

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2021

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, Razaq, White and Wright

Apologies: Councillors Sadler and Whiston

Also present:

Councillor Murphy, Deputy Leader

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure

Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

NESC/21/01 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2021 as a correct record.

NESC/21/02 Neighbourhoods Directorate Budget Proposals 2021/22

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) that provided a further update to the Scrutiny committee on the savings proposals being proposed as part of the 2021/22 budget process and reflected any feedback from the November Scrutiny committees. The savings proposals would be considered by all six Scrutiny Committees for those areas within their remit, prior to going out to public consultation.

The Committee was invited to consider and comment on the savings proposals identified prior to being considered by Executive.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Funding announcements in the government's spending review on 25 November 2020 and provisional local government finance settlement on 17th December 2020 suggested the Council would not be facing the worst-case scenario for 21/22, which was a shortfall of around £100m;
- It was now expected that savings in the region of £50m, as previously identified, would be sufficient;

- Providing a further update to the Scrutiny committee on the savings proposals being proposed as part of the 2021/22 budget process and reflected any feedback from the November Scrutiny committees;
- Savings within the overall Neighbourhoods directorate included proposals of £7.376m requiring an FTE (full-time equivalent) reduction of 2. Due to lead in time around investments etc, the £7.376m would be phased over the period 2021/22- 2024/25, with an initial £6.683m being delivered in 2021/22;
- Charging residents for replacement waste bins would not be considered for 2021/22;
- Outlining the Budget Savings Proposals; and
- Noting that as part of implementing the savings proposals an Equality Impact Relevancy Assessment would be undertaken for each of the proposals.

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

- Welcoming the withdrawal of the option to charge residents for the replacement of waste bins;
- Further information was requested on the proposals for the animal welfare service;
- Stating that the Government had failed to fund local authorities appropriately over many years and had failed to reimburse Councils for the additional financial pressures incurred as a result of COVID-19; and
- Further information was sought on the reported introduction of new charges for providing advice to businesses.

The Deputy Leader stated that he agreed with the comments from the Members regarding the ongoing failure of the Government to adequately fund the Council. He stated that rather than fairly fund services they were relying on Councils to introduce a rise in the Council Tax charge. He stated this was a punitive and regressive approach adopted by the Government. He stated that despite this the Council remained committed to delivering the best services on behalf of the residents of the city with the funds that were available.

In regard to the removal of any proposal to charge residents for the replacement of waste bins in this round of budget considerations, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods stated that the importance of this was recognised and how this contributed to the Councils recycling targets and the impact on the levels of flytipping. He stated that whilst any cuts to services were always unpalatable, he expressed caution that this option may need to be revisited in future years budget considerations, adding that the Committee would be kept informed of any future proposals.

The Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety stated that if the animal welfare service proposal was agreed, work would be progressed to develop a service specification prior to the tendering of this contract.

The Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety also provided examples of the type of opportunities that existed to generate revenue through providing advice to businesses e.g. in respect of a food business providing a pre-

inspection visit to advise on measures needed to ensure compliance before the official inspection and rating.

The Chair stated that an audit of all road safety measures around schools should be undertaken and capital funding be used to fund the delivery of appropriate signage and road markings to improve road safety around all Manchester schools where any deficiencies were identified.

Decision

The Committee;

1. Endorse the savings proposals identified to the Executive;
2. Recommend that the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport considers undertaking an audit of all road safety measures around schools and capital funding be used to fund the delivery of appropriate signage and road markings to improve road safety around all Manchester schools where any deficiencies are identified.

NESC/21/03 Homelessness Directorate Budget and Savings Options 2021/22

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Homelessness provided the high level budget context and priorities for Homelessness across 2021/22 and the feedback from the budget conversation, which had been used for the development of savings options 2021/22 and investment requirements to fund population driven and other budget pressures

The Committee was invited to consider and comment on the savings proposals identified prior to being considered by Executive.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Funding announcements in the government's spending review on 25 November 2020 and provisional local government finance settlement on 17th December 2020 suggested the Council would not be facing the worst-case scenario for 21/22, which was a shortfall of around £100m;
- It was now expected that savings in the region of £50m, as previously identified, would be sufficient;
- The overall approach to the budget strategy had been to align with the 4 key strategic aims of the service and to utilise the investment to maintain frontline delivery in support of these aims, keeping service reductions to a minimum;
- The budget strategy for Homelessness had been to contain the cost of rising need for temporary accommodation within available resources whilst also prioritising resources towards service developments that would achieve the service's priority to prevent and reduce the incidence of homelessness;
- Noting that the greatest risk for the priorities of the service and the budget strategy was the continuing rise in need which was likely to be exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 and the uncertainty of short term funding;

- The Service Transformation Programme would form the core of the approach to tackling and reducing homelessness over the next three years. It would be the framework in which reductions in temporary accommodation and rough sleeping would be achieved through a radical reorganisation of the Homelessness Service and its activities.
- Savings Options and Proposals; and
- Workforce Impact.

