

Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 20 June 2023

Present:

Councillor Johns – in the Chair

Councillors Bano, Hussain, Iqbal, Northwood, Richards, I Robinson and Taylor

Also present:

Councillor Craig, Leader of the Council

Councillor Rawlins, Executive Member for Environment and Transport

Councillor White, Executive Member for Housing and Development

Councillor Simcock, Chair of the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Shilton Godwin, Ward Councillor for Chorlton Park

Nick Roberts, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM)

Danny Vaughan, TfGM

Apologies: Councillor Benham

ERSC/23/24 Minutes

Decision

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2023 be approved as a correct record.

ERSC/23/25 Update on Public Transport

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development) which provided an update on the current/recent performance and future plans for public transport in Manchester.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- The Bee Network, a fully integrated transport network for Greater Manchester;
- Bus performance;
- Bus franchising;
- Metrolink performance; and
- Rail performance and future plans.

Key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussions in relation to buses included:

- How could Councillors be involved in shaping bus routes when bus franchising was introduced;

- The replacement and retrofitting of buses to make them compliant with clean air standards while the Greater Manchester's Clean Air Plan was under review by the Government;
- Improving bus stops, including whether real-time information could be displayed;
- To request that the content of future reports be more explicitly related to Manchester and its wards and areas of the city and the connection to the priorities of Making Manchester Fairer;
- The Bee Network Customer Centre and app and accessing information in community languages;
- Welcoming the increase in bus passengers; and
- The safety of bus passengers and drivers.

The Ward Councillor for Chorlton Park advised that the bus network should be extended, noting that some residents were excluded from bus services due to the distance from their home to the nearest bus stop. She also highlighted the impact on residents of Little Gem bus company ceasing operation.

Nick Roberts from TfGM explained how Little Gem had informed TfGM that they would be ceasing operation from the following day and how TfGM had worked to communicate this to bus users and to try to find a suitable alternative bus company to provide the contracted services. He advised that it was hoped that a suitable alternative bus operator would be in place soon. He stated that this case demonstrated the instability of the current market and that the new model of a franchised service should lead to improvements, with greater stability and control. He reported that the first stage of the franchised network was intended to maintain stability in the short term, with a similar network to that at present, while information was being gathered. Once this information was gathered and analysed, it was likely that there would be a review of the network, taking into account both commerciality and social need, and that this would include an element of consultation. He informed Members that good progress had been made in retrofitting buses and that he was not aware of any pause on this work due to review of the Clean Air Plan, although he would check on this. He reported that real-time information was available at some locations, in particular bus stations, and that consideration could be given to introducing this at popular bus stops but that many people had smartphones which they could use to access this information. In response to further comments on the importance of real-time information, he stated that the Bee Network app would be key in providing information. The Executive Member for Environment and Transport reported that the Bee Network Delivery Committee was discussing these issues and that, as a Member of that Committee, she was highlighting the importance of the Bee Network app being accessible and that not all public transport users had smartphones. She encouraged Members to use the online briefings to ensure that their voices were heard and stated that she would also feed back Members' views to the Bee Network Delivery Committee. She stated that she would take forward the Member's point about community languages with the relevant officer.

Danny Vaughan from TfGM reported that TfGM already ran a customer service centre and explained how this would be enhanced to be able to respond to any issues customers had across the transport network. He outlined some of the plans for the Bee Network app, including journey planning and real-time information, improved information on disruptions, purchasing bus and tram and multi-modal tickets and a mechanism for passengers to feedback on their journey experience. He reported that further information on accessibility, including community languages, could be included in a future report. In response to a Member's question, he reported that information had previously been produced about the level of carbon reduction which had resulted from investment in the Metrolink, represented as the number of car journeys taken off the road, and that it should be possible to translate future investment into figures in a way which was relatable for the public.

Nick Roberts from TfGM reported that bus passenger numbers had recovered since the pandemic but had not returned to pre-COVID levels. He outlined how travel patterns had changed and highlighted the impact of home working. He reported that it was hoped that bus franchising, including branding, marketing, fare initiatives and improved information, as well as identifying new markets and planning services to meet those demands, would increase passenger numbers. In response to a Member's question, he advised that school bus services would be franchised. He agreed that it was important for bus drivers to understand the needs of children and respect young people and stated that he would check on the training for bus drivers in relation to this. He highlighted the work of the TravelSafe Team, tackling Anti-Social Behaviour and working with the police.

In response to a Member's questions about work to improve bus performance, the accessibility of buses, including verbal announcements, the low level of demand for the East Manchester Local Link service and work to reduce congestion and delays due to roadworks, Nick Roberts proposed to provide a written response to the Member after the meeting. The Member agreed to this but stated that a response to the question on accessibility should be provided publicly. The Executive Member for Environment and Transport reported that the minimum standards for the new, yellow buses would include visual and audio announcements and she supported the Member's comment that consideration of accessibility issues was broader than access for wheelchair users. She advised that further information on this would be provided.

