

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 9 January 2024

Present:

Councillor Hitchen (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Good, Ogunbambo, Rawson, Sheikh, Whiston and Wills

Also present:

Councillor Rahman, Statutory Deputy Leader

Councillor Midgley, Deputy Leader

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People

Chief Superintendent Rick Jackson, Greater Manchester Police

Superintendent Chris Downey, Greater Manchester Police

Alison Lynch, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust

Ruth Speight, Assistant Chief Nurse (Safeguarding), Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust

Tom Hinchliffe, NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care

Apologies: Councillor Azra Ali, Appleby, Doswell and H Priest

CESC/24/1 Interests

Councillors Good and Ogunbambo declared personal interests in item 9 (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Infrastructure Contract Update).

CESC/24/2 Minutes

Decision: That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 5 December 2023, be approved as a correct record.

CESC/24/3 Crime and Policing

The committee considered a report of Greater Manchester Police (GMP) which provided an update on the City of Manchester division's journey to improvement.

Key points and themes within the presentation included:

- Improvements in communication between GMP and partners and the community;
- Improvements to prevent and reduce harm;
- Operations to tackle residential and business burglary; and
- Ambitions for future investment into emergency response resources and police student training.

Some of the key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussion included:

- Commending GMP officers and staff for their service to Manchester and its residents;
- Staff turnover and how greater consistency could be ensured;
- If neighbourhood patrol boundaries would be changed to align with ward boundaries;
- Poor communication of the decision to end university policing patrols;
- Suggesting that GMP devise individual ward plans and create dedicated email addresses for each ward for residents and members to report issues to;
- The rationale behind relocating or redeploying police officers;
- Noting a need for better direct communication and meetings with members in North Manchester;
- The need for better communication overall, citing that members sometimes received information on crime in their area through social media or word of mouth rather than directly from GMP;
- How GMP communicated with victims of crime;
- What changes residents could expect to see in the next 12 months; and
- Call-handling and police response times.

The Statutory Deputy Leader stated that the Council had a strong working relationship with GMP and the work, lines of communication and regular briefings which had been in place since the Chief Superintendent took up his post were invaluable. He recognised some challenges but reiterated the positive collaboration between the Council and GMP, particularly in neighbourhood policing.

The Chief Superintendent, GMP attended the meeting and stated that the force had strong communication methods with the Council but recognised that there may have been occasions where members did not feel fully informed. He recognised that it was important to understand different viewpoints, capacity and implications of decisions and explained that the Statutory Deputy Leader of the Council provided a quarterly forum for members, which he also attended, to give a broad overview of crime in the city and an opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns. He stated that GMP had committed to a neighbourhood policing structure consisting of an Inspector and Sergeant and that information on the responsible officers for each area was available online. He also updated the committee on the force's IT system, which he said was addressing some previous limitations.

He recognised that the nature of policing in addition to retirement and seeking other development opportunities led to staff turnover, but more vacancies would be filled as student police officers finished their studies in April 2024.

In response to queries regarding ensuring consistency between departing and new officers, the Chief Superintendent, GMP acknowledged the importance of structured handovers and communication with members and residents. He also recognised that there was a significant period in which most police forces did not recruit but this was now resuming, and people were moving between forces.

It was also confirmed that neighbourhood patrol boundaries would be aligned with ward boundaries from April 2024.

The Chief Superintendent, GMP took responsibility for the decision to disband Student Safe officers on university campuses and recognised that the communication of this was not as effective as hoped. He explained that the public, including students, were not receiving value-for-money through the structure of Student Safe officers and that alternative delivery methods were assessed to provide a more tangible service. He stated that communications were issued in advance of Christmas 2023, and he endeavoured to review this in more detail.

The Chief Superintendent, GMP noted suggestions for dedicated ward plans and ward-specific email addresses and endeavoured to look into the possibility of devising ward plans in more detail. He stated, however, that it would be impractical to have a dedicated email address for each ward as a reporting tool as it could create issues with accountability. He reiterated that contact details for the responsible officers in each area was available on GMP's website.

A member raised concern over a recent cancelled meeting between GMP officers and members in North Manchester and suggested improvements were required in direct communication between GMP and members. In response, the Chief Superintendent, GMP highlighted the need for the police, Council officers and members to work in partnership and that he would want Council officers to be involved in any meetings between the force and members.

In response to a query regarding why police officers were relocated or redeployed onto other projects, members were advised that resource was sometimes required elsewhere. He explained that officer abstraction rates were tracked through an internal app and that the City of Manchester division had the lowest abstraction rate in GMP.

The committee was informed that there was a common approach to communication across the city and that GMP would continue to work with the Council to learn and progress. The Chief Superintendent, GMP highlighted that requests for investigation updates were sometimes made by members or residents which were not appropriate to share. He stated that the force abided by the Victims' Code of Practice when communicating with victims of crime and that there were force-wide performance measures in place regarding contact with victims.

In response to a question regarding the changes that residents could expect to see, the Chief Superintendent, GMP reiterated that there had been a recent increase in recruitment so residents would see and feel an increased police presence. He also stated that call response times would continue to be quick and that there would be improvements in street and road safety. It was highlighted that the force was responding to the needs of a growing future population.

