

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2020

This Scrutiny meeting was conducted via Zoom, in accordance with the provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Present:

Councillor Igbon – in the Chair

Councillors Azra Ali, Butt, Flanagan, Hassan, Hughes, Jeavons, Kilpatrick, Lynch, Whiston, White and Wright

Apologies: Councillors Appleby, Lyons, Sadler and Strong

Also present:

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure

Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

NESC/20/29 Minutes

Decisions

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2020 as a correct record.

NESC/20/30 COVID-19 update

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that provided a brief summary of the current situation in the city in relation to COVID-19 and an update on the work progressing in Manchester in relation to areas within the remit of this committee.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committee's discussions were: -

- Expressing disappointment that the report made no specific reference to BAME citizens;
- Expressing disappointment following the decision to withdraw the 179 bus service, noting that this service was important for key workers and older residents and calling for an end to any further cuts to bus services;
- Calling upon the Chair to write to the Chief Executive of Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) to request an immediate review of this decision to withdraw the 179 bus service;
- What advice had been provided to schools to support social distancing as schools prepare for a return in September and requesting an update on the Active Travel Bids;

- Recognising the amount of work delivered by the Highways Department during the lockdown period, however commenting that communication with residents still appeared to be an issue;
- Requesting an update on the number of homeless people in temporary accommodation;
- What was the approach to supporting homeless people in district centres;
- Noting the pressures that would be placed on the Homeless Service following the end of furlough and the ending of the restriction on the use of Section 21 (Notice to Quit) by private landlords;
- Information on the number of licensed premises across the city and the number of staff employed in the Licensing and Out of Hours Team to understand the scale of the challenge;
- Commenting upon the positive and proactive approach taken by licensed premises; Council officers and Greater Manchester Police to ensure the easing of the lockdown measures was managed in a responsible and safe manner.

The Strategic Director, Neighbourhoods stated that the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BAME residents was acknowledged and the strategies and recovery approach had been reported to both the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Health Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair stated that she would consult with the Chair of the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee with the intention to writing a joint letter to the Chief Executive of TfGM to express the views of the Committee and to request a review of the decision to withdraw the 179 bus service.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport stated that she shared the disappointment of the Committee in regard to the withdrawal of bus services, recognising the importance of these for residents and providing an alternative to journeys by car. She described that this clearly highlighted the need for the introduction of a democratically controlled, regulated bus service.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport further stated that work with the Education Department continued around the issue of active travel in preparation for the schools returning in September. She advised that the local Neighbourhood Teams were supporting this activity, however resources were limited and called upon local Councillors and partners to support this activity. She stated that information on the Active Travel Bids would be provided to Members following the meeting

In response the comments regarding communications and school crossings work, the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport advised that letters were sent to all affected properties and schools to inform them of planned works and local Members were informed via email. In addition the contractor would display signage in the area to notify the public of the works. She also added that it might be the case that some schools had not picked up correspondence due to Covid19 lockdown. She was aware of only one specific incident in Withington where the programme for the crossing delivery was paused following concerns from residents on the location of the proposed works. However, she invited where Members experience any communication issues they were to let her know, and that she would circulate a note

to members on how many crossings have been delivered to date. The Chair stated that a separate private meeting with Members of the Committee and the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport would be useful for Members to raise issues they had experienced. The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport agreed to convene such a meeting if there is interest from the committee for it.

The Director of Homelessness stated that there were currently 158 individuals placed in temporary hotel accommodation who had been rough sleeping at the start of the pandemic. He said that each had individual housing plans with a view to securing them permanent accommodation so they did not return to the streets. He stated that the decision had been taken to continue funding the hotel accommodation for rough sleepers until March 2021, despite the funding from central government ending.

The Director of Homelessness stated that currently there were approximately 2000 households in temporary accommodation across Greater Manchester. He stated that Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation was only ever used as a last resort and there was a statutory limit on the length of time a person could be accommodated in such a setting. He further advised that there had been a significant reduction in the number of families accommodated in B&Bs, adding that if families had been placed in them the average time before being moved to more appropriate accommodation was two weeks. He informed Members that the Homeless Service worked with private landlords, charities and registered housing providers to secure accommodation for people experiencing homelessness and a number of supported accommodation units had been commissioned to provide additional support.

