

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 8 February 2022

Present:

Councillor Hacking - In the Chair
Councillors Ahmed Ali, Azra Ali, Andrews, Chambers, Connolly, M Dar, Evans, Grimshaw, Hilal, Hussain, S Judge, Rawson, Sheikh and Wills

Also present:

Councillor Rahman, Deputy Leader
Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods
Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children's Services

Apologies:

Councillors Whiston and Wilson

CESC/22/7 Minutes

The Chair requested that Councillor Grimshaw's apologies be noted for the January meeting.

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2022 as a correct record, subject to the above amendment.

CESC/22/8 Homelessness Update

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which set out the position of the Council's Homelessness Service in terms of how it supported local residents and how the emerging transformation programme was seeking to increase the prevention of homelessness, continue the reduction in rough sleeping, reduce the use of temporary accommodation and support residents, with a wide ranging variety of needs, including that of securing a place to call home.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- National, regional and local context;
- Homelessness Strategy and Partnership;
- Finance;
- Equalities and diversity; and
- Risks and issues.

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

- Comparisons with other core cities;
- Improving inclusion and diversity, including on the Housing Board, noting the high percentage of homeless people who were from ethnic minority groups;

- People, predominantly women and children, becoming homeless due to domestic abuse, while the perpetrator was able to remain in the family home;
- What percentage of homeless families were being placed outside the city;
- That homeless families were being dispersed to particular areas of the city with more affordable rents and the impact of this, for example, on rent levels, school places and access to NHS services;
- Whether a ward-level breakdown could be provided of where families were being dispersed to;
- Praise for the work of the homelessness team;
- To welcome the focus on preventing homelessness;
- What was being done to expedite support for tenants to secure accommodation following notice being given under Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988;
- Support for homeless people with drug and alcohol addictions;
- People who were in overcrowded accommodation and hidden homelessness, for example, young people who were couch surfing;
- What was being done to support younger people, including those living with families where they were no longer welcome;
- That more needed to be done to provide suitable and affordable homes in the city, including social rented properties; and
- How the budget was split between those in temporary accommodation and those sleeping rough.

The Director of Housing Operations reported that the high number of people presenting as homeless in Manchester was not dissimilar to levels in London and other cities. He advised that people were approaching the Council at the point of crisis and that work was taking place to increase early intervention to prevent people from becoming homeless. He acknowledged the importance of increasing diversity across senior decision makers and when listening to the voices of local people. He advised that work would be taking place to address this over the coming months and offered to provide Members with further information. He advised that approximately 30% of temporary accommodation was outside of the city, due to the affordability of properties, but that the preference was to house people within the city and that this would be a focus within the transformation work. He acknowledged that at present temporary accommodation within Manchester was concentrated in particular areas and advised that this would also be looked at as part of the transformation work. He also drew Members' attention to the Housing Strategy which was being developed. He offered to provide Members with the requested ward breakdown. In response to the question about homeless people with drug and alcohol issues, he advised that investment during the pandemic had enabled services to engage with homeless people who had been difficult to engage with in the past and provide wraparound support to them, although there were concerns about how long the funding arrangements would be in place. The Strategic Lead (Homelessness) explained how the circumstances of the lockdown and the vastly reduced number of people going into the city centre had impacted on people living on or begging on the streets of the city centre, disrupting the way they had been living and persuading them to engage with services and enabling them to move on with their lives. She advised that discussions were taking place between different services and Greater Manchester Police to look at how this work could continue and how to prevent these people from falling back into a street-based lifestyle.