Members were informed that GMP had the best average speed of answer times in the country. Calls to 999 were currently answered between 1-3 seconds and calls to 111 within 30 seconds. Police response times to 999 calls was currently around 10 minutes and responses to crimes and incidents classed as “grade 2” or appointments was around 1 hour. The Chief Superintendent, GMP stated that this was phenomenal progress and the Chair asked him to pass on the committee’s thanks to call handlers.

The Statutory Deputy Leader commented that the police had experienced significant budget cuts in the previous 14 years, including a recruitment freeze and the reduction of over 2000 police officer in Greater Manchester which impacted the ability for neighbourhood policing. He acknowledged the improvements made by GMP, which he felt was testament to the partnership between the Council and the force and stated that it was reassuring that issues continued to be addressed.

Decision:

That the committee

1. note the report;
2. recognise and commend the improvements made by GMP;
3. continue to receive an annual update on crime and policing to better identify issues and areas for improvements going forwards;
4. encourages GMP to continue building consistent communication methods with elected members and residents; and
5. requests that the next annual crime and policing update includes statistics on crime levels in Manchester.

CESC/24/4 Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) Serious Youth Violence

The committee considered a report of the Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) which presented the findings of a recent JTAI in respect of Serious Youth Violence, which took place between 25 September and 13 October 2023.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background to JTAIs;
- Manchester was the first authority in the country to be inspected under a new inspection framework;
- The scope of the Inspection;
- The overall findings of the inspection, which were positive; and
- 6 areas for improvement were identified and a multi-agency action plan had been developed in response.

Some of the key points and queries that arose from the committee’s discussion included:

- That the action plan, policing and multi-agency approach should be child-centred and trauma-informed;
- The key areas that would be considered in a child's Education, Care and Health Plan (ECHP);
- Highlighting a recommendation made by a recent Task and Finish Group on crime and antisocial behaviour for the Council to encourage Youth Outreach Services across the city to adopt a consistent approach to tackling ASB and barriers to reporting experienced by children and young people, and whether this could be incorporated into the JTAI action plan;
- Highlighting issues with the use of jargon and acronyms in the action plan;
- Resources and capacity, with particular reference to Children and Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAMHS);
- Expressing concern over lack of timescales within the action plan with regards to CAMHS referrals;
- What work was undertaken to prevent children from being excluded from school;
- How child-centred policing would reduce the overrepresentation of BAME children in the criminal justice system;
- Noting that the Inspectors highlighted the underrepresentation of girls in referrals to the complex safeguarding hub (CSH), in relation to known levels of need, and that there was no reference in the action plan as to how this would be addressed;
- How these actions would be evaluated and the timescales for this;
- What programmes and interventions were in place to prevent young people from reoffending; and
- Whether the action plan was robust enough to deliver further improvements in addressing serious youth violence.

The Statutory Deputy Leader stated that the Joint Targeted Area Inspection was an important and positive piece of work and emphasised that the Council strived to ensure that improvements were made in regard to tackling serious youth violence. He explained that the Inspector's report highlighted a number of strengths, including partnership working, and some challenges which he stated were important to recognise in order to continuously improve. He also thanked officers who were involved in the inspection on behalf of the Executive.

The Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) advised that representatives from the Council, Youth Justice Service, NHS and GMP were in attendance. He explained that the JTAI was the first inspection held nationally and involved 4 inspectors from key statutory agencies undertaking a 'deep dive' into a particular theme or issue to assess the local authority area's response. He further explained that the inspection assessed strategy and partnership; interventions with individual children and groups; and intervention in places. He recognised that there were six areas for the Council and partners to improve on and informed the committee that an action plan had been submitted to Ofsted and work was being progressed through the Community Safety and Violence Subgroup with support from the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership.

The Chair noted that this work also formed part of the remit of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and she raised questions made representations on behalf of the committee's Chair, Councillor Reid. In response to these questions, the Superintendent, GMP stated that he had overall thematic responsibility for vulnerability and safeguarding across Manchester. He explained that good progress had been made with child-centred policing and that a strategy had been developed which focused on the systems and processes within GMP. This strategy was used to inform the necessity and consequences of arresting a child, entering a child into the criminal justice system and keeping a child in police custody or on bail. He stated that the police force needed to be trauma-informed in order to understand approaches to children and young people and this was being rolled out across all districts in Manchester.

The Deputy Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) stated that staff within the service were trauma-informed and that those working in the Complex Safeguarding Hub had particular skills in this area. He explained that officers were aware of the diverse issues affecting children and considered the causes presented through trauma. He noted that the Council worked with highly complex and exploited children and planning could be difficult as a result of this. Planning was undertaken by a range of agencies and the qualities and skills of officers helped to mitigate some issues with planning. He explained that Children's Services had recently revised the planning document, and this was a focus of the quality assurance framework. He recognised the need for greater focus on siblings' needs and improved consistency in information sharing, although good partnership working was acknowledged.

