

## **Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 16 July 2024**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Hitchen (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Azra Ali, Bell, Doswell, Iqbal, Ogunbambo, Rawson, Sheikh, Whiston and Wright

#### **Also present:**

Councillor Midgley, Statutory Deputy Leader

Councillor T Robinson, Executive Member for Healthy Manchester and Adult Social Care

Councillor Davies, Lead Member for Age Friendly

Andy Brown, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Manchester

Hayley Hughes, Assistant Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Manchester

Sinead O'Connor, Charity Manager, Cheetham Hill Advice Centre

Linda Erskine, Service Manager, Shelter

Elaine Unegbu, Chair, Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board

**Apologies:** Councillor Good

#### **CESC/24/31 Update on Advice Services in the City**

The committee considered a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided an overview of Manchester's advice services, ongoing pressures experienced by services, the range of provision across the city and the outcomes achieved through the advice contracts that the Council commissions. It also provided an update on the recommissioning of the City-Wide Advice Service contract and how the new model would help to tackle inequality in the city.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background to the City-Wide Advice contract and the City-Wide Advice Partnership, which consisted of Citizens Advice Manchester, Shelter and Cheetham Hill Advice Centre;
- The City-Wide Advice contract covered the provision of welfare benefit advice, debt management, and housing/homelessness advice, delivered across six channels;
- How advice services were delivered across the city;
- Demand, trends and pressures on advice services;
- The consultation undertaken regarding recommissioning of the City-Wide Advice Service and the themes that emerged from this;
- The model for the new City-Wide Advice Service;
- That CAM, working in collaboration with Shelter and CHAC, had been awarded the new City-Wide Advice Service contract, which would start in October 2024 and run for a period of three years, with the option to extend for a further two; and
- Other advice providers in the city.

Some of the key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussions were:

- Commending the service provided to residents;
- What place-based advice services would be offered as part of the contract?
- Who would benefit from the Advice and Extra Help Support and whether this would be offered outside of the 15 priority wards;
- Expressing concerns about waiting times on Shelter's telephone helpline;
- Expressing concern about 72% of online survey respondents experiencing barriers to accessing advice;
- Whether organisations offered a callback service and what could be done to improve responses where service users might not respond to unknown phone numbers;
- How the impact of advice services on reducing poverty and inequality would be evaluated;
- Requesting that satellite hubs be provided in specific wards; and
- What support was available for those experiencing digital exclusion or where English was not a first language (ESOL).

Introducing the item, the Statutory Deputy Leader commended the work of advice service providers in an increasingly challenging climate, recognising rising levels of debt and demand for services in the city.

The Strategic Lead (Homelessness) explained that the new City-Wide Advice Service contract had been awarded and would look at how to tackle inequalities in the city; improve community connections; deliver high-quality advice; and how to provide additional support for those who struggle to access advice services.

Representatives from Citizens Advice Manchester, Shelter and Cheetham Hill Advice Centre – which had successfully bid for the contract – attended the meeting and provided an overview of their organisations and the support they offered.

In response to members' queries, the Strategic Lead (Homelessness) explained that the development of the Advice Extra Help and Support programme arose from consultation with a range of stakeholders, partners and those with lived experience to understand gaps around the City-wide Advice Service contract as well as what worked well and where additional input was required. She stated that feedback suggested that the Advice Service contract was working well but there were challenges in certain areas of the city where language barriers made accessing advice services difficult. She explained that the Council wanted to provide additional capacity to some organisations in different priority wards to build up skills and knowledge by working with the main contract providers and to create a link to services. She advised that the approach to the Advice Extra Help and Support programme would be developed over the next few months and that providers would be commissioned in early 2025 with the contract to begin in October 2025. It was also confirmed that this would be targeted in the 15 priority wards, but the wider City-wide Advice Services contract provided services across the city.

The Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Manchester expressed his organisation's appreciation of the Council's investment into the City-wide Advice Service contract.

He commented that the tender proposed the expansion of the current service model to create 15 principal advice hubs to support 45 satellite hubs which would consist of a combination of caseworkers, video consultations and mobile services in areas with the highest demand. He stated that CAM's advice van enabled the organisation to be responsive to need and demand. He commented that following the recent award of the contract, a mobilisation period was underway, and conversations would be held with local stakeholders such as the Council and the healthcare sector to understand the best locations for satellite hubs.

