

## **Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 6 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 Russell (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Ahmed Ali, Andrews, Clay, Davies, Lanchbury, Moore, Rowles, A Simcock, Stanton, Wheeler and Wright

#### **Also present:**

Councillor Leese, Leader

Councillor N Murphy, Deputy Leader

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure

**Apologies:** Councillor B Priest

### **RGSC/20/37 Minutes**

#### **Decision**

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2020 as a correct record.

### **RGSC/20/38 Our Manchester Strategy Reset – Timescales**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Reform, which provided an overview of the Our Manchester Strategy reset, including the timescales of the work.

Key point and themes in the report included:-

- The Our Manchester Strategy reset would reframe the existing Strategy, with it continuing to provide the overarching ambition of the city of Manchester;
- It would reflect Manchester's priorities for the next five years until the end of the Strategy in 2025, remaining distinctly about Manchester;
- The overarching principles of equality, inclusivity and sustainability were at the heart of the reset process;
- The Our Manchester Forum was the governance partnership board for the reset, overseeing the work and approving the final document alongside the Executive and Full Council;
- A number of other strategies and plans were currently in development or due for refresh in the next 18 - 24 months and Officers were considering alignment to ensure other strategies' aims flowed from the Our Manchester Strategy reset's priorities, as the overarching vision for the city;

- Early results from the engagement and research would also be fed into the corporate budget planning process for 2021/22 and the medium term financial plan; and
- A further report detailing the reset's engagement processes and emerging findings would be brought to the Committee for their consideration in November 2020.

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

- How was the Council engaging with hard to reach groups, for example those who were digitally excluded, under the current COVID restrictions around social distancing;
- What percentage of respondents were from a BAME background and did this reflect the proportionality of these communities across the city;
- Consideration should be given to using social media to engage with some of the hard to reach communities;
- What role would Elected Members have in the engagement process; and
- Was the Our Manchester Forum membership now up to full complement and had they been able to meet online yet.

The Director of Policy, Performance and Reform advised that the Council had undertaken targeted resident engagement for those communities that would typically under engage if the survey had been solely digital. The Council had also worked closely with the voluntary and community sector in setting up this targeted engagement, which included face to face engagement in a COVID secure way.

The Policy Officer advised that Officers were currently undertaking an analysis of the responses received to the survey and it was confirmed that the Council had managed to reach 3679 residents so far. Throughout the engagement Officers were keeping track of which communities had engaged in order to ensure that the universal offer was promoted in areas where communities were under represented. It was confirmed that at present there was underrepresentation of residents from the BAME community but this was being supported by the dedicated targeted approach. The survey had also been translated into the top 10 spoken languages in Manchester other than English and paper copies had been made available at Libraries and Community Hubs. There was also work being undertaken to identify the themes of interest from different communities in order to determine whether these were similar or different to the overall themes being identified.

The Chair commented that it was important that the Council did not lose sight of all protected characteristics in undertaking this engagement activity and proposed that in the follow up report data should be provided on the proportion of these characteristics from within the city's population and a breakdown of what has been achieved with these groups in terms of engagement.

The Committee was advised that all Elected Members were sent a briefing at the beginning of the engagement activity at the end of August and discussion with the Deputy Leader was taking place to set up virtual workshops for Elected Members to engage in the process.

The Leader advised that the Our Manchester Forum membership was now up to full complement and there had been five online workshops that had been well attended with high levels of participation.

**Decision**

The Committee:-

- (1) Notes the report.
- (2) Requests that in next month's follow up report, data is provided on the proportion of all protected characteristics from within the city's population and a breakdown of what has been achieved with these groups in terms of engagement

**RGSC/20/39 Capital Programme Monitoring**

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, that informed Members on the progress against the delivery of the 2020/21 capital programme to the end of August 2020.; the revised capital budget 2020/21 taking account of changes between the approved capital budget and any further changes occurring in year; the latest forecast of capital expenditure and the major variances since the Capital Budget Review and Programme Monitoring 2020/21 report submitted to the Executive in July 2020 and the impact any variations may have on the capital programme for the period 2020/21 to 2024/5.

The key points and themes in the report included:-

- The latest forecast of expenditure for 2020/21 for the Council was £435.9m compared to the current revised budget of £485m;
- Spend as at 31 August 2020 was £169.9m;
- A summary of each part of the programme, providing details on the major projects, which included a summary of the financial position, and as a result any changes to the budget that were required, which included:
  - The Highways Planned Maintenance Programme;
  - The Factory
  - Hammerstone Road project
  - Our Town Hall Project
  - Housing Schemes funded through the Disabled Facilities Grant; and
  - The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Education Basic Needs (EBN) programme;
- The forecast was subject to continual review by the programme leads to establish whether the forecast remained achievable; and
- Whilst the intention was for the Council to progress the programme as stated, some projects and their sources of funding may require re-profiling into future years, particularly in light of the uncertainty regarding activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report was to be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 14 October 2020

