

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Accounts and Audit Committee
Date: 21st June 2023
Report for: Decision
Report of: Director of Legal and Governance
Report Title

Draft Annual Governance Statement – 2022/23

Summary

This report sets out the Draft 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The preparation and publication of an Annual Governance Statement is necessary to meet the statutory requirement set out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

The content of the draft AGS has been reviewed and agreed by CLT. This has included agreeing significant governance issues detailed within the AGS. The AGS has been produced taking into account both the framework and guidance on the AGS issued by CIPFA/SOLACE in April 2016.

The final version of the AGS will consider any further feedback from the Accounts and Audit Committee and will accompany the Council's Accounts. The final version will be signed off by the Leader and Chief Executive.

Recommendation

The Accounts and Audit Committee considers the content of the draft Annual Governance Statement.

The Accounts and Audit Committee notes that the final version of the Annual Governance Statement must be approved by 30 September 2023. The final version will be presented for approval by the Committee, prior to sign off by the Chief Executive and Leader.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Alexander Murray – Governance Officer
Extension: 4250

Background Papers: None



TRAFFORD COUNCIL

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2022/23

Executive Summary

The 2022/23 municipal year has seen great changes in leadership nationally with the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in September of 2022 and the subsequent transfer of power to King Charles III. In addition to this national change Trafford went through a local change in leadership following the election of Andrew Western as Member of Parliament for Stretford and Urmston after his successful by-election campaign in December 2022. Councillor Tom Ross was appointed as Leader by full Council in January 2023. There have also been large changes in leadership within the local health system with the dissolution of Trafford CCG and the creation of the Integrated Care System. This transition has seen Trafford Council's Chief Executive Sara Todd named as the Place Based Lead for the Trafford Locality which will greatly strengthen the relationships between the leadership of the Council and its partners within the health service.

The year has seen a large amount work around leisure services across Trafford come to fruition. This work includes the successful award of levelling up funding for the refurbishment of Partington Sports Village, the approval to move forward with consultation to implement a new operating model for tennis courts in parks, the adoption of the Council's strategy for Physical Activity called "Trafford Moving", and the approval of the new Walking, Wheeling, and Cycling Strategy.

Trafford Finances have continued to present a challenge for the whole Council with the agreed budget requiring £11.8M in savings across all departments along with £7.4M in reserves, and £5.7M from a 4.99% council tax increase to address the £24.9M budget gap for 2023/24. In addition to the usual budgeted pressures, during 2022/23 the Council faced nearly £6m of unbudgeted pressures caused mainly by the impacts of inflation and rising demand. Through vacancy and Treasury management those additional pressures were able to be subsumed within the Council's 2022/23 budget with minimal impact upon service delivery.

The 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement saw the removal of the Ofsted report from the significant governance issues for the first time since Trafford Council was found to be inadequate in May 2019. The Council had a full inspection by Ofsted in December 2022 and received a grade of "Requires improvement to be good", which shows significant improvement achieved within the service since 2019, but also shows that the Council has work to do to achieve its ambition of being outstanding.

1. Scope of Responsibility

- 1.1 Trafford Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. The Council are also responsible for ensuring that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently, and effectively. Trafford Council has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to continuously improve how its functions are exercised, with regards to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.2 This overall responsibility requires Trafford Council put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 Trafford Council has approved and adopted a corporate governance code, consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. A copy of the Authority's code is available at: <http://www.trafford.gov.uk/about-your-council/budgets-and-accounts/downloadable-documents.aspx>. This statement explains how Trafford Council has complied with the code and meets the requirement of Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 6, that all relevant bodies have to prepare an annual governance statement.

2. Purpose of the Governance framework

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the Authority is directed and controlled. The framework covers the Council's activities through which; it is accountable to, engages with, and leads its communities. It also enables the Authority to monitor performance against strategic objectives and evaluate whether those objectives are fit for purpose.
- 2.2 The system of internal control forms a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk. However, it can only reduce risk of failure and provide reasonable, not absolute, assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise risks to the achievement of Trafford Council's policies, aims and objectives. The system also ensures that identified risks are evaluated, according to their likelihood and potential impact, and managed efficiently, effectively, and economically.
- 2.3 The governance framework has been in place at Trafford Council for the year ending 31 March 2023 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

3. The Governance Framework

3.1 The Authority has adopted a local governance framework consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' 2016 edition. Trafford Council's Corporate Governance Code details how the Authority meets the requirements of the framework and is aligned to the principles of good governance in local government set out in the CIPFA framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA, IFAC, 2014):

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of the law
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of leadership and the individuals within it
- Managing risk and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.

3.2 The Annual Governance Statement sets out how the Authority has complied with the Code and meets with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (as amended). The Authority also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control through the publication of the Annual Governance Statement. It is subject to detailed review by the Accounts and Audit Committee when they consider the final Statements of Account but before they approve the Statement of Accounts.

3.3 The Authority's financial management arrangements are consistent with a number of the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016). The key principles for which there is compliance are that the Chief Financial Officer (Corporate Director of Finance and Systems):

- is actively involved and is able to bring influence on the Authority's financial strategy;
- leads the whole Authority in the delivery of good financial management;
- directs a fit for purpose finance function; and
- is professionally qualified and suitably experienced.

In addition, the Statement requires that the Chief Finance Officer should report directly to the Chief Executive and be a member of the leadership team, with a status at least equivalent to others.

The Corporate Director of Finance and Systems (the Chief Finance Officer and designated Section 151 officer) is a member of and attends the meetings of the Corporate Leadership Team.

3.4 The key elements of the system and processes that comprise the Authority’s governance framework are outlined in this Annual Governance Statement. The Statement demonstrates the effectiveness of the Council’s governance arrangements during 2022/23 in line with the seven governance principles.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle A.	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
<p>Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution • Members Code of Conduct • Register of Interests • Standards Committee • Corporate Governance Code • Employee Code of Conduct • Disciplinary Policy • ICT Acceptable Use Policy • Anti-Fraud & Corruption Strategy • Confidential Reporting Code
<p>How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2022/23</p>	
<p>During the 2022/23 municipal year a review of Councillors’ remuneration, covered in Part 6 of the Constitution, was undertaken by an independent remuneration panel. The outcomes of the review were submitted to the Annual Council Meeting held on Wednesday, 24th May 2023 and if agreed will be implemented in the 2023/24 municipal year.</p> <p>The Council’s Planning Code of Practice was updated following agreement at the Council meeting held Wednesday, 27th July 2022. The update addressed changes to the Committee since the code was first introduced in 2017 and formalised some of the Committee’s common practices.</p> <p>The Standards Committee considered the publication of Councillor addresses as part of the register of interests at their meeting on Thursday, 22nd September 2022. The Committee’s recommendations were submitted alongside the report to full Council for consideration on Wednesday, 12th October 2022 where it was agreed that Trafford Councillors’ addresses would not be published publicly. Following this decision, the Council retains the complete register of interests but when published only the area a Councillor lives in for example “Address in Trafford” is made publicly available.</p> <p>Councillor Andrew Western stepped down as Leader of the Council in January 2023 following his Election as Member of Parliament for the Constituency of Stretford and</p>	

Urmston in December 2022. Councillor Ross was appointed as Leader of the Council and a report detailing the subsequent changes to the Council's governance arrangements was submitted at an Extraordinary Council meeting on [Wednesday, 4th January 2023](#).