The Strategic Lead (Homelessness) informed Members about the work that was taking place to prevent and address domestic abuse, following the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and the funding that had been provided by the government to support the additional responsibilities that local authorities had under this new legislation. She advised that this work included support for the Sanctuary and Safe Space Schemes to enable victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own home. She reported that new contracts had been put in place with organisations so that, where victims did need to leave their home, they had access to support including housing, financial support and specific support relating to domestic abuse. She advised that, where a family had been given notice under Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, the Private Rented Sector Team was working to identify suitable alternative accommodation in the private rented sector to prevent the need for the family to go into temporary accommodation. In response to a Member's question, she reported that the figures on rough sleepers within the report were part of the national count and included rough sleepers anywhere within the city's boundaries, not just the city centre. She advised that the Council was working closely with Centrepoint to support young people affected by homelessness, including those struggling to live with family, those who were couch surfing and young people with more complex needs.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Housing Operations advised that there were families of various sizes who needed suitable accommodation. He acknowledged that it was a challenge to find suitably sized social housing and advised that the Council needed to be creative in working with the private sector to source suitable affordable homes. In response to a Member's question about the cost effectiveness of placing families outside of the city, he advised that this would be looked at as part of the transformation work.

The Deputy Leader advised that, although affordable housing and overcrowding were beyond the remit of the homelessness report, these issues, including the Housing Strategy, could be scrutinised at a future meeting of the relevant committee. In response to a Member's question about whether the Council should be using its influence to get partners to build more social rented housing, the Chair suggested that the Executive Member for Housing and Employment could be invited to a future meeting and that the Committee could look at areas where homelessness overlapped with housing.

The Chair thanked officers and voluntary and community organisations for their work in this area.

Decisions

1. To request a ward-level breakdown of the areas of the city that homeless families are being dispersed to.
2. To request information on how the budget is split between those in temporary accommodation and those sleeping rough.

3. To note that the Director of Housing Operations will provide further information on diversity and inclusion, including in relation to the Housing Board.

CESC/22/9 Neighbourhood Directorate Budget 2022/23

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which stated that, following the Spending Review announcements and provisional local government finance settlement 2022/23 the Council was forecasting a balanced budget for 2022/23, a gap of £37m in 2023/24 and £58m by 2024/25. The report set out the high-level position. Appended to the report were the priorities for the services in the remit of this Committee, details on the initial revenue budget changes proposed by officers and the planned capital programme. The Committee was invited to comment on the proposals prior to their submission to the Executive on 16 February 2022.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Current budget position;
- Scrutiny of the draft budget proposals and budget reports;
- Next steps;
- Headline priorities for the services;
- Revenue Budget Strategy; and
- Capital budget and pipeline priorities.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods provided an overview of the financial position of the Council, including the uncertainty in future years. He highlighted some of the priority areas within the budget, including funding to address gender-based violence and funding to each ward to address their priorities. The Deputy Leader emphasised the Council's commitment to making Manchester a safe city for women and girls and outlined initial work taking place to address this.

The Executive Member for Children's Services informed Members about the proposal within the budget to invest more money in the commissioning of youth services, highlighting that 2022 had been designated as "Our Year", dedicated to the city's children and young people.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Housing Operations outlined work to monitor and address the effectiveness of Northwards Housing, particularly in relation to repairs. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods advised that this related to housing management and that a report on this would be considered by the relevant scrutiny committee.

Decision

To endorse the proposals which are relevant to the remit of this Committee.

CESC/22/10 Cultural Impact

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided information on the results of the 2020/21 Cultural Impact Survey which

demonstrated how severely the impacts of the pandemic had been felt within the culture sector. An update on workstreams related to the city's Culture Recovery Strategy outlined the role that culture could play in supporting Manchester's social and economic recovery, and the support needed to make this happen. Officers delivered a presentation which provided further detail on the results of the Cultural Impact Survey.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Cultural Impact Survey 2020/21;
- Manchester Culture Awards 2021;
- Cultural recovery;
- Zero carbon; and
- Cultural Consortium.

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

- Opportunities for young people, including work experience and apprenticeships in the culture sector;
- Improving access to the city's cultural offer, including to people from deprived communities;
- Promoting the city's cultural offer internationally;
- The use of digital platforms for cultural events and how prominent a role this was likely to play post-COVID;
- That culture should be considered in its wider sense, for example, street art;
- The culture should reflect the diversity of the city; and
- That residents should be asked how they felt about culture rather than relying on responses from organisations.