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

- Even though multiple requests had been made, the report still lacked detail of the original budget allocation for the capital programmes and without this it was difficult to scrutinise how much it was actually costing to deliver a number of these programmes;
- There was no mention within the report of inflationary pressures against the capital programmes
- Concern was raised that there was a risk that inevitable, covid related cost pressures obscured cost increases on projects where the cost to deliver these programmes had been increasing prior to COVID;
- Was there any opportunity to accelerate some of the planned works under the Highways Maintenance Programme to counter act the increase in costs to deliver the schemes;
- Due to the Social Value requirements of seeking to employ local contractors to work on the capital programmes, there was concern that this might result in local contractors increasing their prices as they were not being required to compete as strongly with contractors who were not local to Manchester or Greater Manchester;
- There was disbelief as to how the Council had ended up with such significant overspends on a number of capital programmes and it was asked what steps were being taken to place the onus of responsibility on the contractor for the delivery of these programmes on time and within the agreed budget;
- Did the Council ever plan for the impact of a pandemic when determining the budgets for capital programmes;
- There was concern that there was no reference to Brexit in the report and it was felt that as this was foreseeable what steps were being taken to take account of the impact this will have on the capital a programmes, contractors and the supply chain;
- Was there any targets set within the SEN provisions;
- What was the overall spend to date, including purchase cost, for Central Retail Park;
- Members were very concerned about the spiralling increase in cost to the Council in delivering The Factory project;
- There was concern around the ability to deliver other capital programmes due to the significant increase in funding required to deliver the Factory, especially other programmes within the culture sector of the economy;
- There was a real concern that there was no budget allocation for safety improvements around schools past the current financial year;
- It was suggested the that Ethical Procurement and Contract Management Sub Group should be re-established to monitor the progress of delivering capital programmes within the agreed budgets and deliver the required social value.

The Leader advised that it was only when inflation led to an overspend position on capital programmes that it was reported. Each scheme had a level of contingency built in to take account of the potential impact of inflation. He also acknowledged that the rate of inflation and delays in projects had an impact on each project being delivered on time and within budget. The Chair suggested that it might be helpful in future reports to separate out the increase in cost due to the impact of COVID and the general impact of inflation.

The Leader acknowledged that whilst it might be cheaper to deliver programmes now rather than in the future, the problem of fast tracking highways maintenance programmes was due to the capacity within the industry to deliver these projects.

The Director of Capital Programmes added that bringing forward more schemes could cause disruption in the supply chain for contractors. It was confirmed that for large budget capital programmes, the Council was bound to follow procurement rules and geography could not be used as a major determinant as to whether a tender was awarded.

The Deputy City Treasurer explained how the capital budget operated, in so much as that although the overall budget was agreed at Full Council in May, it moved in accordance with the checkpoint process of each capital programme. She added that although risks such as a pandemic were foreseeable, it was the likelihood of such risks occurring that had to be taken into account when determining the budgets for each programme, so as not to over price a project. The Director of Capital Programmes commented that risk analysis was undertaken on all construction projects to identify those foreseeable known risks and where and when these occurred lessons were learnt. What was difficult to anticipate was unknown risks, such as those associated ground investigation works.

The Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer clarified that a large piece of work prior to the COVID pandemic had commenced around the risks related to Brexit and a potential hard Brexit and what that would mean for the construction industry and the capital programme. The Director of Capital Programmes advised that standard Brexit clauses in construction projects were being developed in consultation with the Council's Legal Services.

The Leader commented that in terms of SEN, the work being done by Capital Programmes in conjunction with education services to ensure places estimated to be required were in place in time. So far this was being delivered on time.

The Deputy City Treasurer advised that for Central Retail Park the acquisition was £36.9m, alongside c£400,000 demolition cost and c£500,000 in fees. There were also some in year costs for security and utilities with potentially further revenue being needed for the site compound. This was within the overall budget allocation for the project.

The Leader acknowledged the comments made around the increase in cost to the Council in delivering the Factory project. He reaffirmed that the overall benefit cost analysis of the project would remain significantly positive over the next 10 years and recounted the investment that the Council had made in previous years to regenerate the city, specifically within the culture sector of the city's economy and the positive impact this had had local and the recognition it had gained nationally amongst other core cities.

The Chair raised concerns that there were significant overspends in the department, but that planned audits in Capital Programmes had been cancelled due to the department apparently constituting a 'low risk', despite there having been whistleblowing in the department. The Chair proposed that there should be an external independent review of the Council's capital programme and projects,

including how they were being commissioned, the input of the legal department, and the ongoing contract and project management. The Chair emphasised that this was intended as a supportive process and not a witch-hunt. The Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer advised that there had been a full external peer review in 2018 by the Local Government Association on the capital programmes function, which resulted in the appointment of the Director of Capital Programmes to address the problems that existed. A lot of progress had been made since then and prior to COVID19 discussions were taking place with the Executive Member for building on this review and reviewing procurement processes to ensure they delivered maximum value for money and that she always welcomed external scrutiny. Committee Members were in support of this proposal and suggested that the Chair liaised with the Executive Member and Officers on an appropriate timing for a further external review.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure commented that there was a cultural recovery plan that had been put together for the city, which sought government funding of £72m of investment to address the impact COVID19 had had on the sector. He also advised that there were a number of other initiatives taking place to help rebuild the sector across the city.

