

Cllr Jacqueline North

First Deputy (Finance, Resources & Transformation)

Tel: 0161 342 3016

Email: jacqueline.north@tameside.gov.uk



Our Ref: JN/AH/15012024
Ref: JB/JR/CHAIRS24
Date: 15 January 2024

Chair of Overview Panel Chairs of Scrutiny Panels

Dear Councillor Fitzpatrick,

Re: Scrutiny Mid-Year budget update 2023/24

The Director of Resources and myself write in response to the letter dated 9 November 2023, issued by Councillor Smith as the interim Chair of Overview Panel. Congratulations on your recent appointment as Chair of Audit Panel and Chair of Overview Panel. We would like to thank you and your fellow Chairs for your feedback and welcome your challenge and scrutiny as it supports robust and effective financial planning and decision-making, which is required more than ever at this point.

We have continued to maintain transparency on reporting, however as the year has passed, formalised recovery planning has been instituted, with planning taking similar formats to those used to identify and plan for budget reductions in future years. Ongoing vigour, grip and control are being maintained through monthly financial reporting to Executive Cabinet for revenue and capital, with greater detail being undertaken at bi-monthly Star Chambers on the delivery of budget proposals and recovery plans.

Members of scrutiny will be able to gain further clarity on the financial planning model and how Directorates identify and deliver achievable savings in both the political party briefings and the budget scrutiny sessions in January 2024. Both the Director of Resources and I are as keen as yourselves to ensure future decisions are robustly costed and achievable, and wherever possible that they do not jeopardise service quality. The outcome of this would, therefore, mean far fewer late and/or unplanned financial adjustments.

With respect to the Capital Programme, and delivery of receipts, the Asset Management Panel shares your concerns and has sought greater clarity and oversight of the delivery plan for receipts. Updates have progressed to Cabinet for disposals in December 2023 with greater use of auctions where it is the right route to market.

Scrutiny raises a key point regarding accommodation in the borough, and officers across the Council are working towards a unified accommodation sufficiency strategy, with the Director of Place leading a partnership approach with Jigsaw, the main RSL in the borough.

On the final page of your letter, you raise questions and points that may require further consideration, and we take these in turn below and overleaf as an update to you all:

- 1. The savings most at risk of not being met and actions required** – these are reported to Cabinet on a monthly basis as part of the budget monitoring report in my name. As it has become clear to the Director of Resources that savings not at risk of being met cannot be mitigated, he has implemented recovery planning in line with the Council’s Financial Regulations. No savings are being declared as undeliverable at this point; they are considered to be delayed in their implementation. Should they become undeliverable in future, Directorates and Cabinet Members are expected to find compensatory ongoing efficiencies to offset them.
- 2. Challenges and viability of non-statutory and discretionary services going forward.** The Executive Cabinet review all options put forward by officers and challenge the assumptions made where they have concerns. The Director of Resources has been clear that it doesn’t matter whether a service is statutory or discretionary, they must deliver Best Value, be “good spend” delivering outcomes for residents and businesses and that all impacts of decisions be considered in the round. This includes how the borough budgets for the ‘look and feel’ of the borough.
- 3. Financial Position following the separation from the former CCG.** Irrespective of how the local position was managed under the Strategic Commission, the Council and the NHS had to have a Section 75 pooled budget arrangement under the Better Care Fund (BCF). This is still in place, albeit with separate management arrangements with the ICB across Greater Manchester. We cannot speak for the ICB, but we do note the lack of a tri-partite agreement for children and young people, with cases being dealt with as Children’s Services progress the Continuing Care applications per young person. Adult Services are progressing on case-by-case basis, however the rules around Continuing Health Care in adults are much more tightly defined. For Children’s Services, both the Director of Children’s Services and the Director of Resources are driving conversations with their ICB counterparts to build a tri-partite agreement. The ICB are keen for it to be at Greater Manchester level, and for it to be in place by the end of 2024. In Adult Services, part of managing the financial position includes greater checklisting and support to clients who may meet CHC assessment thresholds to increase numbers in receipt of CHC where it is the right outcome – health outcomes are funded by the NHS and Social Care outcomes by the Council.
- 4. Options to alleviate significant placement costs and building greater capacity in Tameside.** Executive Cabinet share your concerns around the costs of placements. Markets across homelessness and temporary accommodation, children’s residential and adults’ residential and nursing are all constrained and fragile. This is not a Tameside issue but is faced across GM and nationally. We welcome the success of Jigsaw in obtaining grant funding for temporary accommodation in Tameside since Scrutiny held their sessions in November. The GMCA are leading on Project Skyline, which should deliver further residential places for young people in GM. Adult Services are working proactively with private landlords to secure accommodation for out of borough resettlement.
- 5. Issues and challenges specific to workforce and external markets.** The issues specific to workforce are not unique to Tameside, the examples of Social Workers and Educational Psychologists are national in nature. Tameside has responded to the challenge through innovative recruitment practices, such as the Social Work Employment Fairs that allow candidates to bring a CV and be interviewed in the same day if they meet the criteria for the role. In fact the Local Government Chronicle