The 2021/22 Annual Report for the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Team was presented to [Accounts and Audit Committee on 28 September 2022](#) outlining fraud prevention and detection activities and further planned work in 2022/23. During 2022/23, the Council's Counter Fraud team have continued to investigate suspected fraud and any irregularities. During 2022/23, the investigations undertaken were primarily in relation to council tax, business rates, social care finance and COVID-19 Business Support Grants. A report on work for the year will be provided by the Council's Counter Fraud Manager to the Accounts and Audit Committee in September 2023.

The Council participates in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data matching exercise. An update was provided by the Audit and Assurance Service to the [Accounts and Audit Committee on 1 February 2023](#) setting out details regarding data submitted as required to the Cabinet Office during the year.

The Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy was updated during the year and approved by the [Accounts and Audit Committee on 14th March, 2023](#). The Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Anti-Money Laundering Policy, two of a range of policies to support the Council's overall Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy, were reviewed and updated during 2022/23.

Several IT policies were updated at the beginning of 2023 including the Trafford Council Acceptable Use Policy; Information Security Policy; Access Controls Policy; and Network Security Policy. The policies are in the final stage of sign off and will be shared with the workforce via a series of communications. The intention is to bring the policies to life and raise awareness with high-risk areas via engaging bulletins and the IT Security training modules. A similar approach has been successful with raising awareness on phishing e-mails.

Changes to the Council's Disciplinary Policy have been made further due to ACAS publishing new advice on staff suspensions at work. The focus is on ensuring that employees are only suspended if it is appropriate and ensuring there is support for employee mental health and wellbeing – this is in recognition of the huge impact of suspension. The revised version is being finalised through the normal sign-off process.

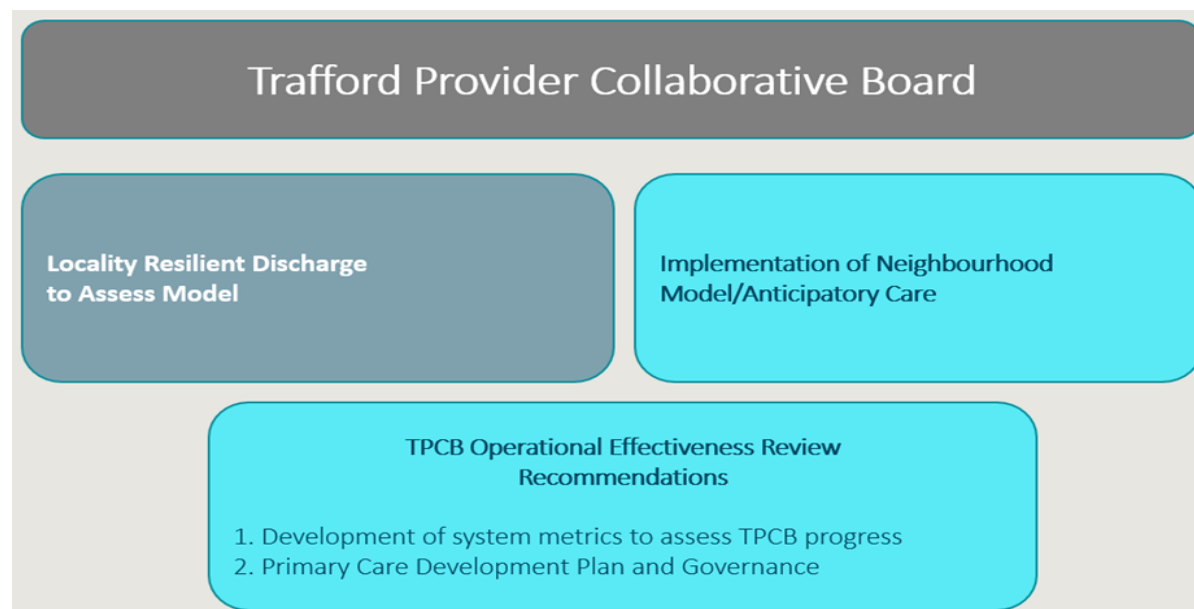
CIPFA SOLACE Principle B.	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
<p>Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision Making Protocols • Access to Information Procedure Rules • Consultation, including Budget Consultation • Trafford Partnership Board & Strategic Boards • Public Service Reform Board & Operational Group • Building Strong Communities Strategy • Locality Working Programme • Joint Strategic Needs Assessment • Local Care Alliance • Joint Commissioning Board • GMCA
<p>How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2022/23</p>	
<p>Consultation and engagement were undertaken on a number of key strategic documents and policy changes during the course of the year. These included:</p> <p>The results of consultation on the facility mix for Altrincham, Stretford, and Sale leisure centres, which was reported to the Executive in July 2022. Further consultation was undertaken across the leisure estate to inform the Leisure Investment Programme during the year.</p> <p>Following the successful application to the governments Levelling Up Fund the refurbishment of Partington Sports Village was included in the Leisure Investment Programme. Further community consultation on the refurbishment is ongoing and will feed into the overall designs.</p> <p>The public consultation to support of a Community Asset Transfer of Old Trafford Sports Barn was concluded. The transfer process is ongoing as the Council is seeking to secure a favourable outcome for the community asset transfer.</p> <p>The adoption of the Civic Quarter Area Action Plan, which had been subject to extensive statutory consultation and an examination in public, was approved by Council in January 2023;</p> <p>Consultation was undertaken on proposals to apply to the Secretary of State to allow the Council to use powers relation to moving traffic offences, which were approved by the Executive in January 2023;</p> <p>Consultation on proposals to establish a Temporary Stopping Place for Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers has begun following approval from the Executive in January 2023;</p>	

At the Executive meeting [in January 2023](#) a set of proposals to implement a new operating model for tennis courts in parks were presented and it was agreed that extensive consultation on those proposals would be undertaken.

The results of a consultation on the new Trafford Moving Strategy, the Council's strategy for physical activity, was reported to the [Executive in March 2023](#) and the strategy was adopted.

The [Executive Meeting in March 2023](#) also approved the new Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Strategy, which had been developed through extensive consultation and engagement during the year.

Local Care Alliance: Trafford's Local Care Alliance was stood down at the end of 2021 as part of the transition to the **Trafford Provider Collaborative Board (TPCB)** in 22/23, as mandated by the Greater Manchester Integrated Care System. The membership was revised, a new interim Terms of Reference was agreed and submitted to the newly established Trafford Locality Board (TLB). The TPCB agreed its guiding principles, values, and ways of working. The TPCB also undertook a prioritisation exercise to create its annual priority programmes of work for 22/23, which is summarised below:



In the latter part of 22/23, an enhanced prioritisation process was launched with the aim to have a refreshed set of priorities for 2023/24 in place by April.

