

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 10 February 2021

Present:

Councillor Igbon (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Appleby, Butt, Flanagan, Hassan, Hughes, Jeavons, Kilpatrick, Lynch, Lyons, Sadler, 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 Shiekh, Assistant Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

Apologies: Councillor Azra Ali, Razaq, Strong and Whiston

NESC/21/8 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2021 as a correct record.

NESC/21/9 Neighbourhoods Directorate Budget Proposals 2021/22

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) that provided an updated Neighbourhoods Service 2021/21 budget and set out the proposed savings proposals, this reflected any feedback from both the November 2020 and January 2021 Scrutiny committee.

The Committee was invited to comment on the report prior to it being considered by Executive.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Describing the 2021/22 budget pressures;
- Outlining the 2021/22 savings proposals as part of the wider £50m savings required by the Council;
- Describing that the Neighbourhoods Directorate had identified an initial £6.683m saving in 2021/22 increasing to £7.376m by 2024/25 across the Neighbourhoods Directorate; and
- To minimise the impact on residents and neighbourhoods, all opportunities for maximising external income sources were considered and the overall Directorate proposals includes £5.985m of increased income generation.

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

- Noting that the government had failed to keep to the promise made at the start of the pandemic that local authorities would be reimbursed for the additional costs incurred;
- Noting that the additional budgetary pressures experienced was in addition to a number of years of budget cuts and austerity; and
- Welcoming the reported levels of recycling, noting the city had achieved our highest overall levels of recycling (40%) and lowest levels of residual waste over the last 10 years, noting this achieved savings to the Council via the waste levy.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods welcomed the improvements achieved across the city in relation to recycling rates. He stated that the ambition is to target work to help further increase these rates, however noted the challenges to achieve these ambitions without adequate funding by the government.

The Chair in concluding this item of business expressed her gratitude to all officers and the Executive Members for their work to deliver and protect services on behalf of the residents of the city in extremely challenging circumstances.

Decision

The Committee endorse the proposals presented within the report to the Executive and Council.

NESC/21/10 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 was an update to the report presented to Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny 13 January 2021, which had been used for the development of savings proposals 2021/22 and investment requirements to fund population driven and other budget pressures.

The Committee was invited to comment on the report prior to it being considered by Executive.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- The report set out a one year budget for 2021/22, however the longer term implications had been considered and those were considered in the Council's medium term financial planning;
- The report had been updated to reflect the Comprehensive Spending Review and Financial Settlement for the City Council which had resulted in a reduction in the Homelessness savings target of £0.5m;
- Describing the Budget Strategy for the Homelessness Service;
- Describing the uncertainty of short-term funding, noting that 2020/21 Homelessness budget is supported by significant non-recurrent one-off funding;
- Providing an overview of the Service Transformation Programme and the savings proposals;

- The approach to savings would be based on the proposed Service Transformation Programme which gave a strategic direction and framework to services, based on a focus of outcomes and partnerships; and
- An update on the Covid-19 response and Everyone In, externally commissioned homelessness services and homelessness management.

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

- Noting and welcoming the commitment to continue funding the Everyone In programme beyond March 2021; and
- What support was being offered to those citizens accessing the Everyone In programme to support them into suitable accommodation'

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 in a dignified and appropriate manner and he reiterated his call upon the government to fund Manchester appropriately and fairly.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure described the challenge to plan and deliver innovative schemes and programmes to tackle homelessness due to the short term approach and piecemeal funding arrangements provided to local authorities, stating that long term appropriate levels of funding was required.

The Director of Homelessness stated that the Everyone In programme had allowed for the delivery of wrap around support services to be provided to homeless people with the intention to support people into appropriate housing solutions, including commissioned supported accommodation. In reply to a specific question regarding staffing he informed the Committee that the FTE reduction saving identified would be achieved through either voluntary severance or retirement.

The Chair stated that the work of the homelessness team and all of the voluntary organisations working across the city was important and valued in addressing homelessness and supporting vulnerable citizens in Manchester.

Decision

The Committee endorse the savings proposals identified to the Executive.

NESC/21/11 Manchester City Council Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that provided an update on the significant progress that has been made in delivering the Climate Change Action Plan over the last 10 months despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. A detailed update on all the actions contained within the Plan with data and visual images where available was appended to the report.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Providing an introduction and background to the Plan, noting that Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019 which recognised the need for the Council, and the city as a whole, to do more to reduce CO2 emissions and mitigate the negative impacts of climate change;
- Providing an overview of the Action Plan that was structured in five sections / workstreams;
- An overview of the established governance arrangements;
- An overview and update on the progress to date;
- Emerging priorities for 2021/22;
- Funding arrangements; and
- Listing those action that required accelerating due to the impact of COVID-19.

