

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2017

Present:

Councillor Rawlins - In the Chair

Councillors Ahmed Ali [CESC/17/07 - CESC/17/09], Alijah, Cookson, Cooley, Fletcher- Hackwood, Grimshaw, Hassan, Knowles and Sharif Mahamed

Councillor S Murphy, Statutory Deputy Leader

Councillor B Priest, Deputy Leader

Councillor Andrews, Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing

Councillor Flanagan, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Culture and Leisure

Councillor E Newman, ward councillor for Woodhouse Park

Apologies:

Councillors Evans and Madeleine Monaghan

CESC/17/07 Minutes

Decision:

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2017 as a correct record.

CESC/17/08 Budget Process 2017-2020: Consideration of the Executive's Draft Budget Proposals and Directorate Budget Reports and Business Plans

The Committee received a report of the Director of Neighbourhoods and the City Treasurer which provided an update on the Council's financial position and set out next steps in the budget process, including scrutiny of the Executive's draft Budget proposals and Directorate Budget and Business Plan reports and accompanying delivery plans by this Committee.

The Statutory Deputy Leader reported that this was the seventh successive year of funding cuts from national government. She advised that the airport dividend had been used to mitigate the impact of this but that the funding cuts would still have a negative impact on the city. She outlined the process that was being followed in setting the three-year budget.

The Committee discussed the response rates to the budget consultation, including the variation between different groups of people, such as young people, older people and different ethnic groups and how response rates from under-represented groups could be improved in future consultations. Members discussed the importance of using different methods to communicate with people including face to face communication and paper copies of the consultation documents, as well as online methods. The Chair advised that it was important to have a clear process to communicate with the public what had happened following the budget consultation to demonstrate that their views had been listened to.

Members commented that it was important to utilise networks such as the Age-Friendly Manchester Board and tenants' and residents' associations to engage with local residents. A member advised that ward councillors were a good source of local knowledge on how best to communicate with people in their ward. The Committee agreed to support the continued use of paper copies of consultation documents to encourage responses from groups of people who are less likely to respond to an online consultation. The Chair requested that the Committee receive further reports on levels of engagement with different groups of people, including young people and older people, and for this to include consideration of how ward councillors' local knowledge and networks such as the Age Friendly Manchester Board and tenants' and residents' associations could be used to improve engagement.

The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources praised the work of the Deputy Leader and the Communications Team in improving public engagement with the budget consultation process. He outlined how the Council had used a range of methods to increase responses from under-represented groups. The Executive Member for Culture and Leisure outlined how the Council had engaged with Youth Council members to seek their views on the budget. The Statutory Deputy Leader advised that the 'budget conversation' had successfully used the Our Manchester approach to engage with local residents.

The Deputy Leader advised members that communication was within the remit of the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee which had requested a report on the lessons learnt from the budget consultation process. The Chair requested that this report also be circulated to the members of the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee.

A member noted that the equality data on responses to the consultation did not include the percentage of respondents who were lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) and what percentage were disabled and asked whether this data had been collected. The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources advised that additional equality data had been gathered which had not been included in the report and that this could be circulated to the Committee, to which members agreed.

The Director of Neighbourhoods outlined the budget proposals within the report which were within the Committee's remit. Members commented that their views on the budget savings options had been listened to and taken into account by the Executive when considering which of the options should be taken forward. The Director of the Neighbourhoods answered members' questions on waste and recycling and on plans for Wythenshawe Market.

Decisions

1. To support the continued use of paper copies of consultation documents to encourage responses from groups of people who are less likely to respond to an online consultation.
2. To receive further reports on levels of engagement with different groups of people, including young people and older people, and to include consideration

of how ward councillors' local knowledge and networks such as the Age Friendly Manchester Board and tenants' and residents' associations can be used to improve engagement.

3. To request that the report that Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee have requested on lessons learnt from the budget consultation process also be circulated to members of this Committee.
4. To request that the additional equality monitoring information from the consultation responses be circulated to members of the Committee.

CECSC/17/09 Support Available to Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Manchester

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Adult Social Services which provided information on the support available to asylum seekers and refugees and explained how this support was accessed. It included information on support for asylum seekers and refugees who were victims of domestic abuse. It also included an update on how the requirements of the Council Motion 'Mutual Respect and Community Cohesion' passed on 20 January 2016 were being addressed. The Strategic Lead Commissioner introduced the report across its main themes.

The Committee welcomed the ward councillor for Woodhouse Park, who had proposed the Council motion referred to in the report. He provided an overview of the motion, advising it was a wider issue that did not only relate to asylum seekers and refugees and that it had been passed unanimously by full Council. He asked that the complete wording of the motion be circulated to members of the Committee, to which the Chair agreed. He highlighted that it had been agreed that the Council should produce an Annual Report on the measures that it had taken to promote mutual respect and community cohesion amongst the people of Manchester. He advised that, while he supported the actions which had been taken, more could be done and that he had not received any updates from Council officers in the past year on what was being done in response to his motion. The Chair advised that the Committee would be receiving a more detailed report on Community Cohesion at a future meeting which would include this annual report and he would be kept informed of this.

In response to a member's question, the Strategic Lead Commissioner reported that Serco had been awarded the contract for asylum seeker dispersal following a long tendering process, at a time when the number of people seeking asylum was a lot lower than it had been in recent years. She reported that Serco had struggled to find suitable accommodation for asylum seekers when the numbers were at their highest but advised that the numbers had since reduced and Serco were now able to find sufficient accommodation. She also informed members that Manchester City Council had worked to increase the dispersal area and that all north west authorities across Lancashire and Merseyside were now accepting asylum seekers.

In response to a member's question, the Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing reported that a decision had been made at a Greater Manchester level that the region would not participate in the Syrian refugee programme until an equitable, fully-funded national scheme for asylum seekers was in place, which resulted in all local authorities across the country receiving an equitable number, not just relying on

those that had taken part previously. The Strategic Lead Commissioner advised that, if a community in Greater Manchester wanted to support a family through the government's community sponsorship scheme, this would be considered on a case by case basis.

A member requested further information on support for female asylum seekers fleeing domestic abuse, including whether the recommendations from Safety 4 Sisters North West, a migrant women's rights organisation, had been shared with statutory and voluntary organisations. The Statutory Deputy Leader advised that the Lead Member for Women was chairing a working group of statutory and voluntary organisations supporting victims of domestic abuse and that she would ask her to provide an update on these recommendations. She advised that, despite the budget cuts, the Council had worked to protect women's refugees. The Chair requested that the Committee receive feedback from the Lead Member for Women regarding the working group on Domestic Violence.

The Strategic Lead Commissioner informed members that the Greater Manchester councils were bidding for funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)'s Controlling Migration Fund. She advised that, if successful, this would be used to support people who were newly granted refugee status to secure a housing tenancy, as they were required to leave the accommodation they were placed in as an asylum seeker within 28 days of the decision. A member welcomed this funding bid.

Members discussed the importance of refugees being able to access ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes to enable them to integrate and expressed concern about the impact of funding cuts from national government. The Strategic Lead Commissioner reported that Greater Manchester councils were also seeking funding from the Controlling Migration Fund to deliver ESOL in a way that could help the maximum number of people, for example, through using online teaching. A member informed the Committee of the benefits the Talk English project was bringing within her ward. The Chair requested that the Committee receive updates on ESOL provision. A member requested that the relevant Committee consider what support was provided for asylum seekers wishing to access higher education.

The Executive Member reported that he would update members on the outcome of the bids to the DCLG's Controlling Migration Fund.

A member requested information on the support unaccompanied asylum seeking children received when they entered the UK education system, including support in learning English and addressing any other needs, such as mental health issues. The Chair advised that she would speak to the Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee about which Committee should consider this issue.

The Chair requested that the Committee receive a further report at an appropriate time to include case studies of asylum seekers and refugees who had received support within Manchester and that speakers from relevant organisations such as the Boaz Trust and the Immigration Aid Unit be invited to attend.

Decisions

1. To note that the Committee will be receiving a report on Community Cohesion at a future meeting, to incorporate the Annual Report on the measures taken to promote mutual respect and community cohesion amongst the people of Manchester. To arrange a date when this report will be considered and invite the ward councillor for Woodhouse Park.
2. To request that a copy of the Council motion on Mutual Respect and Community Cohesion be circulated to members of the Committee.
3. To request feedback from the Lead Member for Women on her working group on Domestic Violence, including an update on the Safety 4 Sisters recommendations.
4. To note that the Chair will discuss with the Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee which Committee should consider the support available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children when they start school.
5. To request that the Committee receive updates on ESOL provision as an item for information in the Overview Report.
6. To request that the Economy Scrutiny Committee consider what support is provided for asylum seekers wishing to access higher education.
7. To receive a further report at an appropriate time to include case studies of asylum seekers and refugees who have received support within Manchester and to invite speakers from relevant organisations such as the Boaz Trust and the Immigration Aid Unit.
8. To note that the Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing will update members on the outcome of the bids to the DCLG's Controlling Migration Fund.

CESC/17/10 Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted. The overview report contained a list of key decisions yet to be taken within the Committee's remit, responses to previous recommendations and the Committee's work programme, which the Committee was asked to approve.

The Chair reminded members that from May 2017 the Committee's meetings would take place on Thursday mornings at 10.00 am.

Appendix 4: Part 2 of the Budget Process 2017-2020 report was received late and published in a supplementary agenda as it was awaiting sign-off.

Decision:

To approve the work programme.