

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 NOVEMBER 2021

PRESENT

Councillor D. Acton (in the Chair).

Councillors R. Chilton (Vice-Chair), J.M. Axford, D. Butt, G. Carter, L. Dagnall, J.D. Newgrosh, K. Procter and R. Thompson.

In attendance

Councillor E. Patel	Executive Member for Culture and Leisure
Councillor Tom Ross	Executive Member for Finance and Governance
Graeme Bentley	Director of Finance and Systems
Andrew Adderley	Acting Director of Property Services, THT
Pete Paton	Head of Building Safety, THT
Wendy Eckersley	Housing Project Officer
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

Also Present

Councillors D. Jerrome

Also in attendance

Mr Wilf Stevenson Trafford Resident

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Mirza, B.G. Winstanley, Dr. K. Barclay and D. Western

17. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 23 September 2021 be agreed as an accurate record.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

19. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Chair informed the Committee that questions had been received from three members of the Public. Two questions relating to agenda item 8 and one relating to agenda item 6 and they would be taken under the relevant agenda item.

20. HOMELESSNESS IN TRAFFORD

The Housing Project Officer gave an update to the Committee of the headline housing figures for the second quarter of the year. Following the update, the Chair requested that the figures be shared with the Committee after the meeting before asking Members if they had any questions. The Vice Chair enquired whether Manchester City Council were supporting the people placed at the Amblehurst Hotel. The Housing Project Officer informed the Committee that Trafford had regular meetings with officers from Manchester Council about the Amblehurst where they discussed the support provided. Trafford also gathered feedback from residents at the Amblehurst which supported the feedback that support was being provided by Manchester Council. The Housing Project Officer offered to arrange a visit to the Amblehurst for any Committee Members who wanted to view the circumstances there and the Vice Chair accepted the invitation.

Councillor Procter asked whether the bed every night scheme was ongoing and how much it was being used. The Housing Project Officer confirmed that the scheme was ongoing and that there had been an increase in demand for the scheme in recent months.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That a visit to the Amblehurst be arranged for the Vice Chair.

21. HIGH RISE CLADDING UPDATE

The Chair invited Mr Stevenson to open the agenda item by asking the questions that he had submitted to the Committee. Mr Stevenson went through each of his questions and the officers in attendance from Trafford Housing Trust (THT) provided responses at the meeting and added that a full written response would be provided addressing each question, which would be shared with the Committee and Mr Stevenson.

As Mr Stevenson was going through his questions Members raised a series of additional questions to the officers from THT. The Vice Chair of the Committee asked whether THT had a fire safety Communications Strategy in place to ensure a high quality of communication was maintained with residents. The Head of Building Safety confirmed that THT had a fire safety communications strategy in place aimed at improving communications. The strategy included regular meetings with resident groups about fire safety in addition to written communications and telephone communications.

Councillor Dagnall asked whether removing the cladding had any negative impacts on residents. The Acting Director of Property Services responded that removing the cladding had reduced the fire risk to residents but there were issues regarding insulation in some areas of the tower blocks.

Councillor Dagnall noted the list of reasons for delays provided by THT and asked for the list to be ordered by importance for the Committee. The Acting Director of Property Services confirmed that this would be done in any future updates.

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Councillor Butt noted that the Council had a representative on the Board of Directors and suggested that they should attend alongside THT Officers the next time THT attended the Committee.

Councillor Axford asked for details about the high-rise panels. The Head of Building Safety responded that the meetings occurred every six weeks, minutes of the meetings were taken, each panel had an action log, and THT were held responsible for completing the actions raised. The Head of Building Safety attended the meetings himself and the meetings were attended by a mixture of officers and residents.

The Vice Chair noted THTs engagement with the Committee but added that the organisation should also contact ward Councillors directly when there were issues within their wards that impacted resident safety. He acknowledged the face-to-face residents' meetings that THT arranged but felt they may miss those who are not keen to engage and could take more steps to reach those residents. The Acting Director of Property Services responded that he would take that feedback back and look to further improve communications.

