

# **TRAFFORD PANDEMIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**22 SEPTEMBER 2020**

## **PRESENT**

Councillor D. Acton (in the Chair).

Councillors Dr. K. Barclay, Miss L. Blackburn, G. Coggins, J. Dillon, J. Holden, J. Lamb (Vice-Chair), J. Lloyd, J.D. Newgrosh, R. Thompson, D. Western, A.M. Whyte, A.J. Williams, and B.G. Winstanley

### In attendance

Cllr Harding	Executive Member for Adult Social Services
Cllr Slater	Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing, and Equalities
Cllr Ross	Executive Member for Finance and Investment
Cllr Adshead	Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Climate Change
Cllr Carter	Lead Member for Education
Diane Eaton	Corporate Director of Adult Services
Jill McGregor	Corporate Director of Children's Services
Richard Roe	Corporate Director of Place
Jane Le Fevre	Corporate Director of Governance and Community Strategy
Nikki Bishop	Corporate Director of Finance and Systems
Donna Sager	Consultant in Public Health
Karen Samples	Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance
John Addison	Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

## **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S.B. Anstee, A. New and B. Shaw.

### **1. MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 19 August 2020 be agreed as an accurate record.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations were made;

- Councillor Lloyd in relation to her position as a trustee of Trafford Domestic Abuse Service.

### **3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

A series of questions had been received from a Member of the public which were read out by the Chair. The questions related to the residents child and the support that had been cancelled due to COVID 19. The Lead Member for Education

thanked the resident for their question and informed the Committee that a full written response would be provided.

RESOLVED: That a full written response be provided.

#### **4. ACTIVE TRANSPORT**

The Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Climate Change introduced the report that had been circulated with the agenda. The Committee were informed that Trafford had been committed to increasing the levels of active travel for a number of years and the outbreak of COVID 19 had led to an acceleration of that process. All of the changes and funding received in response to COVID 19 had to be considered by Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) prior to coming to Trafford and so the Council had not been able to achieve as much as they would have liked. There had been mixed responses from residents for a number the measures implemented, which was expected as implementation would usually involve a longer process with more communication and engagement with residents.

The Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Climate Change addressed the issues of paths being blocked by vehicles across the borough but noted that there other issues of obstruction of paths which would be taken into account when developing a strategy to improve access. The Committee were assured that the Council was fully committed to the Mayor's Challenge fund which looked to create cycling routes linked across all of Greater Manchester. The Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Climate Change informed the Committee that the plans for Urmston would be a trial of the active neighbourhood model with a view to expanding that model across other areas of the Borough.

Following the introduction Board Members were given the opportunity to ask questions. Councillor Coggins welcomed the progress that had been made across the borough in the last few months and noted that keeping active and reducing weight were two ways people could combat COVID and active transport was a way that the Council could look to encourage that. Councillor Coggins asked whether the Communications around active transport could be changed to express what they added to the Community rather than what they took away. These means of transport had been successful in areas where extensive engagement exercises had been conducted and Councillor Coggins asked if there were any plans to do this in Trafford. The Executive Member responded that the timeline for the work was out of the Council's control which had reduced the opportunity for consultation with residents and was something that the Council was working on improving.

Councillor Coggins then asked a range of further questions relating to the report. The Chair stated that rather than receiving answers for each of the questions during the meeting the points raised by Councillor Coggins and other Members of the Committee would form a report to go to the Executive to receive a full response. The Vice Chair welcomed the Chairs suggestion and hoped that the Committee would capture the wider picture within the report and that engagement with businesses and residents within the community would play a large part in any recommendations made to the Executive.

Councillor Blackburn asked how the safety of moving traffic had been assessed since the addition of the additional cycle lanes. The Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Climate Change responded that the safety of the roads and cycle lanes was monitored on a regular basis by TfGM who aided Trafford in moving forward with the schemes and notified Trafford if any black spots were identified.