The Trafford **Joint Commissioning Board (JCB)** was disbanded in 2021 as part of the transition to the mandated **Trafford Locality Board (TLB)**, as required by GM Integrated Care System. The TLB first met in April 2022 with a membership that was built upon that of the JCB and enhanced through the addition of new partners. A Terms of Reference were created which outlined the TLB's purpose as a consultative forum to inform partners decision-making and to ensure decisions are aligned as far as

possible across those organisations, as well as being a forum to manage the relevant section 75 arrangements. The Terms of Reference were approved in anticipation of the formal establishment of an Integrated Care System (Originally April 2022 but deferred until July 2022), with confirmation of delegated authority due from Greater Manchester Integrated Care System in March 2023. Following the delegation, an updated Terms of Reference for Trafford Locality Board was formally submitted to GM Integrated Care System governance in April 2023 for approval.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle C	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Plan • Trafford Local Plan • Trafford Locality Plan • Physical Activity Vision • Medium Term Financial Strategy • Trafford Recovery Plan • Investment Management Strategy

How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2022/23

The Corporate Plan, supported by individual Service Business Plans, the work of the GMCA, and the Trafford Locality Plan set out the immediate and long-term vision of the Council. The 2022/23 budget delivered within the agreed resource allocation, supported this vision: -

The financial challenge faced by the Council during 2022/23 has been difficult and compounded by increases in demand placed upon Council services. This has been caused by two main factors; the ongoing impacts of the Covid Pandemic and the economic turbulence and uncertainty faced during the year leading to a rise in both the inflation rates and interest rates. Inflationary impacts alone have cost the Council a projected c£5m during 2022/23 due to the rising cost of energy bills, spiralling wage inflation and other contract prices. This unbudgeted pressure has been managed, in part, by management controls particularly around the management of staff vacancies, digital transformation, and changes to the way the Council sets money aside to repay its long-term debt. The latest budget monitoring report as of month 10 was reporting a broadly break-even position.

To achieve the long-term financial targets, the Council set a budget for the financial year 2023/24 at its meeting on the [15th of February 2023](#), which was supported by an appropriate assessment of risk by the Director of Finance and Systems. All the expected post pandemic risks along with the ongoing economic and inflation risks were considered within the budget report. Measures to address the budget gap of £24.9m and deliver a balanced budget for 2023/24 included a rise in the level of council tax by 4.99% (generating an estimated £5.7m in revenue), a one-off use of reserves of £7.4m, and a savings programme of £11.8m. A Finance and Change Board was established during the year with a dedicated focus on closing the budget gap. The risk assessment undertaken as part of the budget setting process reflected

the uncertainty high levels of inflation were having on council budgets, which included energy, fuel, and food inflation as well as construction costs.

The financial resilience of the Council was supported by the agreed Reserves Policy, which is subject to regular review underpinning the long-term financial resilience of the Council. The reserves and balances available to the Council to support its immediate financial resilience are therefore important in the context of managing a period of potential significant financial turbulence.

The Trafford Local Plan progressed significantly during 2022/23 with the examination of the Places for Everyone Plan - a joint development plan between nine of the Districts of Greater Manchester. The Places for Everyone Plan will form the central document of the Council's Local Plan, alongside other statutory development plans. As well as supporting strategic and policy sessions in the Autumn, the Council led off site-specific hearings for Timperley Wedge and Carrington in January and March.

In January the Council adopted the Civic Quarter Area Action Plan to guide the development and regeneration of the area around Trafford Town Hall.

The Executive adopted an Inclusive Economy Recovery Plan in February 2021. This plan set out the Council's approach to support residents and businesses to recover from the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The plan has been kept under review, and an updated Inclusive Economy Delivery Plan was approved by the [Executive in February 2023](#). The report provided an update on delivery against the recovery plan, noting some key achievements, including:

- £12m of financial support to Trafford based companies through the Additional Restrictions Grant
- Skills Support for the Workforce supported 121 businesses and 291 Trafford residents
- ESOL co-ordinator recruited, 1218 assessments completed and 615 people placed on a course/offered a suitable opportunity

The revised Plan aligns with the new Corporate Strategy, and links to the Poverty Strategy and the Council's response to the cost-of-living crisis. The plan contains six themes:

- Business support
- Town centres
- Employment and skills
- Communities, social value and VCFSE support
- Climate change/green economy
- Development Framework

The Council continues to invest in its town centres and strategic locations. In 2023/24 work will start on the regeneration of Stretford Mall, public realm improvements in Kingsway and on Lumina Village. Foundation, in the Stamford Quarter, will complete in the summer, as will the latest phase of public realm work in Altrincham. The Council will work with partners to support the continued regeneration of Stanley Square, Sale and a new masterplan will be commissioned for Urmston.

The Council adopted an Asset Investment Strategy in July 2017. The strategy sets out the Council's plans to enable economic regeneration and provide a sustainable income stream to support the Council's budget. The strategy is kept under regular review to ensure it remains aligned with Corporate priorities and the latest guidance, and a revised version was approved at Budget Council in February 2022. The Investment Objective is "to promote TBC's strategic priorities while creating a sustainable income stream to support local services", and the strategy has supported investment in our town centres, the Civic Quarter and Altrincham, and supported the development of residential properties, office space and commercial units in Trafford and the sub-regional economic area.

The **Trafford Locality Plan** 2019-24 was [Refreshed](#) in 2021 to reflect that while the borough's aspirations remain the same, some operational deliverables have changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While Trafford continued to implement the core deliverables of the Locality Plan, work was ongoing across the system to respond to the pandemic which created positive partnership working practices, values, and behaviours. 2021 also saw the establishment of Integrated Care Systems and the requirement of having a new Health and Social Care system in place by April 2022, this changing context and journey were also reflected within in the Locality Plan Refresh.

A review of what had been delivered by the plan so far was begun in Q4 of 2022. The review outlined the distance travelled with a focus on key achievements, what hadn't been done and why, work that was ongoing, and new deliverables that had been added following the original publication of the Locality Plan and/or 2021 Refresh. These findings were presented back to the Trafford Locality Board and Provider Collaborative Board in 2023. A further review of the Locality Plan will take place in 23/24 following the publication of the GM ICP Strategy.