At the end of presenting his questions Mr Stevenson spoke of how residents wanted a full explanation of the process from the beginning to completion and all the issues that had occurred during that time.

The Chair noted the dates for completion within the report and asked if they were still accurate. The Acting Director of Property Services responded that there had been no changes to the estimated completion dates since the report was provided to the Committee.

The Chair enquired whether there had been any progress with retrofitting sprinklers in THT properties. The Acting Director of Property Services responded that LNQ were reviewing their entire housing stock with a view to retrofitting sprinklers where appropriate. The Head of Building Safety added that THT had been in constant consultation with the fire service and residents about retrofitting sprinklers to properties. The big challenge was around convincing residents as they often had a negative view of sprinklers due to years of misinformation and gave an example of an insurance advert showing sprinklers flooding a building.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update from Trafford Housing Trust be noted.
- 2) That the questions received from Mr Stevenson be noted.
- 3) That a written response to Mr Stevenson's questions be circulated to the Committee and Mr Stevenson.

22. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021/22

The Executive Member for Finance and Governance went through the presentation that had been provided to the Committee as part of the Agenda. He informed the Committee that there was a remaining gap of £4.6m and £11m in 2022/23 and 2023/24 respectively that needed to be addressed. Part of the budget gap was due to the pay award for staff, the national living wage, and the loss of dividend from Manchester Airport. The asset investment strategy was down on the projected revenue by around £1M which the Executive Member was happy to provide more detail about to the Committee.

The Director of Finance and Systems delivered the remainder of the presentation. The Director of Finance informed the Committee that the Council had introduced a rag rated performance monitoring system for savings targets, with exception reports produced when concerns arose. Inflation was expected to have an impact on the budget although the size of impact was still unknown as demonstrated by the recent reports where inflation was higher than predicted. He then drew the Committees attention to the dates of the Budget Scrutiny sessions where the Committee would have an opportunity to dive deeper into the proposed budget.

The Director of Finance and Systems had hoped for more information to be available regarding the spending review, but it was still undecided. The Council were among a group of authorities lobbying for a funding floor to be set to guarantee a minimum level of funding for all authorities, which would benefit the Council by around £5M.

Following the presentation Councillor Procter asked about the level of reserves held by the Council. The Executive Member for Finance and Governance responded that reserves had looked very large at start of the year but most of those were earmarked for upcoming expenditure. A review was ongoing to see if the Council could ease the pressure on reserves.

Councillor Axford asked how much government funding Trafford received compared with other authorities. The Executive Member for Finance and Governance responded that Trafford was a very lean Council and had come together with other low funded Councils to lobby to receive 90% of the average funding received by Councils per capita. If the lobbying was successful Trafford receive an additional £5M. The Director of Finance and Systems added that the Government had kept putting back the review of the funding formula and this lobbying was to help the low funded Councils until the review was completed.

Councillor Thompson noted the inflation rate put forward in the presentation of 2.5% and asked when that would be updated with the current inflation figures. The Executive Member for Finance and Governance agreed that 2.5% did not seem likely and informed the Committee that the level was continuously under review, but things changed so quickly it was difficult to give a clear answer as to what the level would be.

Councillor Carter asked about the 3.99% Council tax increase and what the impact having less than that would be for the Council. The Executive Member for Finance and Governance responded that it looked as though the increase would be set to 2.99% which would mean a £1M loss for the Council.

Councillor Newgrosh asked what the impact on the Council of each one percent rise in inflation. The Director of Finance and Systems responded that he would have to work out the answer and get back to the Committee. The Director of Finance and Systems added that the larger impact was the 6.5% increase to the national living wage.

Councillor Newgrosh asked whether Council was of fixed price energy supply. The Executive Member for Finance and Governance believed so but would check and respond to the Committee via email. He informed the Committee that the Council were looking to decarbonise and move towards renewable energy, which would reduce costs and the impact of changes in oil and gas prices.