The Strategic Lead – Community Safety also advised that an appropriate response to trauma was a key component of the Council's Serious Violence Strategy. She stated that the Council also sought consideration of trauma-informed responses through the commissioning process with the voluntary and community sector, youth providers and organisations providing restorative justice. The Council's Public Health service also provided trauma-informed training for frontline staff and partners.

In response to a query regarding resources and capacity, the Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) explained that a profiling exercise was undertaken during the development of the Serious Violence Strategy to identify the scale of need. He stated that the inspection highlighted that early intervention and prevention was key and cited Engage panels, the voluntary sector, youth justice and CAMHS as avenues for this. The Strategic Lead – Community Safety advised that a lot of early intervention and prevention work was funded and that the Council had raised the lack of long-term, mainstream funding with the Inspectors.

The Youth Justice Manager highlighted that Youth Justice service users were three times more likely not to reoffend and that significant funding had been granted from the Ministry of Justice to continue interventions such as speech and language therapy, CAMHS, drama therapy and relationship-building. He recognised that there was a small cohort of children who reoffended and advised that a specialist project,

SHIFT, was underway with approximately 30 children who had been identified by the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership as having risk factors.

The Assistant Chief Nurse (Safeguarding), Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust advised that there had been considerable transformation of and investment into CAMHS with regards to community and preventative work, which was being undertaken alongside targeted core CAMHS work. She highlighted that there was ongoing scrutiny of CAMHS' work and the action plan would include steps to communicate the service's offer.

The Strategic Lead – Community Safety advised that consistency among Youth Outreach Services in tackling ASB and barriers to reporting could also be progressed through the Serious Violence Board in addition to the Community Safety Partnership.

In response to a question regarding children being excluded from school, the Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) explained that the inspection focused on children over the age of 10 years-old. He stated that Manchester was involved in the national pilot of the 'Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed' (SAFE) programme to deliver targeted interventions to reduce truancy, improve behaviours, and reduce the risk of individuals failing to enter education, employment or training and that it had an Alternative Provisions Taskforce which encompassed Pupil Referral Units (PRU). He explained that when an attendance issue was identified, a child would be offered mentoring as a form of early intervention and prevention. The Council also worked with schools to identify issues causing low attendance rates and the required level of support.

With regards to the overrepresentation of BAME children in the criminal justice system, the Superintendent, GMP acknowledged that the Child-Centred Policing Strategy would not resolve issues leading BAME children into criminality but it would help to provide the background and context to help the Community Safety Partnership identify the necessary appropriate support. The Youth Justice Manager noted that the overrepresentation of BAME children in the criminal justice system was a national trend and Manchester strove to address this issue. He explained that resources were in place to identify opportunities for interventions. The Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) stated that there was ongoing work with AFRUCA to protect and safeguard BAME children from abuse, modern slavery and exploitation.

It was noted that the action plan did not make reference to how girls were involved in and affected by serious violence. The Deputy Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) further explained that significant work to raise awareness of the exploitation through and involvement of girls of all ethnicities in serious violence had been undertaken in the previous 9 months with staff and this was identified as an area of continued focus but recognised that this was not highlighted in the action plan.

In response to a query by the Chair regarding evaluation, the Strategic Lead – Community Safety advised that the Inspectors had noted the strong evaluation within projects but had suggested evaluation of the wider serious violence reduction programme. She stated that the Council was committed to developing a performance framework to sit alongside the Serious Violence Strategy and would include measures and statistics. This would be developed in the next few months.

The Strategic Lead – Community Safety explained that mentoring and restorative justice were key interventions in preventing children and young people from reoffending.

The Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) asserted his belief that the action plan, in addition to the recommendations made by the committee, was robust enough to deliver further improvements in addressing serious youth violence. He highlighted that a wider response to serious youth violence and its causes would continue to be undertaken with partners.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People reiterated the importance of partnership working in addressing serious youth violence and stated that the Council and its partners placed children at the centre of work.

In summarising, the Chair thanked the officers and partners who were involved in the inspection and developing the action plan. She stated that poverty played a significant role in criminality and that budget cuts by the government had exacerbated this.

Decision:

That the committee

1. note the report and the draft multi-agency action plan;
2. recommends that a glossary be created to provide further clarity on some of the work and organisations referenced in the action plan;
3. recommends that greater clarity on timescales for referrals to CAMHS be included in the action plan;
4. highlights that the action plan did not make reference to how girls were involved in and affected by serious violence and recommends that the action plan be amended to include detail on current and scheduled work to address the involvement of young girls in serious violence, crime and disorder and sexual exploitation; and
5. requests further progress updates on the actions.

CESC/24/5 Overview Report

The committee considered a report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which 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:

That the report be noted, and the work programme agreed.

CESC/24/6 Exclusion of Press and Public

Decision:

That the press and public be excluded 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 outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

CESC/24/7 Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Infrastructure Contract Update

The Assistant Chief Executive and the Programmes and Policy Manager (Communities and VCSE) provided a confidential verbal update on the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Infrastructure Contract.

The committee discussed a recent bidding process, monitoring requirements and the timescales involved in the contract. It was agreed to bring a quarterly update report to the committee.

Decision:

That the update be noted.