

Economy Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 8 October 2020

This Scrutiny meeting was conducted via Zoom, in accordance with the provisions of the 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 H Priest (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Abdullatif, Green, Hacking, Johns, Noor, Raikes, Shilton Godwin and Stanton

Also present:

Councillor Leese, Leader

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills Culture and Leisure

Councillor Richards, Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration

Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

Apologies: Councillor K Simcock

ESC/20/35 Minutes

Decision

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2020 were approved as a correct record.

ESC/20/36 Proposed Planning Reforms, Local Plan and Greater Manchester Spatial Framework

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing, which informed Members of the proposed response to the Planning White Paper, published for consultation by the Government which closed on 29 October 2020. It also included the response to the Government consultation on “changes to the current planning system” which required a response by 1 October. The report also covered the recent changes to the permitted development rights regime, and concluded with an update on the emerging Local Plan for Manchester and the next steps for the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF).

The main points and themes of the report included:-

- A summary of the proposed planning reforms and the significant challenges these would bring to how the Council used the planning system to enable and deliver key outcomes for the city including economic and sustainable growth, jobs and new homes;
- An overview of the key matters for consideration in the Council’s response to questions posed in the Planning White Paper;

- A summary of the proposed changes to permitted development and use class changes and how this might impact on manage the quantum and mix of development in key parts of the City;
- The next steps associated with the development of the Local Plan, which included consultation on a Scoping Report for the Integrated Assessment; analysis and further commissioning of key elements of an evidence base and development of a draft Local Plan;
- The GMSF was reaching an important stage with a final publication version of the plan due to be consulted on from early November until 31 December 2020; and
- The plan was then intended to be submitted for examination in summer 2021, with the Council's Executive being considering a report on 14 October 2020 recommending approval of the Publication consultation.

Some of the key pints that arose from the Committees discussions were:-

- There was concern that the proposals within the Government White Paper would remove the ability for local people to shape the place in where they lived;
- The proposals failed to address the issues Manchester faced in relation to planning and they would not help Manchester deliver its affordable homes strategy;
- There was concern in relation to the proposal to increase the further digitalisation of both local plan and development management processes;
- There was also concern about the proposal to introduce a fast-track for beauty through changes to national policy and legislation;
- There was concern that proposals to set some policy targets at a national level rather than at a local level could have a negative impact on Manchester to deliver its net zero carbon development target by 2028;
- Further clarity was needed on what the prior approval process proposals in regards to permitted development would mean;
- The driving principle of the Council's response to the White Paper should be centred around the fact that the proposals would diminish the opportunity for locally distinctive policies that reflect specific local conditions and drive the Council's priorities;
- There was a lack of detail in the White Paper around how the proposals would address climate change;
- There was concern that the proposal to outsource Listed Building consent would have a negative impact on the Council's enforcement powers;
- It was felt that the response around the class order change relating to the conversion of office space to residential space could be strengthened;
- The proposals were a threat to the Council's ability to achieve its priorities for the city and to local democracy and Government was misunderstanding what was slowing down house building in the country;
- There was concern around the impact to fire safety in light of the proposals within the White Paper;
- It was heartening to see the views of local residents as to how they would like to see Manchester develop as part of the Issues consultation of the Local Plan, however was the level of responses received been enough to give the process legitimacy;

- There was concern about the proposal to compress some of the later stages of the Local Plan in order to allow the Plan to be adopted in 2023; and
- How was the Council proposing to act on TFGM's response to the Issues consultation in relation to public transport and zero carbon targets

The Committee was advised that Government felt by setting a number of policies at a national level would reduce the duplication of these across numerous local authorities. However it was commented that this ignored the need to acknowledge the distinctiveness of local areas, such as Manchester.

The Director of Planning supported all the concerns that had been raised by the Committee, noting specifically the difficulty the Council would face in trying to deliver its Zero Carbon target if these targets were set nationally and those around the ability to locally determine fire safety requirements in developments. In terms of prior approvals, this was already in place for particular developments, and allowed developers and applicants to submit proposals for assessment, however, the Council was limited in refusing these developments at present. She agreed that further detail was needed from Government on how the proposal to outsource building consent work in regards to enforcement powers that the Council currently had available.

The Committee was advised that Government had already introduced measures around class order changes, however there was a legal challenge taking place brought by a number of civic societies against the introduction of these orders. The Council was awaiting the outcome of this challenge before it determined what response it might need to take.

It was reported that the Council wished to press on with the local plan within the current legislative framework whilst acknowledging the risk should the proposals within the White Paper be adopted wholesale and the impact of these on the Local Plan. It was commented that transitional arrangements would be put in place which should result in Manchester adopting a Local Plan that it wanted which would then mean any future review would need to be undertaken under any new legislative framework

The Committee was advised that the level of responses to the Issues Consultation on the Local Plan was in line with similar consultations around the Core Strategy at a similar stage. It was explained that there had been quite a significant response to the Our Manchester Strategy re-set which covered similar issues so Officers were liaising with colleagues on these responses to help feed into the Local Plan consultation.

Officers acknowledged that the response from TFGM was a key response and they were working closely with colleagues on transport issues. One aspect that would be brought forward would be a refresh of the Transport Strategy 2040 and a local implementation plan, picking up key local transport streams outside of the city centre.

Decision

The Committee:-

- (1) Supports the Council's draft response to the Government White Paper.

- (2) Requests that the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport and Officers take on board the comments made by Committee Members to strengthen areas of the response where appropriate.
- (3) Notes the updates on the emerging Local Plan for Manchester and the next steps for the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF).