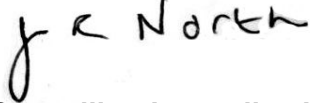
shortlisted us in the Best Innovation in Recruitment category at the LGC Workforce Awards 2023. Our nomination was for our recent recruitment campaign for adult and children's social care – a collaborative project involving HR Recruitment and management teams across Adult and Children's Social Care, Marketing and Communications and colleagues from the Greater Jobs team. Whilst we did not win we were highly recommended.

6. **Facilities Management arrangements and making the best use of Tameside's buildings and venues across all towns** – The Council continually reviews the estate to ensure we retain the space needed to deliver our services from and through. Other sites are considered as to whether they can generate an income stream or deliver a capital receipt and be disposed of to support ambitions around economic regeneration across the borough.
7. **Pivotal role of the Council's asset management and disposal plans.** This point is covered in the answer above.
8. **Access to health funding and contributions** – Children's Services, whilst lacking a tri-partite agreement, under the new Director's leadership are working much more closely with colleagues in Health in a multi-disciplinary manner to ensure the right organisations fund the right costs as laid down in law. Recent income increases will be reported to Executive Cabinet in due course.
9. **Continuing to grow our tax base** – the Executive recognises the need to grow the tax base, and the Director of Resources has made it clear that this needs to be for both Council Tax and business rates. This will support the borough to deliver more quality housing, such as those proposed at Godley Green, and create the conditions for inward investment and business growth such as those proposed for the Ashton Mayoral Development Zone, as well as those that will be delivered through the Levelling Up Fund in Stalybridge.
10. **Demand projections and a need for greater mechanisms of prevention and early intervention; overarching plan, population growth, future pressures / dependency** – The Directors of Adults, Children's and Place are working closely to develop a unified sufficiency strategy whilst also ensuring that emphasis is placed on prevention and early intervention in the key demand-led areas of their Directorates. These are underpinned by population estimates, demographics and Joint Strategic Needs Assessments. The Director of Population Health acts as a critical friend for all early intervention and prevention proposals and has enabled best use of the Household Support Fund in 2023/24 to ensure we maximise support to residents.
11. **A relentless and uncompromising focus on achieving outcomes and making best use of the money available for the residents and businesses we serve** – I am in full agreement with this and it is widely recognised at both Cabinet and officer leadership that focusing on outcomes and "good spend" will ensure we extract the most value from the Tameside pound. Better outcomes, by and large, cost less.
12. **Improving customer interactions and ability of the Council to respond through enhancements in digital solutions and website navigation** – I am keen to stress that digital improvements are high on the list of enabling actions to support the delivery of future budget rounds. The Director of Resources will be bringing these improvements through at pace over the next two years.



The Director of Resources wishes to reiterate that Scrutiny represents a key plank of sound and effective decision-making and is key to helping hold the Executive to account. The need to incorporate financial performance into planned Scrutiny Panel activity is paramount, and both he and I welcome the proposal to cover financial performance in greater depth at Scrutiny Panels going forward.

Yours sincerely,



**Councillor Jacqueline North
First Deputy (Finance, Resources & Transformation)**



**Ashley Hughes
Director of Resources**