Between January and March 2023, the Trafford Locality Board worked alongside partners from across the health and social care system to define its priorities. The outcome of this work is to be shared for approval across the system from April 2023 onwards.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle D	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
<p>Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernisation Programme • Corporate Plan • Medium Term Financial Plan • Efficiency Plan • Capital Strategy • Social Value Framework • Equality Strategy • Children’s Services Improvement Plan
<p>How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2022/23</p>	
<p>The Council’s capital strategy and capital programme were approved at the Budget Council meeting on Wednesday, 16th February 2023. The capital strategy set out the principles that underpin the programme, aligned to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, statutory service delivery, and the corporate objectives. The three-year capital programme included investment of £199m into the Council’s assets, including £3.5m of over-programming which is considered prudent given the scale of the programme. The programme is funded through a combination of external resources, including government grants and developer contribution, capital receipts, and prudential borrowing.</p> <p>The capital programme is developed through the submission of business cases to an internal bidding process. Proposals are assessed based on deliverability and alignment with the capital programme priorities and are approved by CLT and the Executive. The total level of funding available is determined in line with the MTFS.</p> <p>A Capital Programme Board was established in 2022/23, with the Corporate Director of Place as chair and the Director of Finance and Systems as vice-chair, to improve delivery of the current programme and development of future years schemes. Bi-monthly updates are provided to the Executive on delivery against programme and scheme variations as part of the Finance update.</p> <p>Trafford’s Corporate Equality Strategy (2021 – 2025) was first published in 2021 and outlines four equality objectives of: inclusive leadership, improving the representativeness of our workforce, reducing health inequalities, and reducing hate crime. Our strategy for health inequalities follows the NHS Core20PLUS5 principles, focusing on the 20% most deprived population (according to the national Index of Multiple Deprivation), plus population groups experiencing multiple inequalities, in five</p>	

clinical areas of focus which are: maternity, severe mental illness, chronic respiratory disease, early cancer diagnosis, and hypertension case-finding.

Ofsted conducted an inspection under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Framework (ILACS). The inspection took 3 weeks with the first week being held offsite which involved data and evidence submission by the Council. The onsite process involved meeting with practitioners and some managers. The inspection team also spoke with parents, carers, and to some children and young people, as well as some teachers. The inspectors looked at partnership working through the evidence presented by the Council but primarily through children's records and what the team could see about interventions and their effectiveness. The inspection covered every aspect of Children's Social Care from Early Help to Adoption. The inspection was 'unannounced' with the three-week process commencing on Monday 14th November when formal notification was received via a phone call.

The overall outcome of the inspection was that Trafford requires improvement to be good across all areas. The inspectors provided the Council with more detailed feedback which highlighted strengths and weaknesses with the report identifying the following six areas where the Council needed to improve.

- The quality of out-of-hours service provision to offer a more comprehensive and timely service for children.
- The support for homeless children over 16.
- The support to children in care to help them understand their entitlements and how they can influence the shaping and developing of children's services.
- The use of direct work and life-story work to gain the voice of the child and to support children's understanding of their life history.
- The support for care leavers in preparing for their transition to independence.
- The quality and frequency of supervision.

Other than the improved rating the main positive to be taken from the review was that each of the six areas identified were already known to the Council with plans in place for improvement, as demonstrated within the 8 Ambitions plan. The feedback from Ofsted has reaffirmed the Council's concerns and helped to focus efforts to achieve the desired improvement. In response to the report detailed action plans have been laid out to address the areas highlighted by Ofsted. Following the improved rating Trafford is now moving out of intervention but will be looking to maintain some of the strong governance arrangements that have helped the Council to achieve the current level of improvement and which will hopefully lead to further improvement culminating in the attainment of Trafford's ambitions. A full update on the inspection, its findings, and the Council's next steps was delivered to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on the [14th February 2023](#).

Trafford created a Social Value (SV) Charter in 22/23 which was signed off on [24th October 2022 by Trafford Executive](#). Trafford has a steering group which is driving SV improvement.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle E	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Strategy • Change Strategy • Member Development Strategy • Members’ Training Plan • Members’ Induction Process • Employee Training & Development Plan • Corporate Induction Procedure • Employees Personal Development Review (PDR) • Staff Health & Wellbeing Strategy • Absence Management Strategy

How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2022/23

In 2022 the Council started work on the refresh of the people strategy. To date this has comprised of collating intelligence and data alongside a period of engagement with Directorate Management Teams, Staff Forum Groups, Trade Union Members, Staff, and Executive Members. The outputs of this work will support the delivery of a refreshed strategy in late 2023.

Within 2022 work continued towards the priorities and objectives outlined in the people plan, one of which was to become a real living wage employer. The council implemented real living wage supplements to 320 members of staff from January 2023 and subsequently achieved accreditation as a real living wage employer from the real living wage foundation in early 2023.

During 2022/23 the Council offered a full calendar of learning events to all staff. The calendar included mandatory training alongside optional learning sessions and courses to support colleagues with their personal and professional development in areas such as presentation skills, leading personal change, and digital upskilling. The council’s EPIC Manager programme continued to run throughout 2022 with 21 cohorts having completed the programme to date. A Human Resources Toolkit consisting of talks and learning events for managers on HR Specific topics such as Fixed Term Contracts was rolled out during 2022/23. All together a total of 115 learning events were run in 2022/2023.

In addition to the EPIC manager programme Trafford’s wider learning offer is supported through the e-learning platform Me-learn. In 2022/23 a total of 19,5562 e-learning courses were completed by Trafford colleagues and partners. The council

also provides staff with opportunities to gain a fully funded professional qualification through the upskill and apprenticeship programmes. From 2021 to April 2023 over 100 colleagues achieved a formal qualification through those programmes.

The council runs several internal programmes related to supporting aspiring and established managers to succeed in their roles. The Leap into Management (L3) programme, which is delivered in partnership with Salford College, is on its second cohort and a Level 5 in-house programme (Leap into Leadership) was launched in March 2023. The Council also facilitates programmes in coaching and offers the social work degree apprenticeship. The Social Work Degree is open to staff to apply within Children's and Adults Services and the 4th cohort started in September 2022.

All staff have access to the EPIC check-in process and should have an EPIC check in at least once every 6 months. The EPIC Check ins are designed to support discussions and conversations around staff Members wellbeing, performance targets, values, as well as to support their personal, professional, and career development. The paperwork for EPIC check ins was refreshed in 2022 and several new online support tools were developed for managers and staff members. This included the development of a working well passport which is a living document that travels with colleagues as they move jobs/roles within the authority to support their wellbeing and avoid them having to re-apply for support during their career with the Council. The passport and check in tools are all promoted and signposted through the virtual check in training sessions.

The Council offers a coaching service to all colleagues and managers. Colleagues can access one to one coaching with a professional internal coach to support their development and/or to support their wellbeing. A total of 48 colleagues have accessed this service to date.

A succession planning strategy is in place to ensure key skills are retained and staff are upskilled to enable them to take on higher graded roles. Successors have been identified at senior manager level and targeted development initiatives provided to ensure that the Council's workforce is equipped to meet new and emerging demands. The Council has developed several career graded posts to support managers in attracting, developing, and retaining talent for difficult to fill roles where specific skills/qualifications are required.

In June 2022 the Council launched the b-Heard staff engagement survey, which had a response rate of 43%. The survey focused on 7 key areas specific to engagement including "My manager", Leadership, Fair Deal, Giving something back, "My Team", and Wellbeing. The outputs of the survey were used to formulate and share the corporate commitments and actions to support engagement at the Council with staff. Directorates and teams received their own results to enable them to formulate action plans at a local level.

