

Economy Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2021

Present:

Councillors Baker-Smith, Bayunu, Farrell, Noor, Raikes, Stanton, Strong and Shilton Godwin

Also present:

Councillor Leese, Leader
Councillor Craig, Deputy Leader
Councillor Sharif Mahamed, Assistant Executive Member (Antipoverty)
Councillor Midgley, Executive Member for Health and Care
Councillor White, Executive Member for Housing and Employment

Apologies: Councillors H. Priest, Johns and Doswell

ESC/21/40 Appointment of Chair

Noting the apologies received from the Chair, Councillor Farrell was nominated to Chair the meeting. This was seconded and approved.

Decision

To appoint Councillor Farrell as Chair for the meeting.

ESC/21/41 Minutes

Decision

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2021 were approved as a correct record.

ESC/21/42 Manchester's support for families living in poverty

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer and the Director of Inclusive Economy that provided an overview of the Council's response to poverty, including an update on the Family Poverty Strategy Reprioritisation.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background, noting that poverty in Manchester was deeply engrained and formed one of the most significant challenges due to its wide ranging and profound impacts on the people affected;

- The scale of the challenge had been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Noting that the Council and partners had a long-standing commitment to tackling poverty and supporting all its diverse residents to lead happy, healthy and fulfilling lives;
- Information on the rationale and approach taken to the Family Poverty Strategy 2017-22 Reprioritisation;
- Delivery of the Family Poverty Strategy, with examples of current activity and best practice;
- The approach to communications with residents;
- The Council's corporate role in tackling poverty;
- The impact of the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector;
- Tackling poverty through day-to-day service design and delivery, with descriptions and examples provided across a range of Directorates and services; and
- The Council's response to COVID-19, noting the key achievements of the work to date.

The Committee also received a presentation from representative of Munchers Poverty Truth Commission, which informed Members of the findings of the investigation in to the Question "What if people who struggled against poverty were involved in making decisions about tackling poverty?". One of the key learnings from the Poverty Truth Commission was the value in developing relationships with people who share different life experiences and deeply listening to the impact of those experiences

The Committee was invited to comment on the report prior to it being considered by Executive.

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

- That the voices of people with lived experience of poverty was important and there was a need to keep including commissioners to feed-back information;
- Whether the Family Poverty Strategy could link into and be considered alongside other Council strategies;
- That there was a stigma attached to poverty and it was questioned as to how people could be encouraged to ask for help without losing their self-esteem;
- Did the Executive feel that some recommendations are more challenging than others;
- That the Marmot Review (into Health Inequalities) referred to in the report confirmed weaknesses around gender and race inequalities and that this could affect how the Council looked at the implementation of recommendations;
- Would there be some wider Scrutiny focus implemented to share reports and recommendations between Committees;
- That, whilst access to work and working was important, it was not a reality for all and to consider the Poverty Premium for people with disabilities and/or illnesses that keep them out of work; and
- That consultation was key to decision making.

The Deputy Leader confirmed that the Executive for Health and Care and the Assistant Executive Member (Antipoverty) were leading on the Family Poverty agenda and would bring together everything the Council was doing around the issue of poverty and looking at measures of support and prevention. The Deputy Leader stated that the report showed some of the harder issues and added that certain aspects of the Poverty Report (i.e. Revenues & Benefits) would be fed back to other Scrutiny Committees and it would be helpful for these to be shared with the Economy Scrutiny Committee in a year's time.

The Executive Member for Health and Care stated that the report was to provide information on the refresh approach to Family Poverty and confirmed her agreement with the need to include people with lived experience. The Executive Member for Health and Care stated that COVID-19 had exposed and widened many of the inequalities in people's lives and that the Council were committed to sharing the successes of the city with its inhabitants so all have the same opportunity to thrive but added that some of the policies were national and beyond the scope of the Council's response on the issue. The Executive Member for Health and Care stated that next month's Economy Scrutiny Committee would focus on aspects considered within the Marmot Review and added that the Family Poverty Strategy took consideration of some people's inability to work and felt that there was a need to look at tackling the poverty premium.

The Assistant Executive Member (Antipoverty) confirmed that he was taking the lead on Antipoverty and working closely with the Family Poverty Strategy group and referred to the report for information on how the Council was working with vulnerable residents across the city. The Assistant Executive Member (Antipoverty) referred to the work being done on family poverty but gave mention of the pandemic's affect across single adults and adult households and that when the wider review was complete in 2022 this demographic would form part of the ongoing review.

The Director of Inclusive Economy stated that there were three core themes to the Family Poverty Strategy, namely – access to quality sustainable work as a route out of poverty, focusing on the basics such as food and fuel and the third being boosting resilience and building on strengths. The Director of Inclusive Economy stated that part of the Family Poverty Strategy focused on families with children, noting that there had been an increase in the reliance on free school meals during the pandemic and echoed the Assistant Executive Member for Antipoverty's comments around single adults and adult households needs being included to broaden the strategy's aims.

A guest speaker from the Poverty Truth Commission stated that a shared sense of community between people with similar experiences could be a great help to individuals with regard to self-esteem and capturing these experiences should also feed into strategies to tackle poverty.

The Executive Member for Housing and Employment stated that Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) formed part of the response to the lack of work by training 3,000 adults per year.

