

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 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 Rawlins - In the Chair
Councillors Andrews, Collins, M Dar, Doswell, Douglas, Hitchen, Kirkpatrick and Rawson

Also present:

Councillor N Murphy, Deputy Leader
Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods
Councillor Craig, Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing
Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure
Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

Apologies:

Councillors Grimshaw and Hacking

CESC/20/26 Chair

The Committee Support Officer informed Members that the Chair had sent his apologies for the meeting and asked for nominations for a Member to chair the meeting. A Member nominated Councillor Rawlins, which was seconded by another Member and agreed by the Committee.

Decision

To appoint Councillor Rawlins as Chair for the meeting.

CESC/20/27 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2020 as a correct record.

CESC/20/28 Update on COVID-19 Activity

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided a further update 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 the Committee.

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

- the impact and challenges relating to residents at risk, community resilience and equality and inclusion;
- Key planning and recovery activity being undertaken in relation to these areas; and
- the residents and communities workstream which aimed to enable residents and communities affected by COVID-19 to live independent and fulfilling lives.

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

- Support for the approximately 2200 Manchester residents who had been receiving a food box from the national government scheme, but not local food support, when the national scheme was paused on 31 July 2020, including communication with the affected people, whether the Council had capacity to support them and whether there was any ward-level data on the number of residents affected by this and the number of people receiving support who were medically vulnerable rather than financially vulnerable;
- How domestic abuse victims could seek help and children affected by domestic abuse could receive support during lockdown;
- Request for more information on the Sanctuary Scheme;
- Digital exclusion and work to address this;
- What the definition of most vulnerable should be in the Our Manchester Strategy and that the Committee might want to consider this more at a future meeting;
- The valuable role of volunteers during the pandemic and how this could be recognised;
- Whether services had been resumed to residents who had previously been able to have library books delivered to their home;
- What measures were being put in place to ensure that play areas in parks could safely re-open;
- The re-opening of leisure centres and whether changes such as classes only being available at some leisure centres could have a greater impact on people with some protected characteristics;
- Summer youth provision;
- the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, including areas that the Committee would like to consider in a future report; and
- How COVID-19 was impacting differently on different groups.

The Head of Work and Skills assured the Committee of the Council's capacity to cope with additional demand from residents who had previously received support through the national government scheme. The Head of Neighbourhoods reported that the national government had already written to the affected people a few weeks ago and the Council was now following this up with a letter reiterating the support available locally. She advised Members that GPs had also been contacting their patients who were affected by this. The Head of Work and Skills reported that the Council had been mapping levels of need for food support across the city and had a good understanding of this. The Head of Neighbourhoods confirmed that the Council also had data on the number of medically-shielding people per ward and that work was currently taking place to map this against other datasets to get a better understanding of the situation and that this could be shared at a later date.

The Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager reported that during lockdown schools had continued to be notified of reports of domestic abuse affecting their pupils so that they could provide additional checks and support. She advised that, as in previous years, these notifications and support via the school's Safeguarding Lead would continue during the summer holidays. The Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) reported that the Council's targeted summer play offer would be available to some children who were affected by domestic abuse, although she recognised that there would be other children affected by domestic abuse which the Council was not aware of.

The Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager reported that the Sanctuary Scheme, operated by the Independent Domestic Violence Advisory Service, was available to private tenants, owner-occupiers and tenants whose housing providers did not have a similar scheme and that it installed security measures in the homes of those affected by domestic abuse. She informed Members that the messaging in relation to domestic abuse support had been reviewed in light of the lockdown to inform victims that services were still available to them and could be accessed by phone or online. She advised the Committee that her service had also been training universal services on how to identify domestic abuse and safely communicate with victims.

The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that the Council was looking at how the work of volunteers during the pandemic could be properly recognised. He also highlighted that the Lord Mayor had carried out virtual drop-ins to voluntary groups and that the High Sheriff and the Queen's Representative in Manchester had written letters of thanks to organisations.

The Head of Libraries, Galleries and Culture informed Members that the home delivery of library books had been resumed in mid-June for people who had their own front door and that the service was looking to expand this offer in the coming months.

The Head of Parks, Leisure, Youth and Events advised Members that strict guidelines for re-opening play areas had been set by the relevant governing body working closely with the national government. He informed the Committee that not all play areas had re-opened yet as the Council wanted to ensure that the right measures were in place first but the plan was to have all play areas safely re-opened before the end of the month with appropriate measures in place, such as sanitisers and signs about how to safely use the play area.

The Head of Parks, Leisure, Youth and Events reported that it was expected that only about 40% to 50% of leisure centre users would want to return within the next month, which would have a major effect on income, but that the Council was lobbying the national government for additional money to help cover these losses. He advised that, if it was left to market forces, it was likely that only leisure centres in areas of high demand would be re-opened; however, he reported that the Council was undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to make sure that there was as much coverage across the city as possible and that a range of activities were available which met the needs of people with different protected characteristics, while being mindful of financial viability and the current COVID-19 guidelines. The Chair welcomed the service's use of EIAs to inform its decision-making. She requested that a future report on Equalities include information on how the different Directorates

across the Council were using EIAs, for example in relation to COVID-19 recovery work.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure advised that he had circulated information on youth provision to all Members but that he would re-circulate this.

The Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing reported that the Health Scrutiny Committee had been looking at health and inequalities, including in relation to COVID-19. She advised that there were three different pieces of work currently taking place in relation to equalities: one on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on particular communities, another on work to address longer-term structural inequalities (primarily relating to health but connected to wealth) and a broader piece of work on equalities and inclusion led by the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Team. She reported that the Health Scrutiny Committee was interested in further scrutinising inequalities in relation to COVID-19, possibly in conjunction with the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee. The Chair advised that she would ask the Committee's regular Chair, Councillor Hacking, to discuss this with the Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a question from the Chair on data-gathering and engagement with residents, the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) advised Members that engagement with residents was a key element of the refresh of the Our Manchester Strategy, which had been referred to in the report considered at the Committee's 25 June meeting.

Decisions

1. To request a report on Domestic Abuse including details of the Sanctuary Scheme and the number of security installations carried out and information on how many families fleeing domestic abuse had been housed outside of the city and why.
2. To request a report on digital exclusion including how this varies across different parts of the city.
3. To note that the Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure will re-circulate the information on youth provision to all Members.
4. To request a report on the VCSE sector, including what support the infrastructure support services are providing, whether this has changed during the pandemic and whether they will continue to work differently to meet the changing needs of VCSE groups. To also look at equalities monitoring of groups which are being funded and groups which are closing down or are otherwise impacted by COVID-19. To consider in a future report what is being done to ensure that groups which are funded are carrying out work which meets the Council's priorities.
5. To ask that the Chair speak to the Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee about how the issue of COVID-19 and inequalities will be scrutinised.

6. To request that a future report on Equalities include information on how the different Directorates across the Council are using EIAs, for example in relation to COVID-19 recovery work.
7. To consider engagement with residents at a future meeting.

CESC/20/29 Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted. The overview report 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

To note the report.