

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2020

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

Present:

Councillor Igbon – in the Chair

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

Apologies: Councillor Razaq

Also present:

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure

Jo Walby, CEO, Mustard Tree

John Ryan, Hub Manager, Shelter

NESC/20/51 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2020 as a correct record.

NESC/20/52 Homelessness Update

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Homelessness that provided an update on the work that was taking place to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in the city.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- The numbers of homeless presentations by month in 2020;
- Number of homelessness presentations by recorded area of where the applicant presented from;
- Data on the number of Section 21 and Evictions;
- An overview of the Housing Solutions Service;
- Facilities to support and accommodate Homeless People;
- Voluntary sector providers who support homeless people with accommodation and other services;
- An update on the Bed Every Night scheme;
- Describing the 2020/2021 Cold Weather Plans
- 'Everyone In' - accommodation during the Covid Crisis update;

- Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) overview;
- Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) overview;
- Information on the 'Protect Programme', a new scheme to help protect some of the most vulnerable people in our communities from COVID-19;
- Inspections of Temporary Accommodation information;
- The length of time people stayed in temporary accommodation; and
- Information on the work of the Homeless Partnership and Prevention Work.

The Committee heard from Jo Walby, CEO, Mustard Tree and John Ryan, Hub Manager, Shelter who had been invited to the meeting to discuss their experience of responding to homelessness in Manchester.

Jo Walby provided an overview of the history and work of Mustard Tree, describing that they aimed to combat poverty; support the homeless and offer support around training and employment. She stated that during the pandemic they had used their furniture vans to deliver food to vulnerable and shielding residents. She described that they had worked closely with Officers from the Council to coordinate this activity. She said that Mustard Tree also offered support to those that were digitally excluded to access welfare benefits and other means of support.

Jo Walby described that they had experienced an increased number of people seeking advice and support on the issue of debt and Mustard Tree were using the Hardship Fund that they had available to pay off rent arrears and avoid evictions. She commented that issues of mental health, addiction and relationship breakdown were all contributing to the issue of homelessness within the city, noting that funding cuts had been experienced in drug and alcohol services and she called upon the Government for an equality of funding for these services. She commented that she predicted that there would be an increase in homelessness in the new year.

Jo Walby paid tribute to the Homelessness Team within Manchester City Council and when asked what the Council could do to support the work of Mustard Tree she stated that the issue of eradicating homelessness should be a high priority for the Council and the Planning Policy, and all other available Council strategies should prioritise addressing homelessness.

John Ryan, Hub Manager, Shelter provided an overview of the service that Shelter provided that included offering advice on debt; welfare benefits; housing and homelessness. He described that Shelter had experienced a significant increase in the number of people accessing the service, especially on the issue of homelessness and the threat of homelessness.

John Ryan described the work of Inspiring Change Manchester, a programme that had been established to make sure that when the most vulnerable people did seek help in a crisis, there was no 'wrong door' and that agencies could work together to put in place the support needed, no matter what the first point of contact. He explained that this had been designed with the voice of people who had lived experience of multiple needs.

John Ryan stated that the reasons for people approaching Shelter for advice was varied and included debt, rent arrears, domestic violence and young people having to

leave the family home. He stated there were difficulties experienced by people accessing homeless accommodation, especially women and young single people without high need. He further described that loneliness and mental health were significant contributing factors.

When asked what the Council could do to support the work of Shelter, John Ryan stated the need and importance of building affordable homes at scale, adding that this would also support the ability to move families on from temporary accommodation to more appropriate housing. He further called for an immediate end to the Right to Buy scheme to protect the availability of affordable homes. He called for adequate funding for services, including the Entrenched Rough Sleeper Service and Housing First. He described that the reduction and cuts to those services designed to support vulnerable people had a significant impact on their mental and physical health, which eventually placed increased pressure on services and contributed to the increased numbers of homeless.

John Ryan stated that he also predicted an increase in the numbers of homeless in the new year period when it is expected that the suspension of the ability of private landlords to issue a Section 21 (Notice to Quit) is lifted. In response to a question from a Member he stated that Discretionary Housing Payments had prevented many people becoming homeless in the Private Rented Sector.

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

- Noting that debt was a major contribution to homelessness and there was an increase in the number of people who were working homeless and sleeping in cars;
- Calling for an increase in the provision of affordable homes in Manchester;
- What provision is available to those entrenched rough sleepers who may have previously refused assistance by services;
- Had Discretionary Housing Payments contributed to reducing rent arrears and subsequent evictions and what would be the implications if this were to be removed;
- Noting the potential increase in Section 21 notices being issued by Private Landlords following the temporary suspension the role of the Housing Solutions Service was important;
- Requesting an update report on the revised Housing Allocations Policy that had previously been reported to the Committee;
- Noting that giving food and money directly to people who were sleeping rough was an understandable and immediate response by people who witnessed a person sleeping rough, however this was not the most appropriate way to resolve homelessness, how could citizens wishing to help best support them;
- Requesting a further breakdown by reason on the figures presented that detailed the number of homeless presentations;
- Requesting that in future update reports submitted to the Committee comparative annual data on the numbers housed in temporary homeless accommodation should be reported;
- What was being done to move people on from temporary accommodation;
- Welcoming the reported activities to support people access substance misuse and mental health services;

- Recognising that short term funding streams to address homelessness impeded the ability to plan and deliver services long term;
- Who should the public contact out of office hours to seek support for someone they discover rough sleeping;
- Noting that despite a manifesto promise the government had failed to address the issue of homelessness and had failed to fund local authorities appropriately;
- Requesting further details on the findings from the inspections of temporary accommodation, including details of any hazards identified;
- What support was available to people who were homeless but had no recourse to public funds; and
- Would Manchester continue to contribute to the funding of the Bed Every Night service.

The Director of Homelessness described that the Homelessness Service discharged the statutory duty of the local authority in regard to homelessness, however it was recognised and understood that a wider 'safety net' for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness was required. He stated that the service was a member of the wider Homeless Partnership that consisted of public, private, charity, faith sector, education and voluntary sector organisations that was detailed within the report.

The Director of Homelessness described that Manchester provided a Cold Weather Provision that was above the statutory requirement, commenting that this provision allowed for services to engage with people in a meaningful manner and work to stopping them returning to the streets. He described that the Homeless Service approach, and the challenge he has given the service is to look at outcomes rather than process as the method of delivering improved outcomes for those people in Manchester experiencing homelessness.

The Director of Homelessness informed the Committee that the dedicated Section 21 team had Officers with specialist knowledge of this area of tenancy law and had been successful in challenging notices that had been issued incorrectly by landlords. He stated that this engagement with landlords had allowed officers the opportunity to negotiate with landlords on behalf of the tenant to maintain the tenancy or work with the tenant to find alternative solutions and prevent homelessness. He stated that they were looking to retain this service within the budget considerations. He further informed the Members that conversations were ongoing with the Combined Authority around the issue of the future funding arrangements of the Bed for every Night (ABEN) scheme.

The Director of Homelessness acknowledged the comment made regarding the immediate response to offer a homeless person food or money; however, this was often counter productive. He advised that residents wishing to support homeless people should contribute to the many different charities offering practical help and support to the homeless in Manchester and he made reference to the Big Change Manchester campaign and day of action campaigns to raise awareness of this issue.

In response to the question relating to those homeless people without recourse to public funds, they would be directed to charitable organisations for advice and support.

In response to the question regarding out of hours contacts, the Director of Homelessness informed the Members that after 8pm the contact number was diverted to the Longford Centre provision, this could also be diverted to the Women's Direct Access Centre as appropriate. The Chair requested that contact details should be circulated to the Members following the meeting.

The Director of Homelessness further commented that the information as to the reasons for presentations and information relating to the inspection of temporary accommodation would be provided, commenting further that people placed in temporary accommodation were provided with the details of a dedicated officer.

In regard to a specific request from a Member for further information on the Protect Programme that was referenced within the report, the new scheme to help protect some of the most vulnerable people in our communities from COVID-19, the Chair requested that this information is provided by Officers to the Member following the meeting.

The Strategic Lead for Homelessness did advise that the Protect Programme was designed to work with people who sleep rough who were entrenched, and this work was being supported by dedicated social workers and mental health workers to provide a wrap around service. She further described the challenge to plan and deliver innovative schemes and programmes due to the short term funding arrangements provided to local authorities stating that long term funding was required.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure stated that Manchester remained committed to helping and supporting the most vulnerable residents in the city. He stated that the Government had imposed austerity on the city and repeated cuts to enable the delivery of appropriate services. He said that despite the Government's manifesto pledge to address homelessness they had repeatedly failed to fund this action. He stated that he further called upon the Government to support the building at scale of affordable housing to meet the demand.

The Chair concluded this item of business by expressing her appreciation to the invited guests, the Executive Member, all staff working with the homelessness service and the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sector who were working to support the most vulnerable residents in the city.

Decisions

The Committee;

1. Note the report and place on record their appreciation to all staff and volunteers working to tackle homelessness and offer support to the most vulnerable residents within the city.
2. Recommend that the Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure write to the Government to lobby for an adequate funding settlement to support the delivery of work to tackle homelessness.

3. Recommend that the Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure write to all Manchester MPs to raise awareness of this issue and request their support in the lobbying of Government for an adequate funding settlement for Manchester.
4. Recommend that an update report on the revised Housing Allocations Policy be included on the Committee's Work Programme for consideration at the March 2021 meeting.

NESC/20/53 Compliance and Enforcement Service - Performance in 2019/20

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) that provided an update on demand for and performance of the Compliance and Enforcement service during 2019/20.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- An overview of the teams that make up the Compliance and Enforcement services;
- Information and data on overall demand;
- An update on Proactive Activity;
- A breakdown by ward of the number of fly-tipping cases by month with comparisons against the previous year's figures;
- Information on where the additional investment to tackle fly-tipping had been spent;
- Data by ward on the number and nature of calls to the Out of Hours service during the first Covid-19 lockdown period; and
- Case studies.

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

- Waste and fly tipping in areas of North Manchester remained an issue;
- What work was being undertaken with the Universities to address Anti-Social Behaviour caused by students;
- What action was being taken to address waste generated by HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation);
- Further information was sought on the work of the Biffa Investigation Team;
- Data on the types of enforcement action by ward was requested;
- Noting the prevalence of commercial waste, often in district centres and asking what was being done to address this;
- Did Officers engage with Letting Agents when seeking to address issues;
- Clarification was sought on the reported number of prosecutions generated as a result of the 2-year pilot scheme that saw the introduction of 8 overt mobile CCTV cameras and 6 concealed cameras that were deployed across the city to tackle fly tipping;
- Was the money from fines issued following a successful prosecution invested back into the service;

- Issue arose related to terraced properties and the imposition of communal bins as opposed to individual household bins;
- What were the priorities for the service next year;

In response to the questions raised the Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety explained that the Biffa Investigation Team, in addition to removing fly tipping would seek to identify any persons who were responsible for the fly tipping and using the evidence obtained enforcement action could be taken against those who illegally disposed of their waste.

The Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety stated that any money from fines was retained by the Treasury, only monies generated through the issuing of a Fixed Penalty Notices and and civil penalty notices could be retained by the local authority.

The Neighbourhood Compliance Manager (Neighbourhoods) addressed the question regarding the rates of prosecutions generated by the investment into CCTV cameras by describing the challenges in obtaining evidence as a result of criminality, however he expected the figures to increase as the judicial system had been delayed due to the impact of the pandemic.

The Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety stated that a lot of work had been undertaken with landlords of HMO properties around a range of issues, including student behaviour and appropriate waste management and the report provided examples of these. She further stated that the teams would work with all parties to resolve issues, including commercial premises and letting agents and that when appropriate, enforcement action would be taken.

In response to the comments regarding ongoing issues in the Cheetham Hill area the Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety commented that a lot of targeted work had been delivered in the area in an attempt to resolve the ongoing issues. She acknowledged the comment from the local Member and advised that Officers would contact the Member following the meeting to discuss further.

In response to the question regarding the priorities for the service next year, the Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety advised that they would be similar to this year with a continued focus on addressing issues of waste and fly tipping, further adding that residents needed to take responsibility for disposing of their waste in an appropriate and responsible manner.

The Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety stated that the service had responded well during the pandemic and she remained confident that the service would continue to be flexible, working collaboratively with partner agencies to respond to the challenges of the pandemic and any changes announced as the lockdown was eased and Tiers introduced. This includes flexing shift patterns of the LOOH to meet the demands of the service.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods stated that he wished to place on record his appreciation to all of the staff working within the various Neighbourhood Teams for all of their continued hard work and dedication to residents during the previous

challenging year. He further stated that target hardening work had been delivered in North Manchester to address fly tipping hotspots and to support this a communication campaign would be delivered. In relation to the issues raised regarding terraced properties he stated that the Passageway Container Service Improvement Programme, as reported to the Committee at their meeting of 7 October 2020 would address the concerns raised by the Member.

Decisions

The Committee;

1. Note the report and express their appreciation to all of the staff working within the various Neighbourhood Teams for their continued hard work and dedication to residents during the previous challenging year.
2. Recommend that post Covid Neighbourhood Teams work with partners, including registered housing providers and local businesses to actively engage with residents and stake holders on the issue of responsible waste management.

[Councillor Appleby declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as her partner is employed by Biffa.]

NESC/20/54 Overview Report

The report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which contained key decisions within the Committee's remit and responses to previous recommendations was submitted for comment. Members were also invited to agree the Committee's future work programme.

A Member recommended that in addition to the items already scheduled a report be included for consideration at the February 2021 meeting that describes the progress made to date against the Council's Climate Change Action Plan. In addition to this, the report would include details of progress to deliver on the specific actions as prescribed within the Motion that was adopted in July 2019 when the Council declared a climate emergency.

A Member recommended that a progress report on the delivery of the Extension to Selective Licensing Schemes, previously reported to the Committee be considered at the March 2021 meeting.

The Committee endorsed these recommendations.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme, subject to the above and noting the decision taken during consideration of a previous agenda item to include an item on the revised Housing Allocations Policy, to be added for consideration at the March 2021 meeting.