The Council continued to deliver quarterly Let's Talk Engagement sessions for managers and colleagues. The face-to-face events offered staff and leaders the

opportunity to hear from and engage with the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council and the Corporate Leadership Team. The events also provided staff the opportunity to network with other staff members and to share their thoughts and feedback on key subject areas.

The Council continued the delivery of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy 'EPIC You', which comprises of initiatives and activities aimed at improving organisational effectiveness and is organised around four key themes.

- Healthy Lifestyle
- Mental wellbeing
- Focus on Musculoskeletal (MSK) Health
- Health & Safety

In January 2023, the Council launched a new internal health and safety initiative 'Your Safety, Your Wellbeing'. Which was developed to refocus and engage with services on the fundamentals of safety and wellbeing and ensure that colleagues continue to safely finish their working day, every day.

The initiative includes:

- A dedicated intranet resource page with bite size guides.
- Monthly communications on key risk and wellbeing issues.
- 'Team focus' on certain teams to show why safety and wellbeing are an integral part of service delivery.
- A targeted service monitoring and audit programme.

During 2022/23 the Council delivered several initiatives to further support staff members with their safety and wellbeing. Events were run by an internal network of Mental Health First Aiders and included monthly Tea and Talk sessions, one to one sessions, and corporate support of national health and wellbeing campaigns. The Staff Active Travel Group was set up to encourage staff to use more active and sustainable travel through participation in campaigns and by hosting annual local cycling/walking activities for staff at Council offices.

Absence Management –a robust approach to managing employee absences including sickness absence has been put in place and the Corporate Leadership Team monitor levels monthly. The HR Operations team support services in dealing with more complex cases in line with Council policies and guidance.

The Member Development Steering Group continued to meet in 2022 and progressed items relating to Councillors' development needs. A dedicated learning and development intranet page houses resources and learning materials for executive members alongside advertising any internal/external learning and development opportunities/events.

During 2022 a framework was designed to support a "buddy" scheme specifically for new members. Alongside this scheme a member induction programme was

designed and delivered in 2022 to support the effective onboarding of new executive members. This programme comprised of sessions delivered by the Chief Executive, Corporate Leadership Team, and relevant Heads of Services with the opportunity to also attend external events and further internal workshops that focussed on skills and knowledge development.

A programme of continuous professional development (CPD) has been progressed throughout 2022/23, with a focus on finance, equality, and climate challenge. Members have made use of free resources from the Local government Association including their climate hub and training. Consultants have delivered Traveller and Transgender Awareness sessions for members to help support work in their wards. Continuous Professional Development requirements were submitted to the steering group in March 2023, which has helped to shape the future learning and development offer in 2023/2024.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle F	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
<p>Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Procedure Rules • Contract Procedure Rules • Treasury Management Strategy • Scrutiny Committees and Protocols • Risk Management Strategy & Policy Statement • Strategic Risk Register • Internal Audit Strategy • Accounts & Audit Committee
How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2022/23	
<p>The Council monitors and regularly reviews its Strategic Risk Register to ensure key risks are being managed. Update reports were presented through the year to the Corporate Leadership Team and the Accounts and Audit Committee.</p> <p>By the end of March 2023, the highest risks in the strategic risk register related to uncertainty over the Council’s medium term financial position; addressing the climate change emergency; risks in relation to information governance; risks in relation to delivering Leisure Services across the Borough; and dealing with increased demand for school places. The strategic risk reports highlighted responsibilities and ongoing actions to manage the risks identified.</p> <p>The Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 incorporated coverage of various key financial systems and other business risks. Updates of work undertaken were provided to the Corporate Leadership Team and the Accounts and Audit Committee during the year. The Annual Report of the Head of Internal Audit for 2022/23 stated that based on findings from planned audit reviews undertaken during 2022/23, for most reviews at least reasonable levels of assurance have been gained that the systems, procedures</p>	

and controls in place to manage risks and deliver objectives are operating to a satisfactory standard.

There has been a range of internal audit reviews undertaken during the year across each of the main areas of the Audit Plan. Some areas of planned audit work were rescheduled with the aim of providing assurance during 2023/24 and these are reflected in subsequent audit plans. Outcomes from follow-up internal audit work of areas previously reviewed demonstrates that progress continues to be made in improving levels of control. Further action was highlighted for some areas reviewed which will be subject to follow-up in 2023/24.

Given the above, based on assurance gathered during 2022/23, the Internal Audit Opinion is that, overall, a reasonable level of assurance can be given that the control environment encompassing internal control, risk management and governance, is operating to a satisfactory standard.

2022/23 was the first year in implementing the outcomes of the in-depth Scrutiny review which were approved by Council in March 2022. The implementation involved closer working with Executive Members along with lead officers, particularly in relation to work programming. Due to several factors, which included disruption to the Committee's meeting schedule due to the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, the Parliamentary By-election for the Stretford and Urmston Constituency, and resourcing issues over the year, it was not possible to implement all the recommendations from the review.

All STAR authorities use the standard Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) contained within their constitutions which was approved by the submission to the [Council on 23rd March 2022](#) have now been implemented. There have been no change to CPRs in 22/23.

CIPFA SOLACE Principle G	Key Elements of Trafford Framework
Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Website • Freedom of Information Publication scheme • Trafford Partnership Data Lab • Marketing and Communications Team • Annual Financial Statements • Annual Governance Statement • Annual Scrutiny Report • Corporate Plan
How we demonstrated effectiveness in 2022/23	
Information on the Council's decision making is open and transparent and continues to be published on the website. This includes publishing open data through the Council's website, data.gov.uk and the Trafford Data Lab's website	

(trafforddatalab.io). Improvements continue to be made to the scope and quality of information the Council publishes via digital channels. A revised set of design principles is being used to shape new and adapt existing digital content to ensure information and services are accessible and easy to use.

As the Council's External Auditors, Mazars LLP provided regular updates to the [Accounts and Audit Committee](#) through the year. The External Auditor's Annual Reports for 2021/22 and 2022/23 are due to be reported to Accounts and Audit Committee meetings in 2023/24. It was confirmed during the year by Public Sector Auditor Appointments (PSAA) that Mazars LLP are appointed to audit the accounts of Trafford Council for the next five years covering 2023/4 to 2027/28.

An external assessment of Internal Audit was undertaken by CIPFA in March 2023 and will report that the Internal Audit function operates in general conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The findings report is to be presented to the Accounts and Audit Committee in June 2023.

As life returns to some sort of normality after the Covid pandemic Trafford Council's Communications and Marketing Team has been at the forefront of getting key messages out to residents, businesses, and other key stakeholders about how the Council will help the borough recover.

The last 12 months saw the economy fully open up across Trafford as restrictions were lifted. However, there was still an element of caution among parts of the population who needed reassurance. This saw close partnership working with our key stakeholders, for example in the NHS, to deliver joined-up and meaningful content to reassure the public. There was a priority on making sure communications around the 'new normal' were in plain English to ensure the messages to residents and other key stakeholders were easily understood.

There was an emphasis on communicating the three corporate priorities especially around supporting people out of poverty as the cost of living continued to hit people hard during the year. Communications focussed on the help that was available to people who were struggling to pay their bills.