The Leader commented that the Executive had agreed not to place a limit on the capital budget for road safety improvements around schools, and the budget requirement for future years would be dependent on the proposals being brought forward. He added that this was an area that was regularly scrutinised by the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

In so far as Scrutiny Sub Groups, the Leader advised that the Council was still operating under emergency powers and Members needed to have recognition of the demands on senior officers in relation to the support they were able to afford in the current climate.

## **Decision**

The Committee:-

- (1) Recommends that the Executive and Officers commission an external independent review of Capital Programmes and projects to determine that it is functioning effectively.
- (2) Requests that the Executive ensure that there is a budget available for the next financial year for road safety improvements around schools and at points of crossings, although that budget can be a 'floor' rather than a 'ceiling'.
- (3) Notes the report, in particular the updates on:-
  - The decision making criteria used in the Checkpoint process and the benefits realisation work underway;
  - The Our Town Hall, Factory and Eastern Gateway projects; and
  - Capital expenditure on the Council's leisure estate

## **RGSC/20/40 Capital funding for temporary accommodation**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Homelessness and Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, which provided information on the projects that had been undertaken with capital finance in order to improve temporary accommodation in the city. It also contained figures to aid Members to understand if it would be better value for money for the Council to manage emergency accommodation itself, or to continue with the current practice.

Key points and themes in the report included:-

- Details of where the capital budget had been used to improve the provision of good quality temporary accommodation within the broad geographical boundaries of the city, which included:-
  - Development of Apex House;
  - Buying or larger properties for families;
  - Refurbishment of Shared Housing;
  - Refurbishment of Woodward Court;
  - Refurbishment of Women's Direct Access Centre;
  - Adaption of accommodation at Dalbeattie Street; and
  - Investment in Extra Care facilities;
- An overview of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) Ministry for Housing, Community and Local Government (MHCLG) and Homes England Bid;
- Information on Emergency Accommodation being built and managed by the Council; and
- Detail on the value for money that could be derived from the Council building its own provision for homelessness.

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

- Assurance was sought that with the Apex House site being a former office, the properties would be of a decent size with appropriate levels of natural lighting for each property;
- Had any work been undertaken with partners who had hostel accommodation in reconfiguring this accommodation into a more appropriate configuration to ensure it was COVID secure;
- Was there any update on cost effectiveness of buying larger properties;
- What demand was there on PPE equipment from those coming out of hospital or prison;
- Did any monitoring of BAME residents in temporary accommodation take place;
- Whilst it was sad that our residents require temporary accommodation, it was pleasing to see temporary accommodation being provided within the boundaries of Manchester;
- Clarification was sought as to who would be providing the support to those residents that would be accommodated in Apex House;
- It was hoped that through reducing the demand on temporary accommodation from families and the cost that this would save, this money could be re-invested in building more large social housing for families to live in; and

- Was it proposed that all dispersed accommodation was to be managed by an external provider as the current contract came to an end or was this just in relation to Apex House.

The Director of Homelessness confirmed that Apex House would conform to all the temporary accommodation standards and Members would be welcome to visit the site when it was completed. In terms of the issue raised around hostels, this was regularly reviewed and the Council had had to cease using a number of hostels and shared spaces due to the risk of COVID. Government had issued guidance around the safe use of hostel space, and discussions were taking place with partners to make these types of accommodation more COVID secure.

The Director of Homelessness advised that the Council had committed to spending £8.5million on the purchase of 42 larger properties. The value of purchasing these properties was found from improving the health, social skills and educational attainment of children in families who were in temporary accommodation for many years due to the lack of availability of larger social housing. It was also confirmed that the cost of keeping a family in temporary accommodation for many years was significantly high and it was more cost effective for the Council to purchase and have control over large properties for families if this was viable. In terms of PPE, he advised that all in-house services had a good arrangement around the supply of PPE, however he did not have figures on pressure from hospital and prison discharges. He also confirmed that the Council monitored protected characteristics and ethnicity of those in temporary accommodation and agreed to provide figures on this to the Committee.

The Committee was advised that Manchester Council staff would be operating at Apex House and providing the support needed for residents in this accommodation.

The Executive Members for Skills, Culture and Leisure supported the comments made around the need to accelerate the building of larger social housing for families, in order to provide greater long term security for families.

The Director of Homelessness explained that a small pilot had been planned for the New Year, in relation to the dispersed accommodation contract. This was to see if an external provider could access a different benefit rates to reduce the cost to the Council for the provision of dispersed accommodation. This would not affect Apex House. He added that in all aspects of temporary accommodation, the key driver for the Directorate was to be more outcome focussed, in so much as getting the right property for the right people and families resulting in a reducing demand on the need for temporary accommodation.

## **Decision**

The Committee notes the report.

