Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 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 Hacking - In the Chair
Councillors Andrews, Chambers, Collins, M Dar, Doswell, Evans, Grimshaw, Hitchen, Kirkpatrick, Moore, 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 Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

Apologies:
Councillors Battle, Douglas and Rawlins

CESC/21/01 Minutes

Decision

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

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

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided a further update on the savings proposals being proposed as part of the 2021/22 budget process and reflected any feedback from the November scrutiny committees. The Committee was asked to consider and make comments on the savings proposals identified prior to these being considered by the Executive.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Neighbourhoods Directorate background and context;
- Neighbourhoods 2020/21 budget position;
- Current in year forecast position;
- 2021/22 onwards savings proposals;
- Workforce implications; and
- Equalities.

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

- Whether the projected returns from the parks investment programme were realistic within the first year;
- Subsidies to the leisure service providers during the pandemic and any progress in securing funds to cover this;
- Why the Equality Impact Relevancy Assessments had not been completed yet and when Members could expect to see them;
- Concern that funding to the Council had been reduced over a number of years and that the national government had not provided sufficient funding to the Council to fully mitigate the impact of the pandemic; and
- That the Council did not want to make cuts to services but that these were the least worst options and to thank officers for their work in identifying these.

The Head of Parks, Leisure, Youth and Events reported that it was not proposed to make any savings on indoor leisure facilities in the next financial year but that savings were proposed from 2022 onwards. He advised that the Council had submitted a return to the national government for assistance of £1.3 million in relation to the impact of the pandemic on leisure centres, covering the period from December 2020 to March 2021. In response to a further question, he advised that the Council was working on the assumption that there would be an in-year overspend within his service but it was expected that the application for government assistance would be successful. He advised that the government had not yet agreed financial support for the 2021/22 financial year, if COVID-19 restrictions impacted on leisure services beyond March 2021, but that Sport England was currently in discussions with the government about this. He reported that, if restrictions did continue into the new financial year and no further government funding was provided, the Council would need to work with its leisure operators on how that funding gap would be met and that this did present a risk in the current situation. He highlighted that there was a report on the Parks Investment Programme later on the agenda and that he would respond to the question on parks as part of that item.

The Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) advised the Committee that the Equality Impact Relevancy Assessments, which were used to determine whether an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was required, would have been undertaken by all of the services by this point. She informed Members that the Committee would receive an overview of the EIAs resulting from the budget proposals at its meeting on 11 February 2021. A Member questioned the timing of this in relation to the decision-making process. The City Solicitor advised Members that the Committee would be receiving this information at its next meeting which was prior to the final decision on the budget being made at the Budget Council meeting on 5 March 2021.

The Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) clarified the proposals relating to Compliance and Enforcement, Highways, the Animal Welfare Service and charges for replacement bins, while advising Members that these areas fell within the remit of Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee (NESC) and referring Members to the discussions that had taken place on these issues at the previous day's NESC meeting.

Decision

To note the report, subject to Members' comments, and to recognise that, under the financial situation the Council is placed in, officers have worked to identify the least worst options.

CESC/21/03 Our Manchester Strategy Reset - Draft Strategy

The Committee received a report of the City Solicitor which provided an update on the draft *Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025* reset document. A draft of the reset Strategy was appended to the report. The report stated that achieving Manchester's zero carbon target was reflected throughout the work on the Our Manchester Strategy reset and would be clearly captured in the final reset document.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Background to the Our Manchester Strategy reset;
- Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025;
- Final design and communications; and
- Next steps.

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

- How successful had the consultation been in reaching different communities, particularly taking into account the impact of the pandemic and digital exclusion; and
- Was a breakdown of respondents by age, race and sex available.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager outlined the work undertaken to reach people who were digitally excluded when carrying out the consultation on the Strategy, despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. This included producing paper copies of the survey, which were distributed through a range of means including in the emergency food response parcels, through Age Friendly newsletters and through community hubs. She advised Members that it had also been translated into the top ten most common languages other than English spoken in Manchester and that targeted engagement had taken place with under-represented communities through community and voluntary organisations and that this had included face-to-face engagement under COVID safety guidelines. She reported that some community groups had also supported residents to engage with the consultation online. She advised the Committee that the Council would continue to build on this work to improve inclusion. The Deputy Leader highlighted that the number of respondents was twice the number who had responded to the consultation on the original Strategy.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager advised Members that a demographic breakdown of the respondents to the consultation had been included in a report to the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee on 3 November 2020 and she offered to share this with the Committee Members. She informed the Committee that this information was only available where respondents had provided it and that completing the demographic data had not been made a requirement as it could deter

some people from responding. She advised Members that about 70% of the respondents to the universal survey had provided this information and that work would be taking place to look at how this could be increased in future. She informed the Committee that the demographic data from respondents had been compared to the overall statistics for the city and, where certain groups or neighbourhoods were under-represented, targeted work had taken place to address this.