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

- What was the impact of recent changes to the lifting of the restriction on evictions in the Private Rented Sector, introduced as a result of COVID-19 on homelessness services;
- Consideration should be given to providing in-house temporary homelessness accommodating as this would allow for better control of quality and management;
- Further information was sought on the delivery of the A Bed Every Night (ABEN) scheme;
- Noting the Protect Programme funding that had been awarded as a result of COVID-19, was there a commitment from Government to continue funding this programme; and
- Could the Council's reserves be used to support homelessness services.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure stated that despite the promises made to Manchester and all other local authorities that financial assistance would be made available to support councils to accommodate homeless people during the pandemic this had not been provided. He described this as a failure of government, however despite this Manchester had responded to the situation and sought to support the most vulnerable residents in the city and he now called upon the government to fund Manchester appropriately and fairly.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure reiterated that the proposals did not represent a cut in services, but rather savings were to be achieved through a service redesigning. He described that the reasons for homeless presentations were varied, however recognised that the removal of the protection from eviction would have an impact on the number of presentations. The Members were also advised that the proposals also protected the current ABEN spaces and there was no requirement to draw down on the Council's reserves.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure described the challenge to plan and deliver innovative schemes and programmes to tackle homelessness due to the short term funding arrangements provided to local authorities, stating that long term funding was required. He informed the Committee that the Manchester Homelessness Partnership had written to the Secretary of State to lobby on this issue.

In response to the question regarding the suggestion of providing in-house temporary accommodation, the Executive Director of Adult Social Services stated that a response to this would be provided following the meeting.

The Chair stated that the work of the homelessness team and all voluntary organisations was important and valued in addressing homelessness in Manchester. She stated the importance of the preventative work undertaken and stated that the Committee should be kept informed of any changes to the service,

Decision

The Committee endorse the savings proposals identified to the Executive.

NESC/21/04 Our Manchester Strategy Reset – Draft Strategy

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) that provided an update on the draft *Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025* reset document. The draft of the reset Strategy is appended to this report.

Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025 would reset Manchester's priorities for the next five years to ensure we could still achieve the city's ambition set out in the *Our Manchester Strategy 2015 – 2025*.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Describing the background to the Our Manchester Strategy reset;
- Providing an overview of the Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025;
- Describing the final design and communications; and
- Next Steps.

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

- Some Members debated as to whether as a result of the ongoing pandemic it was an appropriate time to proceed with the reset;
- Had any analysis of the previous strategy been undertaken;
- Members welcomed the ambitious strategy as it was required to tackle issues of poverty and health inequality;
- Noting that the consultation response rate had been good, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19;
- Had the demographic characteristics of respondents been recorded to ensure the views obtained reflected the city;
- How were outcomes measured and reported; and
- Did the Our Manchester Forum hold partners, such as Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and local health service providers to account.

The Deputy Leader reiterated that this was not a new strategy, but rather a reset of an existing strategy to reflect on how the city would recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. He stated that the report set out how the city was taking a lead on this issue and being on the 'front foot' as the city emerged from the pandemic. He described that there had been a lot of involvement in this programme of work, including consultation with local Members.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager informed the Committee that information on the benchmarking data and respondent demographic data, where available had been

reported to the November 2020 meeting of the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee. She further advised that it was important to note that the *Our Manchester Strategy* was not a Council strategy, but rather a city wide strategy that involved a range of partners, adding that the outcomes and progress was reported in the comprehensive State of the City report.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager further advised the Committee that a comprehensive communications strategy had been established to maintain links and channels of ongoing dialogue with the different groups across the city who had contributed to the strategy. She stated this provided a mechanism to reflect on what they said to ensure their voice was captured and obtain feedback.

In response to the question regarding holding partners to account, the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) advised that formal structures existed for overseeing the performance of partners such as GMP and health service.