## **RGSC/20/41 Supplier Assurance**

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, which outlined the steps normally taken by the Council to mitigate the risk of supplier failure for major capital projects and larger revenue contracts and the additional measures that had been in operation due to the increased pressure on suppliers as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key point and themes in the report included:-

- Following the Dawnus incident, a review was carried out into the approach to Due Diligence for significant contracts which concluded that a range of indicators should be used with key suppliers on an ongoing basis and not just at the point of award of a contract;
- The Integrated Commissioning and Procurement Unit had developed a system of categorisation for contracts based on how critical they were and how they were performing;
- This system helped to provide an initial guide as to which contracts might require more intensive financial scrutiny linked to risk rather than just value;
- Having identified any critical contracts a range of tools were now in use to inform those involved in management of contracts about the financial stability and any specific risks relating to a key supplier;
- In response to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Integrated Commissioning and Procurement Unit had subscribed to an application “Company Watch” which, as well as providing information on a suppliers’ financial position, provided an additional “Covid Scenario Forecast H-Score” which provided an additional rating on how susceptible a supplier might be to issues created as a result of the pandemic; and
- The Council had recently established a Due Diligence Working Group with representation from Audit, Finance, Development and Shared Services that was reviewing current Due Diligence arrangements in respect of suppliers, various partners and other organisations that were commercially involved with the Council.

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

- Could the PPN arrangements that were currently under review by the Cabinet Office, if not extended, be used as a baseline of good practice;
- Could assurance be given that projects could be adjusted in ways that social value was being delivered due to the impact of COVID; and
- Assurance was sought that top tier contractors were paying promptly to other suppliers further down the supply chain.

The Head of Integrated Commissioning and Procurement advised that the indication from the Cabinet Office was that they were not prepared to continue with supporting local authorities with any spend for supporting suppliers. Officers were working with service units across the Council to consider what arrangements needed to be put in place where this support could either be wound down or continued. In relation to Social Value, it was explained that this was monitored on a contract by contract basis and ongoing discussions were taking place with contractors around how social value

could be derived under current COVID restrictions. He also advised that the prompt payment of suppliers could be an issue which was difficult to address but was something that was looked at to try and ensure it did not lead to supplier difficulties.

### **Decision**

The Committee notes the report.

### **RGSC/20/42 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.
- (2) Agrees the Work Programme as submitted.

### **RGSC/20/43 Exclusion of Press and Public**

### **Decision**

The Committee agrees to exclude the public during consideration of the following items which involved consideration of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of particular persons and public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

### **RGSC/20/44 The Factory**

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director, Growth & Development and the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, which updated Members on: progress with the delivery of The Factory, including the impact of Covid-19 on the project and progress with the redevelopment of St John's.

Having had regard to the report, the Committee asked a number of questions to which the Officers responded.

### **Decision**

The Committee:-

- (1) Whilst noting the intention, expresses its disappointment, to further increase of the Capital Budget resources to support the delivery of Factory in advance of

external contributions being received by the Council, in order that the Council can continue to meet its contractual obligations.

- (2) Notes the progress with the delivery of The Factory.
- (3) Notes the proposals for seeking external funding contributions.
- (4) Recommends that it receives a report at a future meeting that provides an update on the progress that is being made with external funding contributions.
- (5) Recommends that it receives a report at a future meeting on the Ethical Policy Statement and the issues identified as part of the procurement process in regards to potential naming rights.
- (6) Notes the intention to make the next formal submission of the updated business plan to Arts Council England (ACE) in December 2020 and the planned Business Case review process with ACE.
- (7) Notes the progress in the development of employment, training and education opportunities and creative engagement programmes as part of The Factory's skills development programme.



## **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 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 Stone – in the Chair

Councillors Sameem Ali, Alijah, Cooley, Hewitson, Kilpatrick, Lovecy, Madeleine Monaghan, Reeves, Reid and Wilson

#### **Co-opted Voting Members:**

Ms S Barnwell, Parent Governor Representative

#### **Co-opted Non Voting Members:**

Mr L Duffy, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Ms J Fleet, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

#### **Also present:**

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children and Schools

Jordan Navarro, Manchester Parent Carer Forum

#### **Apologies:**

Councillors T Judge and McHale

### **CYP/20/36 Minutes**

#### **Decision**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020.

### **CYP/20/37 Update on Opening of Schools and Colleges For All Children and Young People**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which provided an update on the full reopening of schools for all pupils in September and the current challenges faced by schools. It provided an overview of the work that had taken place in Manchester to support school leaders at this time. The report also noted that, through the learning and education system, children were informed about and understood environmental issues and the negative impact of carbon; promoting safe and healthy lives.

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

- Attendance;
- Infection control;

- Workforce and wellbeing;
- Newly Qualified teachers (NQTs);
- Remote learning;
- Post-16; and
- Our Children (Looked After Children) and the Virtual School.