Decisions

The Committee endorse the recommendations that the Executive:

1. Note the progress that has been made in delivering the Family Poverty Strategy 2017-22;
2. Note the Council's commitment to tackling poverty and its overall offer to residents;
3. Note the recommendations of the Poverty Truth Commission Report; and
4. Endorse the suggested approach to the refresh of the Family Poverty Strategy to address poverty more broadly and support all residents experiencing poverty; those with and without children.

ESC/21/43 Manchester's Digital Strategy

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Inclusive Economy that sought the Committees views on the approval for the adoption of the Manchester Digital Strategy.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing a background and purpose of the Manchester Digital Strategy;
- Describing the stated ambition to make Manchester one of the world's leading smart cities and digital economies in the next five years;
- Describing the development of the strategy;
- The impact of Covid-19 on the growth of the digital sector;
- An overview of the consultation process that had taken place from September 2020 to March 2021 with business, public and VCSE sectors and community organisations and networks;
- The delivery of the strategy and governance arrangements; and
- Describing how the strategy would directly contribute to achieving Manchester's zero-carbon target.

The Committee was invited to comment on the report prior to it being considered by Executive at its meeting on 15 September 2021.

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

- What processes were in place to deal with electrical waste when digital devices were superseded;
- Who would own the infrastructure that was being proposed;
- It was good to see an international context within the strategy;
- How would the creative industry sector of the city feature in contributing to the strategy; and
- The Council should not lose sight of the number of residents in the city that were digitally excluded.

The Director of Inclusive Economy commented that in terms of ownership of the infrastructure , the Council had joined the Digital Co-op , who had developed an interface between the digital providers and end users to enable new developments to be provider neutral which would enable opportunities for new providers to enter the market. In terms of waste from the digital sector, it was noted that at present the strategy did not address this, but it was agreed that this issue would be looked at and consideration would be given as to how this could be built into the strategy.

The Committee was also informed that the time the strategy was being developed the cultural organisations in the city were implementing their recovery plans post covid and there was quite a bit of overlap, which had been taken on board in the development in the strategy and it was acknowledged that creative and digital sectors of the city sat well together and was one of the city's strengths.

Decision

The Committee endorse the recommendation that the Executive adopt the Manchester Digital Strategy as part the City's policy framework.

ESC/21/44 Digital Exclusion Index

The Committee considered the report and presentation of the Director of Inclusive Growth that described what the index was, how it worked, some of the initial trends the index provided in relation to residents and areas of the City with greatest likelihood of being digitally excluded and finally to provide a number of recommendations on how the index could be used to create better targeted interventions and more long-lasting change.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Describing the background and rationale for developing the Manchester Digital Exclusion Index;
- Describing what digital exclusion was and who affected;
- Describing what the Manchester's Digital Exclusion Index was and its purpose; and
- Conclusion and next steps.

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

- Some of the data in the presentation was from Census 2011 and it would be interesting to compare with the Census update expected in 2022;
- That it would be useful to see how Manchester compared to other cities;
- That intervention would be key and would be an on-going learning process;
- Would developing the impact measurement tool affect how other organisations used the index; and

- That an update on the implications of digital exclusion during the pandemic would be useful.

The Work and Skills Specialist stated that comparing the 2011 data with the update next year may expose more challenges and added that GMCA were involved nationally, speaking with other cities and sharing information, adding that Manchester was unique in gathering more information and leading the way in certain areas. The Work and Skills Specialist stated that a support guide would be of help to support communities and inform them on applying for funding and added that the report would help raise awareness of specific needs at schools and for single households.

The Chair concluded by stating that there was a likely overlap with the Digital Exclusion Index map of the North of the city with the Council owned housing stock that the Council needs to address.

Decisions

To note the report.

ESC/21/45 Economy COVID-19 Sit Rep Report

The Committee considered the report of the Director of City Centre Growth and Infrastructure that provided Members with 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 report offered a general overview in addition to considering updates on the following areas: footfall, higher education institutions, aviation, culture, development, affordable housing, transport and infrastructure, skills, labour market and business support and funding

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

- As there was a skills shortage, was there any funding available to support skills development?
- The increase in wages in lower waged sectors was welcomed;
- Was there a knock-on effect on prices locally?
- Was there any work being done to skill match/upgrade people who were coming to the end of their furlough and likely to have their roles disestablished?
- Was information up to date regarding transport use?
- Was there a shift to smaller office space and had the retail sector returned completely?

The Director of Inclusive Economy stated that work was being done with JobCentre+ and hospitality industries to link people with job opportunities as well as linking with Government programmes and MAES. The Director of Inclusive Economy confirmed

North Manchester was a priority target for funding and gave mention of the Kickstart scheme for under 25 year olds whereby a range of employers offered six months paid experience and a career pathway.

The Director of City Centre Growth and Infrastructure confirmed that price increases were evident in the construction industry and addressed the question on transport, stating that rail use was low and bus use was high, especially at peak times. Addressing the question around returning to the workplace, the Director of City Centre Growth and Infrastructure stated that larger businesses were more able to continue away from the office and that retail was still a challenge.

The Leader stated that the wage increase in the hospitality sector was welcomed but noted that this sector largely moved into the care sector during the pandemic but were now returning, leaving a staff shortage in care sector which needed urgent attention. The Leader stated that Brexit and the associated decrease in the student population had affected the amount of people covering roles in the care sector.

Decision

The Committee note the report.

ESC/21/46 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.

Decision

The Committee note the report.