The Executive Member for Finance and Governance concluded by stating that he was happy to come back to Scrutiny after the budget sessions to provide further information when more details were known.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

23. USE OF LAND FOR SPORTING FACILITIES

The Chair read out the questions received from the public. The Executive Member for Culture and Leisure provided a brief response at the meeting and confirmed that a more detailed response would be submitted to the Committee and the Members of the public via email.

Councillor Dagnall asked a follow up question as to whether fencing off the land would require both an agreement from the landowner and planning permission. The Executive Member for Culture and Leisure confirmed that both were needed and could be acquired in either order, although it was expected that people would ask permission of the landowner first.

Councillor Butt asked who was responsible for maintaining the Land. The Executive Member for Culture and Leisure responded that it was the lease holder who was responsible for maintaining the land.

After the questions from the Public the Executive Member asked the Committee if they had any questions relating to the report circulated with the agenda.

Councillor Thompson noted the car parking support provided by Trafford Leisure and asked if it was a named position. The Executive Member for Culture and Leisure introduced the Head of Leisure informed the Committee that the Football Development Officer linked in with all the clubs in the area and worked with them in organising the use of land and facilities in the area, including car parking.

Councillor Carter asked how frequently the agreements with clubs were reviewed and if the outcomes were made public. The Executive Member for Culture and Leisure responded that clubs needed to consult with the public regularly. The Head of Leisure added that there was thorough decision-making process in place to ensure that the right clubs were brought in for those leases in line with the community use agreement. Councillor Carter noted that the response showed that the agreements with the clubs were reached through a robust process but wanted to know what happened afterwards. The Executive Member for Culture and Leisure responded that the Council were developing a robust monitoring process to ensure that the clubs met the terms they agreed to.

The Vice Chair asked about the Manor Avenue playing field where a team from outside of Trafford played and caused issues with the amount of traffic it brought to the area. The Vice Chair had made attempts to contact leisure services about this issue but had not been able to make any progress. The Executive Member for Culture and Leisure assured the Vice Chair that she would address this issue.

Councillor Dagnall asked how many people benefited from the casual use of public areas of land and whether the Council promoted casual use. The Executive Member for Culture and Leisure responded that it was to quantify casual use of land by the public. But the Council did promote the casual use of land by the public and the Executive Member for Culture and Leisure explained the Councils approach to promoting activity and discouraging inactivity, which was broader than organised sporting activity.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the questions from the Public be noted.
- 2) That written answers to the questions be circulated to the Committee and the Members of the Public.
- 3) That the report be noted.

24. WORK PROGRAMME

Committee Members discussed items they would like to see on the Committees work programme. Many Members felt as though the answers provided by Officers from Trafford Housing Trust during the meeting had not been sufficient and requested that further information be provided at the next meeting. The Committee agreed that a letter was to be sent to the Chair of the Trafford Housing Trust Board informing them of the Committee's concerns and asking them to attend the next meeting of the Committee. The Committee also agreed that the letter should be sent to the Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration. Committee Members noted the request made by Mr Stevenson for a public enquiry and agreed to request an internal enquiry with the results shared with the Committee and residents.

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The Committee agreed that Homelessness and the cladding replacement in high rise tower blocks be standing items for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Councillors D. Jerome, L. Dagnall, J. Axford, and the Chair volunteered to be part of a task and finish group to look at Traveller visits in Trafford.

Councillor Carter requested a list of upcoming key decisions the of the Executive to be provided for the next Committee meeting to enable the Committee to select an area for pre-decision scrutiny.

It was agreed that public consultations would be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That a letter be written to the Chair of the Trafford Housing Trust Board.
- 2) That the replacement of high-rise cladding, and homelessness be standing items for the rest of the municipal year.
- 3) That a task and finish group be established on the topic of traveller visits.
- 4) That a list of upcoming Executive decisions be provided for the next Committee Meeting.
- 5) That public consultations be added to the work programme.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.47 pm