

Questions Submitted for Council – 20 March 2024

Question 1 - Submitted by Cllr Zhi

Online, on change.org, there is an internet-based petition titled 'Improve the Safety and Quality of Crossing between Altrincham Girls Grammar School Sites' started by students of Altrincham Grammar School For Girls. This petition wants a better and safer crossing between the main school and the sixth form sites, as at present the current crossing is comprised of planks of wood across a very muddy sodden pathway. Altrincham Grammar School for Girls want a safe crossing that is well-maintained by the relevant authorities.

Can the Council inform me what the Council would like to do in order to solve this issue?

Response:

There are links and pathways between the Altrincham Grammar School for girls and sixth form sites that are unfortunately not adopted and pass through areas of land that is not in the councils ownership. Therefore there are limits to what the council can actually do to improve these paths. The damage to the adjacent greenspaces to this unadopted path has occurred due to the increase in footfall that has resulted following recent expansion of the school sites; the Council will work with the school to look at a solution to approve the widening of the path into the councils green space and elsewhere. However, this will also need permission of the owner of the paths.

Question 2 - Submitted by Cllr Zhi

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, National Highways, formerly Highways England, is responsible for collecting litter on England's motorways. I have had multiple complaints from residents regarding the quantity of rubbish visible at the motorway entry-points in Trafford. Has Trafford Council written to National Highways to enquire about the accumulation of rubbish at the various motorway entry-points in Trafford?

Response:

The litter that accumulates on the slip lanes to and from junctions on the motorways that are within Trafford are the responsibility of National Highways and we do forward our concerns to them with regard to the accumulations of litter that do impact on our environment. If the public and members want to report issues they can also go online and report the issue direct via their website [National Highways Report a problem](#)

Question 3 - Submitted by Cllr Duncan

Over 12 months ago, on the 25th January 2023, in this chamber, I highlighted the urgency to address damp and mould problems for our residents throughout Trafford, more specifically the ward I represent – Manor Ward. Duly, in your formal written reply, I received a barrage of mathematical percentages as to 'what this council is doing' to address this issue.

In the same response, and in order to address my serious concern within Trafford social housing stock, it was confirmed: 'We do not yet have full figures from May 2022 to 25th January 2023 but I can advise that since we changed our processes in November we have dealt with 30 damp and mould complaints across the Borough'. Do you now have these figures?

Questions Submitted for Council – 20 March 2024

The Secretary of State also asked for a full response by the 27th January 2023. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Tom Ross advised: 'he would check whether it could be published'. Can I enquire if this response was sent to the Secretary of State, and if so, can we see a copy of the letter?

Response:

The Council has a dedicated webpage for damp and mould which contains helpful information and advice [Damp and mould \(trafford.gov.uk\)](https://trafford.gov.uk)

Prior to November 2022 the Housing Standards Team did not have a specific code to record damp and mould complaints. Since the introduction of this new coding, the team have received 126 damp and mould complaints across the housing stock as a whole. We do not routinely record the specific tenures of the homes involved as our focus is to tackle the problems identified, however it is estimated that social housing properties account for less than 5% of all complaints.

Social housing tenants are advised to contact their housing provider to use their complaints process and if that is exhausted, make a complaint to the social housing ombudsman. The Council would then intervene if the situation is not resolved. This course of action is used to focus the limited resource we have to tenants of private rented properties, who don't have the same options for recourse as social tenants. The exception to this is if the social housing tenants are vulnerable and deemed unable to progress through the complaint's procedure or the damp and mould is assessed as severe, the Housing Standards Officers will prioritise these cases to intervene and assist.

Attached (at the end of the document) is the full response sent to the Secretary of State in January 2023 – this was submitted as an online form, as required by DLUHC.

Question 4 - Submitted by Councillor Frass

At the Executive Meeting on 26th February 2024, plans were approved to accept a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant subject to conditions requiring shortfall in match funding to be made up by taking money away from approved schemes.

How can the Administration justify taking more and more money away from parks in South Trafford to plough into a park at the other end of the Borough?

