

Executive

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 17 January 2024

Present: Councillor Craig (Chair)

Councillors: Akbar, Bridges, Hacking, Igbon, Midgley, Rahman, T Robinson and White

Also present as Members of the Standing Consultative Panel:

Councillors: Ahmed Ali, Butt, Chambers, Douglas, Foley, Johnson and Moran

Apologies: Councillor Rawlins, Leech and Lynch

Also present: Councillor I Robinson (MInutes Exe/24/9 and Exe/24/11 only)

Exe/24/1 Minutes

Decision

The Executive approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting on 13 December 2023.

Exe/24/2 Our Manchester Progress Update

The Executive considered a report of the Chief Executive which provided an update on key areas of progress against the Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025 which reset Manchester’s priorities for the next five years to ensure the Council could still achieve the city’s ambition set out in the Our Manchester Strategy 2016 – 2025.

The Leader reported on the success of Manchester winning further accolades as an outstanding place to visit, featuring on two prestigious lists of the best places to visit in 2024. The city was named at number 12 in the New York Times’ 52 Places To Go In 2024 list – the only place in England to feature. Major new venues such as Aviva Studios, the home of Factory International, and Co-op Live were cited as reasons to visit as well as smaller established venues such as Band On The Wall and New Century Hall. Manchester also featured in Time Out’s 15 Best Places To Visit in 2024 list for destinations in the UK. The publication described Manchester as “a cultural banquet”, again citing Aviva Studios and Co-op Live among the factors making the city a must-visit.

The Executive Member for Healthy Manchester and Adult Social Care reported on the establishment of a new multi-agency team called the Adults Early Support Team (AEST) to work alongside the Contact Centre. The Team would identify appropriate short-term interventions to enable residents to live well, providing low-level technology or equipment, signposting to information, advice, guidance and community assets, or referring to appropriate services and had been established as part of developing the Adults Early Help offer in the city.

The Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure reported on another successful programme of events and attractions over the festive period 2023 as the city reinforced its reputation as a place to enjoy the season. The Christmas Markets celebrated 25 years since they were first introduced in 1998 in style with 225 stalls over nine sites and record visitor numbers. The markets also won numerous accolades including being named as the best in the UK in research by cinch and the best in Europe by Heald's. In addition, a New Year's Eve fireworks display took place for the first time since before the Covid pandemic and attracted 10,000 people to Castlefield Bowl to welcome in 2024.

The Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure reported that Manchester Libraries had secured funding to create 3D walkthrough tours of all 22 city libraries. The £20,250 grant was awarded by the Library On programme, and funded by Arts Council England, to allow the creation of virtual tours of all the venues for the first time. Viewers would be promised an immersive experience, enabling them to explore our libraries' broad and diverse sections, historical nuances and architecture from the comfort of their own screens. The project was rooted in the need to make Manchester Libraries' 22 sites easier to discover and access, physically and online.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development reported that the Council had shortlisted six multi-disciplinary teams to submit tenders to develop a new Neighbourhood Development Framework for Holt Town. Teams would have until the end of the month to put forward their submissions for an area which had been described as the 'missing piece of the jigsaw' between major investment in the city centre and East Manchester. The Council was seeking to create an ambitious mixed-use city centre neighbourhood. It was anticipated the successful team would be announced in the spring, with work to deliver the proposals commencing immediately once consultation and the necessary planning approvals had been completed.

Decision

The Executive note the updates.

Exe/24/3 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25 and Budget Assumptions

The Executive considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, which set out the main announcements from the provisional local government finance settlement 2023/24 announced 18 December 2023, the impact of this on the Council's budget for 2024/25 to 2026/27 and the next steps in the 2024/25 budget setting process.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources reported that in 2023, local authorities had faced unprecedented financial stress. There had been three s114 notices in six months, taking the total to 7 since 2018, a notable increase from the previous five years, and many more had now publicly indicated that they might need to make the same announcement in the next few months.

Disappointingly there had been no new funding for public services announced in the Autumn Statement or Provisional Finance Settlement. As such, political and financial uncertainty continued into 2024/25 and evidence nationally and locally was that the pressures on social care and homelessness were continuing to grow.