In regard to the district centres, the Director of Homelessness acknowledged this issue and stated that the Outreach Team were working in district centres and were included in the regular homeless counts. He stated that whilst Outreach Workers continued to work with street homeless individuals, the approach was still on the prevention of homelessness. He further acknowledged the concerns expressed by the Chair regarding the ending of furlough and Section 21 Notices, and stated that this situation would continue to be closely monitored and the service was working closely with Shelter to understand the emerging situation, noting the importance of preventative work around the issue of homelessness.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure stated that the Council had both a statutory and moral duty to respond to the issue of homelessness. He commented that the current situation of using temporary accommodation was not ideal, however this was as a result of a failure of government to invest in the building of social and affordable housing. He concluded by encouraging any residents wishing to help rough sleepers to donate to the Big Change campaign rather than giving money directly to individuals on the street as he said this was often counterproductive.

The Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety informed the Members that across the city there was in excess of 2000 licensed premises and the Licensing and Out of Hours Team currently had 38 staff and managers working a shift pattern that covers from 10am to 4.30 am on Friday and Saturdays and 10am -

1am the rest of the week She stated that the staff have a wide range of duties and responsibilities and also undertake a significant amount of proactive work.

With regard to the number of Requests for Service, the Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety reported that whilst the number had not significantly changed compared to the same period last year, the nature of complaints had with far more domestic noise complaints being received. She explained that this could be attributed to the fact that people were at home a lot more than they usually were as a result of COVID-19 and would therefore likely be more conscious of noise from neighbours including music, DIY, parties etc. The Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety described that in terms of COVID-19 guidance the vast majority of premises had managed the transition from lockdown well. She described the circumstances that had resulted in two premises being required to close, however these had both successfully reopened and the situation would continue to be monitored.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods paid tribute to all of the staff working within the Licensing and Out of Hours Team and further reiterated the wide remit and responsibility for a relatively small team, noting that they were not just responsible for licensed premises. He further stated that the recent successful and safe reopening of licensed premises was to be applauded and had been informed by the positive proactive work undertaken by officers and the positive relationships that had been established. He stated that officers would, if necessary take appropriate enforcement action to ensure public safety.

In regard to the strategy for planning ahead and describing the workstreams that had been identified to progress the city's recovery, The Strategic Director, Neighbourhoods reported that the move to reopening leisure centres, play areas and hosting events would be managed with due attention to the national public health guidance regarding COVID-19.

Decision

To note the report.

NESC/20/31 Clean Air and Climate Change progress update

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that provided an update on the Greater Manchester (GM) Clean Air Plan including the impact of COVID-19 (C19) on the timetable for its implementation. It also provided an update on progress to deliver the Council's Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25 and annual direct emissions data for the 2019/20 financial year.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Information on the Greater Manchester Clean Air Plan and the considerations given to the statutory public consultation on the GM Clean Air Plan to be undertaken as soon as reasonably practicable due to COVID-19;

- An update on Manchester City Council Climate Change Action Plan, noting the documents provided Annual Direct Emissions Report, Pathway to Zero Carbon 2038, Quarterly Quantitative Emissions Reporting, Quarterly Qualitative Reporting and the correspondence with the Greater Manchester Pension Fund; and
- Information on Manchester Climate Change Framework 2020-25 annual report that was due to be launched 21 July 2020.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committee's discussions were: -

- Noting the anniversary since the Council declared the Climate Emergency motion, what progress had been made against the fifteen specific asks of the motion;
- What progress had been made in retrofitting domestic properties across the range of tenures;
- How would the Local Plan promote the mitigation of climate change and support the stated ambitions to reduce carbon emissions;
- An update was sought on the number of carbon / environmental themed engagement events held across the city;
- An assurance was sought that any consultation on proposals for a Clean Air Plan for Greater Manchester was inclusive and captured the voice of young people;
- Welcoming the introduction of 27 electric refuse vehicles;
- Was there any information on the proposals by Manchester Metropolitan University to distribute mobile air quality monitoring stations; and
- Noting the disappointing response from The Greater Manchester Pension Fund and reiterating the need for them to disinvest from fossil fuels as soon as possible to support the ambitions of Greater Manchester to address climate change.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport addressed the Council motion and described that progress against each of the "asks" which had also been provided within the report submitted for consideration by the Committee. She detailed which actions were either completed or partially completed and described the reasons for this including those which had been impacted by COVID-19. She further stated that she shared the disappointment and frustration of Members in regard to the response from The Greater Manchester Pension Fund. She said the Pension Fund needed to set out a clear pathway so as to address climate change in line with the ambitions of the region, and she would work with her colleagues from across Greater Manchester to continue to lobby on this important issue.