The Deputy Leader reported that access to and participation in culture had been a key focus over recent years and that, while there was further work to be done, significant progress had been made in this area. He drew Members' attention to previous reports that the Committee had received on this work. The Director of Culture advised that there were a number of cultural organisations that offered subsidised tickets, in addition to the city's free cultural content, but that the cost of public transport was a barrier for some people and that engagement officers were looking to provide an increased cultural offer in neighbourhoods.

The Director of Culture outlined the work taking place to introduce young people to careers in this sector, including through the Factory Academy and the MADE cultural education partnership. He advised that the culture sector in Manchester and the work taking place here was being promoted internationally, particularly in international professional networks, including hosting an international congress in Manchester through which it was hoped to increase international co-commissioning and international trade. He also informed Members about research being carried out about the music sector in Manchester. He reported that, during the pandemic, there had been a lot of interest in putting cultural events and content online and that this would continue, noting that this had enabled the sector to connect to people who might not come to cultural venues in the city centre; however, he advised that a lot of people were keen to get back into venues, citing that attendance at HOME had

returned to pre-pandemic levels, and, therefore, he did not envisage digital content replacing physical venues and events. In response to a Member's question, he outlined how the Cultural Consortium would enable a wider range of cultural organisations to be involved in the development of plans for the sector. The Principal Resources and Programmes Officer (Culture) reported that private sector organisations were invited to respond to the Cultural Impact Survey, advising that there was a challenge in getting a balance between gathering enough data for monitoring purposes from the organisations which had received funding and not asking for so much data that it deterred other organisations from responding.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Culture advised that cultural organisations in the city were responsible for less than 1% of the city's carbon emissions and that the majority of its carbon footprint was from transport and that public transport needed to be improved to address this. He informed Members that residents had been asked about culture as part of the research for the State of the City report and that further information could be provided in a future report to the Committee, if Members wished. He outlined the work taking place to improve diversity, particularly of the leadership of the cultural sector, following on from the findings of the study by consultants The Fifth Sector. In response to a Member's concerns that MADE did not reflect the diversity of the city, he advised that he would pass those comments to the leadership of MADE and provide a response.

The Deputy Leader acknowledged that the cultural sector in the city was not currently representative of the diversity of Manchester but advised that there was a commitment from the sector to improve this and that he hoped that the Committee would be able to see significant progress on this if they looked at this again in a year or two.

Decision

To note the report.

[Councillor Azra Ali declared a personal interest as a Board Member of the Halle.]

CESC/22/11 Manchester Libraries Strategy Update

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided an update on the Library Strategy and presented future plans.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Delivering the Library Strategy during the pandemic and beyond;
- Contributing to achieving the zero-carbon target for the city;
- The positive impact of libraries on local residents and communities;
- Equality, diversity and inclusion;
- Examples of the range of services provided by Manchester libraries; and
- Archives.

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

- To note the high levels of satisfaction across the city from the Public Library User Survey and to recognise the excellent job that library staff were doing;
- To welcome the investment in library buildings;
- Cultural diversification of library stock; and
- What could be done to encourage library membership, particularly in deprived areas.

The Head of Libraries, Galleries and Culture informed Members that the service had done a lot of work in recent years to ensure that the library stock reflected the community that it was serving, that this would continue and that local residents would be asked what they wanted in their libraries. He highlighted the proposal to remove library fines, advising that this was a barrier to using the library for some people.

In response to a Member's question about Archives, the Citywide Services Manager informed Members that a new web catalogue of Manchester Libraries' archive would be launched within the next few months and he highlighted that Manchester was the northern hub for the 1921 census which enabled people to access it for free.

Decision

To recognise the important role of libraries and the commitment of library staff and volunteers.

CESC/22/12 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.