Following the discussion, the majority of the Members agreed that the final version of Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025 should be taken for consideration by the Executive in February 2021.

Decision

The Committee recommend that the final version of Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025 should be taken for consideration by the Executive in February 2021.

NESC/21/05 Manchester Green and Blue Strategy and Implementation Plan, including: Annual update and a report on the Tree Action Plan

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director, Development that provided the annual update on the delivery of the Green and Blue Implementation Plan (G&BI) together with information on the delivery of the Tree Action Plan.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- The work on the green and blue agenda is an essential component of creating a climate resilient city and delivering Manchester's Climate Change Action Plan;
- The report addressed the current context within which this agenda was being delivered including the impact of Covid and the need to deliver an economic recovery that was both inclusive and environmentally sustainable;
- Providing a background to the G&BI Strategy and Implementation Plan;
- Describing the Manchester's Tree Action Plan;
- The role of the G&BI Board and the G&BI stakeholder Group;
- The role of G&BI in delivering the Council's Climate Change Action Plan;
- The Impact of Covid;
- Key delivery highlights from the G&BI Strategy on progress in 2020; and
- Future Priorities.

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

- Welcoming the recent delivery of trees in the Old Moat ward and what were the plans for the delivery of phase 1 and phase 2 of Tree Action MCR;
- Noting the scale of ambition to plant trees, had consideration been given to training Council staff and staff in schools to equip them with the skills to help them maintain trees;
- The species of trees should be the most appropriate for their intended location;
- Consideration should be given to planting the species of the Manchester Poplar tree at appropriate sites;
- There was no mention within the report of Bee network investment in the north of the city;
- Every attempt should be made to protect tree's, especially those that were lost as a result of development and consideration should be given to designating areas as conservation areas to offer that additional protection to trees from development;
- Noting that the delivery of green infrastructure was often an element of any planning consent granted, what measures were taken to ensure these were delivered;
- Noting the delivery of Mayfield Park, stating that this was a good example of partnership working to deliver viable green space to the residents of the city;
- Noting the importance of quality green space had been highlighted during the pandemic;
- How could Council owned land be used to promote and support local community wellbeing and green initiatives; and
- What work was being done with Registered Housing Providers around this agenda.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport stated that there were a range of initiatives to be delivered in the north of the city, making reference to the Northern Gateway Development and the Rochdale Canal towpath scheme that would see the route improved for both walking and cycling, enhancing access to Manchester's waterways. When completed the Rochdale Canal would provide a traffic free environment for local residents to walk and cycle along. She further commented that a schedule of projects to be delivered was planned and she would welcome feedback and suggestions from Members on these.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport commented that the designation of conservation areas would be considered as part of the Local Plan and she encouraged local Members if they deemed it appropriate for an area within their ward to progress this through via ward coordination.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport commented that the informed consideration was given as to the variety of tree species that were selected for any given location, adding that they were selected to maximise carbon capture and promote biodiversity.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer responded to questions by advising that within the first phase of Tree Action MCR, wards had been identified that typically had fewer trees, including a lower percentage of street trees. Many of these wards were in the central part of Manchester, so the list had been amended to include some wards in the North and South to allow a wider geographical spread. Wards not included in

Phase 1 would have the opportunity for tree planting in Phase 2, adding that every ward would receive tree planting. She commented that this was in addition to the ongoing programme of works described within the report relating to community orchards.

The Principal Tree Officer commented on the challenges presented by disease to the Manchester Poplar, however noted the comments from the Member regarding a disease resistant variety and suggested he discussed this with the Member following the meeting. In response to the suggestion regarding training to support the ongoing maintenance of trees, he stated that they were a small team however this would be taken away from this meeting and discussed with City of Trees.

The Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing advised Members that where trees were to be lost as a result of development there was a condition that the developer replace these with a ratio of two trees planted for every one lost, adding that this was to be increased to three. In regard to any specific concerns regarding the delivery and maintenance of green space by developers she stated she would discuss this further with the Member following the meeting. She further welcomed the positive comments regarding the delivery of green space from the development of the Mayfield area, adding that the lessons learnt from the scheme would inform future regeneration projects.

The Senior Policy Officer stated that positive relationships existed with local Registered Housing Providers and good practice regarding green and blue projects and initiatives was shared between them, however acknowledged more needed to be done to capture and report this activity. The Chair recommended that the information that was provided to Registered Housing Providers was circulated to members of the Committee. In response to the question relating to the use of land to facilitate and support community projects he recommended that Members discussed this with their local Neighbourhood Teams.

