

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2021

Present:

Councillor Wilson - In the Chair
Councillors Azra Ali, Andrews, Chambers, Connolly, Evans, Grimshaw, Hilal, Rawson and Wills

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children's Services
Louise Harding, MCR Active
Nicky Boothroyd, MCR Active
Ivan Wadson, Manchester City of Literature

Apologies:

Councillors M Dar, Douglas, Hacking, S Judge, Sheikh and Whiston

CESC/21/28 Chair

The Committee Support Officer informed Members that the Chair had sent his apologies for the meeting and asked for nominations for a Member to chair the meeting. A Member nominated Councillor Wilson, which was seconded by another Member and agreed by the Committee.

Decision

To appoint Councillor Wilson as Chair for the meeting.

CESC/21/29 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021 as a correct record.

CESC/21/30 Homelessness

The Committee received a presentation of the Director of Homelessness which provided an update on homelessness in Manchester. The Chair expressed concern that the presentation slides had only been received on the day of the meeting.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- The service environment;
- Ending the routine use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families;
- Redesign of the Private Rented Sector Scheme;
- Woodward Court and the Direct Access Hostel;
- Temporary accommodation review;
- Service redesign; and
- Outcomes.

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

- That the Committee was likely to look at the service redesign at a future meeting;
- Request for more data on past, present and forecasted homelessness;
- Families temporarily living with relatives or friends and the need to build more social housing;
- Whether there was sufficient housing in the private rented sector;
- People being provided with housing in other areas, when their support networks were in their current area;
- The collaboration with Lambeth Council;
- Request for a report on Woodward Court;
- Timescales for the projects outlined in the presentation; and
- That the Executive Member for Housing and Employment should be invited to a future meeting to discuss housing strategy.

The Director of Homelessness advised Members that the Private Rented Sector Scheme was being designed to prioritise housing within the Council's area. In response to a Member's question, he advised that properties would be sought with rents set at housing allowance levels. He agreed that more social housing was needed, including to address hidden need, such as people living with relatives. He assured Members that Lambeth Council was not one of the southern councils which was re-locating a lot of homeless families to other parts of the country.

The Chair thanked the Director of Homelessness for his presentation.

Decisions

1. To note the presentation.
2. That the requests from Members for further information and reports at future meetings would be discussed with Councillor Hacking on his return.

CESC/21/31 Manchester Playing Pitch Strategy Update

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which updated the Committee on the progress of the Manchester Playing Pitch Strategy and proposals for consideration over the next 12-month period.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Supply and demand update;
- Playing field and outdoor sport facility improvements;
- New site management arrangements; and
- Manchester Playing Pitch Strategy refresh.

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

- Request for data on the number of people using the pitches and equality data, if available;
- Whether those using the playing pitches would be consulted with, including local youth clubs;
- That pitches needed to be resilient to climate change, specifically different weather conditions, and that 3G pitches should be as sustainable as possible; and
- Private pitches that were not being used and might be lost to redevelopment.

Louise Harding advised that information could be provided on the users of playing pitches. She advised that her service would be liaising with Neighbourhood Managers to obtain information on youth clubs and other groups within local areas so that a range of local people were engaged with about plans for local playing pitches, in addition to traditional sports clubs. In response to a Member's question, she confirmed that an Equality Impact Assessment would be carried out on the refresh of the Strategy and that a section on this would be included in a future report to the Committee. She advised that MCR Active was having discussions with funding partners and the Council about climate change and sustainable technologies for pitches. She offered to provide Members with an update on work on sustainable 3G pitches at a future meeting. She reported that her service was consulted on any planning applications on playing pitch land and that, unless there was a mitigation plan, the service would be object to the application.

In response to a Member's question, Louise Harding advised that her service was currently in discussions with the Council's Education Service regarding the plans for the Newall Green High School site and whether the site could be maintained for community use and she offered to provide Members with an update on this at a future meeting; however, she advised that MCR Active was also looking at a relocation plan for clubs, groups and users of the former school's facilities. She also outlined work to assess and gather evidence on the shortfall of football pitches in Wythenshawe and, if necessary, to identify a site and funding for new 3G provision in the area. In response to a question from the Chair, she outlined proposals for club cricket sites to be used for more informal cricket. In response to a Member's question on an activation programme for cricket wickets, she confirmed that this would be going ahead and that she could share further information on this.

Decision

To note the report, subject to Members' comments.

CESC/21/32 Recycling in Leisure Centres

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided an overview of recycling rates for Council owned leisure centres and highlighted the progress made through the pandemic from February 2020 to May 2021. It highlighted the progress that had been made in generating a sustainable waste and recycling structure to achieve zero waste to landfill and increase recycling in all the leisure centres. This was one of the objectives set out in MCR Active's Leisure Facilities Sustainability Strategy 2020-2025 in response to the Council's priorities for waste.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Background information;
- Recycling rates; and
- Plan for 2021/22.

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

- The proportion of gym users using reusable water bottles rather than single-use plastic bottles;
- Measures to reduce COVID-19 transmission and their environmental impact, for example, paper towels to clean down equipment between users;
- The monitoring of recycling rates; and
- Staff training.

