

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2016

Present:

Councillor Peel – In the Chair

Councillors Azra Ali, Shaukat Ali, Chohan, Hughes, Igbon, Kirkpatrick, Leech, Longsdon, Ludford, Noor, Paul, Rawson, Sadler and Sheikh

Councillor N Murphy, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Councillor B Priest, Deputy Leader

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Culture and Leisure

Councillor Battle, Executive Member for Environment

Councillor Akbar, Assistant Executive Member

NESC/16/28 Minutes

Decision:

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2016 as a correct record.

NESC/16/29 Committee Support

The Chair expressed his thanks and congratulations on behalf of the Committee to Lee Walker, the previous Committee Support Officer, who had now commenced a new job.

NESC/16/30 Budget Savings Options

The Committee received a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Growth and Neighbourhoods) and the City Treasurer entitled 'Budget Process 2017-2020: Consideration of Options'. The report and the accompanying Directorate Budget report at appendix 1 set out briefly the financial considerations, current forecast position and savings options for the period to 2019/20. The financial position was based on the best information available at the time. Appendix 2 set out the detailed findings of the recent budget conversation held with residents, businesses, partners and other stakeholders of Manchester which are informing the strategic plans for the city.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods introduced the report across its main themes. He explained that the Council did not support the cuts that were being made as a result of a reduction in government funding to the Council. He added that the savings options were based on information available at the present time; but the actual extent of required cuts would not be known until the government delivered its Autumn Statement at the end of November 2016. The Deputy Chief Executive drew member's attention to those parts of the report which fell under the Committee's remit. She encouraged members to identify any options they would not want to pursue; dependent on the level of cuts required. The Chair welcomed the improved process for the scrutiny of the Council's budget in particular the increased resident consultation. However, he commented that more detail was required on the overall budget.

Members asked for clarification on various issues. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that the spending priorities noted within the report were detailed further in the Growth and Neighbourhoods Business Plan, an updated version of which would be submitted to the January 2017 meeting of the Committee. In respect of the use of Council reserves she advised she would respond to the member directly. In respect of the impact on staff arising from the savings options she advised that this was detailed in the final column of the table in Appendix 1. She added that the Council did operate 'business as usual' Voluntary Severance/Voluntary Early Retirement (VS/VER) schemes but that no enhancements would be offered at the present time. Members discussed the 'Our Manchester' approach and felt that staffing reductions may detract from the implementation of this; to which the Deputy Chief Executive conceded. She described initiatives in Wigan which had delivered better outcomes for residents and resulted in savings over the longer term.

Members discussed the savings options identified in respect of waste. A member questioned whether the contribution made by the Council to the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority (GMWDA) was fair. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods responded that it was correct under the terms of the current contract but consideration was being given to renegotiation of the contract. Members noted that the recent reductions to bin size should result in a reduced waste disposal charge. The Head of Commissioning and Delivery confirmed that there were no proposed service cuts to waste only improvement and efficiency savings and described the detail. In response to a members query the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods confirmed that disposal costs included the disposal of side waste, that the contractor was obliged to collect side waste, and that members could contact him directly regarding any issues.

Members discussed the problems of recycling in apartment blocks, which Manchester had a higher proportion of than surrounding local authorities; and which resulted in increased waste disposal charges. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods described some of the work that was ongoing to tackle this. A member said more needed to be done, in particular developing a planning condition to encourage recycling facilities for new developments within the city. A member highlighted the work of the Waste and Recycling Task and Finish Group and noted that a report on waste would be submitted to the December meeting where this could be discussed in more detail. Members noted that this was a priority for residents and in addition to the scheduled waste reports requested further information on waste in respect of the Council's budget be brought to the Committee's December meeting,

Members discussed compliance and enforcement. The Strategic Lead Compliance Enforcement & Community Safety explained that the savings options for the animal welfare service were improvement and efficiency savings and not service reduction. She said the Council would still carry out its statutory functions in respect of stray dog collection but would cease some of its 'softer' activities such as attendance at community events and running a facebook page. She added consideration was also being given to outsourcing some services. A member said that persistent dog foulers should be targeted. The Strategic Lead described the difficulties of obtaining evidence in order to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) In response to a query she responded that staff across a number of teams were authorised to issue FPN's. In

response to a query regarding the Neighbourhoods Service she advised that the funding partner was CityCo.

Members agreed that recent years had seen justified increases to compliance and enforcement. Members welcomed the increased staff within the out of hours service and stressed the importance of this area of work. A member said that if out of hours staff reduced this would increase the workload of day staff; and may even result in more work because any issues were not dealt with there and then. Members who were also members of the Council's Licensing Committee praised the vital information provided by out of hours compliance staff. Members agreed that they would not wish to see any reductions to either daytime or out of hours compliance staff where possible; and requested further information on this be brought to the Committee's December meeting.

In respect of grounds maintenance members discussed the savings option of the removal of the fine turf team. A member queried why the cost of maintaining the bowling greens was so high in the first place. Members agreed that bowling greens were focal points for the community and this service reduction option may be of concern to both Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee and Health Scrutiny Committee members. A member asked whether consideration could be given to communities or groups helping to maintain the bowling greens themselves. Members requested further information on this be brought to the Committee's December meeting.