In response to a member's concern regarding call wait times, the Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Manchester explained that the City-wide Advice Service contract funded approximately 4000 responses to calls per month but that the current demand was around 7000, highlighting challenges with resourcing and demand. He provided assurances, however, that the new contract provided additional investment for CAM to provide more place-based and digital advice. The Service Manager, Shelter apologised for the difficulty experienced personally by the Member and agreed to look into this further. She explained that there was a direct referral pathway to Shelter through the contract and that urgent cases were contacted on the same day.

With regards to barriers to accessing advice services, the Strategic Lead (Homelessness) stated that this was often due to a lack of awareness of the services available and where these were located. She explained that the new contract sought to address this and to provide advice services in a culturally sensitive way. The Assistant Chief Executive, CAM explained that the organisation worked with a diverse range of partners and funders and that there would be a stringent customer service element incorporated into the new contract with residents consulted on their experiences.

The Chief Executive, CAM acknowledged challenges in providing a high-volume, personal service. He explained that CAM made initial contact by telephone following a referral and would discuss the service user's preferred method of communication once contact was made.

The Strategic Lead (Homelessness) informed the committee that data from the City-wide Advice Service contract fed into the Making Manchester Fairer programme and data from the contract would be assessed by the Commissioning team to monitor the outcomes and impact on reducing inequality and poverty. There would also be links between the new contract and VCSE organisations and other specialist advice, such as the Greater Manchester Immigration Advice Service, were integrated into the wider service.

In response to a query regarding support provided for non-English speakers or those digitally excluded, the Charity Manager, Cheetham Hill Advice Centre stated that the organisation encouraged the use of face-to-face services in these circumstances and would encourage those making a referral to provide advance notice of any additional needs, such as a translator. The Strategic Lead (Homelessness) stated that the Extra Help and Support programme would provide funding to community organisations to provide assistance with tasks such as form-filling and letter writing.

In concluding the item, the Chair thanked the representatives of Citizens Advice Manchester, Shelter and Cheetham Hill Advice Centre for their attendance and commended their work across the city, which the committee echoed.

**Decision:**

1. To note the report.
2. To request a further update on the City-wide Advice Service contract in 12 months', including work to address barriers to accessing services;
3. To request further information on the indicative monitoring and evaluation methods for the contract;
4. To request detail on the delivery plan of the contract for the next 6 months; and
5. To request that the report be shared with all members of the Council.

**CESC/24/32 Age Friendly Manchester – Delivery Progress Update**

The committee considered a report of the Director of Public Health which provided a summary of progress and the arrangements in place to support the delivery of Manchester's age friendly strategy, '*Manchester: A City for Life 2023-2028*'.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- The fundamental focus for the first six months of the new strategy had been on building foundations for the next 5-year programme;
- Progress against each of the 4 main themes of the strategy, with examples of the work undertaken; and
- Solid foundations were in place to drive delivery with strengthened partnerships and working arrangements to support this.

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

- The success of the national pension credit uptake campaign;
- What work was being undertaken to recruit more South East Asian residents to the Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board;
- If any work would be undertaken to recruit people aged over 40 to the Board to future-proof work; and
- Reiterating the importance of being engaged with the community and the need for a sense of belonging.

Introducing the report, the Executive Member for Healthy Manchester and Adult Social Care stated that Manchester's age friendly strategy was a 5-year programme that had made significant achievements within the last 6 months. The Director of Public Health stated that being an age-friendly city was one of the greatest achievements of the Council's Department of Public Health and reiterated the commitment and ambition to this.

The Chair of the Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board welcomed the committee's interest in the work of the strategy and the Board. She explained that the

delivery plan focused on implementing the foundations of the strategy and that good progress had been made. She highlighted the four strategic themes, and the Programme Lead provided an overview of progress with delivery on these.

The Lead Member for Age Friendly also attended the meeting and commended the work of officers on delivering the strategy.

In response to a query regarding pension credit uptake, the Programme Lead stated that the campaign to encourage this was still in its infancy but expressed optimism about the campaign. She stated that there was a collaborative effort with Making Manchester Fairer to promote the campaign widely and that further information could be provided when available.

