

# **Economy Scrutiny Committee – District Centres Subgroup**

## **Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2020**

### **Present:**

Councillor Shilton Godwin – in the Chair  
Councillor Stanton

Councillor Richards, Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration  
Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport  
Nicola Kane, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM)  
Dr Steve Millington, Institute of Place Management (IPM), Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)  
Gareth Roberts, IPM, MMU

### **Apologies:**

Councillors Hughes, Kirkpatrick and Madeleine Monaghan

### **ESC/OSG/20/01     Minutes**

The Head of Local Planning and Infrastructure and City Policy provided an update following the unsuccessful bid to the Future High Streets Fund for funding for Withington District Centre. He reported that Withington had since been chosen as an area to receive additional support to develop an improved bid for the second phase of the Fund, with support from the IPM. The Chair welcomed this.

### **Decision**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2019.

### **ESC/OSG/20/02     Walking, Cycling and Public Transport**

Nicola Kane from TfGM delivered a presentation on Transport and Accessibility to Manchester's District Centres. The main points and themes included:

- TfGM's vision for 50% of all journeys to be made by walking, cycling or public transport by 2040 and the plan to achieve this;
- The current accessibility of district centres by public transport;
- The Bee Network proposals, which would improve cycling and walking access to and within district centres;
- Current research which sought to understand why people made 41% of short trips by car; and
- Streets for All Strategy and how it could be delivered.

In response to a question from the Chair, Nicola Kane offered to provide a short note giving further explanation of how the Greater Manchester Accessibility Levels in the map on the fifth slide of her presentation had been calculated.

A Member informed the Subgroup about a piece of work that students at the School of Architecture were undertaking on re-imagining Didsbury District Centre.

In response to a question about connecting places outside of the city centre to each other, Nicola Kane advised that proposals to bring bus services under the control of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) could provide an opportunity to improve orbital connections, as could orbital cycle lanes.

The Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration agreed that re-regulation of bus services was important. She expressed concern at the cost of travelling using more than one mode of public transport and the time that bus journeys took. She also highlighted some of the challenges which pedestrians and cyclists faced, for example, the quality of pavements and the behaviour of some drivers, for example, parking on the pavements. She advised that these were areas where the Council could have an impact and that this should be linked in with the work on cycling and walking taking place at a Greater Manchester level. She also advised Members that it was important to have benches in district centres.

Nicola Kane reported that making basic improvements to the quality of pavements and tackling pavement parking had the potential to make a large impact. She advised Members that Chris Boardman was lobbying the government regarding better ways to address pavement parking, through enforcement and making it socially unacceptable. She also informed Members about current research taking place to demonstrate the safety of implied zebra crossings.

The Chair commented that civil enforcement was important and that the behaviour of some drivers was likely to be a factor in why so many people were not making short journeys on foot.

In response to a question from the Chair, Nicola Kane reported that the location of the Beelines, routes with improved cycling and walking access, had been chosen following consultation with the public and councils. The Head of Local Planning and Infrastructure and City Policy reported that his service wanted more focus around district centres, where there was the potential for small scale interventions to make it a lot easier for pedestrians, and that they were in discussions with TfGM about this; however, he had been advised that any proposals had to benefit both cyclists and pedestrians. Nicola Kane suggested that a mixture of large flagship Beelines and smaller local schemes was the best approach but she welcomed comments from Members and the public on what the priorities should be.

In response to a question from the Head of Local Planning and Infrastructure and City Policy, Nicola Kane reported that she was happy to meet with officers or Members outside of the meeting to discuss how additional information could be gathered on how people travelled to district centres. She also highlighted that data was available on the condition of local footways.

The Chair thanked Nicola Kane for attending. In summary, she advised that the final report on the Subgroup's work should include the importance of accessibility to district centres by sustainable modes, particularly for people living with a 2-kilometre radius. She also highlighted the importance of underserved communities having good bus routes to shopping areas as well as the quality of the public realm, including pavements, and the use of enforcement to tackle problems like pavement parking. She further highlighted the importance of continuing to liaise with TfGM as a key partner.

## **Decision**

That the points raised by the Chair be incorporated into the final report.

## **ESC/OSG/20/03      Climate Change and District Centres**

The Subgroup received a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development) which considered the role of district centres in contributing to the zero carbon targets by 2038. It covered key issues that would need to be considered in future policy development, particularly with respect to the new Local Plan. It also considered the role of the revised Climate Change Action Plan and the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Climate Change Subgroup in determining how district centres might contribute towards a zero carbon city by 2038.

