. The Corporate Director of Place stated that a date had not yet been set for opening Regent Road car park and that discussions were ongoing. After the responses had been given the Leader reiterated his point about the value of capturing Trafford Council's story for use as part of the lobbying efforts to obtain fairer funding for the borough in light of the budget challenges the authority would face in the next two years.

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Following the conclusion of the discussions the Leader moved the recommendations of the report and they were approved.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That the 2024/27 proposed budget strategy, including the 2024/25 draft revenue budget and the 2025/27 MTFS be approved and the income and savings proposals be included for the purposes of consultation only (where necessary) and these proposals will also be referred to the Scrutiny Committee for their consideration;
- c) That the proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.99% in 2024/25 (comprising 2.0% adult social care precept and 2.99% general increase) and by 2.99% for the remaining years of the MTFS 2025/27 be noted.
- d) That the assumptions made in setting the MTFS in Section 4 and the degree of uncertainty be noted.
- e) That the remaining budget gap for the years 2025/26 to 2026/27 be noted.
- f) That the commentary of the Director of Finance and Systems, the Council's statutory S151 officer, regarding the financial sustainability of the Council in Section 1 be noted.
- g) It was noted that the draft proposals are subject to various consultation exercises, further analysis of reserves, savings and income including impact assessments, potential future movements in core funding and specific grants, revised costings and robustness assessments.
- h) It was note that the review of the Capital Programme which is ongoing and the prioritisation process to be undertaken to compile an affordable capital programme 2024/25 to 2026/27.
- i) That the continued use of flexible use of capital receipts to support in part the cost of the Modernisation Team in developing the Council's Finance and Change Programme for 2023/24 and 2024/25 be noted.

**48. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY 2023-28**

The Executive Member for Communities and Safety introduced the item by explaining the journey of the policies development leading to them being presented to the Committee. The Executive Member drew the Committees attention to the main aims and objectives of the licensing standards and the benefits that their implementation would deliver. The Committee were asked to

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note the issues that had caused the delay to the policy being drafted and that the policy included a series of amendments. The Executive Member then proceeded to read out the most salient amendments including those to the minimum standards and spoke about the restrictions on age of vehicles, emission standards, and the impact that they would have upon the clean air programme. The Executive Member concluded her introduction by reading out the recommendations and thanking the officers who had prepared the report.

The Executive Member for Leisure, Arts, Culture, and Heritage welcomed the report and the changes that it would implement especially around agreed minimum standards across greater Manchester, speaking from her own experience as a regular user of taxis.

The Leader then opened to floor to comments and questions from all Members in attendance.

Councillor Evans raised a concern about the implementation of emissions standards and the impact it could have on the drivers within the borough. The Corporate Director of Place assured the Committee that the Council were aware of the changes that Taxi Drivers faced and that the Council would proceed with implementation with due diligence.

Councillor Frass noted the issues around vehicles which were licensed within other areas who operated within Trafford and asked if there was anything that could be done to tackle the safeguarding concerns. The Corporate Director of Place stated that the Council had limited powers to tackle the issue and encouraged users to use Greater Manchester licensed taxis and to report any issues with a taxi to their licensing authority.

Following the conclusion of discussions, the Leader moved the recommendations of the report and they were approved.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the content of the report be noted;
- 2) That the approval of the proposed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy which includes the amendments detailed at 3.19 be recommended to Council;
- 3) That the delegation of authority to the Corporate Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Communities and Safety to bring the implementation date for vehicle age and emission standards (for existing licensed vehicles) forward from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026 should it be deemed appropriate in support of the Clean Air agenda be recommended to Council.

The meeting commenced at 6.35 p.m. and finished at 8.04 p.m.