The Interim Head of Infrastructure and Environment drew Members' attention to the £1.2 billion worth of transport investment for local roads, bus, train and tram services referred to in the report and advised that this investment would help to improve the reliability of bus services.

Danny Vaughan provided an update on Metrolink since the Metrolink Service Performance Report, included at appendix 2 in report, had been produced in March 2023. He reported that patronage of the Metrolink network was increasing and was now at about 90% of pre-COVID levels. He reported that revenue was not at pre-COVID levels but costs had increased significantly, in particular energy bills, and that,

while subsidies had not been required prior to the pandemic, dialogue was ongoing with the Government about subsidy levels. He reported that the results of a customer satisfaction survey had been broadly positive but the main areas of concern raised had been anti-social behaviour and capacity. He outlined work to tackle anti-social behaviour on Metrolink, including increasing frontline staff. He stated that performance had improved, while highlighting recent issues and forthcoming track renewal work which would affect services. He highlighted plans for service improvements, as driver vacancies were being filled. He also reported on possibilities to expand the Metrolink network and develop tram-train rapid transit.

Key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussions in relation to Metrolink included:

- Would the Ashton line return to a 6-minute service;
- Passengers being charged the "incomplete journey fare" if they forgot to tap out at the end of their journey;
- Would early morning services be reintroduced to Manchester Airport, for workers and travellers;
- Anti-social behaviour on trams, including vaping, including whether TravelSafe officers should travel in smaller groups on more trams;
- Making information clearer for visitors to Manchester; and
- The lift at Castlefield/Deansgate Metrolink not working.

In response to a Member's question, Danny Vaughan confirmed that open data would continue to be available after the move to the Bee Network app. He reported that marketing campaigns had been used to remind people to tap out at the end of their journey, although he highlighted that, depending on the zones travelled through, forgetting to tap out would not necessarily result in a higher charge. He reported that Metrolink would be looking into taking into account the overall daily cap when making this charge and autocompleting for passengers who made regular journeys. He advised that there were currently no plans to reintroduce early morning services to Manchester Airport but that it had not been ruled out, whilst noting that it had not been particularly well used, that most of the people using it travelled between 5.30 and 6 am and that there were bus options for most areas. He confirmed that a 6-minute service would be restored on the Ashton line as far as the Etihad Stadium. He reported that TravelSafe officers and Customer Service Officers currently tended to travel in groups, targeting hotspots. He advised that recruitment was currently taking place and that 40 to 50 additional customer service staff should be working on the network by September so passengers should see greater staff visibility. He agreed with a comment from the Chair about improving information for visitors, stating that customer information should be reviewed and not assume a level of understanding about Manchester and the Metrolink.

In response to a Member's comments, the Chair proposed that the Committee receive a report on Heavy Rail later in the year.

The Leader reported that colleagues at TfGM had done a great job in making the case in relation to HS2. She expressed disappointment that the plans for Platforms 15 and 16 at Piccadilly Station had been withdrawn and stated that the Council would continue to lobby, particularly through Transport for the North and the Joint Greater Manchester Rail Taskforce, for plans to address the capacity issues.

Decisions:

1. To request an annual update on public transport from TfGM, including Manchester-specific information, information on the geographical spread of services across the city, links to the Making Manchester Fairer priorities and information on the capital investment programme.
2. To request a report on rail, to include HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) and the Northern Hub (Platforms 15/16).

ERSC/23/26 The Greater Manchester Trailblazer Devolution Deal and its implications for Manchester, including Adult Skills and Technical Education

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development) which provided a summary of the recent Greater Manchester Trailblazer deal and its implications for Manchester.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- The background to the Deal
- The four priority areas within the Deal which were:
 - Single Settlement;
 - Housing and Regeneration;
 - Transport; and
 - Skills;
- Considerations for Manchester in relation to these priority areas; and
- Additional announcements.

Key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussions included:

- To welcome the devolution of powers to the city region;
- What was being done to ensure that the city region was in the best possible position if there was a change of government, in terms of retaining the commitments in this deal;
- Was the £150m of brownfield funding intended to enable the delivery of current housing targets or to stretch them further;
- To ask for more information on what the Housing Quality Pathfinder might mean in practice; and
- To request a report on the development of a Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc).

In response to a question from the Chair, the Leader stated that more progress had been made in achieving devolved powers for areas within the control of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) than for other Government departments. She cited as an example that Greater Manchester had asked for control in the post-16 educational sector and influence in the pre-16 sector and had not been given either of these, although the Department for Education had agreed to look at a partnership in the post-16 sector, which would give the city region more influence in post-16 education and skills.

The Leader advised that she felt there was very little in the deal that a future Government would not continue with; however, she advised that the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer had announced that a Labour Government would make major reforms to or scrap business rates so work was taking place to understand what that would mean for Greater Manchester. She advised that a future Government would also need to consider devolution across different geographical areas and what powers cities themselves should have, informing Members that the Core Cities were leading on work in relation to this. In response to a question about the rail partnership, she stated that this was not the devolved control and capital, that the city region had wanted and that it was still an emerging partnership, which the city region would work hard on.