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report which included:

- The digital economy;
- Public transport and accessibility;
- Urban living;
- Transport and land use policy;
- Climate change adaptation/mitigation; and
- Policy options.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Planning and Infrastructure Manager reported that this was a period of change for district centres and that district centres in the future could increasingly have other uses, for example, more residential use. He advised that the Council's plans needed the right balance between a flexible approach which enabled district centres to successfully change and develop and maintaining a degree of control to ensure that they retained important features. He outlined how the Council's Local Plans had changed over the years from being very retail focused and prescriptive about the types of retail units required to having a greater degree of flexibility, while still wanting control over some uses, such as takeaways and betting shops. The Head of Local Planning and Infrastructure and City Policy reported that the key principle was that a district centre should be the focus of the community and enable people to meet their basic needs, not just in terms of shopping but services such as GP surgeries, without having to drive to other areas.

The Chair asked what could be done to help people to make their buildings more energy efficient. A Member highlighted that this responsibility might rest with the landlord rather than the tenant leasing the building. The Head of Local Planning and

Infrastructure and City Policy reported that many buildings in district centres were 100 years old, with poor insulation and a large carbon footprint. He advised that it was important to engage better with business owners and landlords and to look at what tools could be made available to them to provide them with support in addressing this; however, he acknowledged that retro-fitting district centre buildings was a challenge and it was likely that this would require some funding.

The Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration informed Members about work that the Compliance Team had been carrying out to target rogue landlords, including in relation to flats above shops. She advised that this work, and the information gathered, could be linked in with a piece of work on making district centre buildings more energy efficient and that priority should be given to buildings where there were concerns about the well-being of residents living there. The Chair welcomed this suggestion.

### **Decision**

To note the report.

### **ESC/OSG/20/04     Institute of Place Management (IPM) Recommendations**

The Subgroup received a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development) which described the process and overall findings and recommendations of the IPM pilots.

Dr Steve Millington from the IPM delivered a presentation on this work. The main points and themes included:

- The research underpinning the pilot projects;
- The quantitative and qualitative data gathered;
- The approach to future proofing the high street;
- Repositioning, reinventing, rebranding and restructuring district centres;
- Key findings; and
- Recommendations.

Dr Steve Millington informed Members about the planned ABCitiEs conference which would be taking place in Manchester, advising Members that they were welcome to attend and he would confirm the date.

The Chair thanked Dr Millington and his colleagues at the IPM for their work. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that this work was taken forward in each of the district centres involved in the pilot and of providing ongoing training and support for officers so that they could inform and support local communities and help them to bring in additional resources.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Head of Local Planning and Infrastructure and City Policy reported that the footfall counters would remain in place for at least another year and it was hoped to retain them for longer. The Chair advised that it was important to ensure that this data was being shared with traders

and to identify the best method for doing this. Dr Millington informed the Subgroup about plans to make a data dashboard available to all local authorities for free.

The Head of Work and Skills advised the Subgroup that, as the Council no longer had regeneration teams in each area, it was important to ensure that there were teams in district centres with enough capacity to facilitate and develop local networks, support the use of the data gathered, take forward the learning from the pilots and develop this work across the other district centres.

The Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration suggested that the Chair might want to have a further meeting of the Subgroup to determine how the recommendations in the final report should be structured and to ensure that the full history of the Subgroup's work was included in the report. She suggested that the Subgroup might also want to give further consideration to how the Council could use its influence to improve district centres, for example, at a Greater Manchester level or with national government, the current situation with the Neighbourhood Teams and how this work linked into other Council work, for example, the Local Plan and zero carbon initiatives.

## **Decision**

To note the report and presentation.

## **ESC/OSG/20/05 Findings of the District Centres Subgroup**

The Head of Local Planning and Infrastructure and City Policy introduced the item, highlighting the important role of district centres and some of the key findings from the work with the IPM. He advised the Subgroup that officers would add details of the Subgroup's earlier meetings into the final report and also highlight the importance of the co-location of public services in district centres, which had emerged from the Harpurhey pilot. He proposed that he meet with the Chair and the Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration to discuss the Subgroup's final recommendations, prior to a final meeting of the Subgroup. The Chair supported this proposal. She advised that consideration should be given to having some additional expert resource to support the work in district centres. She requested that the final report include information on digital connectivity and all the areas which had been considered at previous meetings including the views of local traders.

Dr Steve Millington highlighted the importance of breaking down silos and working with a range of partners, such as TfGM, cultural organisations and universities.

The Chair advised that she would discuss with the Chair of the Economy Scrutiny Committee whether the Subgroup's final report should also go to the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

## **Decision**

To ask that the points raised be incorporated into the final report.

## **ESC/OSG/20/06    Terms of Reference and Work Programme**

The Subgroup received the terms of reference and work programme. The Chair proposed that a further meeting of the District Centres Subgroup be arranged.

### **Decision**

To arrange a final meeting of the Subgroup.