Challenges in having representation from all communities on the Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board were acknowledged and the Programme Lead stated that an e-bulletin and leaflets were used to recruit new members. She also commented that word-of-mouth through networks were useful and that efforts to reach the most marginalised residents would continue. Members were advised that some candidates who applied to join the Board were encouraged to join the Age Friendly Assembly, which was a broader cohort of people living in Manchester, instead to familiarise themselves with the age friendly work and agenda. In response to a member's suggestion of future-proofing age friendly work by including residents aged over 40 to the Board, it was stated that the World Health Organisation's age friendly programme started at 50-years-old.

The Executive Member for Healthy Manchester and Adult Social Care wished to place on record his gratitude to members of the Board and Assembly, who he stated gave up their time to contribute to the development of age friendly policies and work.

**Decision:**

1. To note the report.
2. To request that the next progress update includes further detail on pension credits.

**CESC/24/33 Progress update on the development of the Our Manchester Strategy 2025-2035**

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive that provided an update on the development of a new Our Manchester Strategy 2025-2035. A project team and steering group was formed in late 2023 ahead of the phase 1 engagement being launched in early 2024. This report provides a summary of the approach to engagement, the overall phase 1 engagement reach and a summary of the findings that are most relevant to the work of the Committee.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background, describing that the Our Manchester Strategy 2025 was the ten-year strategy for the city and the current Our Manchester Strategy was due to expire in 2025;

- Officers had completed the first phase of development for the next Our Manchester Strategy for 2025 to 2035; and
- Providing an update on the activity undertaken to date, a summary of the outputs from the first phase of the development for the new strategy, and a summary of the next steps.

Some of the key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussions were:

- How the consultation and feedback would be expanded upon going forward;
- How engagement would continue to be culturally sensitive throughout the lifespan of the new Strategy;
- Welcoming the refresh of the strategy following 14 years of austerity under the previous government;
- Noting differences in themes emerging from targeted engagement and the online survey, particularly the need for affordable housing;
- How the committee could monitor and evaluate the strategy;
- How the strategy and work compared with that of other Core Cities; and
- The need to include reference in the strategy to residents' sense of safety within the city.

The Assistant Chief Executive explained that the report detailed the first phase of the development of the new Our Manchester Strategy for 2025-2035 and that all scrutiny committees would be considering the report. He advised that residents, businesses and other stakeholders had been engaged with between January and March and that this consultation included broad, open-ended questions about future ambitions for Manchester, to ensure equalities and inclusion was built in from the outset. He stated that over 10,000 people had engaged with the consultation, which was welcomed.

In response to members' queries, the Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the second phase of engagement would include face-to-face consultation in different parts of the city and would focus on what the strategy would mean for residents and the city as a whole. The Strategy and Economic Policy Manager stated that a significant amount of data was available following the first phase of engagement and this would allow officers to assess how different groups, communities and areas responded to different questions.

The Assistant Chief Executive noted the different emerging themes, such as affordable housing which was a strong focus at in-person engagement sessions and community spirit which was important to groups and organisations. There was also a large focus on day-to-day immediate issues, such as cleanliness and open spaces.

Members were advised that a wider piece of work was underway through Making Manchester Fairer to create a set of community engagement standards, which would ensure a consistent approach to consulting residents in a culturally sensitive way. The Assistant Chief Executive also confirmed that a series of metrics would be developed, particularly 'closing-the-gap' metrics which would assess how performance indicators measured impact on the overall population versus the impact on disadvantaged groups. This was linked to the approach of Making Manchester Fairer which had a monitoring framework to examine progress with reducing

inequalities. The Assistant Chief Executive stated that these approaches would assess how the strategy helped to close the gap for more deprived areas of the city in addition to race, ethnicity, age or disability and further information would be provided in the report in October.

In response to a query by the Chair, the Assistant Chief Executive explained that members would be kept informed of the work and progress of the strategy through the State of the City report, which was typically released annually to all members, although there had been a delay with publishing the report for 2023. This report also included comparison with other Core Cities and some London boroughs and would highlight positive case studies, which could also be presented in the final Our Manchester Strategy 2025-2035.

**Decision:**

1. To note the report.
2. To request further information on performance metrics and how the survey will be monitored and evaluated in the next report in October.
3. To request that consideration be given to trauma-informed work in the final Strategy.
4. To request that the strategy includes detail on perceptions of safety amongst residents of all ages and how this could be improved.

**CESC/24/34 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 and responses to previous recommendations.

**Decision:** To note the report.