Nicky Boothroyd from MCR Active advised that gym users had been increasingly bringing their own equipment such as towels to the gym since leisure centres had re-opened and that this included bringing water bottles with them. She advised that research could be done on the use of reusable bottles as work took place with the vending machine company to remove plastic bottles from the machines. She reported that more cleaning of equipment had to take place during the pandemic although there were alternatives to using paper towels such as fogging machines. She advised Members that environmental issues formed part of the contract monitoring for GLL and SLM and that an audit of staff training was also about to be carried out. She advised that training on climate change had been rolled out to staff across GLL and SLM. In response to a Member's question, she reported that the Regional Gymnastics Centre was not producing any waste which was not recyclable and did not have a general waste collection.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/21/33 Manchester UNESCO City of Literature - Progress Report

The Committee received a report of Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which detailed the progress with Manchester UNESCO City of Literature. It outlined how, following the designation awarded in 2017, an independent organisation was established in 2019. The vision for Manchester City of Literature was for Manchester to be an innovative, distinctive, equitable, globally connected city of reading and writing, where diverse voices were celebrated, creative talent and industries were nurtured and where literary activity changed lives. This report showed the progress the organisation had made towards the vision, how it had unified the city's literary sector to strengthen programmes and events that supported reading for pleasure, literacy and social capital. It also showed how the charity had leveraged additional funds for the city and created new festivals and activity to benefit residents.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Manchester City of Literature: a partnership network;
- Funding;
- Responding to the pandemic;
- Project activity supporting literacy and reading for pleasure;
- International Mother Language Day;
- Festival of Libraries;
- Community Champions;
- Write Manchester; and
- The future.

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

- How would this be publicised;
- Request for more information on the Community Champions referred to in the report;
- How were young writers and illustrators benefitting from Manchester's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature;
- Work with schools; and
- Whether any LGBT-related events had taken place or were planned.

Ivan Wadeson, Executive Director of Manchester City of Literature, advised that there had been a lot of press coverage when Manchester was awarded this status in October 2017 and that work had then taken place to set up the organisation in 2018 to 2019. He advised that a website had been created in November 2020, that the organisation had been working to develop a social media presence and that the events it was delivering also worked to promote awareness of the City of Literature. He outlined the Community Champions programme which was working to identify how the organisation could best support particular communities to come to literary activities on their own terms. He reported that the international network of UNESCO Cities of Literature provided opportunities for young writers and his organisation worked with the community of writers it was building up to make them aware of those opportunities. In response to a Member's question, he informed the Committee that his organisation was working closely with Read Manchester and that he was a Board Member.

Ivan Wadeson reported that engagement with schools had still taken place during the past year but that it had been online and that the pandemic had affected the numbers involved. He highlighted the Write Manchester programme outlined within the report which would be launched in October 2021 and the resources this would provide for schools. He informed Members that the City of Literature worked with a diverse range of writers and had platformed emerging LGBT writers. A Member suggested doing some work linked in with LGBT History month in February.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/21/34 Read Manchester - Progress Report

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which detailed the progress with Read Manchester since it was launched in 2016, managed within the library service in partnership with Education, and the National Literacy Trust. It showed how by developing the love of 'reading for pleasure', Read Manchester contributed to tackling low literacy levels in the city. It showed how initiatives such as book gifting had continued to maintain residents' access to reading, during the pandemic. It stated that Read Manchester would be more important than ever over the next 12 months with the Year of the Child.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Work to ensure that the poorest children in Manchester started school with language and vocabulary skills on par with their peers;
- Work to ensure that all 11-year-olds in Manchester left primary school able to read well;
- Work to ensure that young people in Manchester developed an enjoyment of reading;
- Work to prepare young people in Manchester for the workplace;
- Work to promote book ownership in Manchester;
- Work to promote adult literacy in Manchester;
- Work to engage communities in literacy through libraries in Manchester; and
- The future.

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

- To welcome the progress made;
- Community library projects; and
- What feedback there had been from children and young people and how this would inform future work.

The Hub Manager (Read Manchester) recognised the purpose that small community-based libraries served for people who might not want to access an imposing library building and that this project had to expand beyond libraries and schools through networks like this. She advised that summer reading challenge flyers and approximately 2000 books had been distributed to the network of little free libraries and that she would be discussing a proposed small free library for Wythenshawe Park later that day.

The Director of Education informed the Committee that Councillors, senior officers and other were engaging with children and young people to hear their experiences of the pandemic and what they would like to see in 2022, which had been designated as the Year of the Child in Manchester. She advised that reading and libraries had been mentioned a lot by the children and young people, including positive feedback about the reading challenge, visiting libraries and the transition read for pupils moving from primary to secondary school. She advised that school leaders had fed back on the value of children's authors talking to and reading to pupils – either through visits or online during the pandemic – which had brought the books to life for the pupils and encouraged reluctant readers to pick up a book. She informed the

Committee that Read Manchester and events with authors would be a prominent part of the year dedicated to children and young people.

The Executive Member for Children's Services praised the way different Council services and schools had all worked in partnership on Read Manchester.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/21/35 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.

A Member requested that the Committee receive a report on Homelessness at a future meeting to provide an update on the areas of work outlined in the presentation delivered earlier in the meeting. The Chair advised that this would be raised with Councillor Hacking.

Decision

To note the report, subject to the above comments.