The team continued to produce monthly reports outlining its work for the Corporate Leadership Team and for the Executive so its work can be properly scrutinised to make sure it remains in line with the Council's key corporate objectives. This has included analytics of its media coverage, whether that has been positive or negative, and engagements levels with social media output.

The team will continue to work hard to ensure key stakeholders see for themselves the transparent nature of the work the Council does.

4. Review of effectiveness

4.1 Trafford Council's Corporate Governance Code sets out the Authority's responsibility to undertake a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework on an annual basis. The review is informed by the work of the Council's executive managers, the Head of Internal Audit's annual report, by the external auditor's comments, and the results of reviews and inspections.

4.2 The processes applied, the sources of assurance obtained in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of governance arrangements, and, as part of that, the systems of internal control include the following:

Management Controls	Independent Assurance	External Assurance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial Management• Programme Management• Performance Management• Risk Management• Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal Audit• Scrutiny• Health & Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• External Audit• Other inspectorate e.g. OSTED, CQC• Sector led improvement e.g. LGA

4.3 These governance functions are described in more detail within the Council's Corporate Governance Code and specific assurances or improvements delivered during 2022/23 are detailed in Sections 3 and 5 of this Statement.

4.4 The review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Accounts and Audit Committee concluded that the arrangements continue to be fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. The areas which have been addressed and those which are to be addressed with new actions are set out in Section 5.

5. Significant Governance issues

- 5.1 The Council takes its responsibilities and duties seriously with regard to ensuring continuous improvement in the way that its functions are exercised and in the consideration of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 5.2 In the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement a number of significant governance issues were identified. Below are the details of those significant governance issues followed by the action that the Council has taken in 2022/23 to address them.

2021/22 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2022/23
<p>Continued impact of COVID - Covid 19 continues to have a major impact in the borough. There are three main ways in which this is felt.</p> <p>Firstly, the impact on population health and the increase in health inequalities. Obesity rates, including in children, have increased, as has the proportion of people who are drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. These behavioural changes will add to the burden of disease in our population. We are mitigating this through our health promotion and behaviour change programmes, but these take time to show results.</p> <p>Secondly, the impact of the reduction of services, particularly health and education, in the pandemic has led to a backlog of activity and a need for remedial action to catch up. However, capacity within services is limited and public needs and expectations are high.</p> <p>Thirdly, there is a risk of further waves, or a vaccine resistant variant emerging. This could require standing up of testing or contact tracing, or a reintroduction of social isolation measures. We have retained a core workforce to support any such actions and they are</p>	<p>The Council no longer has any dedicated resources to reduce the risk of Covid, or to respond to any outbreaks. However, by and large Trafford is now seeing high levels of both acquired and natural immunity, and regular vaccination is still being offered to high-risk groups. The Council continues to support care homes with infection prevention control measures and in the absence of a new variant with high morbidity/mortality and high rates of vaccine escape, Trafford is moving into endemic management.</p> <p>The risk score is low to medium, which recognises the continued risk of new COVID variants and potential challenges in winter 2023. Rates continue to fluctuate, although in the summer the risk reduces. All project level risks have been reviewed, with residual risks assigned to appropriate owners. Business continuity plans have also been revised. With the reduction in dedicated resources along with the reduction in rates, the likelihood of a significant outbreak has reduced but the impact, should this occur, would be high.</p>

2021/22 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2022/23
<p>employed until 31st March 2023. We have also ensured that our learning from the pandemic is recorded and included in the organisation's outbreak and business continuity plans are able to do so. A range of programmes to support residents and businesses to mitigate economic impact have been introduced.</p> <p>The Health and Social Care Group has progressed both strategic and operational work providing support to Care Homes, Direct Payments services, Home Care, Drug and Alcohol services and Domestic Abuse and, training for care providers. Commissioners have sought assurance of business continuity from all service providers. The group works closely with CCG, primary care and the Trafford Local Care Organisation</p> <p>The Children's Social Care and Health is working towards trying to secure placement stability for Looked After Children, staffing resilience for maintaining front line critical services, children's health and wellbeing, youth justice and cohesion and advising supporting school and educational settings.</p> <p>With the current high rates of infection in Trafford and the national lockdown in place, the plans for staff returning to work have been put on hold and staff are being encouraged to work from home wherever possible.</p> <p>The vaccination programme is underway, led by the CCG, and while uptake is excellent overall, there are inequalities emerging within this, which we are working to address.</p>	

2021/22 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2022/23
<p>We have also recruited a neighbourhood-based community engagement team to work in localities on community engagement and behaviour change, and vaccination uptake in relation to COVID.</p>	
<p>Climate Change Emergency - All available indicators suggest that climate change is already occurring and will, if anything, become more prominent. The impact is considered to be high as a minimum (very high without mitigation) as the consequence of climate change give rise to unpredictable and severe weather events occurring with increased regularity. These will in turn have significant impacts on the environment, economy and society. In short, the impacts are wide ranging and cross cutting in character.</p> <p>Trafford will continue to address this on a number of fronts with the completion of two studies looking at the greening of Trafford Park and its transition to a low carbon future. Complimentary work is underway to prepare for a heat network around the Civic Quarter and Stretford. The Public sector decarbonisation programme is ongoing, along with the expansion of the EV charging network in the Borough and the delivery of new active travel schemes.</p>	<p>Action has progressed on Climate change mitigation and adapting to the change which is already ‘baked in’ to climatic conditions. In 2022/23 the Council commissioned two key studies on a Low Carbon and Greener Trafford Park. These are complimentary studies aimed at preparing this extensive industrial area for low emissions and low carbon business in future years. At the same time there is an ambition to create a greener environment, better suited to active travel for employees – and creating a healthier more resilient business location. Both studies were reported to the Council’s Executive in March.</p> <p>Meanwhile funding has been received for the next phase of feasibility for the Civic Quarter Heat Network. In addition, the public sector decarbonisation scheme continues to be rolled out as does our work to install EV charging at appropriate locations throughout the Borough.</p> <p>In order to accelerate delivery of these programmes of work a new Head of Climate Change has been established and will be recruited in early 2023/24.</p>
<p>Financial Management and the Medium Term Financial Position - The Council’s budget gap for 2023/24 and 2024/25 is currently estimated at £35.4m, with £25.8m in 2023/24; this takes into account</p>	<p>During 2022/23 the Council has been faced nearly £6m of unbudgeted pressures caused mainly due to the impacts of inflation and rising demand particularly in children’s placement</p>

