

Economy Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 3 December 2020

Present:

Councillor H Priest (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Green, Hacking, Johns, Noor, Raikes, Shilton Godwin and Stanton

Also present: Councillors: Leese and N Murphy

Apologies: Councillor K Simcock

ESC/20/46 Minutes

Decision

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020 were approved as a correct record.

ESC/20/47 Manchester Digital Strategy

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Inclusive Economy, which provided an overview to the development of the Manchester Digital Strategy and its alignment to the city's strategic priorities. The Committee also received a presentation that detailed the work to date to create the Strategy and its emerging priorities.

Key point and themes of the report included:-

- A strategy was required to drive the cohesive vision of digital across the city;
- Supporting all Manchester residents to be able to access opportunities digitally is key to building a more inclusive city;
- The proposed emerging Strategy was currently based around four pillars which aligned to the Developing A More Inclusive Economy – Our Manchester Industrial Strategy;
- Strategic alignment was essential to ensure successful implementation of the Digital Strategy's aims both within the Council and across the city;
- The city's digital sector continued to be one of our key growth sectors, both in terms of increasing jobs and gross value added;
- Whilst there are many employment opportunities in this growth area, it was essential to increase digital skills levels and improve digital infrastructure to ensure all of Manchester's residents and neighbourhoods can access them; and
- Following the Committee's comments, the draft Strategy will go out for public consultation in early 2021.

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

- What was meant by the phrase deploying digital connectivity as a utility and to what extent could the Council support this;

- There was concern that there would not be enough capacity to upskill Manchester residents in using digital;
- Was there any capacity within the strategy to ensure that the Council and its partners procured from organisations that were committed to being carbon zero or carbon negative;
- Further information was requested on Fibre Manchester and the required physical infrastructure to enable the Strategy to be delivered;
- To what extent did the Strategy address access to the necessary technology for all residents in the city, such as fibre broadband to all properties;
- Who would be held accountable for the progress of the Strategy; and
- Would there be a joined up GM approach to procuring the necessary digital devices for those who were subject to digital poverty.

The Digital Strategist informed the Committee that the Council would be joining with Tameside and potentially a further three GM Councils to enable the delivery of the physical infrastructure across the city and region through the use of digital co-operatives. This would allow for smaller operators to enter the market and provide more choice for residents at lower prices. He clarified that in terms of ownership of the infrastructure, this would belong to the co-operative or by a co-operative member. He added that viewing digital connectivity as a utility simply meant that it would be available everywhere, in some places free and in other at an affordable rate. In terms of the Green Economy, there were many organisations within the industry that were operating as Carbon neutral and reinvesting in renewable energy and it would be these types of organisations that the Council should align itself with going forward.

The Director of Inclusive Economy advised of the steps that were being taken to help residents get connected and develop the necessary digital skills, including the work of schools and colleges with students in terms of blended learning. She added that at present she was not aware of any GM wide procurement approach but would investigate the possibility of this and outlined how the Council and MAES had provided a vast number of residents with the necessary equipment to enable them to become digitally included.

The Deputy Leader agreed to take on board all the comments made by the Committee as the Strategy was developed and agreed to report back as to how the digital offer could be improved for Manchester residents.

Decisions

The Committee:-

- (1) Notes the report.
- (2) Notes that a number of themes emanating from this item will likely form future agenda items in the next Municipal Year.

ESC/20/48 HS2 Phase 2b Western Leg Design Refinement Consultation Response

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director, Growth and Development that informed the Committee and the Executive of a Design Refinement Consultation (DRC) being carried out by HS2 Ltd on the western leg of Phase 2b of HS2 (Manchester-Crewe). The consultation sought views on updates to station designs at both Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport, in addition to a route alignment change, in order to reduce the impact on the existing train care facility at Ardwick, and to facilitate the integration of Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) at both Piccadilly and Manchester Airport high speed stations.

The report outlined the Council's proposed response to the consultation. The draft response was attached as an appendix and should be read in conjunction with the report.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Providing an introduction and background to the report;
- Describing the context of the response; and
- Providing a summary of the main issues to which the city continued to seek resolution, and which the Council and its partners expect further collaborative engagement on.

The Committee heard from Councillor Lovecy, Member for Rusholme ward. She described that local Councillors continued to oppose the proposed location of the vent shaft on Fallowfield Retail Park. She stated that this would have a detrimental impact on local schools; it would result in the loss of a Park and Ride scheme that would have an adverse impact on air quality. She stated that the current proposal would also result in a loss of local retail provision that would have a negative impact on the local community. She stated that these arguments, in particular that from the local schools needed to be strengthened within the response.

