

EXECUTIVE

11 DECEMBER 2023

PRESENT

Councillor T. Ross (in the Chair).

Councillors S.Adshead, K.G.Carter, J.Harding, E.Patel, J. Slater, R.Thompson, A.J.Williams and J.A Wright

In attendance

John Addison	Governance Manager
Nathan Atkinson	Corporate Director of Adults and Wellbeing
Emma Malpas	Head of Legal Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Jill McGregor	Corporate Director of Children's Services
Richard Roe	Corporate Director of Place
Paul Rogers	Governance Officer
Sara Saleh	Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources
Sara Todd	Chief Executive
Graeme Bentley	Director of Finance and Systems

Also Present

Councillors Acton, Butt, Ennis, Evans, Frass, Paul and Welton

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62. ATTENDANCES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hynes (Deputy Leader).

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

64. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

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

Question 1 refers to the Treasury Management Report – “With regard to the Treasury Management report please could the Executive Member for Finance give information as to why the following two funds have been preferred for significant additional deposits/investment namely Invesco and Legal and General.”

The Executive Member for Finance, Change and Governance responded. “The Council invests monies which are available for example grants received in advance of spends requirement from the balances and reserves which it holds. In

making an investment the first priority is to ensure an approved level of security and liquidity of Council funds is maintained and then to achieve a revenue return. These investments are made in accordance with the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy approved by Council in February each year. The Strategy provides the framework of limits and criteria which in conjunction with regular updates and credit ratings and independent counter party advice allows the Council's Treasury Management team to invest funds appropriately. The investment reference in question have been placed in accordance with this Strategy and are within the approved limits for that investment group. They are instant access short term investments placed to provide a return to the Council while maintaining the liquidity requirements of the Council's cash flow."

Question 2 – relates to the Corporate Plan section 2.3. "In respect of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, having noted several times, daytime, that the charging points at Sale Water Park were not being used by any vehicles, could the appropriate Executive Member advise the terms on which the Council receives financial remuneration from useage of EV Charging throughout the Borough and the level of remuneration that's been received in each of the last three months in particular, from the multiple installation at the Water Park."

In response the Executive Member for Change informed Members that in view of the technical nature of the question a written response would be provided following the meeting.

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

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny presented a report regarding Access to Council Services. This report follows a request for information on the performance of services in answering calls. The Scrutiny Committee discovered that this information is not recorded apart from calls to the Council's contact centre. The Scrutiny Committee recommend that the Executive take action to address this gap in service and provide assurance to the Committee and residents that all services are contactable by members of the public with up to date numbers on Departmental websites.

RESOLVED: That

1. the Council should ensure that no phone number is visible on the website or given out by Customer Services unless a clear guarantee of service relating to that number has been agreed with that department. This guarantee should include that the facility to leave a message if the call is not answered should exist, and that every message left will be responded to within NN hours. If this service level is not possible for a department, their number should not be made available to the public.
2. all Departments do a sweep of their website to ensure pages are up to date with accurate contact information to reduce the residents' need to contact the Council via phone or email and that clear time scales for responses are in place.

3. all Departments within the Council regularly check staff phone numbers posted on the internet are correct. Furthermore, ensure that the numbers are active, consistently manned, and/or have voicemail inboxes that are checked on a regular basis.
4. all public phone numbers for contacting services by the public have an out of office message, which provides a team inbox email where contact can be made.
5. a Council-wide policy be developed that outlines the expectation for teams to be contactable by residents, other Council Services and that this policy includes time scales to manage customer contacts.
6. to identify where existing and new technology can be utilised to make access to services easier for residents. For example, online forms parking permits application.
7. a report on the steps taken by the Executive to address these issues be provided to the Scrutiny Committee at their meeting 13th March 2024.

66. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2023 be approved as an accurate record.

67. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (MID-YEAR)

The Executive Member for Finance Change and Governance presented the Treasury Management 2023-24 Mid-Year Performance Report. This report gives Members a summary of the Treasury Management activities undertaken for the first half of 2023/24 as follows;

Debt Activity:

- The level of external debt fell from £318.1m at 31 March to £303.1m at 30 September 2023,
- Gross loan interest costs totalling £8.4m are to be contained within the current year budget provision,

Investment Activity:

- The level of investments reduced from £70.4m at 31 March to £69.4m at 30 September 2023,
- Estimated external investment interest to be earned for 2023/24 of £3.39m is £0.97m above the £2.42m current year budget requirement,
- The average rate of return achieved during the period April to September 2023 was 4.72%, or 0.14% below the comparable performance indicator of average 1 Month Sterling Overnight Index Average (SONIA) interest rate of 4.86%.

Prudential indicators:

- The Council complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements and
- There were no breaches of prudential indicators.

The Executive Member drew attention for the need for each Member to feel confident about asking questions on Technical subject matters and informed Members that there will be training available in January for all Members in relation to Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management.

A query was raised regarding the external debt to finance and in year borrowings which now shows an approved limit of £717 million for 2025-26 and was this the best way to deal with this debt. Also, how much of the 18 Public Works Loan Board loans are at the 9 per cent rate.

The Director of Finance and Statutory S151 Officer informed Members that on the phasing of borrowings what we are mindful of doing is reflecting where the capital programme and the asset Strategy projections are going and that what we are doing so it's a reflection of when our planned spend, particularly that spend that's financed by borrowing is going to take place and that is a reflection of delivery of projects. Regarding debt costs, the table in the report that indicates what our average interest rates are on or debt at the end of September Paragraph 4.1 of the report refers. So we are looking at average rate of 2.55 per cent. The majority of our debt is at the lower rates of interest as opposed to high given where the average rate is. He would confirm the exact number to Members following the meeting.

On a query regarding the operational boundary for external debt investment strategy being £375 million and the reference to authorisation for £500 million borrowing and also what is meant by under borrowed, the Director of Finance and Statutory S151 Officer informed Members that the £375 million reflects our budgeted need in 2023-24 so it doesn't reflect what is already gone. The overall value of the investment fund is still £500 million. Some of this might be undertaken in 2022-23 and that is the reason why it is not showing £500 million. Regarding the term under borrowed, each time the authority has a requirement to borrow in respect of any capital expenditure or an investment through the asset strategy, if we do not borrow it becomes badged as under borrowed. This can then be taken up as necessary and the Council's cash flow dictates if we need to do that. A lot of activity comes through short term investments so in some cases we can live with that under borrowing for a period of 12-24 months when the investment might get repaid.

RESLOVED: That the Treasury Management activities undertaken in the first half of 2023-24 be noted.

68. CORPORATE PLAN UPDATE

The Leader presented a report which provides a summary of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-24. The report covers highlights from April 2023 to September 2023. He drew attention to the priorities for 2021-24 split into three sections –

- Reducing Health Inequalities
- Supporting People out of poverty
- Addressing of Climate Crisis

Each Strategic priority has a number of key performance indicators and the table Appendix 1 attached to the report provides a summary of the indicators and information regarding current performance. A red, amber, green status is also shown in the Appendix that gives an indication whether performance is improving or declining based on target.

The Leader informed Members that it is a good story to tell. There has been over the years some progression with school street schemes, improvement in affordable housing completions, recycling rates are good and library borrowing remains very healthy. We will be looking to refresh the Plan over the next few months and engage with partners and other people in 2024 with the final Plan being available in the summer.

In referencing a comment raised regarding addressing our climate crisis, paragraph 2.3 of the report refers, the Leader was delighted to acknowledge the new resource in place to respond to the climate crisis and emphasised that the new resources such as this does help deliver on our priorities.

The Executive Member for Finance, Change and Governance welcomed the report and the work that Trafford undertakes and made particular reference to the following –

- Following the conclusion of the Trafford Poverty Truth Commission Trafford has adopted the four recommendations on how to focus our work to alleviate and end poverty in Trafford.
- Pleased to secure funding at Longford Park and the deculverting of the brook and lessons to be learned in other green spaces.
- The putting together of a developer hub for Trafford for people wanting to build and is a One Stop point of information.
- The employment rate – renewing of the Trafford Educating Enterprising Skills Action Plan.
- Encouragement of the over 50's workforce back into the labour market who had decided to withdraw from the labour marker following COVID.

It was suggested that there should be an extra part under other highlights to recognise parks and green spaces which was awarded eleven green flags this summer under challenging conditions and a very small budget.

Reference was also made to the programme of urban tree planting and woodland creation and work with the City of Trees. They have officers at ten local authorities and they work with community groups and organisations.

Members attention was drawn to the health and equalities around smoking and smoking cessation and the work which is being done around the vaping and substance misuse problems in our communities and to give our residents a healthier environment. Reference was made to the highlighting in the report of the percentage take up of funded childcare for two year olds. We are second in the north west and eighth nationally so this maybe should be revisited.

It was suggested that the levelling up fund successful bid for the Partington Leisure Centre should be in the report and the promotion of health and welling of residents in Trafford.

Members attention was drawn to the improvement of EPCs and CO2 emissions referred to in Appendix 1 to the report which had not moved at all and needed some focus to improve. Also to the experienced care people that is so low, Appendix 1 refers, What are we doing about that.

The Executive Member for Climate Change acknowledged the work needed to improve EPCs but underlined the fact that this was not directly in Trafford's gift. Trafford has started to send out letters for the ECO4 Improvement Service and that every effort would be made to ensure that all residents who would qualify for the benefit would be informed. So if you are on benefits for Department and Works and Pensions you can apply for funding for energy performance improvement measures to be installed.

Members were informed that there is a lot of mistrust by residents that this offer is a scam so there is work to be done by Members to reassure residents about the scheme.

Regarding CO2 emissions, the Corporate Director of Place informed Members that we are limited as to what we can do on this aspect. It is down to what is happening in the economy. On the EPCs we are pushing where we can.

The Leader informed Members that we have been embracing the public sector decarbonising schemes so a lot of our public buildings have been through appropriate measures with a view to making an impact.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services acknowledged the problem with Care Leavers and underlined the need to stay in touch with our care experienced young people. The national target is 12 weeks but our's is a stretch target of 8 weeks. If we are measured against the national target the percentage would be 92 per cent of all the care experienced young people against our stretch target of 76.6 per cent which is a significant increase against 38 per cent in 2019-20.

With regard to oral health at Broomwood which has not had an NHS dentist on the estate for some time, the Executive Member for Health and Care informed Members that the Council will take this up with NHS colleagues with a view to alleviating this problem.

On an issue raised regarding the Central Government decision to withdraw the Council Support Fund, the Executive Member for Housing and Advice did not understand why this had been withdrawn given how well this had been received and put into use. The Council would do whatever it can with partners. The Director of Finance and Statutory S151 Officer informed Members that the Council will get some of that funding back.

In response to a query about residents whose circumstances have changed and are still living in large houses and could downsize thereby releasing the house to other families in need, the Executive Member for Housing and Advice informed Members that such a situation is rare and for the most part, people who have lived in large houses for years do not want to move. There are some websites run by Greater Manchester that can help in such cases. The Executive Members would endeavour to produce some figures for Members on the issue.

The Leader informed Members that there is scope to explore what we do with community schemes/community groups and that's why we have got additional capacity to invest in the service and we look at the art of how we partner up with others. We are fortunate that we have some examples of new decarbonised properties which we could imitate across wider areas.

The Corporate Director of Place reminded Members that the area focused approach was what Local Authorities used to do with schemes but we do not have that level of funding to emulate those types of schemes even though they would be no doubt a success. On the point of households taking out loans, it is something which could be investigated. The difficulty with that suggestion is that getting households to engage with free schemes is an uphill battle let alone getting them to pay for the work themselves.

In response to a suggestion in supporting schools to have solar panels installed or other energy performing measures outside of the public sector in terms of decarbonisation scheme, the Executive Member for Climate Change informed members that this is a body of work the Estates team is undertaking alongside the Principal Officer for Climate Change and Sustainability. The Executive Member for Climate Change further informed Members that we need to make sure that the private sector partners are as equipped as possible to drive forward carbon reduction measures by themselves.

RESOLVED: that the Executive notes the contents of the Corporate Plan Quarter 1 and 2 Report.

69. URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)

There were no items of urgent business.

70. EXCLUSION RESOLUTION

There were no matters for private consideration.

Executive
11 December 2023

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 7.21 pm