

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 11 October 2022

Present:

Councillor Hitchen - In the Chair

Councillors Azra Ali, Benham, Connolly, M Dar, Hilal, Hussain, Iqbal, Johnson, Ogunbambo, Rawson and Wilson

Also present:

Councillor Midgley, Deputy Leader

Councillor Hacking, Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure

Councillor Reid, Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Judge, Lead Member for the Armed Forces

Louise Harding, MCRactive

Apologies:

Councillors Chambers, Evans, H Priest, Whiston and Wills

CESC/22/37 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022 as a correct record.

CESC/22/38 Homelessness

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Housing Operations that provided an update on the plans for winter for people who slept rough and the Homelessness Commissioning Strategy.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Updates on the transformation progress;
- Describing the Enabling Independence Strategy, the Council wide strategy on supported accommodation; and
- Noting that Members had requested that a full homeless scrutiny update report be presented to the 10 January 2023 meeting.

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

- Recognising that people experiencing homelessness often also had complex needs associated with substance misuse and mental health, and the response and support to this needed to be appropriate;
- Recognising the importance of prevention initiatives to avoid people experiencing homelessness;
- Prevention Hubs needed to be established across all areas of the city;
- The need to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation, especially for families;

- Private Landlords needed to do more to improve the quality of their properties and respond to repairs in a timely manner;
- Housing Associations should improve the turnaround times to re-let vacant properties to reduce the reliance on the Private Rented Sector;
- Data was sought on ethnicity and temporary accommodation occupancy;
- How equalities considerations informed the approach to address homelessness; and
- More information was requested on the Peony Project.

The Committee heard from Councillor Reid, Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. She reiterated the concerns raised regarding the impact on rates of homelessness of the cost-of-living crisis and rising childcare costs that had been articulated by the Members. She stated that it was important that families who were placed in temporary accommodation were housed close to the child's school and support network. She called for an end to housing families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and called for more Social Housing to be delivered across the city. She also supported a call for an immediate end to no fault Section 21 evictions and called for the use of Council controlled advertising boards to promote help and advice.

The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that the Manchester Homelessness Partnership had been relaunched on 10 October 2022. She stated that homelessness presented a significant challenge for the city and would be exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis. She stated that if Manchester residents wished to support homeless people, they should contact the many voluntary support organisations or donate to the Real Change MCR campaign. She further commented that people could also donate goods to the Mustard Tree. She further commented that the Council continued to lobby government to adequately fund services to support homeless people. She called for an end to no fault Section 21 evictions, an increase in the Local Housing Allowance Rate and for developers to build more affordable homes.

The Assistant Director for Homelessness advised that it was recognised that people experiencing homelessness often had complex needs and the response and support offered needed to be appropriate to meet their needs and provide wrap around support. He reiterated the importance of prevention work to avoid homelessness, adding that this was everyone's responsibility. He stated for example that if a landlord did serve a notice to quit officers would work on behalf of the tenant to negotiate and engage with the landlord to maintain the tenancy, adding the need for professional, quality landlords to operate in the Private Rented Sector. In response to a specific question, he provided a definition of the term 'intentionally homeless' and the duty on the authority in such cases.

The Assistant Director for Homelessness advised that B&B accommodation was only used in exceptional cases and for no more than six weeks; however, there were circumstances when this this period was extended. He advised that the average length of stay was 25 days. He stated that different departments did work closely together such as Children's, Adults and Community Mental Health services.

The Director of Housing Operations stated that, following the meeting, he would circulate information on the Housing Strategy that described the approach to refurbishing the Council's own assets to accommodate homeless people. In regard to Registered Social Housing voids, he stated this could be attributed to issues with the supply chain; however, he acknowledged this was an issue that needed addressing. He further advised that the intention was to build upon and expand the Prevention Hubs model. In response to a question asked regarding commissioned accommodation, Members were informed that this was Housing Related Support services delivered by third party Registered Housing Providers.

The Strategic Lead for Homelessness described that the Peony Project was a project that provided supported accommodation for women with complex needs. She said this provided intensive support to enable people to move on into suitable alternative accommodation. She advised that more information would be provided in the report scheduled for the January 2023 meeting. In response to a question regarding Floating Support, she advised that this was a new model of service delivery and would be evaluated with the intention being to roll this model out more widely across the city. She reiterated the point raised earlier that homelessness prevention was everyone's responsibility and provided an example of primary care signposting people to appropriate sources of support and advice.

The Assistant Director for Homelessness paid tribute to the staff working in the homelessness teams and paid tribute to their dedication and commitment to supporting some of the most vulnerable residents in the city. He said the team collectively had a vast knowledge and experience and he was keen to listen to their suggestions as to how the service could be improved.

The Chair advised that Members would be discussing and agreeing the scope of the report scheduled for January 2023 at the rise of this meeting. She requested that the report authors liaise with both Lead Members for Race as this report was being written to ensure the points raised regarding equalities were addressed.