The Director of Public Health stated that active travel was one of the best things that could be done to improve people's health and wellbeing within the area. There were direct health benefits through increased activity but also benefits from improved air quality, due to reduced pollution which also aided in combating global warming. The Director of Public Health agreed that there needed to be lots of communication and engagement with residents to ensure that the measures put in place were suitable, but there was a real need to reduce the number of vehicles on the road. COVID 19 had put this into perspective as the evidence showed the impact poor air quality had in exacerbating the effects of the virus. The areas where active transport had been successful had shown that many of the concerns business did not come to fruition and local spending actually increased when people used active transport. In order for the borough to meet its carbon reduction targets there was going to have to be a reduction in the number of petrol and diesel vehicles on the road soon and the Council needed to act. It was important that the messaging around these changes was positive and supportive as some people would undoubtedly find the changes difficult.

The Corporate Director of Place asked that Councillor Coggins send her questions to him directly to receive a full written response in addition to the report going to the executive. The Corporate Director of Place highlighted that the work that had been done in Urmston was an example of work the Council wanted to do where possible. The report mentioned the Council were in the process of creating an active travel strategy for the borough which involved officers from across the Council and highlighted the commitment to active travel. The Corporate Director of Place noted the importance of communications and informed the Committee some of the work was already ongoing both with residents and local businesses.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the Committee submit a report on active transport to the Executive.
- 3) That Councillor Coggins is to submit questions to the Corporate Director of Place to receive a full written response.

## **5. RETURN TO SCHOOL**

The Lead Member for Education introduced the report that had been circulated to the Committee. The Lead Member for Education stated how quickly the environment was changing as there had been a number of changes in the short time since the report had been written. Central government had stated that all schools were to reopen in September and Trafford had seen good levels of attendance since the reopening although there had been a rise in the number of

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children who were home schooled. The Lead Member for Education assured the Committee that there was an officer dedicated to support to children who were home schooled. Many children were attending early year's provision and all nurseries across Trafford were open. There continued to be issues around breakfast and afterschool provision as it was difficult to deliver those services safely and this was something that the Council would continue to monitor closely.

The Committee were assured that if there was a case of COVID 19 at a school and a bubble had to be sent home the relevant ward Councillors would receive a report. When the report was written there had been 23 COVID 19 incidents in schools which had risen to 35 incidents as of the meeting. 10 of those were at secondary schools with one school sending the whole of year ten home. The government had announced that there would be a national helpline but Trafford were asking schools to continue to use the local helpline set up by Trafford public health so that they could keep an eye on the local picture. There was a lot of support available for schools, which was detailed within the report, with maintaining the clusters of Sencos being particularly important. The catch up funding would be released in three tranches and the Lead Member for Education encouraged all Councillors who were governors to scrutinise how that money was used.

The final part of the report looked at school transport. The Lead Member informed the Committee that the Council had struggled to provide transport at the start of the new school year. The Council arranged 175 runs which carried 578 children and young people to school and further 18 runs which carried 45 adult. Part of the issue was that the Council did not have adequate numbers of passenger assistants due to many of the passenger assistants needing to shield themselves during the pandemic. Trafford had 130 staff, 10 volunteers from other Council services and 9 volunteers from a special school. A large recruitment drive was planned to increase the number of passenger assistants but it would take time for the new staff to start.

The Chair asked out of the number of children and teachers listed as being off due to COVID 19 how many had tested positive and how many were self-isolating. The Lead Member for Education responded that the number of children who tested positive was very small but whenever it happened their entire year group bubble had to isolate. The Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance added that a question and answer session was being held with head teachers the following day which would be an opportunity to ask them to re-evaluate their risk assessments to ensure they were still fit for purpose. The Committee were assured that children who were at home in self-isolation were continuing to receive lessons at home and the Director of Public Health informed the Committee that Trafford were using the national symptoms list for when a child needed to self-isolate.

Councillor Blackburn asked if there were any public health concerns about using supply teachers to fill in for those who were self-isolating. The Lead Member for Education responded that it was a concern and schools were trying to minimise the amount of supply teachers used. The Director of Education Standards, Quality

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and Performance added that the national guidance did allow for supply teachers to be used as long as they followed safe working practice.