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

- Welcoming the report and commenting that the quality and presentation of the data and information presented was comprehensive, concise and accessible;
- How many staff and Councillors had completed the Carbon Literacy training to date;
- How many wards had received specific climate change related events;
- Was there a zero carbon advertising strategy;
- What work was being undertaken with local schools regarding meals to promote meat free days and the sourcing of local produce;
- How much of the carbon reduction reported against Council buildings was as a result of the decarbonisation of the national grid;
- Were there any more possible savings from the replacement street lighting;
- Noting the data reported for street lighting and the operational fleet, why was there a difference between quarter 1 and 2 compared to the previous year;
- Noting the impact of Covid on levels of homeworking was consideration being given to how staff would be working in the future and how buildings would be used post pandemic;
- What work was being done to engage businesses on the issue of climate change;
- Would climate change be addressed in the Local Plan;
- What work was undertaken to ensure all building developments across this city were sustainable and supported the carbon reduction ambitions of the city;
- When would the additional waste fleet vehicles be in service;
- A Member requested that information on the Newton Heath Project be shared with the three Miles Platting and Newton Heath councillors following the meeting;
- Requesting an update on the call on the Greater Manchester Pension Fund (GMPF) to divest from fossil fuels;
- Would local ward councillors be involved with the planned cycle and walking routes for Wythenshawe;
- Noting that it was reported that the Civic Quarter Heat Network would initially run on gas, some of which was green gas, would consideration be given to using alternative sources of energy in the future;
- Were there any additional or alternative sources of funding to support the retrofitting of homes to enable the necessary level of retrofitting by 2038;

- Information was sought on the recruitment and role of the Climate Change Neighbourhood Officers that were being recruited;
- Welcoming the information on the Tree Action Plan;
- Clarification was sought as to the reasons for the air travel reported; and
- Following the UK's exit from the European Union could Manchester continue to bid for European funding to support environmental projects.

The Chair invited Cllr Wright to update the Committee on the changes proposed to scrutiny arrangements that had been discussed and proposed at the recent meeting of the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee. Cllr Wright stated that it had been recommended that the remits of all six scrutiny committees would be reviewed with the intention of having one committee that was dedicated to climate change and the environment. This proposal was to be progressed and finalised in March. The Committee noted and welcomed this update.

In response to the questions, the Director of Policy, Performance and Reform informed the Members that to date a total of 961 staff (including 45 Councillors) had completed the Carbon Literacy training. He stated that it was anticipated that the silver accreditation status would be achieved as there were an additional 150 members of staff scheduled to undertake the training. He noted that the delivery of this training had converted to being delivered online during the pandemic.

In response to the number of events delivered in wards, the Head of Neighbourhood Management stated that to date, noting the restrictions due to the pandemic, events had been held across fourteen different wards, that had been attended by over 300 people and the intention was to continue with the work post Covid. She further stated that, in addition to those specific events, events had been held in three other wards that had included environmental and climate change elements. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods commented that to date 41 separate environmental community projects had been supported through the dedicated Neighbourhood Investment Fund.

The Head of Neighbourhood Management reported that two of the three Climate Change Neighbourhood Officers had been recruited and that these staff had the necessary skills and experience to work with diverse local communities and existing networks and to support the local Neighbourhood Teams.

The Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer stated that work was being developed with schools and partners around a range of environmental issues, including those raised by the Member. She further stated that consideration was being given to reviewing the staff workforce strategy and the travel policy in recognition of the changes to working patterns as a result of Covid. She stated that it was important to recognise that a 'one size fits all' approach was not appropriate and that it was important to maintain a visible presence within the city and across neighbourhoods.

The Head of Corporate Estates and Facilities added that the 9% carbon reduction from Council building emissions was due to the decarbonisation of the national grid, however the new ways of working would allow for a review of the use of the estate with a view to making further savings, commenting that some buildings that had

closed during Covid, such as libraries would reopen at an appropriate time. With reference to the Civic Quarter Heat Network he stated that consideration would be given to exploring the opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint of the energy centre once a stable operational point had been achieved.