2021/22 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2022/23
<p>the current estimate of the impact of inflation. It is fair to say there is still a large amount of uncertainty in the projections and a range of budget assumptions have been included in the forecast position. Since February a Finance and Change Board has met to develop a sustainable savings programme to address this position. In October a draft budget report was presented to Executive on proposals to help balance the 2023/24 budget. This report identified that significant work had been achieved but a gap of £8.5m still remained and therefore the work of the Board will continue to identify proposals to bridge this position. The Executive is clear that reserves cannot be relied upon to bridge the remaining gap due to their precariously low level.</p> <p>The financial landscape continues to be uncertain and despite setting a balanced budget for 2022/23 there are some underlying pressures in children’s placement costs, home to school transport and wage and energy price pressures which are currently estimated to exceed the budget by £6m (period 6 position). This will put pressure on the delivery of Council services during the year if additional funding isn’t received from Government which is now highly unlikely. Reforms affecting both children’s and adult services will impact on medium term budget planning, particularly the planned reforms related to adult social care charging which are due to be implemented by 1/10/2023. These will have serious adverse impacts on the Council’s budget and ability to recruit both social work and finance staff to administer the new proposals.</p>	<p>costs and home to school transport provision of c£2.6m. To address this management action was taken around the management of staff vacancies which has helped address some of the financial challenge but the key measure that was reviewed during the year was the approach the Council takes to set aside resources to pay for the repayment of its long-term debt. The change in approach is still done in compliance with statutory guidance but means lower amounts are set aside in the short-term. Not doing this would have entailed the Council having to utilise more earmarked reserves in year; a position which would have significantly weakened the Council’s overall financial resilience. A combination of these measures has allowed the Council to broadly break-even in 2022/23 (based on the latest budget monitoring position).</p> <p>Despite setting a balanced budget for 2023/24 there remains significant financial pressure on the budget and uncertainty as the ongoing impacts of inflation and additional demand for Council services rises. The Finance and Change Board will continue and focus its activity in two ways; one will be the delivery of the existing savings programme in 2023/24, the other will be on the identification of a new programme of savings for 2024/25 and 2025/26.</p>

2021/22 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2022/23
<p>Information Governance</p> <p>The 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement contained a very detailed update on the Council’s Position in relation to Information Governance which covered the following areas;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Security • Data Protection Act 2018 and FOI Act 2000 compliance • FOI Requests • SARs • Data breaches • NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit • Records Management <p>The full version is available from page 43 of 2021-22-Final-Annual-Governance-Statement.pdf (trafford.gov.uk).</p>	<p>Data breach reports are being reviewed and authorised by the Head of Legal & Governance to ensure overview and consistency of outcomes and recommendations.</p> <p>The service has been working with Workforce and Core Strategy to maximise engagement and overall compliance with mandatory training across the Council. The service has also been working with Workforce and Core Strategy to understand and identify responsibility for the training requirements of shared NHS and school staff in respect of data security matters.</p> <p>Not all SAR and FOI requests are processed centrally by the IG team. The Place and Children’s Social Care Directorates process their own enquiries which are sent out in the name of individual directors. The individual requests and supporting information are not held centrally but are held on the systems used by those directorates. There is currently no mechanism in place to secure oversight of these processes, deadlines and timelines of responses being provided by individual directorates. As part of the Microsoft 365/Dynamics 365 migration process, discussions are underway between key stakeholders across the Council and as part of those discussions, digital solutions are being explored to improve and automate processes where possible to accurately measure and improve performance.</p>

2021/22 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2022/23
	<p>Records management: As part of the Microsoft 365/ Dynamics 365 migration process, discussions are underway between key stakeholders across the Council in respect of retention policies and data archiving policies insofar as they relate to digital data. The ICT service has captured SharePoint retention requirements from services across the Council as part of this ongoing work.</p>
<p>Amey Contract - The Council will continue to actively manage the Amey contract within the performance management framework and contractual mechanisms available. The Council will conclude the seven year review, setting out a new contractual relationship and performance framework for the second half of the contract</p>	<p>Performance by Amey through the One Trafford Partnership improved through 2022/23, particularly in the Waste service where performance targets were consistently met in the second half of the year. The Estates Service was brought back into the Council in February 2022, by mutual agreement; further agreement has been made to bring the Waste Minimisation team into the Council, subject to staff consultation.</p> <p>A new structure was agreed to strengthen the Council client team, with a particular focus on waste, active travel and highways, with recruitment taking place through the year.</p> <p>Work on the seven year review was progressed during the year and key areas of principle agreed through a series of working groups. The review is expected to be completed by summer 2023.</p>
<p>Joint Venture partner fails to deliver services to the required standards - The Covid-19 pandemic has delayed negotiations and the JV Partner's performance during the period has</p>	<p>The response to this is covered under the Amey Contract section above and these two sections have been combined going forward.</p>

2021/22 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2022/23
<p>continued to be generally good, though inconsistent. Action will be taken to address underperformance in line with the mechanisms set out in the contract.</p> <p>Work to achieve significant improvements in the delivery of the contract are ongoing with Member oversight and input from stakeholders, including residents. The 7-year review process review process has been extended due to COVID interference with evaluation and negotiation and is due to complete in 2022/23. A separate review of current governance arrangements is also scheduled for 2022/23.</p>	
<p>Leisure Services - The refurbishment programme will deliver improved facilities that will support the Councils corporate and borough wide strategic priorities. Through tailored place-based programming, centres will help address health inequalities and improve community health and wellbeing outcomes.</p> <p>The revenue budget and reserves approved by Council in February 2022 included support for a full range of leisure provision for 2022/23 and over the medium term. Plans for the refurbishment of Altrincham, Stretford and Sale leisure centres continue, with the aim of works commencing on Altrincham in the new year, subject to planning permission. In addition, a Levelling Up Fund bid has been submitted for Partington Sports village.</p> <p>To further mitigate risk related to the Leisure investment, the Council have commissioned independent due diligence and updates of the</p>	<p>The Council adopted and launched Trafford Moving the boroughs physical activity and sports strategy, to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. Trafford Moving is underpinned by the Council's investment in the phased refurbishment of its Leisure Centre Investments. Planning permission for Altrincham Leisure Centre was granted in in November 2022 and the centre will re-open in August 2024. A revised programme of physical activity is in place while refurbishment is carried out.</p> <p>The Council was successful in its application to the governments Levelling Up Fund and was awarded £18.3m in January 2023 for the refurbishment of Partington Sports Village. Village. Business plans for Stretford and Partington, are being developed supported by Max Associates to ensure a sustainable leisure offer. Stretford was approved by the Executive to follow Altrincham in the phased refurbishment</p>

2021/22 Significant Issues	Action Taken 2022/23
<p>business plans for each centre by Leisure consultants, Max Associates.</p> <p>Progressing work on a new operating agreement for Trafford Leisure is a priority for 2022/23.</p>	<p>programme and progressed to RIBA stage 3. A new and detailed Operating Agreement is being progressed between the Council and its Leisure provider and is due for completion in November 2023.</p>
<p>Impact of Brexit - The true impact of Brexit both in terms of challenges and opportunities have tended to be masked by onset of the pandemic. It is only in 2022 as regular activity has substantially resumed that the impacts become more obvious.</p> <p>The majority of companies operating within Trafford have adjusted to the restrictions on trade with Europe and the changes in workforce. However, uncertainties remain, especially with ongoing changes linked to the Northern Ireland Protocol, which could result in further trading restrictions through 2022/23 should relations with the EU deteriorate. In contrast, the economic benefits of Brexit are less obvious and will take longer to be established.</p>	<p>2022/23 continued to see significant economic turmoil, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, with high energy prices, and sustained levels of inflation. The cost of living crisis was a key concern through the year, and a range of activities were undertaken in partnership with the Community Hubs and Registered Provider partners to mitigate the impact of this.</p> <p>The Council adopted an Inclusive Economy Recovery Plan, setting out its proposals to support the economy to grow, support inward investment, skills and training and develop the green economy.</p>

Significant Governance Issues 2023/24

5.3 The Council is committed to achieving its objectives through good governance and continuous improvement. Going forward, the Council will continue to ensure the effective delivery of its objectives and manages its resources to meet the ongoing financial challenges being faced. Detailed below are significant governance issues and actions planned to address these in 2023/24.