Members discussed the savings options around Neighbourhood Teams. They noted the important role of both Neighbourhood Teams and the Neighbourhood Investment Fund (which was scrutinised by Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee) and felt that any cuts to these would impact on the delivery of the 'Our Manchester' approach. Members stressed the important role of Neighbourhood Teams in supporting both local residents and councillors. Members agreed that they would not wish to see any reductions to Neighbourhood Teams where possible and requested further information on this be brought to the Committee's December meeting.

The Chair noted that no savings options had been identified in respect of Planning and Building Control and asked for more detail on whether potential savings have been investigated to be brought to the December meeting of the Committee.

The Chair and other members also noted that members have not received the overall departmental budget and spending proposals and so are not in a position to make alternative savings proposals. Members asked for further details to be provided at the December meeting in order to be able to make a more fully informed decision.

Decision:

1. To welcome the improved budget process and increased engagement with residents
2. To request further detail on the overall departmental budget and spending proposals to be provided at the December meeting in order to be able to make a more fully informed decision.

3. To request more detailed information regarding the current savings options be brought to the December meeting of the Committee including:
 - a. Waste
 - b. Compliance and Enforcement
 - c. The Neighbourhoods Service
 - d. Grounds Maintenance
 - e. Neighbourhood Teams
 - f. Planning and Building Control

NESC/16/31 Manchester Contracts and Highway Maintenance

The Committee received a report of the Director of Highways which provided an update to the Highways Maintenance Report presented to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee in January 2016 regarding the methodology / approach associated with both the reactive and programmed maintenance programmes and details measures put in place to improve the service. At members request the Director of Commercial Services was in attendance should members have any queries regarding Manchester Contracts. The Director of Highways introduced the report across its main themes.

Members welcomed the improvements that had been made to date. Members asked for clarification on a number of points including the rationale around the different cycles and timescales for planned maintenance, which roads were a, b or c and whose responsibility they were; how long it took for repairs to be completed; and what percentage of repairs were checked. The Citywide Highways Manager explained that priority was given to repairs based on risk which was dependent on factors such as whether the repair was situated on a key route in and out of the city, or near a flood plain, schools or commercial facilities. He offered to provide an item for information to the Committee which explained the road classification system and ownership to which members agreed. In respect of marked areas he explained the process and that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) was 20 working days adding that priority could be given if required.

In response to a members query regarding what was required to clear the backlog of gullies that required cleansing. The City wide Highways Manager responded that 4 gully machines were needed to clear all gullies over an 18 month cycle. However, additional resources would be required over the next 12 months to clear the backlog. The Director of Highways added that a ten year investment plan was currently being drafted for the Highways Service which included drainage and structures. In response to a members query regarding the cost of the backlog the Director of Highways responded that this would be included within the investment plan which was currently being drafted. The Chair asked whether the options delivery report was part of this plan, expressing interest in the delivery report. The Executive Member for the Environment advised that a capital investment strategy for the city would be produced as part of the Council's budget setting process. The Chair asked for a future update on the options delivery report.

In response to members queries the Citywide Highways Manager explained the process for carrying out repairs, checks and re-inspections including before and after photos. In response to a members concern that residents could not currently upload

photos to the Councils website the Citywide Highways Manager advised he would ask the web team to address this. Members raised ward specific issues, and he offered to respond directly to those members.

A member made a number of queries. The Director of Highways responded that the prime purpose of the capital plan was maintaining the current highways but added that a small amount would be included for the development of projects and to enable consideration given to match funding. In response the Citywide Highways Manager explained the process of jet-patching which was being trialled at present and was often very effective. He said the process did not appear to work as well in damp conditions or high frequency routes. In respect of paint being used on the highways he advised there were strict legal processes to be followed which often required this. In respect of the potential re-use of tarmac the Director of Highways responded that this would be given consideration. However he noted that sometimes this would not be appropriate, for instance where a thin layer of tarmac covered a concrete carriageway. In respect of a members suggestion that the Council should grit cycleways the Executive Member for the Environment advised she was in discussions regarding this at present.

Members discussed persistent blockages and what more could be done to address these. The Citywide Highways Manager explained that gully cleansing was a constant process. Firstly a team would attend to clear the gully, for blockages a jetting team would follow. If jetting did not work there may be an issue underground such as tree roots and a third team would attend to dig down and identify the problem. He added that the investment plan would include detail of mechanisms to deal with persistent problems.

Members discussed severe weather and what could be done in response to this. The Citywide Highways Manager explained that there was work ongoing at the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) level to address this and assured members that contingency plans were in place.

Decisions:

1. To note that the Citywide Highways Manager would provide an item for information which explained the road classification system and ownership in Manchester
2. To request a future update on the Highways Delivery Plan.

NESC/16/32 Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which contained key decisions within the Committee's remit and responses to previous recommendations was submitted for comment. Members were also invited to agree the Committee's future work programme.

The report contained an Item for Information on the options for the delivery of carbon literacy training to members. Members agreed that option 3 was the preferred option but agreed to both options 2 and 3 in order to encourage more people to attend. In response to a members concern regarding when the training would be offered the Deputy Chief Executive (Growth and Neighbourhoods) responded that members

would be consulted regarding their availability for this. She added that the Council's Senior Management Team were committed to Carbon Literacy. The Chair congratulated her on achieving accreditation.

The Chair noted that some items planned for the December meeting would be deferred until late January in order to give consideration to the Budget items. A member asked that the Cycle City report be considered sooner than then.

Decisions:

1. To recommend that Options 2 and 3 are pursued for the Carbon literacy training.
2. To note the report and approve the work programme