

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2017

Present:

Councillor Peel – In the Chair

Councillors Appleby, Azra Ali, Shaukat Ali, Chohan (NESC/17/07-09) Hughes, Igbon, Kirkpatrick, Leech, Marshall, Noor, Paul, Rawson, Sadler and Sheikh

Councillor N Murphy, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Councillor Battle, Executive Member for Environment

Councillor Flanagan, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

Councillor B Priest, Deputy Leader

Councillor Akbar, Assistant Executive Member

Apologies:

Councillor Ludford

NESC/17/07 Minutes

Decision:

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2017 as a correct record.

NESC/17/08 The Council's Budget 2017-2020

The Committee received a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Growth and Neighbourhoods) and 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 Committee were asked to consider and make recommendations to the Executive on those draft budget proposals which are within its remit and to comment on draft Directorate Business Plans and Delivery plans which have been designed to ensure the Council delivers high quality services and outcomes for residents, as well as a balanced budget, across the three financial years 2017/18-2019/20. The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources introduced the report across its main themes.

Members discussed the public consultation which had taken place regarding the Council's budget. Members welcomed improvements made to the budget consultation process following previous years but also raised a number of concerns. A member commented that some of the questions were confusing and asked whether more could be done to encourage residents to complete the questionnaire as there was a high number of questionnaires started that were not completed. Another member suggested that the questions were too lengthy. A member welcomed the efforts made with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities to encourage them to engage but asked what more could be done to overcome any barriers to engagement. She suggested that members could help promote engagement within their wards. A member suggested that the consultation be made available in community languages. A member added that since response rates

varied between consultations it would be useful to compare the response rate this year with that of previous years budget consultations. The Chair noted that consideration needed to be given to the resource available to carry out consultations. The Committee noted that Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee considered Corporate Communications and agreed to refer their comments to them.

Members discussed the report itself and agreed that scrutiny of the budget was both difficult and complex. Members suggested that in future reports could be provided which were more relevant to the remit of each Committee. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods explained that the Council only had a short time scale within which to produce these reports following confirmation of the settlement from the government. The Chair suggested that instead the cover report could provide more clarity on the relevance of the information contained within the appendices for each Committee. Members acknowledged that 'Appendix 3: The Executive's Draft Budget Proposals (Consolidated Schedule)' included which Scrutiny Committee was responsible for scrutinising the various savings options.

A member asked for an update on the Committee's request to consult with users of the bowling greens. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the consultation was ongoing and that the original savings option of £170,000 had now been revised to £100,000. He added that this saving was proposed for the 2018/19 year in order to give adequate time for consultation. The Committee noted that bowling greens were also of interest to Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee as they considered Leisure. The Committee requested an Item for Information following the consultation to be provided to members of both Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee and Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee.

Members discussed waste and raised concerns that the proposed additional savings may not be achieved following the reduction in size of domestic bins. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods responded that he felt the savings were achievable. The Chair described some of the work that was ongoing by the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority (GMWDA) to reduce disposal costs by securing a better deal at a European level and to incentivise the recycling market. In response to a member's query regarding proposals to generate income from academy schools the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods explained this was about ensuring consistency of charging. Members noted that an update on Waste and Recycling was included on the Committee's work programme.

In response to a member's query regarding bereavement services the Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources confirmed that it was not intended to increase the prices of existing services; this was about introducing new or improved services which would generate income.

The Chair thanked the officers and Executive Members for providing the report and noted that the Committee's previous comments regarding the budget options had been taken into account within the Executive's budget proposals.

Decisions:

1. To note the report and to note that the Committees views regarding the budget options had been taken into account when formulating the budget proposals.
2. To note members' comments regarding the public consultation and provide these for information to members of Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee.
3. To request an 'Item for Information' be provided to members at an appropriate time on the outcome of the consultation with users of the Bowling Greens. To request that this also be shared with members of Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee.

NESC/17/09 Housing Revenue Account and Northwards Housing

The Committee received a report of the City Treasurer and Strategic Director (Development) which had informed Executive of the outcome of the review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and how the City Council delivers its housing management services and the options available. The Director of Housing introduced the report across its main themes. He explained this was further to a request made by the Committee in January 2016 when they had considered the Housing Revenue Account 2016/17 to 2018/19 as part of the Council's budget setting process. He advised at that time that a full review of the long term viability of the Housing Revenue Account, based on government policy would be undertaken within the next 12 months and that members would be kept informed of this activity.

A member asked whether the governments 1% rent reduction requirement for social housing tenants had impacted on the Council's ability to build more houses. The Director of Housing confirmed that the reductions to rental income had negatively impacted on the HRA which was previously buoyant and generated a surplus. He said that were the HRA in surplus this could be used to build houses should the Council choose to do so. However, the rent reduction had resulted in the HRA being in deficit over the longer term and this needed to be addressed. He added that some housing developments were planned using funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The Deputy Leader added that the rationale was to reduce Housing Benefit costs to the government but it had inadvertently resulted in restricting the ability of social housing providers to finance new developments.

A member asked why Private Finance Initiatives (PFI's) were not considered a viable option for Northwards. The Deputy Leader advised that the government had now ended the PFI programme; adding that when this decision was taken some projects were allowed to complete such as the one in Brunswick but the Council's historical plans for a Collyhurst PFI could not be taken forward.

A member asked for more information on the legal restriction on the Alderly Edge bungalows; noting that the bungalows would generate revenue for the Council were they sold. The Head of Housing explained that sale of the properties to the Peaks and Plains Housing Association was not possible at the present time due to a legal covenant which granted an adjoining property owner first refusal of the land should the properties be sold. He added that the covenant would only expire upon death of that person. Executive had therefore agreed that Peaks and Plains Housing

Association should manage the properties for the present time with a view to reviewing this over the longer term.

Decision:

To note the report

[Cllr Appleby declared a personal interest as a board member for Northwards Housing]

NESC/17/10 Rogue Landlords

The Committee received a report of the Deputy Chief Executive - Growth and Neighbourhoods which provided an overview of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funded work undertaken in 2016 to tackle rogue landlords. The Strategic Lead Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety introduced the report across its main themes. She explained that this was a discrete three month project and as such the Council focused on properties where it already knew there were issues and employed a multi agency approach. She described some of the issues investigated as part of the project including disrepair, fire safety concerns, anti social behaviour and waste. She added that the Council brought six prosecution cases against two landlords as part of this project which also acted as a deterrent to other rogue landlords. She stressed the importance of proactively targeting resources and encouraged input from members regarding properties where a proactive approach was needed.

Members welcomed the report but were concerned whether this type of work could continue in light of the Council's budget restrictions. A member noted that a report had recently been provided to the Committee outlining the Council's plans to implement Selective Licensing for private rented properties within certain areas of the city; adding that he was also aware that the government had recently consulted on expanding the Mandatory Licensing Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's). A member asked whether the Council could recoup its costs from fines levied against rogue landlords. The Strategic Lead responded that this was a discrete project with funding provided from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) attached; however resources were continually reviewed and the team worked closely with colleagues across the Council and external organisations including Greater Manchester Police (GMP), the Home Office, and Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC). She emphasised the importance of adopting a pro-active approach and of working with other teams and organisations to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes with restricted resources. The Neighbourhood Manager (Citywide) added that licensing schemes for private rented properties were helpful as they enabled the Council to recover its costs by charging a fee for the licence. She said that the Council did recoup costs where it was possible to do so, for example the Council was able to charge landlords for the service of certain enforcement notices. She added that the government would be making some changes through the Housing and Planning Act which would enable local authorities to recoup costs in addition to pursuing prosecutions.

In response to a member's query as to how vulnerable tenants were being supported the Strategic Lead advised that the Council worked closely with a range of organisations including the housing and homelessness charity Shelter; to which tenants could be referred. She added that the aim of the project was to ensure that tenants were not left in poor housing conditions.

In response to members' queries as to how they could contribute to this work the Strategic Lead advised that members could feed in through the ward co-ordination process or contact her or the Neighbourhood Manager (Citywide) directly. She added that a number of locations had been identified for future projects and she would consult with members regarding their priorities for action. The Chair added that it would also be helpful for ward members to be notified where action was taking place within their ward.

Decision:

To note the report.

NESC/17/11 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 Chair advised that he had agreed to defer the report on the Cycle City Ambition Grant and it was now scheduled to be brought to the meeting to be held on 28 February 2017. He also suggested that the report on Waste and Recycling scheduled for the 28 February meeting be deferred to the new municipal year to enable a full quarter of performance information to be included and a report on 'Clean and Green' be added to the work programme to which members agreed.

The Committee agreed the updated terms of reference and work programme for the Air Quality Task and Finish Group.

The Chair noted that a petition had been received with over 1000 signatures which warranted consideration at the next meeting of the relevant scrutiny committee (Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee) under the Council's Petitions Scheme.

The Chair reminded members that it had been agreed the Committee would complete their Carbon Literacy face to face training as a group and members were asked to save the afternoon of 28 March 2017 for this. Where members had already completed the online training they would not have to complete it again. However, members that had not yet completed the e-learning would need to do this prior to the face to face session and would be provided with details of how to do this. The Deputy Chief Executive (Growth and Neighbourhoods) added that improvements had been made to the online training so this could now be accessed from a variety of electronic devices. The Chair added that whilst this session was for members of the Committee any additional places would be offered to all members.

The Delivery Plan Growth and Neighbourhoods (Appendix 4 of the report on the Council's Budget 2017-2020) was received late as it was awaiting sign off and was published in a supplementary agenda.

Decisions:

1. To note the report and approve the work programme subject to the above additions.
2. To approve the updated terms of reference and work programme for the Air Quality Task and Finish Group.