The Provisional Settlement yet again covered a single financial year, Most details were pre-communicated in previous finance and policy statements, however, the exception was the scale of the cut to Services Grant at £329m, (84.1% nationally). For Manchester this was a reduction of £6.1m leaving a grant of just £1.1m. Whilst some redistribution of services grant had been anticipated, it was not expected at this scale.

The impact of the settlement on the Council budget position was a net reduction of c£1.6m next year. This reflected a £0.8m increase to Adult Social Care (ASC) grants which had to be passported to Adult Social Care. Therefore, the budget impact was a £2.4m worsening of the position rising to £5.3m in 2025/26. In addition to the settlement announcements, Manchester was seeing growing pressures in social care and homelessness and it was unlikely that these would be contained within the budget assumptions. Recently there had been an increase in children's placement numbers and costs, further significant pressures across ASC budgets and some worrying trends in asylum seekers/migrant policy/homelessness. This was in line with national trends and core cities and other GM authorities were all reporting similar issues.

Work was underway to confirm the position and identify further measures to close the budget gap. These would include looking for further cost reductions and mitigations as well as some potential one off sources of income which would support the budget position. The increasing pressures would mean that the gap in 2025/26 and beyond would widen with the full year effect of the increased numbers of residents requiring care and support this year (£5m in 2024/25, £36m in 2025/26, increasing to £55m by 2026/27). Whilst extremely challenging it was important that a realistic and deliverable budget was set. The final budget proposals would be developed in January and reported to scrutiny committees for consideration in February.

Decisions

The Executive:-

- (1) Endorse the report
- (2) Note that officers will identify the £5m of savings needed to close the budget gap

Exe/24/4 Changes to Council Tax Support Scheme from April 2024

The Executive considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, which proposed changes to the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme (CTSS) in order that the scheme remained fit for purpose in response to the cost-of-living challenges and the transition of most working age residents in receipt of welfare benefits onto Universal Credit.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources explained that most of the changes only affected working age claimants in receipt of Council Tax Support. Non-working age claimants (pensioners) were only affected by the proposed changes to increase the maximum length of time the Council could backdate Council Tax Support.

The main change proposed would make the Council's CTSS more generous for working-age households. The current CTSS paid up to 82.5% of the Council Tax bill leaving 17.5% to pay. The proposed change would pay up to 85% of the Council Tax bill leaving 15% to pay. In addition it was proposed to extend the backdating period for working-age claims from six-months to 12 months to allow greater flexibility to support vulnerable residents and reduce avoidable requests for reconsiderations and appeals.

The estimated additional cost to the Council, based on current caseload figures, of moving to a CTSS in 2024/25 with a maximum award of 85% for and adjusting the UC excess income bands upwards by 2.5% to maintain parity, was £699,682. After applying the assumed 4.99% increase in Council Tax across the working-age and pension-age caseload indicated a total additional cost to the Council in 2024/25 of £734,596. In addition, extending the backdating period from six-months to 12 months carried an estimated cost to the Council of £35k in 2024/25.

The proposals had been considered by the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 11 January 2024, where the recommendations were fully endorsed.

Decisions

The Executive:-

- (1) Note the outcomes of the consultation process and the Equality Impact assessment (EIA) both of which have supported and informed the final recommendations.
- (2) Approve the following changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme from 1 April 2024:
 - (i) Increase the maximum Council Tax Support Award from 82.5% to 85% for working-age households.
 - (ii) Adjust the Universal Credit excess income bands upwards by 2.5% to maintain parity with the 85% maximum award.
 - (ii) Extend the maximum backdating period from six-months to 12months

Exe/24/5 Increasing Council Tax Premiums on Empty Properties

The Executive considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, which proposed changes to the Council Tax premium charged on empty unfurnished and furnished properties.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources explained that from April 2013, the Council had been allowed to charge an additional premium on homes that had been empty and unfurnished for more than two years. Initially the premium was 50%,

but in 2019, after further legislation, the current regime was introduced where the Council charged a 100% premium after two years, a 200% premium after five years and a 300% premium after ten years. Also from April 2013, the Council removed the 50% open ended discount on empty, furnished properties, replacing it with a one month, 100% discount to allow landlords time to do necessary repairs between tenancies. This was removed by the Council in 2019, meaning no discount was available to owners of empty, furnished properties.