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

- To thank schools staff for all their work in re-opening schools to all pupils;
- To recognise the support that the Council's Education Service was providing to schools;
- The additional challenges and pressures on school staff, including head teachers and senior leadership teams, and how their mental wellbeing could be supported;
- That schools were taking different approaches to the 'bubbles' of pupils who were in contact with each other and what was being learnt about what was and was not working in terms of infection control;
- Remote learning, including how this was being monitored and evaluated, and noting that some children did not have their own laptop and did not have access to a reliable internet connection;
- The increase in families deciding to home educate their children and how much of this was due to fears over sending their children to school during a pandemic;
- The availability of tests for COVID-19; and
- The impact on pupils in Year 11 and Year 13 who were due to take examinations in the summer of 2021.

The Director of Education reported that more was being learnt about how to reduce infection risk and what worked well and that best practice was being shared regularly with all Manchester schools. She advised the Committee that the Council's Health and Safety Team was working with her service and schools to reduce the risk. She reported that the more information schools held, for example, on children's playtimes and where they had sat for lunch, the more schools could narrow down who had been in close contact with an infected pupil, therefore, reducing the number of pupils who needed to self-isolate.

The Director of Education informed Members about the new statutory duty for local authorities to monitor and evaluate remote learning and outlined how her service was doing this through visits to schools by independent Quality Assurance professionals. She advised Members that a number of options were being looked at to help pupils who did not have access to wifi, such as dongles and providing paper copies of materials.

The Director of Education advised Members that, during lockdown, some families had found that having their children learning at home worked well for them but that some of the requests to home educate did stem from anxiety about sending children back to school. She outlined the approaches being taken, stating that many parents were ringing the Council's attendance helpline to talk through the situation and their

options. She advised Members that conversations were also taking place between the school and the family, ensuring that they understood the full implications of home education, such as losing their child's school place, and looking for solutions, which in some cases, particularly in special schools, could include some remote learning. The Executive Member for Children and Schools praised the work of the Council's Attendance Team in advising parents who were anxious about sending their children back to school.

The Director of Education informed Members that all schools which were members of the Manchester Schools Alliance (MSA) could access an Employee Assistance Scheme, including counselling and other mental health support, for free and that the MSA and her service were looking at how to promote this more; however, she reported that a few schools were not members of the MSA and discussions were taking place about how to ensure these schools were providing appropriate support to staff.

The Director of Education informed the Committee that every school had been sent ten COVID-19 testing kits which they could use where there was difficulty in accessing tests through the normal channels and that these could be re-ordered through the Department for Education (DfE) as necessary. She advised Members that she shared their concerns about the impact of the pandemic on Year 11 and Year 13 pupils, noting that in areas such as Manchester where infection rates were higher, pupils were more likely to have to spend part of the academic year isolating at home but would be compared and competing with other pupils nationally who had been less affected. She commented that even good quality remote learning was not the same as being at school and that some children faced additional challenges, such as not having a quiet space at home where they could study. She informed Members that she would be raising this with Ofqual and through other forums.

## Decision

To agree that future updates will focus on school attendance data and any new developments or significant changes to the current situation.

[Councillor Alijah declared a personal interest as a deliverer of initial teacher training.]

## **CYP/20/38 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Update and the Response to COVID-19**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which detailed the actions taken by the Council, health services and education settings to support children and young people with SEND and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

- Changes in Government legislation in relation to children with SEND;
- Participation and co-production with parents/carers;
- Young people's experiences, views and engagement;
- The Local Offer and the Information Advisory Service;

- Multi-agency working and joint commissioning;
- Quality and impact of Education, Health and Care assessments and plans;
- Elective Home Education;
- Inclusion;
- The continuum of provision in Manchester;
- Transition Planning Team;
- Short breaks and personal budgets;
- Workforce development; and
- Regional networking.

Jordan Navarro, Chair of Manchester Parent Carer Forum explained the role of the Forum. He informed the Committee that Forum members were all parents or carers of children with SEND so other parents felt able to approach them and they were able to represent the views of this group in meetings with the Council. He reported that the Forum had always had a good relationship with the Council's SEND Team and that, during the pandemic, this had strengthened further and they had also developed relationships with other Council teams which had had a positive impact.

Jordan Navarro highlighted that some children with SEND found it difficult to attend a COVID-19 testing centre (for example, autistic children who found the number of people and the queuing difficult) but families had sometimes struggled to access home testing kits. He reported that the Forum had carried out a survey on COVID-19 testing centres and children with SEND, the results of which he would share with the SEND Team.

The Head of School Quality Assurance and Strategic SEND informed the Committee that nurses had visited the homes of children with complex SEND to carry out COVID-19 tests and that this had worked well. She reported that her service had communicated to the DfE the success of this approach and the challenges being experienced by some families in getting their children with SEND tested. Schools, including special schools, were also now able to provide home testing kits to families where necessary. She acknowledged that this has been a challenging area, although there had been some improvements and she welcomed the opportunity to see the results of the survey Mr Navarro referred to and hearing any suggestions from parents of children with SEND on how this could be improved.

