

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.]

CEESC/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, statues, 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.