

Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 25 May 2021

Present:

Councillor Russell (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Ahmed Ali, Clay, Hitchen, Lanchbury, B Priest, Robinson and A Simcock

Also present:

Councillors: Craig

Apologies: Councillor Davies, Kirkpatrick, Rowles and Wheeler

RGSC/19/21 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021 as a correct record.

RGSC/19/22 Annual Property Report 2020/2021

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, which provided an update on property activity since the last Annual Property Report to Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee in November 2019. The report was an updated version of a report that was prepared for the 9 March 2021 meeting and provided further information on activity across the Development Team and Investment Estate and the Operational Estate up to the current date. The report also included an update on the specific areas requested in the Scrutiny Committee's work programme, including Central Retail Park; future plans and performance of the investment estate in relation to potential income generation; estates rationalisation and work on reviewing the Council's operational estate; the Zero carbon agenda and future developments within the Capital Strategy.

Key points and themes in the report included:-

- Development Team and Investment Estate update, including commercial, city centre, other commercial and employment development, housing, district and town centre, leisure, sport and education development, capital receipts, investment estate, Jacobs contract and asset valuations; and
- Operational Estate and Facilities update, including operational estate activity, Facilities Management Service, Asset Management Programme update, Carbon Reduction Programme, systems and records update, Town Hall Project, future ways of working and estate rationalisation.

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

- Was there any update on the rent review of the airport;
- Press reports which had been critical of land deals made by the Council;

- The likely impact of the pandemic on the use of office buildings;
- When the plans for Wythenshawe Town Centre would be realised; and
- The importance of supporting Emerge/Fareshare in their re-location to a suitable property.

The Head of Development reported that the Council had received an initial response from the airport in relation to the rent review and that officers were working through the information provided and would respond to the airport in the next few weeks. In response to a further question, he clarified that this rent was reviewed on an annual basis.

The Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer advised that the article in the Manchester Evening News had included the Council's response which explained the rationale behind the decisions taken. The Head of Development reported that there were compelling reasons for entering into the transactions referred to and that the research referred to in the press had not gone into sufficient detail, highlighting that in some cases the Council had legal obligations or was receiving a rent from the company concerned. A Member asked if officers would be willing to go through the detail of these transactions with any Members who wanted more information and explanation. The Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer agreed and suggested that a session could be arranged for Members. The Deputy Leader highlighted the importance of communicating clearly to Members and the public what the Council was doing with its assets for the benefit of Manchester people. In response to a Member's question about the challenges for people trying to find out information about these transactions, the Head of Development advised that it was partly about the complexity of some of the transactions and the level of detail needed to understand it and also that the Council undertook a lot of transactions and the requests that people submitted for information could be quite generic.

In response to a Member's question about Heron House, the Head of Development informed the Committee that leases had already been completed for all tenancies with the exception of the Barclays Consortium. The Deputy Leader suggested that the Member could be provided with an indicative completion date to give her assurance.

The Director of Inclusive Growth reported that commercial development in the city centre had held up quite well during the pandemic and that, while office space could be configured differently in future, the indications for future growth were positive.

The Deputy Leader agreed to a Member's request that all Councillors be provided with details of how to obtain information in relation to different types of Corporate Property questions.

A Member asked whether the CPAD system would be able to provide some of the information that Committee Members were requesting about specific properties. The Head of Corporate Estates and Facilities reported that this was the case and that training sessions could be provided to Members on using this system; however, he advised that some of the information did require interpretation and that officers were happy to assist Members with this.

The Chair requested greater clarity in future reports on the original approved budgets, the current position on spending and income generated. A Member requested greater clarity in future reports on how “affordable housing” was being defined.

The Head of Development informed the Committee about plans for Wythenshawe Town Centre, including a round 2 Levelling Up bid, looking at how other investment could be leveraged in and recent land acquisitions nearby which provided more options for the area. He advised that, although like other areas it had been affected by the pandemic, it had held up well during this period and the Council was in discussions with the owners about future plans.

In response to a Member’s question about how many car parks the Council still had and how many had been disposed of, the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer advised that she would provide this information after the meeting.

In response to a Member’s question, the Head of Development reported that the rental support policy would be finalised within the next two or three weeks.

The Chair welcomed the range of work outlined in the report and the positive impact on Manchester residents. Regarding the carbon reduction programme, she advised that it would have been useful to see further information on the carbon reduction measures listed, including costs, who had funded them and cost savings. In response to a question from the Chair, the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer agreed that it would be challenging to complete the projects decarbonising heat in 11 Council buildings by September 2021 as the Council had only been informed in March 2021 that its bid for funding for these projects had been successful. The Head of Corporate Estates and Facilities advised that a delivery plan was in place to achieve this although the Greater Manchester Consortium was also working to understand what exactly had to be completed by this deadline. The Chair requested that officers report back on this at an appropriate time. In response to a Member’s question, the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer reported that the Council was working closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and Manchester Climate Change Partnership on climate change and highlighted that the successful bid referred to previously had been made as part of a Greater Manchester Consortium.

Decisions

1. To note the report.
2. To note that all Members of the Council will be provided with details of how to obtain information in relation to different types of Corporate Property questions.
3. To note that the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer will provide information on how many car parks the Council still has and how many have been disposed of.

RGSC/19/23 Re-establishment of the Human Resources Sub Group

The Committee received a report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which sought the Committee's approval to re-establish the Human Resources Subgroup for the 2021/22 Municipal Year and agree its terms of reference.

Decisions

1. To agree that the Chair of Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee chairs the HR Subgroup.
2. To appoint Councillors Ahmed Ali, A Simcock and Robinson to the Subgroup and to note that other Councillors who are not currently Members of this Committee have requested to be appointed to the Committee and also expressed an interest in joining the Subgroup.
3. To agree the terms of reference as set out in the report.
4. To agree the work programme as set out in the report and propose that each meeting has one thematic report and one departmental-based report.

RGSC/19/24 Re-establishment of the Ethical Procurement and Contract Management Sub Group

The Committee received a report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which sought the Committee's approval to re-establish the Ethical Procurement and Contract Management Subgroup for the 2021/22 Municipal Year and agree its terms of reference.

Decisions

1. To agree that the Chair of Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee chairs the Ethical Procurement and Contract Management Subgroup.
2. To appoint Councillors Clay, Lanchbury, B Priest and Robinson to the Subgroup.
3. To agree the terms of reference as set out in the report.
4. To request that the delivery of local employment and training opportunities be incorporated into the work programme.

RGSC/19/25 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.

RGSC/19/26 Exclusion of Press and Public

Decision

To exclude the public during consideration of the following item which involved consideration of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of particular persons and public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

RGSC/19/27 Scrutiny Committees' work on cross-cutting themes of the Our Manchester Strategy

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that provided an overview of how cross-cutting themes in the *Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025* reset document were to be covered by the scrutiny committees during the 2021/22 municipal year.

Decision

To note the report.