In response to a Member's question on how children with autism were affected by the changes in how schools were operating, the Head of School Quality Assurance and Strategic SEND reported that so far it seemed that the increased structure and calmer atmosphere, for example, around lunchtime and in school corridors was beneficial for children with autism. She highlighted that the number of exclusions since pupils had returned to school was lower than in previous years.

In response to a Member's question about Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), the Head of School Quality Assurance and Strategic SEND advised Members that, although the timescales for completing these had been relaxed during the pandemic, the Council had still aimed to complete them within 20 weeks. She reported that, although many families were still waiting longer than this at present, changes had been implemented to improve the timeliness and quality of the plans, new staff had been recruited and progress was already being made. A Member

welcomed the changes being made, including engaging with parents at an earlier stage in the process.

The Chair thanked everyone who had been involved in supporting children and young people with SEND during the pandemic.

## **Decision**

To note the report and that the Committee would continue to monitor support for children and young people with SEND.

### **CYP/20/39 Responding to the Needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

The Committee received a presentation from Children's Services which provided information on responding to the needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

Officers delivered the presentation which referred to:

- Presenting issues;
- Increasing demand in related areas;
- Manchester's multi-agency offer;
- Education and attainment outcomes;
- The Council's pledge to Our Children and Young People (Looked After Children and Care Leavers) affected by Brexit immigration changes;
- Partnership working; and
- Case studies.

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

- Concern that local Ward Councillors had not been informed about asylum seekers housed in a hotel in their area, noting that Ward Councillors could provide help to these people;
- Concern that an application for settled status had been refused because the child had a criminal conviction;
- Educational attainment of UASC;
- Trafficking of children; and
- Age assessments of asylum seekers.

The Chair requested that Members be provided with a briefing note about the hotel which was accommodating asylum seekers.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools praised the Council's work in this area and the commitment of staff. He reported that the Immigration Aid Unit had praised the Council's work in relation to the pledge and young people affected by Brexit immigration issues. He advised Members that, although the pandemic had affected people's ability to provide documents and secure their status, the government had not allowed for this by changing their deadline for settlement

schemes. He suggested that the Committee might want to look at this issue as the deadline approached next year.

The Service Lead informed Members that trying to keep children within Manchester, living with Manchester-based foster carers, led to the best results, partly because of the role of Manchester's Virtual School in supporting Our Children. She reported that the children were assessed before they started school so that they were placed in the right ability group and support was provided for any special needs. She informed the Committee that, of the UASC leaving care, around 86% were in Education, Employment or Training. She reported that her service was mindful that some children might be trafficked into the country or vulnerable to modern day slavery, that she was a member of the multi-agency Modern Day Slavery Partnership Group working to address these issues and that staff in her service received training on modern day slavery. She advised Members that her service had a robust, legally sound process in place for age assessments, noting that adults could try to present as children but also that children could attempt to present as adults.

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and their work.

### **Decision**

To request that Members be provided with a briefing note about the hotel which is accommodating asylum seekers.

### **CYP/20/40 Overview Report**

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted. The overview report contained key decisions within the Committee's remit, responses to previous recommendations and the Committee's work programme, which the Committee was asked to approve.

A Member requested an update on the issues raised at the Committee's February 2020 meeting regarding non-Manchester children being placed in children's homes in Manchester and about training for Members on child sexual exploitation. The Chair asked that the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services update Members on this.

### **Decisions**

1. To note the report and agree the work programme.
2. To ask that the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services update Members on the issues raised at the Committee's meeting in February 2020.

## **Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 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 Hacking - In the Chair

Councillors Andrews, Battle, Chambers, Collins, M Dar, Doswell, Douglas, Grimshaw, Hitchen, Kirkpatrick and Rawson

#### **Also present:**

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

Mike Wild, Chief Executive, Macc

#### **Apologies:**

Councillor Rawlins

### **CESC/20/36 Minutes**

#### **Decision**

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2020 as a correct record.

### **CESC/20/37 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 this Committee.

Officers 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; and
- Key planning and recovery activity being undertaken in relation to these areas.

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

- To welcome that libraries were using the Track and Trace app but also offering an alternative for people who did not have a smartphone;
- To welcome the donation of 400 Chromebooks with 6 months of internet access to address digital exclusion, to ask what the criteria would be for

- distributing them and whether support would be available on how to use them;  
and
- The Test and Trace isolation payment system.

The Head of Libraries, Galleries and Culture confirmed that those receiving the Chromebooks would be paired with a Digital Champion to provide telephone support and that the criteria for who would receive the Chromebooks would be circulated to Members. He informed Members that 20 libraries were now open and that the service had been planning to extend opening hours but this had been postponed until November pending an announcement from the Government on restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19. He reported that there had been a good level of library usage since the libraries had re-opened. He advised that approximately 20% of this had been people wanting to access PCs and the internet but that in some areas this had been up to 40%, reflecting different levels of digital access across the city.

