

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 5 November 2020

This Scrutiny meeting was conducted via Zoom, in accordance with the provisions of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Present:

Councillor Hacking - In the Chair

Councillors Andrews, Chambers, Collins, M Dar, Doswell, Evans, Grimshaw, Hitchen, Kirkpatrick, Moore, Rawlins, Rawson and Russell

Also present:

Councillor Murphy, Deputy Leader

Councillor Craig, Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure

Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

Barbara Guest, Independent Choices

Apologies:

Councillor Douglas

CESC/20/41 Minutes

A Member highlighted that the information requested at the last meeting, in relation to the review of symbols across the city, had not been circulated to Members. The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure stated that he would provide this to Committee Members after the meeting.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport provided a brief update following the item at the previous meeting on the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. She informed Members that the organisations which were currently being funded through the Our Manchester VCS Fund, whose funding had been due to finish at the end of March 2021, would have their funding extended by three months. She advised that the future of the fund would be considered as part of the wider budget proposals and that the Council was waiting for news of the financial settlement from the national Government. The Chair welcomed that the existing funding arrangements had been extended.

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2020 as a correct record.

CESC/20/42 Peterloo Memorial

The Committee received a report of the Director of City Centre Growth and Infrastructure which provided details of the arrangements for a public meeting on the 18 November 2020. The report stated that the construction of the Peterloo Memorial

was undertaken in the context of Manchester achieving its zero-carbon target for the city and that the location of the Memorial was easily accessible using sustainable modes of transport.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure introduced the report. The main points included:

- The context of and background to the development of the Memorial;
- The options considered to make the monument fully accessible and why these had not been workable;
- Proposals for a temporary ramp around the anniversary of the Peterloo Massacre;
- That lessons had been learnt from the mistakes made; and
- The purpose of the virtual public meeting on 18 November 2020.

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

- That some Committee Members had not received their invitation to the meeting on 18 November 2020;
- Concern that the meeting had been arranged at short notice and that it was important to carry this out in the right way, including ensuring that it was accessible;
- A lack of clarity regarding who the meeting was for and could the meeting be open to all interested parties;
- That it had not been made clear to everyone why the ramp option proposed in February was not considered suitable;
- That the lessons learnt and the changes to processes should be a formal document or framework;
- Could the temporary ramp be available at other times if groups requested it;
- Could the costings for all the options be made available at the public meeting; and
- Would the costs of putting in place the temporary ramp every year be sustainable in future years, given the Council's financial situation.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure agreed to put in place a formal policy or strategy to formalise the lessons learnt from this. He committed to making the virtual public meeting accessible to disabled participants and stated that people with an interest in this issue would be able to participate and that he would be willing to postpone the meeting for a couple of weeks to ensure it was carried out in the right way. He advised Members that the Council was willing to consider installing a temporary ramp for events at other times of the year, although the costs would need to be taken into account. He reported that costings had not been worked out for the permanent options as none of them had proved workable. He informed the Committee that the Council was committed to providing a temporary ramp each year for the anniversary, despite the costs, due to the errors it had made in relation to the Memorial. The Development Manager reported that he did not have costings for either the permanent options or the temporary ramp but that the cost of the temporary ramp was likely to be lower.

Decision

To ask officers and the Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure to change the date of the public meeting in order to give more time to ensuring that it is carried out in the correct way and that the meeting be an open, accessible forum for the consideration of a limited number of options, including the most recent proposal from the campaign groups and the Council's proposal for a temporary ramp.

CESC/20/43 Domestic Violence and Abuse - Update

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided a response to Members' questions about specific aspects of domestic violence and abuse response as well as a general update on progress across the agenda, including COVID-19 response and recovery work.

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

- COVID-19 response and recovery;
- Domestic abuse and accommodation;
- Priority Move On Project;
- Domestic Abuse Sanctuary Scheme;
- Operation Encompass;
- LGBT IDVA service provision;
- Workplace domestic abuse policies;
- Review of Domestic Abuse Strategy and commissioning arrangements; and
- Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews.

Barbara Guest from Independent Choices informed the Committee about the history of her organisation and about the services it currently provided, including the Greater Manchester Domestic Abuse helpline, which included support in community languages, and a service which provided casework and support to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) victims of domestic abuse who were at moderate or high risk of harm. She outlined some of the challenges that the pandemic had created for domestic abuse support services and for victims of domestic abuse. She reported that Independent Choices had needed to find a way to deliver its service via home-working, which had involved buying additional equipment and diverting its helpline to a mobile phone system. She also reported that face-to-face support and meetings had been replaced with telephone, email and messaging contact and online meetings. She advised, that in some cases, such as Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences, holding meetings online had worked well and that this might be something that could continue to be used. She also outlined the impact on staffing capacity, as the service had been unable to use its trained volunteers and this had placed increase pressure on its paid staff, although she reported that the service had been able to obtain a limited amount of extra funding to increase capacity. She reported that, because the sector was stretched at the moment, this had affected its ability to do other work, such as strategic work and fundraising. She reported that, during lockdown, domestic abuse victims had been confined to their home with the perpetrator and been less able to access support. She reported that the sector had responded to this by using a range of methods to publicise the support available to victims and to enable them to make contact, including increased social media

campaigns and changing the non-urgent email service to an urgent support email service, which victims could access at any time. She also informed Members of the impact of lockdown on the service's LGBT clients, as other sources of support for them were unavailable, and reported that her service had provided additional support.