Councillor Winstanley asked whether the additional wellbeing and education grant was provided to academy schools as well as state schools. Councillor Winstanley also asked when the report mentioned the 5 local experts were they a new resource or a deployment of staff from other areas. The Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance responded that the funding would be available to all schools and the 5 experts were current Trafford staff who would gain training to pass onto to schools, along with a wealth of resources provided by the Department for Education (DfE), to increase capacity across the system. As Trafford already had a comprehensive toolkit in place they were using this resource as an additional support package for schools when they needed it.

Councillor Thompson asked why 13% of children with EHC plans had not attended school. The Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance responded that there were a number of factors which could have impacted the figures. The figures provided were not wholly accurate as they were reliant upon schools completing the DfE portal, which not all had done. There were a number of children on EHC plans who had been sent home due to risk of infection with one specialist school being closed entirely and there were a number of parents who had anxiety about sending their child back to school. Trafford were meeting with the network of Sencos and head teachers of special schools to ensure that, whether a child was attending school or not, the right level of support was being provided. The Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance stated that it was a complex picture as to why the figures were at those levels and that a focused report could be brought to a later meeting. The Chair agreed that such a report would be welcomed by the Committee at a later meeting.

Councillor Dillon asked whether any families were being fined for none attendance, whether laptops had been provided to all of the children who needed one, and whether there were any children who were not receiving all of the provision listed in part F of their plans. The Lead Member for education responded that they had not fined anyone for none attendance. The Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance responded that laptops had been first provided to children in care and some additional laptops had been available and were offered to year 10 pupils. The DfE had also opened up additional resource that schools could apply for to aid pupils.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance stated that further analysis would be done by the service to be picked up within a report looking at annual reviews for children on EHC plans and a detailed response around the Council's expectations of schools, the guidance that the Council is giving schools, and how therapies and health were administrating their duties and meeting Children's needs accordingly would be provided. The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that the Council had shared their approach to school attendance with the RFC and DfE at their fortnightly react meetings. The Council's approach was to be supportive and encouraging of all children and families during this time regardless of the performance levels.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That a focused report on the level of children with EHC plans attending school be provided at a later meeting.
- 3) That a report on EHC Plan reviews be provided at a later meeting.
- 4) That a detailed a detailed response around the Council's expectations of schools, the guidance that the Council is giving schools, and how therapies and health were administrating their duties and meeting Children's needs accordingly be provided to the Committee.

## **6. FINANCE UPDATE**

The Executive Member for Finance and investment went through the presentation that had been circulated with the agenda. The presentation included the updated financial position for the year with a predicted £45.5M of COVID 19 related pressures during the year. Through government grants and actions taken by the Council and their partners it was predicted that the Council would be left with an overall deficit of between £2.2M and £8.3M. The Executive Member for Finance and investment stressed that these were all estimates and it was highly likely that the figures would change, especially if there were further outbreaks of COVID 19. The updated budget pressure for the next financial year was £35.1M with £19.2M business as usual pressures and £15.8M from COVID 19 pressures. The Council were looking to identify one off payments to address the recurrent COVID 19 pressures and making savings to address the business as usual pressures. The Executive Member for Finance and investment then informed the Committee of the approach that was being taken to identify savings across all services. The options included the recent offer of voluntary severance to staff. The final slide of the presentation showed the timeline for the budget during the year, including the budget scrutiny process, culminating in the budget going to full Council in February 2021.

Following the presentation Members were given the opportunity to ask questions. Councillor Blackburn asked about the voluntary severance scheme, whether it was a redundancy scheme and if so how many jobs were expected to be lost by the next year. The Executive Member for Finance and investment responded that it was a severance rather than redundancy scheme. Staff Members were being asked to look at flexible working options as well as possible severance depending on a person's circumstances and what would work best for them and their service. The Executive Member also stated that he could not rule out redundancies later on in the year depending on the situation at that time. Councillor Blackburn followed up her question asking whether this was being offered to passenger assistants and if that could further reduce the number of passenger assistants the Council had. The Executive Member responded that he could not comment on the impact the scheme would have on a service at this stage.