The Director of Customer Services and Transaction informed the Committee about the new payment scheme, which would be administered by her service, for people who had been instructed to self-isolate and who had to take time off work as a consequence. She reported that the main scheme was for working age people who were in work and claiming benefits and who had been told to self-isolate by the Test and Trace Service. She informed Members that there was also a discretionary scheme for people who were on a low income but were not claiming benefits. In response to a question from the Chair, she confirmed that the Government would provide the funding for the scheme, comprising of an initial upfront payment and a top-up to meet the cost of the payments made through the main scheme; however, she advised that Government funding for the discretionary scheme was a fixed amount of £226,000.

Members discussed the many other individuals and businesses which would be affected financially by the pandemic but did not meet the criteria for this scheme. The Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing reported that, if additional restrictions were introduced in Manchester, this should include a support package for those affected and that local politicians were making the case to the national Government for more financial support. The Chair expressed his support for this.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure informed Members that there was a lot of uncertainty in the Culture sector at the moment as it was not known what restrictions might be put in place to curb the increase in infections but that the Council and its partners were working to respond to the changing situation.

## **Decision**

To note the report.

### **CESC/20/38      Update on Work with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector During COVID-19**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Reform which provided an update on the work with the VCSE sector in light of COVID-19, specifically updating on the work of Macc (VCSE Infrastructure Support Service) and

the Council's Our Manchester Funds Programme Team. The report noted that officers would work with the VCSE sector and the VCSE infrastructure provider to consider how the sector could play a full and active part in Manchester's ambitions to live within its science-based carbon budget and become a zero carbon city by 2038 at the latest.

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

- VCSE infrastructure support during COVID-19;
- Work of the Programme Team, including during the pandemic; and
- Funding.

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

- To recognise the important contribution that voluntary, community and mutual aid groups across the city had made during the pandemic;
- Request for information by equality strand on the financial support that had been given during the pandemic from the Council and external funders;
- Request for information on the substantial investment being made in highways infrastructure, in particular demographic information on the people employed on these projects, for example, employment of Manchester residents and disabled people; and
- As the Our Manchester VCS grant fund was currently in the third year of a three-year programme which was due to end in March 2021, was an extension of the current contracts being considered, due to the disruption caused by the pandemic, and would there be a further funding round.

Mike Wild, Chief Executive of Macc, informed Members that a virtual Spirit of Manchester Awards ceremony would be taking place on 22 October to thank voluntary and community groups for their work. He informed Members that this would be broadcast on YouTube at 7pm and that he would be sending an invitation to all Councillors. He informed the Committee about Macc's work to try to secure additional funding for the city, stating that additional funding had been secured from National Emergency Funding and the national Government.

The Programme Lead (Our Manchester Funds) reported that he would liaise with Mike Wild to provide an overview of where financial support was being provided during the pandemic in relation to the equality strands. In response to a Member's request for information on any gaps in funding provision, he reported that he could provide high level data and advised that funders were now communicating and sharing information between themselves, supported by the Council, which would enable a more detailed picture of this to be developed in future.

In response to a Member's question about work with older people, the Programme Lead (Our Manchester Funds) informed Members about the Older People's Neighbourhood Support Fund, which was a targeted programme which had started shortly before the lockdown. He offered to provide additional information on work taking place with older people and how the neighbourhood groups were adapting during the pandemic.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport informed Members that the social value of the highways contracts had been discussed at the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting the previous day. She advised Members that a report on this would be going to a future meeting of that Committee and would include the information that the Member had requested. In response to a Member's request that this report also be submitted to the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee, the Chair advised that, if it included information which related to equalities issues, this Committee could also receive it for information.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport reported that a number of options were being considered in relation to the current Our Manchester VCS Fund grants, including an extension of the funding for a further period. She advised the Committee that the programme was currently being reviewed, including discussions with stakeholders on the needs of the sector, and consideration was being given to the future funding arrangements for the sector. She reported that these decisions would need to take into account the Council's new financial position and its strategic needs, including the re-set of the Our Manchester Strategy. The Chair expressed the Committee's support for discussions about extending the current contracts and for the continuation and, when financially feasible, growth of the Our Manchester VCS Fund.

## **Decisions**

1. To request information on the financial support that has been given during the pandemic by the Council and external funders, broken down by equality strands, as well as information on any gaps in provision.
2. To request that the report on social value in the highways contract requested by the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee be provided to Members of this Committee for information.
3. To express the Committee's support for discussions about extending the current Our Manchester VCS Fund contracts and for the continuation and, when financially feasible, growth of the Our Manchester VCS Fund.

[Councillor Grimshaw declared a personal interest as a Governor at St Anne's Primary School, Ancoats.]

## **CESC/20/39              Equalities Update**

The Committee received a report of the City Solicitor which provided a summary update on some of the key equality issues and activities that had been prioritised and progressed in the first half of the financial year 2020-21. It provided an overview and examples of the ways in which the Council and its workforce had engaged with issues such as COVID-19, its impact on different communities and its detrimental effect on existing inequalities; the Black Lives Matter movement and; how the Council was ensuring that Our Manchester funding was helping to address some of the inequalities experienced by Manchester residents. Whilst environmental impacts were not addressed in the report, it did outline the importance of and approach to an

inclusive recovery from the impacts of COVID-19. It noted that the Council's recovery plans would have regard for environmental issues, recognising that there was a relationship between these and the health and wellbeing inequalities that could affect some of the city's more disadvantaged communities who historically experienced poorer health outcomes.

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

- COVID-19 and inclusive recovery planning;
- Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) in the COVID-19 recovery work;
- Black Lives Matter;
- Workforce Race Review and Race Equality Working Group;
- The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Staff Network Group (SNG);
- The Greater Manchester BIG Disability Survey;
- Equality compliance in Our Manchester funded organisations; and
- Equality objectives.

The Chair of the SNG informed Members that she was also the Senior Project Manager for the Race Review and a member of the Race Equality Working Group. She reported that the Working Group so far had been an encouraging journey which members had learnt and grown from and that she was feeling positive about where this was going.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods described 2020, with both the publication of the Council's Race Review and international events, as a watershed moment. He emphasised the importance of equalities being embedded within the Council and reported that he had been encouraged by the work that had taken place so far and how it had involved BAME employees, while stating that the outcomes would be seen over weeks, months and years. He also highlighted the financial challenges the Council was facing and the importance of using EIAs to consider how different communities would be affected by budget proposals.

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

- To welcome and support the work being carried out and hope that the Council could lead the way and provide examples of best practice which other organisations across the city and more widely could follow;
- Request for an update on the review, in response to Black Lives Matter, of symbols within the city, including who was carrying out the review, what was being looked at (for example, statutes, emblems, street names, building names) and when Members could expect some feedback on this;
- The increase in people suffering from mental illness due to the pandemic and how this would be addressed;
- The need to acknowledge and address the Council's failings, including the lack of BAME employees in senior leadership roles;
- The monitoring of diversity within organisations that the Our Manchester VCS Fund awarded funding to; and
- The Working Group including its membership and how staff had been recruited to it.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods reported that the Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure was involved in the review of symbols across the city. The Chair asked the Scrutiny Support Officer to follow this up with the Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure and for a response to be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager assured Members that the increasing need for mental health support, including the impact of this on the VCSE sector, had been recognised and that discussions were taking place on how to address this. The Programme Lead (Our Manchester Funds) informed Members about the review of the Mental Health Strategy. The Chair suggested that the Committee might want to consider this at a future meeting.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods reported that the under-representation of BAME staff at senior levels had been highlighted in the Race Review and that this issue was being taken forward by the Working Group which was putting together an action plan. The City Solicitor reported that the Council's recruitment policy and other Human Resources policies were being reviewed. She also informed Members about the reverse mentoring trial project which, she advised, would help senior managers to think differently about the decisions they made and how they made them.

The Chair of the SNG outlined some of the work that was taking place to address the under-representation of BAME staff at a senior level. This included looking at whether managers were adhering to the act-up and secondment policies and looking at how staff above Grade 12 were recruited, including the recruitment agencies used, the criteria for the posts and the candidates being put forward, as well as the development of existing Council staff and giving them the opportunity to apply for these senior posts.

The Vice Chair of the SNG informed Members that, through the Working Group, BAME staff had been involved in planning this work and been able to provide feedback, receive a response to that feedback and see changes being made, rather than just being led along a path which had already been determined. He advised that he felt this was an encouraging sign that this work would lead to real change.

The Programme Lead (Our Manchester Funds) reported that, when considering applications for the Our Manchester VCS Fund, factors considered included the make-up of the organisation, governance and the involvement of local people that they served, and that this was done through looking at the application and through due diligence checks of organisations which were due to be awarded funding. He clarified that this was a grant and different from the arrangements in place for monitoring contracts awarded by the Council.

The Chair of the SNG informed Members that there were approximately 30 employees in the Working Group, including black, Asian, minority ethnic and white staff from different areas and across different grades. She advised the Committee that the work had been split into five themes, which were being worked on by subgroups of 6 to 8 staff, and that staff had been able to choose which theme they

wanted to work on. She reported that the Working Group had been advertised through a staff broadcast and some employees had put themselves forward through this while some had been chosen by their head of service to be involved.

The Chair expressed the Committee's support for this work and emphasised the high priority the Committee placed on this. He thanked the Chair and Vice Chair of the SNG for their work and advised that he was open to discussing with them and other members of the Working Group how the Committee could best be involved in scrutinising this work and raising its profile. He suggested that the Committee receive an update report in the new year, in particular focusing on the work of the Working Group.

## **Decisions**

1. To request that a response from the Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure on the review of symbols across the city be circulated to all Members of the Committee.
2. That the Committee might want to consider the review of the Mental Health Strategy at a future meeting.
3. To receive an update report in the new year, in particular focusing on the work of the Working Group.

## **CESC/20/40      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.

The Chair noted that the proposed Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) around Wynnstay Grove, which had been discussed at previous meetings, had now been enacted.

## **Decision**

To note the report and agree the work programme.