The Strategic Lead Policy and Partnerships informed the Members that work had been commissioned to understand the cost of retrofitting Northwards properties, and this analysis was being used as the basis to estimate the costs of retrofitting the city's Private Rented Sector stock but with a 20% uplift to take into account the condition of these properties. . He stated that this would involve significant sums of money to deliver and that bids were being prepared to submit to government as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. He further stated that confirmation was still awaited on the full details of the Green Homes Grant that had recently been announced by government including eligibility criteria.

The Chair commented that a substantive item on the issue of housing would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee and this would provide an opportunity for Members to discuss this further.

With regard to the Local Plan, the Head of Local Planning and Infrastructure stated that the existing Core Strategy included the requirement for developments to include a range of environmental standards to mitigate climate change. He commented that Manchester was the first to require BREEAM assessments to be completed for proposed developments, noting that BREEAM assessments were undertaken by independent licensed assessors using scientifically-based sustainability metrics and indices which covered a range of environmental issues. He concluded by saying that the new Manchester Local Plan whilst needing to comply with national guidance would also seek to be ambitious in demanding high environmental standards from new development and a full consultation exercise would be undertaken.

The Head of Local Planning and Infrastructure informed the Members that a GM wide consultation on the GM Clean Air Plan would be conducted in October 2020. He noted the comments from the Committee regarding the need to ensure this was inclusive and stated that an Equality Impact Assessment of the proposed consultation would be undertaken prior to the launch. He acknowledged the need to capture the voice of young people in this exercise. He concluded that further enquiries would be made regarding the proposals by Manchester Metropolitan University to distribute mobile air quality monitoring stations.

The Head of Neighbourhoods described that prior to the COVID-19 lockdown a number of environmental themed resident events had been held across the city, which had included engagement with schools and young people. In addition ward coordination meetings continued to promote environmental issues and local climate change actions. She said work would continue with schools around the issue of active travel and that a list of all events held would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport stated that she had attended a number of events across the city and consideration was being given as to how these can be reinstated in a safe and appropriate manner with regard for the current guidance regarding COVID-19.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport summarised the achievements to date of the City Council to address climate change and reduce carbon emissions. She stated that the Council had achieved a 53.8% reduction in its direct CO₂ emissions against the target set of 41% between 2009/10 and 2019/20. She said this had been achieved by an ambitious and wide ranging plan of action that had seen the delivery of the civic quarter heat network; the introduction of electric vehicles; the switch to LED street lighting; reducing emissions from the estate; a programme of planting trees; supporting bio diversity and nature based solutions; allocating space for active travel and progressing the introduction of clean air zones. She described that in response to comments from the Committee regular reporting of this progress had also been introduced.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport concluded by stating that the impact of COVID-19 was unprecedented and reflection and consideration would be given to this as the city planned for green recovery. She recognised the impact that COVID-19 had on young people and the importance of recognising their concerns and ambitions around climate change. She reiterated that

the Council recognised this and supported them. She further commented on the significant socio-economic impact that COVID-19 would have on a large number of residents as the ending of furlough was realised and the impact that have on food and fuel poverty experienced by residents. She stated that this was recognised as a social justice issue and she called upon all partners and local businesses to continue to build upon the good work and help deliver a cleaner, healthier, carbon neutral city.

Decision

To note the report.

NESC/20/32 Overview Report

The report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which contained key decisions within the Committee's remit and responses to previous recommendations was submitted for comment.

The Chair noted that the Members would be meeting in private following this meeting to discuss the work programme.

Decision

To note the report.