In response to a Member's question about the extent to which the Strategy had succeeded in addressing poverty, the Policy and Partnerships Manager advised that progress against the Our Manchester Strategy was reported on annually in the State of the City report. She also confirmed that the Council had engaged with the Poverty Truth Commission as part of the work on the Strategy reset.

In response to a Member's question about which sectors of the economy were expected to have job opportunities as the city recovered from the pandemic, the Chair advised that this had been discussed at that day's meeting of the Economy Scrutiny Committee and suggested that Members who were interested could watch the recording on that meeting.

Decision

To thank the Deputy Leader and officers and to note the report.

CESC/21/04 Manchester's Park Development Programme 2021 - 2025

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided an update on the progress and future programme of investment for parks that would accelerate delivery of the Park Strategy and support the delivery of revenue savings beyond 2021.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- The background to the Programme;
- Framework for investment;
- Pipeline of projects;
- Deliverability; and
- Next steps.

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

- What was the reason for the decision to divide the £960,000 available in 2021/22 for capital projects in parks by ward, with each ward being allocated £30,000;
- How would value for money be achieved if different areas were individually buying a small number of items for a local park;
- That the larger investment opportunities should be spread across a number of parks;
- What support was the Council providing during the pandemic to small and independent businesses who normally operated within the parks;

- To thank the Parks team for the support they had provided to community groups in parks; and
- Some local residents could not afford to attend the commercial events being held in parks and how could they be supported to benefit from these events.

In response to the question that was asked under the Budget item about how realistic the projected returns were, the Parks Lead advised that the service had a good track record over the past four years of capital investment in parks leading to increased returns, with income from parks increasing by about 20% year on year. She advised that the projected returns were predicated on parks being able to host a programme of events and activities as they had in previous years, although this was likely to be towards the end of summer due to COVID-19 constraints. She advised that the projected returns were also the result of work in previous years, for example, changing contracting arrangements and the staffing structure. She also highlighted some of the investment projects which were currently in the pipeline over the shorter and longer term.

The Parks Lead advised that, following consideration of the options, it had been decided that the most equitable way to allocate the Parks in Partnership £960,000 funding was to align it with the Neighbourhood Investment Fund (NIF) and allocate £30,000 per ward. She advised that it also gave local areas the opportunity to seek match funding from other sources. The Head of Parks, Leisure, Youth and Events informed Members that this approach put decision-making in the hands of Ward Councillors and local areas. He advised Members that the money did not have to be spent in that ward and that neighbouring wards could choose to work together on a project that was beneficial for local residents. Committee Members expressed their support for this fund.

The Parks Lead informed the Committee that a small project team had been established to support the delivery of the investment and that part of this work would be to ensure the best value for money, for example where a number of different areas were each buying a bench for their local park. In response to a Member's question about whether the funds would be used to replace equipment which was in a poor condition or for new improvements, the Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure advised that this was at the discretion of the Ward Councillors and other stakeholders in the ward.

The Parks Lead highlighted how some of the small and independent organisations which operated in parks had supported the local community during the pandemic, for example in the delivery of food packages. She confirmed that her team had been providing support to these organisations during the pandemic, including support in putting in place safe operating plans where they could continue to trade, directing them to grants they could apply for where they could not trade and facilitating the development of a network of these business so that they could provide each other with peer support.

The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure advised the Committee that the return from the commercial events held in parks, such as Parklife and Lightopia, was reinvested in parks for the benefit of all residents and that, while there were a few

premium commercial events, the majority of events in parks were free and accessible to all. He thanked Parks staff for their work during the pandemic.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/21/05 Update on COVID-19 Activity (Residents and Communities Recovery Situation Report Summary)

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided a summary of relevant sections of the Residents and Communities Recovery workstream.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Residents at risk;
- Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on communities;
- Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people; and
- Equality and inclusion.

In response to a Member's question about Free School Meals, the Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing advised Members that this had been discussed at the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (CYPSC). The Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) stated that that the CYPSC had received a report which covered this and that she could provide Members with an update.

A Member expressed concern at the increase in domestic violence and abuse referred to in the report and asked whether the Committee could be updated after the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy Group meeting. The Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) suggested that the Committee receive a report on the Strategy in May or June. She advised Members that it was proposed to hold a workshop for Members on where this work was up to, most likely in mid to late February. She also drew Members' attention to the Domestic Abuse Bill which was currently going through Parliament, advising that officers were awaiting the final version of the Bill and could update Members on this at a future meeting. A Member requested that the Committee receive a report on the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy at a future meeting. The Chair advised that this would be discussed under the next item.

In response to a Member's question about the impact of the restrictions on evictions being lifted, the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) advised that the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee had requested a report on this at its March meeting and that this report could be shared with Members of this Committee.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/21/06 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 agreed to the Member's request under the previous item for a report on Domestic Abuse, including the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy, and advised that he would speak to officers about the timing of this. A Member commented that Members had not received an update since the last time this issue had been discussed and asked that this be provided.

In response to a Member's request for a report on spending on school meals, the Chair advised that this was likely to fall within the remit of either the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee or the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee and that he would discuss this with officers and the relevant Scrutiny Chairs.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme, subject to the above comments.