In February 2023 the decision was taken to adopt the new powers made available in the Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023, which would come into force as of April 2024 and would allow the Council to charge the long-term empty premium of up to 100% after one year instead of the current two-year timespan, from 1 April 2024. It also allowed the Council to charge a premium of up to 100% on empty, furnished properties from April 2025, including second homes.

The focus and rationale behind these changes was to encourage owners to bring properties back into use more quickly to address housing shortages that have been well reported.

In February 2023, there were 733 properties that had been empty and unfurnished for between one and two years. It was estimated that applying the premium after one year instead of two would create additional Council Tax liabilities of £1.3 million. By September 2023, the number of empty properties in this category had reduced to 604 properties reducing the estimated increase in Council Tax liabilities to £1.1 million, of which an estimated £0.8m would be retained by the Council. In addition, in February 2023 there were 5,371 properties that were empty and furnished, split almost 50/50 between those empty for more than a year and those empty for less than a year. By September 2023, the 12 month average number of empty properties in this category had reduced to 5,057 properties producing an estimated increase in Council Tax liabilities of £7.2 million, reflecting the Council's share only. However, this would be significantly reduced because properties owned by Registered Social Landlords would be exempt from this premium.

The proposals had been considered by the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 11 January 2024, where the recommendation was fully endorsed.

Decision

The Executive agree that the Council will adopt the new powers allowed by the Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 in order to:

- Charge the long-term empty premium after one year instead of two years from 1 April 2024.
- Charge a 100% premium on empty furnished properties, subject to any future guidance or regulations from Central Government from 1 April 2025.

Exe/24/6 Joint Targeted Area Inspection

The Executive considered a report of the Strategic Director (Children and Education Services), which informed Members of the findings from the recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) in respect of Serious Youth Violence and next steps.

The Deputy Leader (Statutory) advised that the inspection took place between 25 September 2023 and 13 October 2023. The inspection was led by Ofsted and involved a total of 12 inspectors from CQC (Health and Care), Ofsted (Schools and Social Care), HMPI (Youth Justice) and HMICFRS (Police, Fire and Rescue). In addition, the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) were also engaged as a key partner. The inspection considered 3 broad areas.

1. Strategic Partnership responses to serious youth violence;
2. Intervention with Individual and groups of children affected by serious youth violence and criminal exploitation; and
3. Intervention in places and spaces.

The inspection identified the governance arrangements for Serious Violence in the city to be a strength and Inspectors described the work of Manchester's Complex Safeguarding Hub as strong and effective. There was also recognition for the work undertaken by and in partnership with Manchester Youth Zone.

Whilst recognising the strength of Manchester's partnerships and eight areas of strength, the report also identified six areas for improvement. These included enhanced multi-agency evaluation of projects to understand better how they work together as part of an overall system and more consistency in information recording and sharing between partners. A requirement of the inspection was for a multi-agency action plan to be developed in response to the six areas identified for improvement and work had already begun on this.

Decision

The Executive note the report and steps being taken to address the areas for improvement

Exe/24/7 Revisions to the Council's Corporate Policy and Procedures on the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA)

The Executive considered a report of the City Solicitor, which sought approval to revisions to the Council's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) Corporate Policy and Procedures.

It was explained that the proposed revisions were to update the Council's existing Corporate Policy and Procedures only. There was no change to the Council's approach to use of the powers available to it under the RIPA and the IPA. However, the existing Policy and Procedures were not fully compliant with current legislative requirements which the revisions were intended to rectify.

In addition, assurance was given that the Council only very rarely used the powers available to it, but it still needed to have a robust and up to date Policy in place which officers could follow should the need arise. If the Council's Policy was not fully compliant with current legislative requirements this could lead to the Council to not meeting its statutory obligations, exceeding its powers and placing it at risk of legal challenge with its attendant reputational and financial consequences.

Decisions

The Executive:-

- (1) Approve the revisions to the Council's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ('RIPA') and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 ('IPA') Corporate Policy and Procedures.
- (2) Note the information in paragraph 3.7 of the report regarding the Council's use of RIPA for the period 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2023.

Exe/24/8 Proposal for the Next Phase of Selective Licensing

The Executive considered a joint report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) and Strategic Director (Growth and Development), which sought approval to undertake public consultation for an additional nine Selective Licensing Areas.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development explained that Officers had used local data and intelligence and lessons learnt from previous selective licensing phases to identify nine potential areas across six wards that were experiencing issues which meet the criteria to justify a Selective Licensing designation in the area.