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

- Supporting the local Councillors in opposing the ventilation shaft that was still proposed to be located on Fallowfield retail park and that alternative, more appropriate sites should be considered by HS2 Ltd;
- Supporting the call for an underground station to be built at Piccadilly station;
- What more could be done to support the case of the Council; and
- The views of the Economy Scrutiny Committee needed to be taken into consideration and reflected within the response.

The Leader stated that it was important to continue to argue for the need to build an underground station at Piccadilly to accommodate HS2 and address issues of capacity at the site, noting that a surface station would be inappropriate. He further commented that the design of the HS2 Airport Station needed to be fully integrated with local development plans and existing planning policies, including Metrolink and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

The Head of City Centre Growth & Regeneration stated that discussions continued with HS2 Ltd to discuss the issue of the planned ventilation shaft that was still proposed to be located on Fallowfield retail park. She described that alternative locations had been suggested however these had been rejected on the grounds of visual disamenity and antisocial behaviour.

The City Centre Growth and Development Manager informed the Committee a summary would be provided in response to the consultation however individual responses would not be provided to issues raised. She stated that officers and Members would continue to work and engage with HS2 Ltd to seek to influence the design. She advised that she was aware that a local MP had requested an urgent meeting with Ministers to discuss the issue of Fallowfield retail park and the location of the vent shaft.

The Head of City Centre Growth & Regeneration advised that having regard for Councillor Lovecy's comments the response would be reviewed to strengthen the points that she had addressed. The Strategic Director, Growth and Development further commented that the views of Committee would also be incorporated into the final submission.

Decisions

The Committee:-

- (1) Recommend that having regard for the views and comments expressed by the Committee and that of the local ward Member, Section 8 of response relating to the Birchfield Road Ventshafts be reviewed to reflect the opposition of schools to these proposals.
- (2) Having regard to recommendation 1, endorse the recommendation that the Executive:
 - Note the proposed refinements within Manchester in the HS2 Design Refinement Consultation;
 - Note and comment on the City Council's draft submission in response to the consultation; and
 - Delegate authority to the Strategic Director – Growth & Development, in consultation with the Leader and Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport, to finalise the response and submit to HS2 Ltd.

ESC/20/49 Update on COVID-19 Activity

Further to Minute ESC/20/38 (Update on activity under COVID 19), the Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development), which provided a further update 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 the Committee.

The key points and themes included:-

- An economic overview at a national, regional and local level;
- A sectoral impact update, including the impact on footfall within the city, hospitality and visitor economies, aviation and universities;
- The steps needed to stimulate development & investor confidence in the city;
- Work being undertaken with TfGM to agree a broad overall transport plan to support the gradual opening up of the city with a focus on pedestrian movement and safe use of public transport;
- Work being undertaken around Skills, Labour Market and Business Support following on from the THINK report findings; and
- A progress update on the lobbying of government for additional funding.

The Leader also provided a verbal update on the most recent developments since the publication of the report.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committees discussions were:-

- There had been a failure of government in providing appropriate financial support to the city and wider region the length of time that people have been living under strict restraints;
- It would be useful to have year on year comparative data on footfall in the city and district centres to help in the longer term thinking of recovery;
- There was concern about the impact of the pandemic on the hospitality sector especially for the months following Christmas as trade was usually quiet in these months;
- There was concern in relation to the number of people claiming unemployment related benefits in the city centre and the impact this might have on private renters;

The Director of Inclusive Economy advised that the increase in unemployment increased rapidly in April and May and although this has levelled off it was still increasing. She outlined the work that was being undertaken to address the increase in unemployment in the city.

The Strategic Director confirmed that year on year data of footfall can be provided and could be reported in future Economy Dashboards. It was also reported that the Business Sounding Board would be launching a campaign in the new year around supporting restaurants, cultural venues and hotels, building on the eat out to help out model, but more specific to Manchester.

Noting the concerns raised, the Leader commented that the full economic recovery of the city would likely take three to five years and that areas that had been placed in Tier 3, such as Manchester, received no further financial support than those in Tiers 1 or 2. As such it was important that the City was placed into Tier 2 as soon as possible to enable businesses to trade and survive.

Decision

The Committee notes the report

ESC/20/50 Overview Report

The Committee considered 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.

Decisions

The Committee:-

- (1) Note the report.
- (2) Note that the Chair will finalise the Work Programme for the February and March 2021 meetings in consultation with Officers.