Response:

The Longford Park project provides a unique opportunity to improve facilities within one of the oldest and most historic parks in the Borough. The original home of John Rylands, the Park has a long legacy of social improvement and community involvement. By upgrading many features within the park, we can help sustain its future for decades to come. At a time when more development is being directed to locations within our urban areas such as the nearby Civic Quarter, it is right that we invest in providing sustainable greenspace for existing and future residents to enjoy. For that reason it is wholly appropriate that the Council is committed to securing the benefits brought by the Longford Park initiative.

In the meantime we will not be neglecting parks elsewhere. Parks across the borough have received an annual capital investment of circa £250k p.a. for the previous 5 years and will continue at similar levels over the next couple of years as part of the MTFP. The budget will be supplemented using other grant funding and developer contributions that become available and will contribute towards improvements in infrastructure including play equipment, pathways and drainage across all the parks in the borough. The NLHF funding was a site specific bid for funds with a specific funding strategy to meet any match funding requirement over the next few years.

Questions Submitted for Council – 20 March 2024

Question 5 - Submitted by Councillor M. Taylor

I would like to submit a question to Council about the state of Halecroft Park, which is within my ward.

I would like to know:

- When will the broken railings along the entrance of Halecroft Park will be repaired, as they are a health and safety issue and an eyesore.
- When will the pond will be drained and filled in as it is not fit for purpose. Indeed, the Friends of Halecroft Park are still waiting for it to be filled in due to how unsafe it is.
- When will the wildflower meadow start to be properly maintained as it looks a mess and hasn't been cut.
- What are the plans for the pavilion as currently it is not being utilised and as such is a wasted opportunity.
- What disabled access is being implemented to make the Park more accommodating for those with disabilities as some areas are currently inaccessible.

Response:

The issue of railings and the filling in of the pond are scheduled to be undertaken early in the new financial year. Together with maintenance of the wildflower meadow and parks activities these items are discussed with Friends of Halecroft Park during the regular walkabouts that take place. With reference to the pavilion this will require investment and a business case to justify any future use / re-opening. Disabled access to all our parks is being assessed on an ongoing basis and will form part of the 25/26 capital bid for parks.

Question 6 - Submitted by Councillor Evans

It is acknowledged that secondary school places in the south of the borough are in the red zone of Trafford's Rag Reports. Should a selective school approach the council requesting to expand to accommodate the demand in their locality would the school be allowed to access this £43.08m available in the Capital Budget?

Response:

There are corrections to the question. At last night's All-Party Accounts and Audit Committee the secondary school places RAG rating was downgraded to Amber, as the Committee acknowledged the tremendous efforts that the school teams are undertaking to provide more places in the south of the borough, including the proposal to increase the PAN at Altrincham College by another 300 by 2025 – another 2 forms in every year group.

There is also not £43.08m available to spend. The unallocated balance of the Council's basic need grant allocation for 2025/26 is £9.315 million, as per the Education and Early Years Basic Need and High Needs Capital Report which went to Executive on 29 January 2024.

Questions Submitted for Council – 20 March 2024

Since 2015, around one third of pupils who achieve a place in our grammar schools live outside of Trafford. In 2023 this equated to 363 pupils. **Currently all Trafford residents who meet the entrance requirements for a selective school can achieve a local grammar school place** and so our priority is to invest in creation of additional non-selective places, for Trafford resident pupils, with the limited funding we do receive. We do not have a need for any additional selective school places.

The following table shows the proportion of non-Trafford residents in each of the year 7 cohorts at the October census each year between 2015 and 2023:

School	% Non-Trafford Residents								
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Altrincham Grammar School for Boys	26%	25%	21%	12%	6%	15%	18%	19%	15%
Altrincham Grammar School for Girls	17%	23%	19%	26%	28%	18%	24%	21%	20%
Loreto Grammar School	43%	42%	44%	43%	42%	36%	40%	42%	43%
Saint Ambrose College	45%	53%	49%	50%	55%	64%	50%	43%	54%
Sale Grammar School	18%	16%	23%	15%	1%	20%	5%	5%	10%
Stretford Grammar School	28%	42%	48%	46%	29%	37%	43%	37%	33%
Urmston Grammar School	23%	32%	23%	29%	41%	18%	38%	38%	36%
All Trafford Selective Schools	27%	32%	31%	31%	28%	28%	29%	28%	29%

Trafford Council is not the admission authority for any of the grammar schools in our area, the admission authorities for these schools (their Board of Trustees) could consider reviewing the oversubscription criteria within their admissions policies to support the sufficiency position and make sure there is a Trafford First approach.

School Place Planning and Sufficiency was scrutinised by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on 24 January 2024.

Question 7 - Submitted by Councillor Newgrosh

"We are now in the final year of the five-year Trafford Empty Homes Policy, what measures have Trafford council actually employed, over the last four years, to bring privately owned long term empty houses back into use? And how many privately owned houses have been brought back into use over the entirety of this scheme?"

Response:

The Council seeks to take a comprehensive approach to Long-term empty homes – and the problem is tackled by a number of different teams within the Authority, including Council Tax, Housing Standards and Planning Enforcement. Housing Standards Officers make every effort to co-ordinate and tackle long-term empty homes however this is alongside other responsibilities such a tackling serious disrepair, which will always take priority when there is a risk to life or likelihood of harm.

The Council respond to complaints relating to empty properties by visiting the property and making an assessment using an 'Empty Property Matrix', in accordance with the Empty Property Strategy. The Matrix allows Officers to allocate each property a

Questions Submitted for Council – 20 March 2024

unique score which is used to rank and prioritise tackling long-term empty homes. In order to make the best use of available resources only the properties that have scored highest will be actioned. In these cases, officers will attempt to trace and engage with the owner and request their proposals and timescales to return the property to use. Where the property is insecure, giving rise to vermin infestation on the land, or causing statutory nuisance, officers will take appropriate steps to ensure the owner remedies these matters. If this is unsuccessful, the officer will undertake enforcement action and works in default.

Where owners can't be traced; or are unable or unwilling to bring the property back into use, the Council must adopt a longer-term enforcement strategy. Officers will identify if certain powers can be used that allows the Council to build a case for enforced sale or compulsory purchase - both of which are costly, complex and lengthy processes; and need to be adequately resourced to be successfully progressed.

During the period of the current Empty Property Strategy, the Housing Standards Team have used their enforcement powers on multiple occasions to minimise harm to the immediate locality to secure empty properties and/or clear harbourage, vermin or accumulations of refuse on land. Two long-term empty and problematic homes have been brought back into use through enforcement action leading to considerable debts and commencement of enforced sale, which were suspended after both Owners recognised the seriousness of the Council's action and agreed to sell their properties. Without the Council's intervention these properties would have otherwise remained vacant and in a deteriorating condition, causing harm to their locality and restricting housing supply.

The Council is in the process of initiating an enforced sale of another long-term empty property in Hale; and is actively pursuing enforcement action on three empty homes in Stretford. There are other examples where officers have been successful through informal engagement and negotiation with owners, or their representatives. Officers have been able to encourage / support them to act, with the result of bringing the property back into continued housing use.

Whilst action on empty homes is led by Housing Standards Officers, they will work alongside other teams, such as Planning Enforcement and Council Tax Recovery, to utilise the widest possible range of enforcement powers and apply pressure on owners of long-term empty homes so their properties are returned to use at the earliest opportunity. Planning Enforcement recently prosecuted the owner of two long-term empty properties in Stretford for failing to comply with a S.215 Notice after they failed to **clean up the land and deal with the poor state of their buildings**.

Council Tax "Empty Property Premium" continues to be applied to long-term empty homes. Through this premium, owners are charged a progressively higher rate of Council Tax, the longer their property is left empty. Housing Standards are currently involved with two active cases and are working alongside Council Tax colleagues to recover unpaid council tax debts through liability orders, bankruptcy proceedings and seizure of property assets to return the property to use.

Housing officers also work alongside the Council's Housing Options Team to identify suitable empty homes and promote the Council's Private Sector Leasing Scheme

Questions Submitted for Council – 20 March 2024

where the property is leased to us and used for re-housing. Where appropriate we will also promote other schemes that in operation across Greater Manchester such as 'Let Us', which is a similar property leasing scheme operated by social landlords with a lease rent in return. Officers have recently started an Empty Property Working Group bringing together representatives from Housing Standards with Council Tax and Estates, to try and work more effectively and cooperatively in tackling empty properties.