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

- Request for information on the availability of refuge beds;
- What lessons had been learnt from the Domestic Homicide Reviews;
- Installations of additional security measures in homes and the timescale for completing this;
- How many people were attending hospitals or GP surgeries in relation to domestic abuse;
- Operation Encompass and schools' take-up of training on domestic abuse;
- Support for older victims of domestic abuse; and
- The number of people who were reporting domestic abuse to Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and how repeated incidents were dealt with.

The Community Safety Lead informed Members that her service was regularly collecting data to identify pressure points for domestic abuse services and where additional resources were needed. She reported that the domestic abuse support organisations had responded flexibly to changing circumstances during the pandemic. She also offered to share with Members the briefings which had come out of the Domestic Homicide Reviews.

The Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager reported that since 8 June 2020, following a period where staff had been furloughed due to COVID-19, the Safe Partnership's installers had fitted additional security measures in 10 homes. She advised that the timescale for carrying this out was generally 24 to 48 hours. She reported that these figures did not represent the total number of security installations carried out as some of the bigger housing providers arranged this themselves. She informed Members that, while she did not have data for hospitals, all GP surgeries across the city had been trained in identifying domestic abuse through the Iris Project and that in quarter 1 of 2020 160 people, mainly women, had been directly referred to the Iris Project and in Quarter 2 189 people had been referred. She advised that this was a slight reduction on the previous year which was likely to be due to fewer people attending their GP surgery during the pandemic. She reported that regular briefings and information were being sent to Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools through the Council's Quality Assurance Team and she advised that e-learning training on domestic abuse had recently been offered to schools and that the take-up so far had been positive.

Councillor Doswell reported that she and a group of female backbench Councillors had been doing some work in relation to this issue and she asked whether this group could input into the review of the Domestic Abuse Strategy and whether they could receive an update on the timeline for the review. The Community Safety Lead agreed to this and advised that she would ask the team undertaking the review to get in touch.

The Community Safety Lead acknowledged that access to domestic abuse support services for older people was an area of concern, for example, whether online services were less accessible to some older people, and that this was being looked at and would also be considered as part of the review of domestic abuse services. Barbara Guest reported that her service received calls from older people who were victims of domestic abuse and from friends or family who were concerned about them; however, she advised that nationally evidence suggested that a lot of domestic abuse involving older people was hidden and reported as elder abuse, which could then go through a different process involving Adult Social Care, rather than domestic abuse services.

The Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager explained how disclosures of domestic abuse to GMP were dealt with, with cases being risk assessed and the approach taken and agencies involved being dependent on whether the risk was deemed to be standard, medium or high.

Barbara Guest informed the Committee about the media campaign that Independent Choices would be running during the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence and asked whether Members could share the videos, to which the Chair agreed.

The Deputy Leader thanked officers and external partners working in this area for their hard work during this challenging time. The Chair echoed these thanks. He thanked Barbara Guest and the officers for attending the meeting and invited them to contact him if there was any other support the Committee could provide.

Decisions

1. To ask for a note on the availability of refuge beds to be circulated to Committee Members.
2. To note that the Community Safety Lead will share with Members the briefings which have come out of the Domestic Homicide Reviews.
3. To note that Barbara Guest will provide Members with Independent Choices' social media details so that Members can share the videos they put out during the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.

CESC/20/44 Update on COVID-19 Activity

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided a further update summary of the current situation in the city in relation to COVID-19 and an update on the work progressing in Manchester in relation to areas within the remit of this Committee.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- The impact and challenges relating to residents at risk, community resilience and equality and inclusion; and
- Key planning and recovery activity being undertaken in relation to these areas.

The Head of Neighbourhoods provided the Committee with a further update, as England had entered a new lockdown period since the report was published. She outlined the support that was being made available to people who were clinically extremely vulnerable, while stating that shielding would not be in place in the way it had been during the first lockdown. The Chair commented that a briefing for Members was taking place that evening,

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Neighbourhoods advised Members that the letter being sent from the national Government to people classed as clinically extremely vulnerable informed them that they should contact their local authority if they needed help while the letter from the Council provided them with local information, including details of the Council's helpline. She reported that conversations were taking place with local disabled people's organisations in Manchester about providing information and support to people who did not fall within the clinically extremely vulnerable category but who might still need support.

In response to a Member's question on payments for people who were instructed to self-isolate by the Test and Trace Service, the Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing reported that these were being processed as quickly as possible, although there might be a lag in the recording of the payments.

Decision

To note the report.

[Councillor Rawlins declared a personal interest as a trustee of a foodbank.]

CESC/20/45 Council's Medium Term Financial Plan and Strategy for 2021/22

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that set out the impact of COVID-19 and other pressures and changes on the Council's budget for the period 2021-2025. The report also set out the impact of COVID-19 on the capital programme and the implications for the budget. The report stated that the budget reflected the fact that the Council had declared a climate emergency by making carbon reduction a key consideration in the Council's planning and budget proposals.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- The Medium Term Financial Plan remained challenged by uncertainty, which included the outcome of the Spending Review and post 2021/22 the potential changes to how local government funding was distributed;
- Prior to COVID-19 there was an underlying budget gap of c£20m for 2021/22 rising to c£80m by 2024/25;
- Dealing with the impact of COVID-19 had resulted in major spending pressures, particularly in social care, but also across all Directorates;
- The forecasted budget shortfall relating to COVID-19 pressures and the Budget Position 2021/22 to 2024/25;

- Initial proposals across all Directorates to start addressing the budget gap in advance of the Spending Review and Local Government Financial Settlement;
- The need to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment on the options put forward, particularly those that involve impacts on services for residents and reductions in the Council's workforce;
- Proposed consultation on budget options and timescales; and
- Next steps.

The Committee also considered a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which estimated that the Council would have a budget gap of £105m in 2021/22 increasing to c £159m in 2022/23 and stated that all Directorates had been seeking to identify savings options for consideration by Members. The report set out the details of the initial savings options proposed by officers for the Neighbourhoods Directorate.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Background and context;
- The Directorate's current budget position and in-year forecast;
- Savings options for 2021/22 onwards;
- Further considerations;
- Workforce implications; and
- Equalities.

The Committee was invited to comment on the reports prior to their submission to the Executive on 11 November 2020.

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

- That the Council was in a very difficult financial position and that more funding was needed from the national Government but that, in the absence of this, difficult decisions had to be made to set a balanced budget;
- Whether the savings set out in the report in relation to parks were achievable and how they would be made;
- Concern about the costs of maintaining leisure centres and providing funding to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) during the pandemic, possible ongoing subsidies to GLL and whether any of this money could be recouped from the Government;
- That the Council should only be supporting private companies such as GLL as much as was necessary, for example, to prevent them going out of business where that would be more costly to the Council, as this had to be considered against other priorities such as preventing homelessness, and that, in the current climate, the Council needed to prepare for the possibility that a company the Council had outsourced services to could go out of business;
- Concern about the potential impact on the income budget of ongoing restrictions related to COVID-19 and what steps were being taken in relation to that, including quantifying the amounts and identifying possible further savings;

- That Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) should be carried out at the earliest appropriate time and used to inform decision-making and that this should be more clearly set out in reports;
- To ask that the next report on the budget proposals include information on what the Council's statutory obligations were, to enable Members to see where cuts could be made without breaching those obligations; and
- That the Executive should take into account the possible unintended consequences of the Council's budget decisions on partners, including the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector.

The Head of Parks, Leisure, Youth and Events reported that £12 million capital investment had previously been allocated to invest in parks to help generate income streams from parks and to reduce their operating costs. He advised that income from parks had been increased by about 40% over the past four years and he stated that his service was confident that the income targets were achievable, although he acknowledged that any restrictions on trading which lasted into next spring and summer represented a risk to this. He reported that previously the intention had been to re-invest this additional income to improve parks but now it was proposed that this money would be used to balance the Council's budget and maintain parks at their current standard. A Member requested that details of the proposed investment programme for parks be included in a future report to the Committee on the Parks Strategy.

The Head of Parks, Leisure, Youth and Events informed Members that the Council had made representations to the Government about the need to provide funding to the leisure sector during the pandemic. He informed Members that a funding package had been provided to councils with in-house leisure services but councils which had outsourced their leisure services were not eligible for this; however, he reported that the Government had in the previous week announced a £100 million fund which local authorities could bid for and the Council would be submitting a bid to that fund to try to secure the maximum amount possible to try to ameliorate the additional costs. He advised the Committee that further funding announcements were expected.

The Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) drew Members' attention to section 4.3 of the Budget Options report which detailed the impact of COVID-19 on the Directorate's income. She advised the Committee that this had been taken into account in the in-year budget management, that mitigation was in place for £1.7 million and a number of further options were being looked at, including securing more money from the national Government.

In response to a Member's question about Manchester Fayre, the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) advised that this had been discussed at the most recent meeting of the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee, whose remit it fell within, and that the Executive would be taking a decision about this at its December meeting.

Decisions

1. To note that the Committee's comments will be provided to the Executive in advance of its meeting on 11 November 2020.

2. To request that details of the proposed investment programme for parks be included in a future report to the Committee on the Parks Strategy.
3. To ask that the next report on the budget proposals include information on the Council's statutory obligations in relation to the areas where cuts are being proposed.

[Councillor Rawlins declared a personal interest as a Director of the Forum Trust.]

CESC/20/46 Neighbourhoods Directorate Budget Options 2021/22

This item was covered in the above minute (CESC/20/45).

CESC/20/47 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.