The Head of Corporate Estates and Facilities stated that the emissions from streetlights had reduced due to the programme of upgrades to more energy efficient LED fittings. The fleet emissions had reduced due to both upgrading to electric vehicles and a reduction in journeys during the pandemic.

The Strategic Lead City Centre Partnerships informed the Committee that a review of the 27 new electric refuse collection vehicles would be undertaken to inform the roll out of additional vehicles to the fleet, taking into consideration all options. In response to the specific question regarding air travel she confirmed that the flights reported were booked by Children's Services and were to assist with the repatriation of people and were not for staff travel.

The Head of Integrated Commissioning and Procurement stated that the contract for external advertising had recently been awarded and although there was no specific clause relating to the advertising subject matter and climate change, the contract stipulated that the service vehicles would be electric and the actual sites were designed to collect rain water to clean the screens.

The Director of Licensing and Building Control described that the review of the Local Plan was an opportunity to embed and strengthen the climate ambitions for the city, however Members were reminded that the Core Strategy, adopted in 2012 already contained a robust framework to address climate change. She further described that this existing framework, as part of the planning process, was evidenced in the planning reports and these standards were applied to all developments.

The Strategic Lead Policy and Partnerships advised the Committee that the Climate Change Agency reported on city wide carbon budgets and this data was produced annually, however the Council did monitor and report its own progress against this target. In regard to the issue of retrofitting, he stated that the Council had continued to bid for all funding that had been made available, however he acknowledged that significant investment was required from the government to deliver the ambitions as described in the plan. He stated that direct lobbying of Government was being undertaken by senior officers on this specific issue as part of the wider Economic Recovery and Investment Plan, noting that this would also contribute to the local skills and employment ambitions.

In answer to a question regarding the skills for a zero carbon economy work, the Strategic Lead Policy and Partnerships stated that the Work and Skills team had been working on the emergency food response and on Covid business grants so had not been able to make as much progress as they would have liked. However, he informed the Committee that Green skills would be a key element of the Work and Skills Strategy that would be refreshed later this year. He further advised of an Our Town Hall green skills event for Manchester secondary schools scheduled for April.

In response to the specific question regarding access to European funding streams following the UK's exit from the European Union, the Strategic Lead Resources and Programme confirmed that the Zero Carbon Cities project that ran from 2019 to 2022 would not be affected as the funding had already been awarded. He stated that the deal allowed for continued access to funding streams, such as the new Horizon Europe programme.

The Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer stated that the Council sought to influence and lead on the issue of climate change with business partners through a range of mechanisms, such as the Manchester Climate Change Partnership, the Business Sounding Board and City Co. She said this activity was also supported and complimented by the Manchester Climate Change Agency.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport informed the Committee that the Wythenshawe Walking and Cycling scheme was currently in development and invitations had been sent to all appropriate Members inviting them to join her to cycle the route as an opportunity to obtain Members' feedback.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport stated that she shared the disappointment and frustration of Members regarding the failure of the GMPF to respond to the calls to divest from fossil fuels and support the carbon reduction ambitions of the Council. She stated that in collaboration with her equivalent colleagues across Greater Manchester she would continue to lobby on this issue, adding that the GMPF had been invited to attend a Greater Manchester Green City Board meeting that had been scheduled. She commented that pension funds in other areas of the country had given an undertaking to divest from fossil fuels and urged GMPF to follow this example.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport concluded by stating that she had welcomed the comments and questions from the Committee. She stated that she was keen to work closely with the format of the new scrutiny committee. She described that despite the enormous challenges experienced as a result of the pandemic the work to deliver the Climate Change Action Plan had continued as a priority. She paid tribute to all of the officers involved, stating that the same officers had been involved in additional activities to support residents.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport stated that awareness of the importance of the environment had been highlighted during the pandemic and it was important to build upon and embed this across all activities as the city began the process of recovery post pandemic, including skills, employment and health. She concluded by stating that despite comments regarding climate change from the government this had not been followed by decisive actions and the government needed to adequately fund Manchester to support delivery of our ambitious plan.

The Chair in conclusion expressed her gratitude on behalf of the Committee to the Executive Member and all officers for their continued commitment to delivering the Climate Change Action Plan during a very challenging period. She stated that the issue of climate change and carbon emissions was the responsibility of all residents across the city.

Decision

To note the report.

[Councillor Flanagan declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as a family member was employed at Manchester airport.]

NESC/21/12 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.