

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 4 November 2020

Present:

Councillor Igbon (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Appleby, Flanagan, Hassan, Hughes, Jeavons, Kilpatrick, Lyons, Razaq, White and Wright

Also present:

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure

Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

Councillor Shilton Godwin, Lead Member for Active Travel

Apologies: Councillor Azra Ali, Butt, Lynch, Sadler, Strong and Whiston

NESC/20/43 Urgent Business

Urgent Business: Household Waste and Recycling Centres during COVID-19 lockdown

The Chair introduced an item of urgent business by inviting the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods to provide the Committee with an update as to the operation of Household Waste and Recycling Centres following the recent announcement by the Prime Minister of national lockdown to commence 5 November 2020.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods stated that all the Household Waste and Recycling Centres across Manchester operated by Suez would remain open during the period of lockdown.

Decision

To note the update

NESC/20/44 Minutes

The Chair informed the Committee that she would be referring the issue of Social Value and Highways to the Chair of the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee (see ref NESC/20/41). She further advised that to address the specific questions raised by Members of the Committee in relation to the information that had been provided, a meeting would be convened with the Director of Highways and the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport.

A Member stated that following the previous meeting he has sought further information regarding the budget arrangements and the waste levy. He stated that it was his opinion that the information reported to the previous meeting had been

incorrect. He requested that the Chair take this matter up with the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods following this meeting.

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020 as a correct record, noting the above comments.

NESC/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 COVID19 and other pressures and changes on the Council's budget for the period 2021-2025. The report also set out the impact of COVID19 on the capital programme and the implications for the budget.

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 COVID19 there was an underlying budget gap of c£20m for 2021/22 rising to c£80m by 2024/25;
- Dealing with the impact of COVID19 had resulted in major spending pressures, particularly in social care, but also across all Directorates;
- The forecasted budget shortfall relating to COVID19 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 involved impacts on services for residents and reductions in the Council's workforce;
- Proposed consultation on budget options and timescales; and
- Next Steps.

Decision

The Committee notes the report.

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

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) that described that as part of the planning for the 2021/22 budget, the Council was estimating a budget gap of £105m in 2021/22 increasing to c £159m in 2022/23, and all Directorates have been seeking to identify savings options for consideration by Members.

This report set out the details on the initial savings options proposed by officers. The savings options would be considered by all six Scrutiny Committees for those areas within their remit. The Committee was invited to comment on the report prior to its submission to the Executive on 11 November 2020.

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

- Noting that the budget options were being considered in the context of the imposition of a decade of austerity and continued cuts to public services;
- Reducing any staff posts that generated income for the Council would be counterproductive and should be rejected;
- There should be no reduction in staff undertaken enforcement activity;
- Rejecting any proposal to charge residents for the replacement of recycling bins, noting that this could lead to increased rates of flytipping; and
- Rejecting any proposal to reduce the Neighbourhood Investment Fund, noting the positive contribution these made in wards, adding that in the event this had to be considered a cost benefit analysis should be undertaken prior to any final decision being taken.

The Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) responded to questions from Members by clarifying that the report did not set out firm proposals but options that might require further consideration by the Committee following the announcement of the Spending Review and Finance Settlement.

Decision

The Committee recommended that when the Executive are asked to consider the officer cuts and savings options that they take into account the feedback from this scrutiny committee.

[Councillor Appleby declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as her partner is employed by Biffa.]

NESC/20/47 Homelessness Directorate Budget and Savings Options 2021/22

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Homelessness that provided the high level budget context and priorities for Homelessness across 2021/22 and the feedback from the budget conversation, which had been used for the development of savings options 2021/22 and investment requirements to fund population driven and other budget pressures. The Committee was invited to comment on the report prior to its submission to the Executive on 11 November 2020.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Providing an introduction and context of the report;
- An overview of the budget strategy for Homelessness;
- A summary of the directorate budget;
- Describing the savings options and proposals;
- An overview of additional options to be considered;
- Analysis of overall impacts; and
- Workforce impact.

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

- Noting that the budget options were being considered in the context of the imposition of a decade of austerity and cuts to public services;
- Despite the cuts Manchester had sought to defend the most vulnerable residents in the city, and in doing so the Committee paid tribute to all of the staff working in the homelessness service, particularly during the COVID19 pandemic;
- Unanimously reject the officer proposals, commenting that any cuts in this service would have implications on other service budgets ;
- Noting that the cost in providing accommodation for those previously sleeping rough in response to COVID19 and Everyone In was £7m, the Committee called upon the government to meet this cost;
- Noting the positive feedback received on the Everyone In scheme;
- Recommending the establishment of a task force comprised of the Revenue and Benefits Unit, local charities, faith groups and VCSE partners to consider homelessness prevention;
- The GMCA (Greater Manchester Combined Authority) should increase their financial contribution to Manchester to support the work to address homelessness;
- Working in partnership with local registered housing providers, the Capital budget should be used to purchase properties to house homeless families;
- Noting the significant funds paid to private Bed and Breakfast (B&B) providers the Council should commission and manage its own B&B provision;
- Noting the importance of the need to prevent homelessness, the Section 21 team and the Private Rented Sector Team needed to be maintained; and
- Recognising the important work of staff working in the homelessness service the Committee rejected any proposal to reduce staffing.

The Director of Homelessness welcomed the comments from the Members. He stated that it was recognised that the use of B&B accommodation was not always appropriate, particularly for families. He stated that the Service Transformation Programme would form the core of the approach to tackling and reducing homelessness over the next three years. It would be the framework in which reductions in temporary accommodation and rough sleeping would be achieved through a radical reorganisation of the Homelessness Service and its activities. The programme would focus on five key areas; the strategic vision, redesigning the journey through the system, prevention, accommodation and communication and development.

The Director of Homelessness stated that the Section 21 Team had been funded through an uplift in the service budget as part of the previous year's budget considerations and commented that it was anticipated that evictions might increase as a result of COVID19.

The Director of Homelessness responded to the suggestion of establishing a task force by describing that the multi agency Manchester Homeless Partnership was already established. In response to the positive comments received regarding the Everyone In service he stated that this had achieved many positive outcomes for the individuals they had assisted, noting that this had been achieved by working collaboratively with VCSE partners.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure stated that despite the promises made to Manchester and all other local authorities that financial assistance would be made available to support councils to accommodate homeless people during the pandemic this had not been provided. He described this as a failure of government, however despite this Manchester had responded to the situation and sought to support the most vulnerable residents in the city and he now called upon the government to fund Manchester appropriately and fairly.

Decisions

The Committee recommended that when the Executive are asked to consider the officer cuts and savings options that they take into account the feedback and recommendations from this scrutiny committee.

1. The Committee reject the homelessness options as described within the report.
2. The Committee recommend that Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure write to the government and ask for the additional £7 million for the continued provision of accommodation during the COVID19 pandemic for those who previously slept rough.
3. The Committee recommend that that Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure establish a task force comprised of the Revenue and Benefits Unit, local charities, faith groups and VCSE partners to consider homelessness prevention work.
4. The Committee recommend that the Council, in partnership with local registered housing providers should purchase properties funded via the capital budget to house homeless families.
5. The Committee recommend that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority should reimburse Manchester the £0.5m to fund the A Bed Every Night provision.

NESC/20/48 Active Travel

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) that provided an overview of the activities undertaken to promote active travel and connectivity across the city.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Activities undertaken with both schools and neighbourhoods;
- Physical infrastructure to support active travel and future plans;
- How active travel linked into the climate change emergency to reduce carbon and improve clean air;
- An update on Government Funding for active travel and what other avenues were being accessed;
- Options for further pop up cycle lanes and other measures in the city; and
- How the Council measured the objectives of Active travel.

The Chair invited the Neighbourhood Officer for Hulme to address the Committee on the Junior PCSO scheme that had been established in the ward. The Officer described the background to the scheme, the work and engagement undertaken with local schools, children and their parents. She described the benefits and positive outcomes of the scheme and how this contributed to the wider climate change ambitions of the Council.

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

- Noting the inspiring and positive contribution that the Junior PCSO scheme had delivered and recommending that this good practice and learning should be shared across all wards;
- Noting that the positive activities and initiatives with schools and local communities seemed to be concentrated in certain areas and there was a distinct lack of these delivered in the north of the city and in Wythenshawe;
- Investment in infrastructure to support active travel and improve connectivity was required in North Manchester; and
- An update was sought on the government funding to support active travel.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport informed the Committee that all provisions, such as Play Streets were advertised and available across all areas of the city and not restricted to certain areas. She stated that schools were contacted and offered support to deliver local schemes however it was the decision of the individual schools to take up this offer. She noted that she recognised the significant challenge schools had faced this year as a result of COVID19 however the options and support of local Neighbourhood Teams still remained. The Director of Education confirmed that information was regularly shared with schools and this would be raised again via Virtual Head Teacher Meetings, with consideration given to a targeted approach.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods stated that all Ward Plans should include Climate Change and the Head of Neighbourhoods confirmed that the local team did engage with schools in the Wythenshawe area and this work and dialogue with schools would continue.

A Member of the Committee commented on the work undertaken by local Councillors and schools in North Manchester and she offered to share this experience and lessons learnt with other Neighbourhood Teams across the city. The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport welcomed this and commented upon the important roles local Members had in supporting and promoting active travel initiatives.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport addressed the issue of government funding by stating that despite repeated promises and public statements regarding the importance of active travel the government had failed to respond to the funding bids submitted. She described this as a failure of government and challenged the Chancellor to address this. She described the current situation as very frustrating as Manchester had many initiatives and schemes planned and were keen to progress this important area of work as quickly as possible.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport stated that conversations continued with both Transport for Greater Manchester and the Walking and Cycling Commissioner to explore all funding options.

The Committee then heard from Councillor Shilton Godwin, Lead Member for Active Travel who stated that the need for active travel was very important particularly at this time, commenting that this activity could improve people's resilience to the pandemic and significantly contribute to clean air. She supported the comments of the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport and repeated the call on government to adequately fund this important area of work and help Manchester realise its climate change ambitions.

Decision

The Committee recommend that the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport promote with all schools the Junior PCSO School Scheme, working collaboratively with local Neighbourhood Teams, Education and the Highways Service.

[Councillor Hughes declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as he is employed as a bus driver in Manchester.]

NESC/20/49 Monitoring and Compliance - Construction Sites

The Chair announced that due to the time constraints upon the Committee having given due consideration to the the budget reports she recommended that this item of business be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.

Decision

To defer consideration of this report to the next meeting of the Committee.

NESC/20/50 Overview Report

The 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.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme noting the decision to defer the previous agenda item.