The Chair stated that she would write to the Secretary of State Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and invite them to visit Manchester to witness the experience of homelessness in Manchester. She further called on all Manchester MPs to lobby the Secretary of State on this issue.

Decisions

1. The Committee note the report and would be agreeing the scope of the report scheduled for January 2023 at the rise of this meeting.
2. That the Chair, in conjunction with the Deputy Leader, write to the Secretary of State Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and invite them to visit Manchester to witness the experience of homelessness in Manchester.

CESC/22/39 Armed Forces Covenant Update and Annual Report

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services and Strategic Management Team Armed Forces Champion that introduced the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report for 2021/22.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Noting that the report would be presented to Council;
- Providing an introduction and background;
- Information on the formation of the Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group;
- Describing that the Armed Forces Act 2021 placed new statutory duties upon councils and other statutory bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant when exercising certain housing, education, or healthcare functions; and
- Next steps.

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

- The Committee welcomed the report and the progress described;
- Welcoming that the Council had achieved Gold Status from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme due to significant progress in becoming a forces friendly employer;
- Did the other boroughs across Greater Manchester have the Gold Status;
- What was being done to support those ex-service personnel who experienced homelessness in Manchester;
- Were soldiers from the Commonwealth entitled to access the same support; and
- Welcoming that the Armed Forces had been added to the Council's Equalities Impact Assessment template to ensure all services had due regard to the impact their service had on this community.

Councillor Judge, Lead Member for the Armed Forces, spoke of his pride in the report and paid tribute to the team who had delivered this important area of work. He stated that it was a 'living' report which reflected the lived experience of ex-service men and women. He stated that he had immense pride in the Armed Forces Day each year and stated that this was very well attended in Manchester. He stated that it was his ambition to have the national Armed Forces Day event held in Manchester, and he would continue to lobby for that.

In response to the specific questions, Councillor Judge advised that eight of the ten boroughs across Greater Manchester had obtained the Gold Status from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. He further stated that those ex-service personnel who experienced homelessness in Manchester were known to services and voluntary groups and there was regular engagement to offer support. He further advised that Commonwealth soldiers were entitled to the same support and made reference to his experience of working with a Commonwealth soldier and his family who now lived in the Help For Heroes housing scheme delivered at Canada Street. He further advised the Committee that any omitted names from war memorials could be added and if Members were aware of any such cases to contact him directly.

The Committee also heard from the Equalities Specialist Officer who spoke of his experience since leaving the Armed Forces. He further commented that the refresh of the online Armed Forces Toolkit had been important to ensure the Council provided necessary and improved information, links, and signposting for veterans, reservists, their families, and professionals working with the armed forces community.

Decision

The Committee welcome the report and support the call for the national Armed Forces Day event to be held in Manchester.

CESC/22/40 Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) that provided an update on the key findings identified in Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS), specifically regarding sport specific playing pitches and courts. The site-specific action plan that accompanied the strategy would remain a live document managed by the Council and partners for the lifespan of the Strategy (2022 – 2031).

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background;
- Describing how Places for Everyone linked with the PPOSS;
- Analysis of population and housing growth to calculate likely future demand on a sport by sport and area basis;
- An update on the Manchester Capital Schools Programme (2021 – 2026);
- Information on the Manchester's Sport & Physical Activity Strategy 2019-2028, noting that this set out a vision to get all residents moving more across the life course helping to transform their health and wellbeing;
- Governance arrangements;
- Describing the vision and strategic aims;
- An update on supply and demand, and sports specific key recommendations;
- Investment opportunities; and
- Conclusions.

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

- Third generation artificial grass (3G) pitches in South and Wythenshawe areas, including plans underway for Hough End and Wythenshawe Park sites;
- The need for access to 3G pitches to be affordable to all residents;
- The need to consider all environmental implications;
- The need to work with all schools to ensure that community groups and clubs could access their pitches at weekends;
- Had population demographics been taken into consideration when devising this strategy;
- Recognising the importance of getting more Manchester residents active; and

- The need to improve 'non official' pitches in parks, by installing markings and improvements to the pitch surfaces.

The Commercial Manager (Neighbourhoods) noted that a report entitled 'Manchester Sport and Physical Activity Strategy Update and Proposed Refresh' had been considered at the Committee's September meeting and this had included consideration of affordability. She further confirmed that consideration was given to gender specific provision.

Louise Harding from MCRactive advised that demographics had been taken into consideration when devising the strategy and that the strategy would address inequalities in provision. She further advised that work was underway with the Football Association to consider the approach to pitches. Discussions were ongoing with schools regarding the issue of use of school pitches at weekends. In response to a question from the Chair regarding provision in the north of the city, she advised that she would discuss this further outside of the meeting.

The Chair asked that a written response be provided to Councillor Evans in answer to a question he had submitted regarding 3G pitches in Wythenshawe. Officers confirmed that this would be done following the meeting.

Decision

The Committee endorse the Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy.

[Councillor Ogunbambo declared a personal interest as Chair of Blackley FC]

CESC/22/41 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.