Decision

The Committee:-

1. Recommend that Officers, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport explore the options for delivering a programme of tree maintenance training. This training to be made available to all relevant partners, including staff working in schools.
2. Recommended that the green and blue information that is provided to Registered Housing Providers is circulated to members of the Committee for information.

NESC/21/06 Monitoring and Compliance – Construction Sites

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods); the Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing and the Head of Compliance, Enforcement and Community Safety that had been submitted to provide information that had been requested by the Committee.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Known active construction sites across the authority;
- The city's start and end times for construction works to be undertaken and the rationale for those times;
- How many neighbouring local authorities and other core cities had the same permitted construction times as Manchester; and
- Information on the monitoring of construction sites and the approach taken to enforcement, including examples of types of breaches identified and how these were addressed.

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

- The need to manage development to achieve the correct balance to support the development of the city and mitigate the impact and disruption to local residents, adding that city centre ward Members had supported resident campaigns on this issue;
- How wre complaints managed, to date how many developers had been issued with a fine and what was the approach if disturbances and complaints arose from developments in neighbouring authorities;
- Noting that trees were often removed as part of preliminary land clearance activity prior to any formal planning consent and conditions;
- How many enforcement officers were employed;
- Noting the continued lack of communication with local residents and Members to advise them of works to be undertaken, especially work undertaken at night;
- The impact of temporary road closure on local neighbourhoods; and
- Noting that the understanding amongst developers as to their responsibilities to local residents as part of the agreed Management Plans, with particular reference given to inconsiderate parking.

In response to the questions and comments raised by the Committee, the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport acknowledged the concerns expressed relating to the impact on city centre residents as a result of development. She gave a commitment that she would progress the discussions on how best to address this with Members outside of the meeting, stressing that it was important to strike the correct balance. She stated that all complaints would be investigated and addressed with the developer concerned.

The Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing recognised that complaints did arise from Manchester residents as a result of development work being undertaken in neighbouring authorities. She advised that she would liaise with her opposite colleagues in Salford to discuss this further. The Licensing and Out of Hours Manager gave an assurance that all noise complaints would be investigated and an agreeable resolution sought in all cases, even those that crossed boundaries.

The Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing advised the Committee that certain preparatory works were permitted on land prior to a formal planning application submission and consent being granted, however if Members had

concerns regarding any activity they should contact her department at the earliest opportunity and a site visit could be arranged.

The Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing stated that works after 6pm was only permitted if the developer had a satisfactory communication strategy in place to relay this information to local residents. A Member commented that from her experience she was not confident this was happening, especially for those residents living in flats. The Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing further advised that road closures were permitted to allow for the delivery of a development scheme and the Considerate Constructors Scheme was a tool to address the issue of parking.

In response to the specific question regarding fines and enforcement, the Licensing and Out of Hours Manager stated that there were two Licensing and Out of Hours Teams (City Centre and City Wide), whose duties included responding to noise complaints from construction sites. These two teams comprised of 35 FTE officers working a seven-day shift pattern, including evening and night cover. He stated that to date no fines had been issued to developers as cases had been resolved informally by engaging with the developer when complaints had been received.

The Section Planning Manager advised the Committee that there were five Planning Enforcement Officers and stated that both teams worked closely together to resolve issues.

The Chair commented that the Considerate Constructor Scheme was a voluntary scheme and consideration needed to be given to establishing a bespoke Manchester Considerate Constructors Scheme that had to be adhered to by contractors and be included as a mandatory condition of any planning consent. The Committee supported this recommendation.

The Chair further recommended that a briefing session be arranged for Members of the Committee to provide an overview of a range of activities that included, but not restricted to planning and related enforcement; roles and responsibilities and Traffic Regulation Orders. The Committee supported this recommendation.

Decision

The Committee:-

1. Recommend that the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport give consideration to establishing a bespoke Manchester Considerate Constructors Scheme that had to be adhered to by contractors and be included as a mandatory condition of any planning consent.
2. Recommend that Officers, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport arrange a briefing session for Members of the Committee that provides an overview of a range of activities that included, but not restricted to planning and related enforcement; roles and responsibilities and Traffic Regulation Orders.

NESC/21/07 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.

In concluding the meeting the Chair wished to place on record her appreciation and gratitude to all staff and partners across the city for their ongoing resolve, dedication and commitment to support the residents of the city during the pandemic.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme.