

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 7 February 2019

Present:

Councillor Hacking (Chair) – in the Chair [CESC/19/06, CESC/19/08 - CESC/19/11]
Councillors Andrews, M Dar, Douglas, Evans, Fletcher-Hackwood, Rawlins and Rawson

Also present:

Councillor N Murphy, Deputy Leader
Councillor S Murphy, Statutory Deputy Leader
Councillor Ollerhead, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources
Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Schools, Culture and Leisure

Chief Inspector Cherie Buttle, Greater Manchester Police (GMP)
PC David Fisher, GMP

Apologies:

Councillors Collins, Cooley and Kirkpatrick

CESC/19/6 Minutes

The Chair informed Members that the Committee would receive the information it had requested on the Council resources being invested in core events in a report to its meeting on 7 March 2019.

Decisions

1. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2019 as a correct record.
2. To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Our Manchester Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Fund Task and Finish Group held on 3 January 2019.

CESC/19/7 Begging and people who beg in the city centre

[Councillor Hacking declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in this item, due to his partner being employed by Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH), left the room, and took no part in discussions. Councillor Evans was nominated Chair in his absence and chaired the meeting for this item only.]

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Strategic Development) and the Chief Operating Officer (Neighbourhoods) which provided information on the proactive partnership work that was being undertaken in relation to begging.

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report, which included:

- The context;
- Begging in Manchester;
- The emerging intelligence picture; and
- Next steps.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- That the data on the age of people begging in the city centre focused on those between the ages of 26 and 45, whereas those outside that age range were likely to need more support, and to request further information on the younger and older age groups;
- What was being done to improve the way the Council and GMP supported and motivated individuals who were begging to seek support and change their lives;
- The difficulty of separating the issues of rough sleeping and begging and the importance of scrutinising these two issues together, even though they fell within the remit of different scrutiny committees;
- Whether there was evidence of organised begging run by gangmasters; and
- What was the impact of the Big Change initiative, which encouraged the public to donate to a fund which provided people facing homelessness with practical items to support a long-term change.

The City Centre Public Services Manager informed Members that approximately 10% of those begging were under the age of 26. She reported that numbers diminished after the age of 55 because of the range of support services available to older people. She informed the Committee that young people who were begging were asked what support they needed and signposted to services and that, where there were safeguarding concerns, appropriate referrals were made. She advised Members that most of the young people who were begging were already known to officers working in this area.

The City Centre Public Services Manager reported that the Council and GMP had already made significant progress in making their systems work more effectively and in an integrated way to address the issue of begging and how individuals could be supported to change their lives. She reported that the criminal justice system was used where individuals refused to accept offers of help to change their behaviour and that officers had been working with the Crown Prosecution Service and the Probation Service to encourage the use of sentencing options such as a requirement to attend drug rehabilitation services, which could positively change the individual's behaviour, rather than just issuing a fine. Chief Inspector Cherie Buttle from GMP reported that the police had four officers in the city centre dedicated to dealing with rough sleeping and begging and that all officers received training on this. She advised Members that the first approach was to signpost the individual to appropriate services. She reported that enforcement was also used where appropriate but that those brought into custody were also signposted to services and the focus was on breaking the cycle of begging.

The Community Safety Lead reported that there was not currently much evidence in relation to organised begging in Manchester but that work had recently started under

Programme Challenger, Greater Manchester's partnership approach to tackling serious organised crime, to gather information on this.

PC David Fisher from GMP reported that over £250,000 have been distributed so far by the Big Change. He reported that the public was being encouraged to donate to the Big Change, rather than giving money to beggars on the street, and that the money was used to help keep people at risk of homelessness off the streets, for example, providing clothing and other items they needed to gain and maintain employment. The Deputy Leader advised that more needed to be done to communicate the positive impact of Big Change to the public and that he would take this forward, in conjunction with the Council's Communications Team.

Decision

To request a further report on begging and rough sleeping, noting that this spans the remit of two scrutiny committees whose Members should have the opportunity to scrutinise it. To request that this report include further information in response to Members' comments, in particular further information on the work to gather evidence in relation to organised begging.

[Councillor S Murphy declared a personal interest as a trustee of MASH.]

CESC/19/8 Updated Financial Strategy and Directorate Business Plans 2019-20

Further to item CESC/18/54, the Committee received a report of the Chief Executive and the City Treasurer which provided an update on the Council's financial position and set out the next steps in the budget process, including scrutiny of the draft budget proposals and Directorate Business Plan reports by the Committee.

The Committee also received a report of the Deputy Chief Executive which set out in broad terms the Neighbourhoods Directorate's key priorities, key activities and both the revenue and capital strategy for 2019-20. In the Business Plan for the period 2017-2020, directorates had set out their proposed savings in the context of their objectives. This report set out both the progress made to date in delivering these savings and the directorate's focus over the final year of the three-year plan. This report was a refresh of the directorate's Business Plan for 2018-20 in the context of changing resources, challenges and opportunities.

The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources outlined the context of the reports, in particular the challenges presented by funding reductions from the national government. The Chief Operating Officer (Neighbourhoods) provided Members with an overview of the reports. The Executive Member for Schools, Culture and Leisure highlighted investments and improvements being made in areas within the Committee's remit.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- To welcome that the Council was investing in services which residents had stated were important to them, despite the current financial situation;
- Whether there were any plans for the returned £2.7 million from the unused central business rates levy surplus;
- How confident were officers that an additional £163,000 would be generated from parks in 2019-20;
- Request for further information on the Manchester Volunteer Inspired Programme (MCRVIP); and
- To thank officers and Executive Members for their hard work in developing the budget proposals and business plans.

The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources reported that the £2.7 million was earmarked for addressing the budget pressures on the Children's Services budget. The Executive Member for Schools, Culture and Leisure informed Members that the Council had already managed to increase the income generated from cafes and other facilities in the city's larger parks and that responses to the consultation on the Parks Strategy had indicated that residents wanted more amenities, such as cafes, in parks. He reported that the first 15 park plans were being implemented, with support from partners including volunteers, and that he was confident that the income targets could be achieved. The Strategic Lead (Parks, Leisure and Events) reported that 25% of the running costs for Manchester parks were funded by income generated through trading or secondary income from the parks. He informed the Committee that, based on benchmarking with other cities, he was confident that, with the right investment and approach, there was a lot of scope to increase the income generated from the city's parks.

In response to the question on the MCRVIP, the Strategic Lead (Parks, Leisure and Events) informed Members that many local people had volunteered to support the Commonwealth Games held in Manchester in 2002 and had expressed an interest in continuing to volunteer at future events. He reported that in 2006 the Council had secured funding to establish a volunteering bureau which was primarily focused on sport and leisure events and that this model had been successful and had subsequently been adopted by other cities. He informed the Committee that the Council was now working to expand the MCRVIP to encompass other types of volunteering opportunities. The Chief Operating Officer (Neighbourhoods) reported that officers were working with colleagues in HROD (Human Resources and Organisational Development) on how this platform could be used to link Council staff to volunteering opportunities, as Council employees were now eligible for three days of volunteering leave per year.

Decisions

The Committee:-

1. Supports the way the Council is working to continue to provide services in the face of challenging financial circumstances.
2. Requests that the report on Events, which is scheduled for the 7 March meeting, include further information on the Manchester Volunteer Inspired Programme and how it links into the events programme.

CESC/19/9 Refreshed Business Plans - Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

The Committee received a report of the Deputy Chief Executive which provided an overview of the role of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) in the Council's business planning process for 2019/2020. It outlined the context of why the Council undertook EIAs and how this process was managed to support good quality analysis which informed decision making. It also described how the Council used Equality Delivery Plans as part of this process to highlight achievements on equality in the preceding year, as well as stating its commitments to equality activity and analysis over the remaining year of this budget cycle (2019-20).

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report, which included:

- Equality analysis and business planning; and
- The schedule of EIAs.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- To note that some of the data in the EIA schedule table within the report was listed as 'to be confirmed' and to ask when this information would be available, particularly in relation to timescales;
- To request further information on the use of EIAs outside of the budget process;
- To welcome the inclusion of EIAs for the Strategic Development Directorate; and
- To note that the item in the EIA schedule table which referred to "all major residential and commercial developments" was very broad.

The Head of Workforce Strategy informed Members that some of the information which was listed as 'to be confirmed' had become available since the report was published. He advised that it was anticipated that, by the Committee's meeting on 7 March 2019, this information would be available for all the EIAs, or if there were any gaps, there would be a clear reason for this. He outlined the process for completing EIAs, reporting that the completion of EIAs was service-led with support and quality assurance from the Equalities Team. He informed Members that over the next 12 months' work would be taking place to strengthen the governance and quality assurance of EIAs, train staff and ensure that EIAs were easily accessible to the public. He acknowledged that the item on the EIA schedule relating to "all major residential and commercial developments" was very broad and advised Members that he would provide further information on this in the report to the Committee's next meeting on 7 March 2019.

Decision

To note that the Committee will want to look at some of the EIAs at a future meeting and that this will include the Affordable Housing Policy and others to be identified at a later point.

CESC/19/10 Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Infrastructure Service

The Committee received a report of the Deputy Chief Executive which provided information on the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Infrastructure Service, specifically on the co-design process and recommendations for a new VCS infrastructure service contract.

The Statutory Deputy Leader referred to the main points and themes within the report, which included:

- The co-design process;
- The co-design recommendations; and
- Next steps.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- That the findings from the work of the Our Manchester VCS Fund Task and Finish Group were also relevant to this work, for example, in relation to communication with Members and clarity for VCS groups on what support and advice they could expect from the infrastructure provider and from the Council;
- How it would be ensured that organisations which were bidding for the contract did not have an advantage over others through having been involved in the co-design process;
- The need for clarity on what support the infrastructure provider could and could not provide so that Members knew when it was appropriate to signpost VCS groups to them and so that the groups were clear on what the offer was;
- Whether it was expected that the same amount of money would be invested in the infrastructure contract or whether the service would be reduced due to budget pressures;
- How the infrastructure provider was expected to facilitate the engagement of other suitable groups, such as disability-focused organisations, in fora where it was more appropriate for them to attend;
- How greater clarity could be provided on the support that the Council and the infrastructure provider each provided in relation to Community Asset Transfers and how support for Community Asset Transfers would be done differently in future; and
- The proposal that the contract could be awarded to more than one provider and how this would work.

The Statutory Deputy Leader advised Members that it was valuable to have the existing infrastructure provider involved in the co-design process so that they could share their experience but that it was important that they and other organisations which were interested in bidding for the contract were not involved in the later stages of making decisions about the content of the contract.

The Principal Resources and Programmes Officer advised Members that she would feed back to the Programme Lead the point about ensuring clarity on what the infrastructure provider could and could not provide. She informed Members that, as part of future funding rounds for the Our Manchester VCS Fund, a representative of the Council's Programme Team would be present at meetings with the VCS groups

to ensure consistency and clarity of information for the groups. She reported that, at the present time, officers were working on the basis that the amount of money invested in the infrastructure contract was expected to be similar to that under the previous contract.

The Statutory Deputy Leader informed Members that the Council had an ambition to increase the number of Community Asset Transfers but wanted to ensure that the groups involved were able to manage the properties they were taking over and that the details of the support to be provided through this process was still being developed. She reported that there would need to be greater clarity in the final contract of the role of the infrastructure provider in facilitating the engagement of other suitable organisations in fora, where appropriate.

The Programme Development Officer reported that, if more than one provider was awarded the contract, it would be expected that the providers would work in partnership and that the work could be divided based on their expertise. The Statutory Deputy Leader clarified that the Council would consider bids from individual organisations and joint bids from more than one provider.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/19/11 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.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme.