

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 3 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 Hacking - In the Chair
Councillors Andrews, Chambers, Collins, M Dar, Doswell, Douglas, Grimshaw, Hitchen, Kirkpatrick, Moore, Rawlins, Rawson and Russell

Also present:

Councillor Murphy, Deputy Leader
Councillor Craig, Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing
Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure
Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods
Councillor Watson, Lead Member for Age Friendly Manchester
Councillor Cooley, Ward Councillor for Brooklands
Elaine Unegbu, Chair of the Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board
Marie Greenhalgh, Vice Chair of the Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board

CESC/20/48 Minutes

Following on from the Committee's recommendation at its November meeting, the Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure confirmed that the public meeting about the Peterloo Memorial had been postponed. He reported that the new date had not yet been finalised but that work was taking place with the Equalities Team to ensure that the meeting would be accessible.

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020 as a correct record.

CESC/20/49 Manchester's Age Friendly Recovery

The Committee received a report of the Consultant in Public Health (Ageing Well Lead) which outlined how COVID-19 and the impacts of restrictions in place this year had disproportionately affected older people. It also outlined a set of proposals, developed by the Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board, the Age Friendly Manchester Team and senior officers in the Council, that were designed to help address the barriers many of Manchester's mid to later life residents reported that they faced. The report also stated that the Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board – and more broadly the Age Friendly Assembly - was a strategic partner in the delivery of the Manchester Climate Change Framework 2020-2025. A key principle within the framework was that older people as residents of Manchester had a role to

place in reducing the contributors to and impacts of climate change. It was expected that this would contribute to Manchester's zero carbon target.

The main themes within the report included:

- Ageism;
- Care homes;
- Neighbourhoods;
- Employment; and
- The Our Manchester Strategy Reset.

Elaine Unegbu, Chair of the Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board, highlighted the issue of ageism, how this had been exposed by the pandemic and its impact on the health and wellbeing of older people, including isolation, loneliness and depression. She reported that the language of vulnerability and stereotypical images of older people perpetuated negative attitudes and that a different approach was needed with positive narratives to combat ageism, everyone having a role to play and honest, sustained conversations taking place.

Councillor Watson, Lead Member for Age Friendly Manchester, spoke to the Committee about older people living in care homes. She reported that this group of older people had not been involved in the Board before now and the Board was working to address this. She drew Members' attention to the recommendations within the report related to care homes, advising that care homes and their residents needed to become part of and able to participate in the local neighbourhood. She advised that community integration was being considered from the start within the new LGBT-Affirmative Extra Care Scheme that was being built in her ward and that all older people's accommodation should be like this. She also reiterated the importance of thinking about the language used to describe older people.

Marie Greenhalgh, Vice Chair of the Age Friendly Manchester Older People's Board addressed the Committee about the role of neighbourhoods in whether people aged well and experiences of health problems, social isolation and poverty. She outlined some of the challenges that older people had faced during the pandemic and highlighted the role of neighbourhood and community groups in addressing these. She drew Members' attention to the recommendations in the report relating to neighbourhoods. The Chair praised the work of Good Neighbour Schemes, including the one in his ward, particularly their invaluable work during the pandemic. A Member highlighted the work of The Place (Fallowfield Library) including the Forever Young group for older residents. The Programme Lead advised that there were a range of examples of good practice across the city and the aim was to make this good practice consistent across the city. In response to a Member's question, he advised that Members could sign up for a monthly bulletin to find out what was going on. A Member expressed concern that some older people who normally contributed to the work of community and voluntary organisations within their neighbourhood felt unable to do so during the pandemic.

Councillor Cooley spoke about employment in relation to people over the age of 55. She reported that a lot of people in this age group would find themselves unemployed, particularly as a result of the pandemic, and that it was important to

support this age group to find work, not just younger people, particularly as people were now expected to work longer. She recommended that the Council should lead the way on this, setting an example and working with partners to encourage them to offer apprenticeships and other work opportunities to older people. She also highlighted the contribution that people who had not been in paid employment made, for example, to family and community life, and advised that this should also be valued.

Elaine Unegbu welcomed that the Board had been involved in the Our Manchester Strategy reset and she emphasised the importance of ensuring that the voices of older residents were heard during engagement processes. She asked the Committee to note all the recommendations that had been made in the report and asked that they put them forward to the Executive.

A Member welcomed the recommendations and advised that the Council needed to further embed equalities across its policies.

Councillor Cooley stated that all Members should be raising the Age Friendly Manchester agenda at their ward co-ordination meetings and asking what was happening within their own wards.

In response to a Member's question about care home residents being able to have visitors, the Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing reported that, while care homes in some parts of the country were using lateral flow tests, which were carried out by care home staff and gave results within 30 minutes, to test visitors for COVID-19, there were concerns about the accuracy of the results. She advised that it was proposed that in Manchester care home visitors would have to take another test which was sent to a laboratory for testing four days beforehand, followed by a lateral flow test on the day of the visit. She reported that it was hoped to have a process in place for this within a fortnight.

A Member expressed concern that, although people were living longer, they were spending longer periods of this in poor health and that there was a gap in healthy life expectancy between different areas of the country. The Programme Lead informed Members that work was taking place at a Greater Manchester level, through the Ageing Hub, to help people to age well and also to support people with long-term health conditions. He advised the Committee that the Council and partner organisations were looking at how ageing well could be incorporated into all neighbourhood plans across the city.

In response to a Member's question, Councillor Cooley confirmed that the information on baby boomers' income in point 7.13 of the report came from research by the Resolution Foundation.