Councillor Lloyd noted the contingencies which were contained in the budget report especially around the high needs budget and asked the Executive Member for Finance and investment how confident he was that the contingencies would be

adequate. The Executive Member for Finance and investment responded that they were the best estimates available at the time and were very likely to change, especially following the announcement of further restrictions. The Corporate Director of Children's services added that the monitoring of the demand lead pressures was ongoing and the Council was continually thinking of strategies to help to deal with fluctuations in demand.

The Chair noted that a number of fees and charges had been suspended during COVID 19 to help people cope during those times and asked when the fees and charges would be resumed. The Executive Member for Finance and investment responded that many of the charges that were originally suspended had since been restarted and the majority of the loss of income from those services was due to a reduction in demand. The government had offered some assistance to councils to address the loss of income and it was hoped that this would be increased. The Executive Member for Finance and investment stated that COVID had shown the importance of fees and charges in enabling the Council to fund the delivery of services. The Corporate Director of Place added that the Council had not stopped charging fees for planning applications but that the type of applications had changed. There was a smaller number of major development and housing applications being seen but more in relation to trees. The Corporate Director reiterated that there had been a decrease in demand for parking and added that there had also been a loss in rental income from commercial properties held by the Council.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

## **7. PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE**

The Executive Member for Health Wellbeing and Equalities introduced the item and thanked the Director of Public Health and the public health team for the work they had done to prepare the report and in dealing with the ongoing pandemic. The Executive Member handed over to the Public Health Consultant to provide an update on testing. The Committee were informed that the ambition had been to have a range of testing options available in the area which had been achieved. There was a backlog in supplying test and receiving results but this was a national issue. Care homes offered regular testing to residents and staff and had been proactive in their approach to dealing with COVID 19. Schools had a very small set of testing kits available to offer to families who could not visit testing sites and schools were having issues in ordering additional testing kits. Trafford would be maintaining the testing sites within the borough which was a positive outcome and the focus was on ensuring that residents were being tested when they had symptoms.

Councillor Williams thanked the public health team for the work that they had done in establishing the Partington testing site, especially around the excellent communications and engagement. Councillor Williams had asked at a previous meeting to have data on the number of hospitalisations in the area to be added to the weekly update sent to Members which had not yet been done and asked that this be added. Councillor Williams noted that in the report on flu vaccinations there were concerns about a possible lack of availability of vaccinations and asked

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whether those concerns had abated since the report was written. The Director in Public Health responded that the hospitalisation data would be added to the weekly update. There was a delay of around two weeks between increase in cases and any hospitalisations that resulted from the infections. Given the age profile of the people who had been contracting COVID 19 it was unlikely that there would be much of a spike in the level of hospitalisations. With regards to the flu vaccinations GPs were working very hard in an attempt to maximise coverage and the Council were encouraging people to get the vaccination if possible. Those over 65 or with pre-existing conditions were being prioritised and there was a large drive within schools. Due to the restrictions on contact people needed to have an appointment in place rather than just turning up for vaccinations.

The Executive Member for Adult Social Services addressed the report that had been made on Channel 4 during the week which had made it seem that Trafford had been sending COVID positive patients into care homes. The Executive Member assured the Committee that the story had been a miss interpretation of the facts and that all patients were being tested prior to being discharged from hospital, which Trafford had been doing since March. A winter plan for Trafford was being developed and the Executive Member offered to bring the plan to scrutiny prior to winter.

Councillor Barclay asked whether Trafford schools had sufficient test for children. The Director of Public Health responded that there were issues with the number of tests available for schools and there was expected to be a delay in receiving more tests. The Consultant in public Health added that schools were given a set of tests for children who were deemed to be vulnerable, children who would struggle to get tests elsewhere, and staff members. Many schools had run out of those tests and had been told that it would be 21 days until new tests were available. Public Health England had come up with a set of criteria to determine how likely a child was to have COVID and what actions the school should take. While these criteria were not a substitute for a test they were effective in minimising the risk of infections spreading.