The nine areas identified were:-

- Whiteway Street – Harpurhey
- Leng Road / Melrose Street / Droylsden Road and Scotland Street – Miles Platting & Newton Heath
- Viscount Street and Heald Grove - Moss Side
- Enver Road – Crumpsall
- Heathcote / Sanby Road – Longsight
- Northmoor Road – Longsight
- Flats above shops and Esmond / Avondale

Despite a number of targeted efforts to address the issues faced in the proposed areas, the evidence indicated that significant progress had not been made in dealing with the problems that had led to the areas being considered for Selective Licensing. For example, latest local statistics demonstrated that all of the proposed areas were still experiencing higher than average levels of rubbish and fly-tipping for their wards. Given the lack of practical or beneficial alternatives, Selective Licensing therefore represented a justifiable tool for the Council to use in responding to issues with neighbourhood and property management, in conjunction with a range of other actions that were currently being undertaken or are planned.

Decisions

The Executive:-

- (1) Approve a public consultation with residents, private landlords, businesses and other stakeholders (as set out in Section 7 of the report) to designate selective licensing schemes within the nine geographical areas, across six wards, detailed in Maps 1 to 9 (set out in Appendix 1) and listed in Section 6 of the report.
- (2) Subject to the outcome of the consultation, delegate authority to the Director of Neighbourhoods, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Development, to approve the designation of up to nine of the selective licensing areas identified in the report.

Exe/24/9 Former Central Retail Park (Part A)

The Executive considered a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development), which provided an update on progress for the redevelopment of the Former Central Retail Park site.

The Leader reported that since the publication of the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) for the former Central Retail Park (FCRP), the Council had been negotiating with the Government Property Agency (GPA) to secure the first phase of development on the FCRP site. An agreement had now been reached to secure the delivery of the first phase, a “Manchester Digital Campus”, consistent with the principles set out in the agreed SRF. This agreement showed a significant commitment to, and confidence in, the city, and was a big step towards achieving the objectives of the SRF to support regeneration and economic growth by securing regional investment, creating new high quality employment opportunities, providing new offices and creating pedestrian connections.

The development of the first phase would be for circa five acres and had the potential to accommodate up to 7,000 full time jobs, with a significant proportion being recruited locally in Manchester. Complementary ground floor commercial and amenity uses (e.g. shops and cafes) and surrounding public realm would also be provided. The delivery of the first phase would provide the catalyst to deliver the overall SRF, which would lead to significant socio-economic benefits, in line with the Council’s objectives, in particular those included within the Manchester Economic Strategy.

Alongside this, the Council had recently appointed a design team for the new park, demonstrating the commitment to deliver this major new local green space as soon as it was practical to do so. Concept designs for the park were currently being developed and would be subject to consultation at an appropriate stage.

The key terms of the agreement with GPA for the sale of the phase 1 land for redevelopment were outlined in the associated Part B report. The agreement was for the disposal of the Council’s freehold interest to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Provision was included in the terms for the sale to

account for the development not commencing, or being partially completed, including arrangements for the Council to re-acquire the site if appropriate, to maintain control of its future development. It also set out the permitted uses of the site, the expected environmental standards and compliance with social value policies.

Decisions

The Executive:-

- (1) Note the progress made on bringing forward Phase 1 of the Former Central Retail Park development.
- (2) Note the terms of the arrangements for the disposal of the Phase 1 site to the Government Property Agency for the redevelopment of this part of the site.

Exe/24/10 Exclusion of Press and Public

Decision

The Executive agrees 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.

Exe/24/11 Former Central Retail Park (Part B)

The Executive considered a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development), which outlined the confidential commercial terms of the proposed land disposal of approximately half of the Former Central Retail Park (FCRP) for redevelopment by the Government Property Agency (GPA).

Decisions

The Executive:-

- (1) Approve the disposal of the part of the site to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, for the development of phase 1 of the Former Central Retail Park (FCRP) on the terms set out in the report.
- (2) Delegate authority to the Strategic Director (Growth and Development), in consultation with the Leader, to negotiate and finalise the detailed terms of the disposal together with such other ancillary property and commercial arrangements to support the disposal and development of the FCRP site.
- (3) Authorise the City Solicitor to complete and enter into any necessary contractual and/ or ancillary documents required to give effect to the above recommendations.