A Member stated that the first draft of the Workforce Equality Strategy, which had been considered by the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee at its November meeting, while referencing older employees, had focused more on creating job opportunities for younger people. She asked that the draft Strategy be amended to recognise the need to create opportunities for older people. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods supported the Member's comment and

advised that he would speak to the Executive Member for Children and Schools, who currently also had responsibility for Human Resources, about the report recommendations relating to employment and how the draft Workforce Equality Strategy could be amended, in response to the point the Member had made.

The Programme Lead advised that the Age Friendly Manchester team would be working with the Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development to progress the Board's recommendations relating to employment. In response to a Member's question about the North Manchester Age Well in Employment Pilot, he advised that discussions were currently taking place about holding a socially distanced jobs fair. Elaine Unegbu advised that meaningful apprenticeships should be offered to older people.

A Member highlighted the importance of education opportunities for older people and that financial costs could be a barrier for some people. The Director of Inclusive Growth advised that employment for people over the age of 50 was a priority area for the Work and Skills Strategy. She informed Members that the Greater Manchester Working Well programme had been expanded by approximately £13 million. She advised that there had been a long-term underinvestment in adult education, including a lack of funding for adults taking qualifications beyond their first Level 2 qualification, other than loans which people could be reluctant to take; however, she advised that there had been an indication from the government that there would be more investment in adult education, including funding for adults to take A-level or equivalent qualifications. She advised that work was taking place regarding apprenticeships for older people but that there were some issues, in particular, the perception of apprenticeships as being for younger people and for roles in particular industries and the wage offered for apprenticeships which could be difficult for people with more financial commitments to manage on.

The Chair thanked the officers and guests. He recognised that Manchester was leading the way in this work, the achievements so far and the importance of continuing to build on that.

Decision

That the Committee welcomes the report and wishes to convey to the Executive that it strongly and unanimously supports the recommendations contained within it.

CESC/20/50 Driving Digital Inclusion and Bridging the Digital Divide in Manchester

The Committee received a report of the Director of Inclusive Growth and the Head of Libraries, Galleries and Culture which provided an update on the digital inclusion challenge within Manchester, the impact of COVID-19 on those who were excluded and the initiatives that were being developed to scale up efforts to tackle the challenges.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- How digital exclusion affected communities in Manchester;

- The Council's work so far to address this;
- Manchester Digital Inclusion Working Group;
- Get GM Digital Programme;
- Manchester Digital Inclusion Action Plan, focusing both on residents who did not have home internet access and those who did not have the skills or confidence to use it effectively; and
- The role of adult education providers.

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

- Help for people who were applying for Universal Credit;
- That some people who were digitally excluded would also not have any contact with the Council and its services and how those people could be reached;
- An example of how local people in one area had been connected to the internet via MiFi, a mobile Wi-Fi device; and
- To recognise the important role libraries were playing in enabling people to have digital access and to thank the staff for their work.

The Director of Inclusive Growth advised that the Council's Revenue and Benefits service was not notified of residents who were claiming Universal Credit but that the Council was working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Citywide Services Manager (Reform) reported that a common issue that people contacted the Digital Support telephone line, set up in May 2020, for was help with applying for Universal Credit and that these queries were referred to Manchester Citizens Advice who could assist them with both the digital element and knowledge about the benefits system. The Work and Skills Specialist advised that the Council was working closely with Jobcentre Plus to support them to link with adult learning providers.

The Citywide Services Manager (Reform) informed Members that residents who had received Chromebooks had been identified either through contact with the Council's COVID Hub or through a referral from a partner agency, such as health services, but that it was difficult to reach people did not have contact with any agencies. The Work and Skills Specialist reported that some people had found out about the help available through word of mouth but that it would be useful to get information into more places where people went, such as cornershops.

The Chair reported that the Economy Scrutiny Committee had discussed the infrastructure element of digital inclusion at its most recent meeting but that MiFi had not been mentioned and that he would raise this with the Chair of the Economy Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair thanked officers for their contribution.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/20/51**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.

The main points and themes within the report 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.

The Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing informed the Committee that, from the following month, the way this information was reported would change and that the reports would be shorter but that the Committee could ask for more information to be provided on specific areas.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Inclusive Growth advised that domestic abuse support services had adapted the way they worked during the pandemic and that some had received additional resources during this period. She clarified that the report reflected that at present it was expected that the services could revert to a more business-as-usual approach from March 2021 but that this was being reviewed regularly.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Inclusive Growth advised that she would check where the request for more funding from the DWP for the Test and Trace payments was up to and let the Member know.

A Member asked if there was any further progress on identifying satisfactory accommodation for homeless people who might test positive for COVID-19. The Chair requested that the Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing provide a response directly to the Member concerned.

A Member highlighted that some Manchester residents had concerns about the vaccines for COVID-19. The Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing outlined plans to understand and address these concerns and advised that there would be a more detailed plan for this after Christmas.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/20/52**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 informed Members that the Committee would receive reports on the Budget, the Parks Investment Programme and a further COVID-19 update at its next meeting and that the Equalities Update was likely to be considered at the February meeting, dependent on the amount of budget information the Committee had to consider at that meeting.

A Member commented that she had not received the information which had been circulated to the Committee about the review of symbols across the city. The Chair asked that this be re-circulated.

Decisions

1. To note the report and agree the work programme, subject to the above amendments.
2. To ask the Scrutiny Support Officer to re-circulate the information about the review of symbols across the city.