ESC/20/37 Economic Recovery of the City's Cultural Sector

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Lead Policy and Partnerships and Director of Culture (Home Manchester), which provided an overview of the impact of COVID on the City's cultural sector, outlined access to local and national financial support for the sector and the gaps identified in the assistance needed for the cultural economy.

Key points and themes in the report included:-

- The sector faced unprecedented challenges as one of the last industries able to reopen on a financially viable basis;
- The industry was reliant on a highly-skilled, flexible but vulnerable freelance workforce that had been severely impacted by a loss of business;
- A Manchester Culture Recovery Plan had been developed with a wide range of partners and stakeholders and a COVID Culture Recovery Board had been established to lead the city's response to the pandemic and aid the sector's recovery;
- Cultural partners had responded creatively to the crisis with many seeking new and digital solutions to engaging audiences and participants;
- There were a number of initiatives to assist businesses, support freelancers and deliver reopening strategies at a local and national level;
- Emergency assistance had been made available by Arts Council England and the Government had put in place a Culture Sector Recovery Fund for England; and
- There was evidence that the current level and means of support available would be insufficient to sustain the sector for the duration of the continued period business disruption.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committees discussions were:-

- The Cultural sector had a foundational importance to the future of the city in its ability to shape the identity of Manchester and ability to attract and retain people;
- It was pleasing to see in the request for support from Government that this included support for individual freelancers and sub-contractors;
- Without significant government support to sustain this industry there was a real risk that the city would not be able to sustain the industry;
- It needed to be recognised by Government that Manchester's cultural sector had been struggling pre-COVID due to the years of cuts in public funding streams and the redirection of funding to schemes in London;
- Inclusivity of the sector need to be looked at as part of the recovery plan;
- What consideration, if any, had been given to the use of empty assets within the sector;

- There was concern about the loss of smaller cultural venues that had happened during COVID and what landscape was needed to be created to allow new venues to emerge and have a chance of surviving;
- Consideration needed to be given to broadcast media, including radio, as part of the recovery plan;
- Was there any thinking around how greater security and stability could be afforded to those freelance jobs within the cultural sector; and
- Government needed to recognise the high quality provision of skills and training that Manchester provided for those wanting to or already working in the cultural sector.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure advised that it was paramount that Manchester and other Core Cities approached government as one voice when making the case for funding. He also acknowledged the difficulty the sector had faced resulting from the removal of funding streams which in turn, had made the sector move to an income generation model which had been severely impacted by the restrictions brought about by COVID.

The Committee was advised that it was testament to the prudent financial management and good governance of cultural organisations that Manchester had not seen a more severe impact to the sector. Many organisations were now however, seeking cultural emergency funding to help support them to the end of March 2021 and the concern was how these organisations would survive past March 2021 if the restrictions related to COVID were still in place.

The Strategic Lead Policy and Partnership commented that a working group of UK Core Cities was being established with representatives of northern core cities to lobby government on the support needed around the hospitality, leisure and culture sectors.

The Committee was informed that an emerging cultural workspace plan was in development as it was acknowledged that property prices would have an impact on the ability of creative practitioners to find affordable workspaces and there would be a need to be live to the needs of grass roots venues to try and support them appropriately.

The Executive Member for Skills Culture and Leisure supported the point made around the need to provide greater security and stability for those working in freelance roles within the cultural sector. It was commented that the crisis had highlighted how valuable the creative ecology of freelancers and artists was to the city and cultural offer and how precarious and vulnerable those individuals were.

The Director of Inclusive Economy concurred with the point made around the need to recognise the high quality provision of skills and training that Manchester provided for those wanting to or already working in the cultural sector and alerted Members to what further provision was being made.

Decision

The Committee notes the report.

ESC/20/38 Update on COVID-19 Activity

Further to Minute ESC/20/30 (Update on activity under COVID 19), the Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development), which provided a further update 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.

The key points and themes included:-

- An economic overview at a national, regional and local level;
- A sectoral impact update, including the impact on footfall within the city, hospitality and visitor economies, aviation and universities;
- The steps needed to stimulate development & investor confidence in the city;
- Work being undertaken with TfGM to agree a broad overall transport plan to support the gradual opening up of the city with a focus on pedestrian movement and safe use of public transport;
- Work being undertaken around Skills, Labour Market and Business Support following on from the THINK report findings; and
- A progress update on the lobbying of government for additional funding.

The Leader also provided a verbal update on the most recent developments since the publication of the report.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committees discussions were:-

- Had there been an increase in footfall in some areas compared to others and was this as a result of displacement from the city centre;
- Was there any more detail on Kickstart and Jets and how these programmes would integrate;
- Was there any information on whether Manchester or Greater Manchester was going to apply to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund and if so what would be applied for.

The Director of Inclusive Economy advised Kickstart was not going to be locally designed or delivered but work had been undertaken with GM colleagues on what our approach and outcomes might be. The Council was committed to providing at least 30 Kickstart opportunities across the Council and where possible lining those up where there was turnover or apprenticeship vacancies. The Council had also started conversations with businesses around the use of Kickstart but further work was needed on this. Jet was a re-announcement of the chancellors Summer Statement for additional funding for those furthest from the labour market which would result in an additional £13m across GM delivered through the working well programme.

The Committee was advised that footfall increases likely related to the number of students that had returned to the city in Fallowfield, Withington and Rusholme wards.

The Strategic Lead – Policy and Partnership advised that Manchester intended to join the GM consortium bid for the Public Sector Decarbonisation fund with a bid being

submitted later in the year. A further update could be provided to Members closer to the time if required.

Decision

The Committee notes the update.

ESC/20/39 Overview Report

The Committee considered a 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. Members were also invited to agree the Committee's future work programme.

Decisions

The Committee:-

- (1) Notes the report; and
- (2) Agrees the Work Programme as submitted.