The Chair asked for more information on contact tracing. The Consultant in Public Health informed the Committee that there were two types of contact tracing in Trafford which were level two, who were people who had not yet been contacted by the national team who needed to be contacted, and complex setting. Level two was working well although demand had been higher than expected. The team had managed to contact 70% of cases that had come through the local system. The service was implementing a new model integrating the service with access Trafford, which would build resilience and help the team manage demand. Trafford had been working on surge capacity to deal with sudden increases in demand and from the 28<sup>th</sup> September there would be 60 members of staff available to manage demand.

The complex tracing had been busy with workplaces coming through the system. The workplaces that engaged with the team were doing very well and were able to support contract tracing. The biggest pressure point was within schools. There were 29 schools with instances running and there were a number of schools that looked fragile in terms of the number of bubbles who were going out. Regulatory



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services had been excellent in supporting the contact tracing and going out to work places. The public health team were working with the communications team around pushing the message of how important self-isolation was in combating the virus.

The Chair asked how the contact tracing worked in terms of contacting people who had been in contact with someone who had tested positive. The Consultant in Public Health told the Committee about a case in Urmston where a person had been to a pub and then tested positive. The Committee were informed that the rules would be much tighter following the announcements that had been made.

Councillor Barclay asked whether any progress had been made on back tracing and establishing patterns of transmission to aid in prevention. The Director of Public Health responded that the team were still learning. The team had found that people were reporting having had fewer contacts than would be expected. Once the local contact tracing became more robust and as more was picked up from the national system the team would be able to ask more pertinent questions as to what people had been doing as well as whom their contacts had been. There had been some cases of groups doing their own contact tracing, especially within schools. With the hospitality industry it could be quite difficult to work out from a single case as to where they picked up an infection from as people will have usually have visited a number of venues. The Consultant in Public Health added that Trafford were engaging with the GM contact tracing group and would raise this with them.

There was an issue with businesses using agency staff or staff moving between different locations owned by the same business. Trafford were working with businesses to make their premises as COVID secure as possible. The Director of Public Health informed the Committee of the new community engagement group which would help the team understand the pressures and challenges that people were facing as well as presenting an additional conduit to get messages out into the community.

Councillor Blackburn asked about carers who went to multiple residents and whether the Council was doing everything to protect them and their clients. The Director of Public Health responded that the Council were providing support to Home Care providers through equipment and training to ensure that they are as safe as possible.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That the Council's winter plan be brought to the Committee before the start of winter.
- 3) That the Director of Public Health and the other members of the team be thanked for all the work that they have done and continue to do.

**8. ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chair informed the Committee that there were likely to be another two meetings before December and asked Members if they had any items that they wanted to be considered at those meetings. The Chair also informed the Committee that there were provisional dates for budget scrutiny of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of December and the dates would be confirmed at the next Council meeting. Committee Member made a number of suggestions for items including home schooling, an update on Ofsted, CAMHS, and Public Health. The Chair stated that the different items would be considered by the agenda setting panel at their next meeting.

Councillor Dillon raised a point about the lack of ability to do task and finish work that was done under the standard Scrutiny Committees. The Chair responded that there were issues around officer capacity which was under continual review. There could be a possibility of Members doing a focused piece of work but there may be a lack of officer support. Councillor Dillon raised further issue that the Committee was only receiving information from officers rather than from wider sources. The Vice Chair agreed that the Committee should look at having external representatives such as the local chamber of commerce and other witnesses to attend meetings.

RESOLVED: That Committee Members comments and suggestions be noted.

**9. COMMITTEE REPORT TO EXECUTIVE**

The Chair introduced the report to the Committee briefly and asked if there were any questions or amendments to the report or if it was agreed by the Committee. No questions or amendments were raised and the report was agreed to be sent to the Executive.

RESOLVED: That the report to be submitted to the Executive.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and finished at 6.10 pm