<p>Climate Change Emergency</p>	<p>The Council is committed to meeting net zero by 2038, has an adopted carbon neutral action plan, and a multi-agency Climate Change and Air Quality commission. Two reports on greening Trafford Park were completed during the year, setting out a pathway to significantly reduce carbon emissions from the Park, improving the environment, enabling active travel, whilst maintaining economic output. Developing proposals to implement these plans will be a key focus of 2023/24. A new post of Head of Climate Change has been established to provide greater focus on this key priority, with additional posts also established to focus on Trafford Park.</p>
<p>Medium term financial position</p>	<p>Despite setting a balanced budget for 2023/24 significant budget gaps of £7m and £10m exist for 2024/25 and 2025/26 respectively. It will be imperative that the Finance and Change programme continues in the short and medium term with a dual focus and supporting the delivery of the already identified savings programme whilst also focussing on new ideas that will be required if the Council is to have a sustainable financial position in the future. Reserve balances are at a low level and reliance cannot be placed on these to support the budget position. A large element of the savings programme in 2023/24 is comprised of “corporate” related savings which to a large extent have been exhausted and will not be an answer to balance future budget pressures with the focus likely to fall on front line services.</p>
<p>Information Governance</p>	<p>Two IT and Digital Cyber Security Officers are now in place and are making good progress on improving the council’s cyber security posture. There is a considerable backlog of improvement required but significant progress is planned for 23/24. The initial submission for the 2023 NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit has been submitted and is under review by audit. The Council is expecting to achieve all of the mandatory requirements and to meet the standard when the submission is presented in June 23.</p> <p>The Council plans to introduce a new training dashboard in May 2023 and a new Training IT system in May 2024, which will enable compliance to be more accurately monitored and promoted.</p>

	<p>The service redesign is continuing and in 2023/24 the Council will undertake recruitment activity to address the current lack of capacity. The project team will continue to develop the review of the IG team function and to explore the creation of IG champions across the Council to emulate the function of the IAB and the merits of its reestablishment.</p>
<p>Demand for School Places</p>	<p>Primary Places: In the normal admissions round for entry into reception and in September 2022 there were sufficient places for our residents with surplus places in all areas. The admission round for September 2023 is still being finalised but there are sufficient places in all areas.</p> <p>However, the surge of in-year applications continues to have an impact on primary places and has created pressure in the secondary sector as children move up.</p> <p>Secondary Places: In the normal admissions round for entry into Y7 in September 2023 there was just enough capacity to offer a place to everyone who applied. However, 191 Trafford children, predominantly resident in Altrincham and Sale, could not be allocated places at any of their preferred schools and were allocated places at the nearest school with a vacancy. 110 of these places were in other areas of Trafford. At the end of the allocation every secondary school in Trafford was full and many schools allocated places above their published capacity.</p> <p>Projects have been completed or are planned over the course of 2023/24 to deliver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 College places per year group from September 2024. • 30 additional Primary places per year group from February 2023. • 45 additional infant/primary school places per year group from September 2023. • 135 temporary additional places in Y5 and Y6. • 30 temporary additional places in Y4 • 30 temporary additional places in Y2 <p>In addition to securing extra capacity, the Council will also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to update and review the most recent GP registration data, • Annually review catchment areas for primary schools to ensure that the available places are targeted most effectively.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement EYES Schools Admission module for enhanced monitoring and reporting on in-year applications and impact of inbound migration. • Hold regular meetings with DfE Place Planning Teams to monitor sufficiency and impact of inbound migration. • Explore provision of a new secondary school in Sale/Altrincham area. • Deliver tailored application advice for Altrincham and Sale parents in the transfer cohort for September 2023 to help secure Y7 places for Trafford residents and develop a robust communication strategy.
<p>Leisure Services</p>	<p>The Council will ensure refurbishment continues at Altrincham Leisure Centre, scheduled to re-open in August January 2024. The Council will also ensure that public consultation continues throughout 23/24 at each stage of the design process for Stretford Leisure Centre and Partington Sports Village. Independent scrutiny and validation of the business plans for each centre will be provided by Max Associates to support the Council in ensuring that investment in its Leisure estate provides value for money and delivers the Councils Strategic Objectives, as set out in the Strategic Objectives Planning Model (SOPM) and the Councils Corporate Plan. The Operating Agreement between the Council and Trafford Leisure will provide a robust governance and reporting framework against agreed service standards, asset management and financial and legal agreements. Following approvals, the Operating agreement is being developed for inception due November 2023.</p>
<p>Economic Uncertainty</p>	<p>The Government target is to half inflation by the end of 2023, though it remained above 10% in April 2023. The prospect of further increases in interest rates threaten to remain a brake on the housing sector with house prices remaining generally static, which could see a slow down in development activity. The economic outlook remains uncertain with predicted growth low, though unemployment rates also remain low. The Council believes that it has an important role to maintain confidence in the Trafford economy and to continue to enable inward investment. The regeneration of our town centres will continue, with works starting on the King Street and Kingsway in Stretford, the completion of the Foundations development in the Stamford Quarter alongside the public realm improvements, and a new masterplan for Urmston.</p> <p>The Council will also continue to use its' Investment Strategy to support appropriate development. Subject to the final outcome of the Examination in Public the anticipated adoption of Places for Everyone will establish the planning policy basis to enable development in our strategic locations alongside investment in critical infrastructure. Working with partners in GM</p>

	the Council will ensure it maximises the potential of the Trailblazer devo deal to deliver inclusive economic growth for all our communities.
Amey Contract	The seven year review will complete in 2023/24, establishing a new contractual basis for the contract, alongside revised governance arrangements and amended performance management framework. Work will also be progressed on Microsoft Dynamics, the new CRM system, which should improve the customer journey of reporting service requests. Maintaining and improving the uplift in performance will enable greater focus on service change, maximising the potential benefits of the partnership to support investment in infrastructure and green spaces.

The Council is committed to achieving its objectives through good governance and continuous improvement. Going forward, the Council will continue to ensure it delivers its objectives and manages its resources to meet the ongoing financial challenges being faced.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Councillor Tom Ross
Leader of the Council

Sara Todd
Chief Executive