The Strategic Director (Growth and Development) reported that the £150m of brownfield funding was to help deliver the existing pipeline of homes and linked to a target of 7000 new homes within 3 years and that it was important to demonstrate to Government that Greater Manchester could achieve more with greater flexibility and certainty of funding. In response to a Member's question, she stated that this should include affordable housing and net zero housing. In response to a Member's question, the Executive Member for Housing and Development outlined some of the other sources of funding available for housing development.

The Strategic Director (Growth and Development) reported that there were few details on the Housing Quality Pathfinder at present but that DLUHC had been looking at what additional powers could be developed to help drive better quality in the Private Rented Sector so Greater Manchester and the West Midlands could potentially trial these. She reported that the Mayor of Greater Manchester would have powers to approve large-scale landlord licensing, rather than the Secretary of State.

In response to a question from the Ward Councillor for Chorlton Park about the future relationship between Manchester and Greater Manchester, including in relation to scrutiny, the Assistant Chief Executive reported that work was taking place within the GMCA around its decision-making, governance and scrutiny structures in light of this deal and that the Council would be working with the GMCA on this, which might need to include consideration of how scrutiny at a Manchester level fitted in with scrutiny at a Greater Manchester level.

The Leader outlined how the Council was ensuring that Manchester was not disadvantaged financially by the deal and the new funding arrangements, including seeking assurance from Government that the Greater Manchester councils could bid for new funding which became available and making the city's case for a fair share of the funding for Greater Manchester, taking into account its characteristics, including a much larger population and higher levels of deprivation. In response to a question from the Chair of the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee about whether the other 9 Greater Manchester authorities agreed with this division of funding, she reported that funding per head of the population was a well-established approach and that, when addressing issues such as poverty and inequalities, this would sometimes require funding to be targeted rather than divided equally across all areas, and that this would direct more funding towards Manchester.

The Chair stated that Members wanted a further report on the MBacc but there would need to be a discussion about the most appropriate scrutiny committee to receive this report. The Leader reported that the conversation on developing the MBacc was intended to help identify what good technical pathways into jobs would look like, particular post-16, and how schools could support that. The Chair proposed that this item be added as a 'to be scheduled' item on the Committee's work programme and advised that he would speak to the Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee about which Committee would receive it.

Decision:

To add the MBacc as a 'to be scheduled' item on the Committee's work programme and to note that the Chair will speak to the Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee about which Committee will receive it.

[Councillor Johns declared a personal interest due to writing on devolution for his work.]

ERSC/23/27 Headlines from the 2021 Census

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Assistant Chief Executive which summarised the headline outputs that had been released from the 2021 Census so far, specifically describing the change in resident population, the concerns the Council had in terms of missing population, and an overview of how the Census results were generally used to support decision making.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Key results from the 2021 Census;
- Concerns with the Census results;
- The Manchester City Council Forecasting Model (MCCFM);
- Using population statistics to inform service planning; and
- The importance of the Census and population statistics.

Key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussions included:

- Funding implications of the population undercount in the Census 2021;
- The Manchester City Council Forecasting Model (MCCFM); and
- Opportunities for Ward Councillors to engage with this work at a ward level, including feeding back information.

The Assistant Chief Executive reported that the Council was in discussions with Government officials and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) about the undercount and funding implications, had offered to share the MCCFM with them and was lobbying hard to get this undercount taken into account in the funding formulas.

In response to a Member's questions about the MCCFM, the Head of Performance, Research and Intelligence reported that this was a recognised model, which had been through testing and review, and had been procured by the Council a number of years ago. The Performance and Insight Manager reported that the Council had used a number of different data sources to ascertain the population numbers that should have been expected in the Census. She described how the model had been developed by an eminent demographer and the methodology that Manchester was using and stated that Manchester's approach had been peer reviewed. The Member welcomed this work.

The Head of Performance, Research and Intelligence reported that a lot of work was taking place with Neighbourhood Teams and other agencies to understand the local context but acknowledged a suggestion that more could be done with Ward Councillors and stated that he would take this forward. In response to a Member's question, the Performance and Insight Manager outlined some of the data sources used including Child Benefit, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), Council Tax, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the electoral roll. She reported that the Council had a ward data bank and that a lot of ward-level data was available, which could be shared with Members.

In response to a question from the Chair about data in the Census such as ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, the Assistant Chief Executive reported that the detailed information within the Census was being used, albeit with the caveat that there were people missing from these figures. The Performance and Insight Manager advised that there was a concern that a higher proportion of the people missing from the Census data were likely to be from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. She reported that the Council was building up information from other sources, such as the school census, on issues such as ethnicity and language.

Decision:

To note the report.

ERSC/23/28 Overview Report

The committee received a report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which contained key decisions within the Committee's remit.

The Chair noted that the Committee had requested that an item on the MBacc be added to the 'to be scheduled' list on the work programme and had also requested a report on rail, which should include HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) and the Northern Hub (Platforms 15/16).

Decision:

That the committee note the report and agree the work programme, noting the above comments.