

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2022

Present:

Councillor H Priest - In the Chair

Councillors Azra Ali, Benham, Chambers, Connolly, M Dar, Evans, Hilal, Hussain, Iqbal, Johnson, Ogunbambo, Rawson, Whiston and Wills

Also present:

Councillor Midgley, Deputy Leader

Priya Chopra, Saheli

Charlotte Cooke, LGBT Foundation

Apologies:

Councillors Hitchen and Wilson

CESC/22/19 Chair

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

Decision

To appoint Councillor H Priest as Chair for the meeting.

CESC/22/20 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2022 as a correct record.

CESC/22/21 Domestic Abuse

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided a summary of recent and current work to address Domestic Violence and Abuse, including the implementation of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Background information;
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021- Safe Accommodation Duty and New Burdens Funding;
- Domestic abuse and the wider Violence Against Women and Girls agenda (VAWG);
- Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews; and
- Future funding and sustainability.

Charlotte Cooke from the LGBT Foundation informed the Committee about her organisation's work with the LGBT community, both specific services for survivors of domestic abuse and other services and support that they provided. She outlined how her organisation supported victims of domestic abuse in a holistic way, looking at all their different needs, using the Foundation's own services and referring them to other services, where appropriate. She informed Members how the New Burdens funding was being used by her organisation to provide casework support to low to medium risk survivors of domestic abuse, including supporting them into a range of housing options and providing group-based peer support. She outlined the increasing complexity of many of the referrals, such as mental health issues, substance misuse and issues with basic needs such as housing, employment and financial support. She informed the Committee how they worked with partner organisations, such as housing associations, and worked across different local authority areas, as an organisation based on a community of identity, rather than a geographical community.

Priya Chopra from Saheli informed the Committee about the work of her organisation, which had previously predominantly supported south Asian women affected by domestic abuse but was increasingly working with a more diverse group of black, Asian and minoritised women. She informed the Committee that this included refuge provision and about Saheli's recent acquisition of dispersed accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse, which had increased their capacity to support women fleeing from domestic abuse. She outlined how Saheli worked with women who did not speak English and who were far removed from the job market, including building their self-esteem. She highlighted a range of work that the organisation was doing including group-based work to help women identify signs of abuse and work with Afghani women, women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and older women. She welcomed that the New Burdens funding had enabled Saheli to provide greater support to children affected by domestic abuse and to support women with more complex needs, including mental health issues.

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

- To request a breakdown of statistics by protected characteristics;
- Concern about whether the main domestic abuse service providers were able to meet the needs of minority groups;
- What was the pathway for male victims of domestic abuse;
- What was being done to reverse the trend of the perpetrator of domestic abuse remaining in the home, while the victim had to flee;
- What work was being done with schools; and
- To request that all acronyms in future reports be explained.

The Community Safety Lead informed Members that quarterly performance information was produced which provided a more detailed breakdown of the statistics and that this could be shared with Committee Members. She acknowledged the challenges of and importance of ensuring that services were accessible to and appropriate for the diverse communities within Manchester. In response to a Member's question about self-identification and the acceptance of trans women in single sex services, Charlotte Cooke confirmed that access to the LGBT Foundation's services was based on self-identification. She reported that finding

accessible refuge spaces for trans, non-binary and gender variant survivors of domestic abuse was a challenge and that work was taking place to issue guidance on this. In response to a Member's question, she reported that, while her organisation provided a range of services, including talking therapies, some individuals with more complex needs required support from elsewhere; however, she advised that mainstream organisations tended to immediately refer any LGBT individual seeking support to the LGBT Foundation without fully considering what services they provided, while there were also concerns about the cultural competency of mainstream therapeutic services and fears from LGBT individuals accessing mainstream services about having to come out, and about whether the people they were being supported by would be able to understand their experiences.

The Community Safety Policy and Performance Manager reported that the needs assessment carried out last year had identified the need to improve support for male victims of domestic abuse and that the pathway to accessing support was not obvious for male victims who were not from LGBT communities. He advised that work was taking place at a Greater Manchester level to address this, which Manchester had contributed to, and that Manchester was also looking at what it could do to improve this, rather than just waiting for the outcome of the Greater Manchester work.

The New Burdens Project Manager highlighted that 35 domestic abuse survivors had used the Sanctuary Scheme to safely remain in their own home and advised that there should be a push to increase the use of this scheme so that more survivors and their children remained in the family home, as well as perpetrators being dealt with appropriately. The Community Safety Policy and Performance Manager highlighted the role of Domestic Violence Protection Notices in enabling victims to stay in their own homes and advised that, while these had been under-used previously, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) were committed to improving this. In response to a Member's question about the percentage of domestic abuse survivors who, despite accessing the Sanctuary Scheme, ended up having to leave their home, the Community Safety Lead advised that she would look into this and respond to the Member.

In response to a Member's question, the New Burdens Project Manager informed Members that voluntary organisations had been attached to the hotels where refugees were being accommodated and that a small grant had been given to Safety4Sisters to work with people with NRPF but that the government had not clarified the position on providing funding to support victims of domestic abuse with NRPF.

The New Burdens Project Manager outlined a programme that Manchester Women's Aid had been running in schools called "Ten Dialogues" which looked at what a healthy relationship looked like and how to treat people with respect. She reported that the initial funding for this had ended but Manchester Women's Aid were trying to secure further funding to continue this. The Community Safety Policy and Performance Manager advised that there might be funding to do some further work with young people linked to the VAWG agenda. In response to a question from the Chair about the Respect Young People's Programme, he advised that this programme focused on children and young people who were abusive to their parents

and that the programme also addressed the impact of the abuse on siblings. In response to a question from the Chair about Looked After Children and peer on peer abuse in children's homes, the New Burdens Project Manager advised that her team would look into this.

Decisions

1. To request that the most recent quarterly report which provides a further breakdown of the statistics be circulated to the Committee Members.
2. To ask for the percentage of domestic abuse survivors who, despite accessing the Sanctuary Scheme, end up having to leave their home.
3. To note the key issues which have arisen from the discussion, including proportionality and intersectionality and the relationship between mainstream and specialist support services, in particular, people from minority communities being referred to specialist organisations for their community, regardless of whether that was the most appropriate organisation for the type of support they required, and to note that the Committee may want to consider these issues further at a future meeting.

CESC/22/22 Homelessness Update

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which set out the position of Manchester City Council's Homelessness Service in terms of how it supported local residents and how the emerging transformation programme was seeking to increase the prevention of homelessness, continue the successful reduction in rough sleeping, reduce the use of temporary accommodation and support residents, with a wide-ranging variety of needs, including that of securing a place to call home. In addition, set out in the report, was a deep dive into the activity to increase prevention, the support provided to people when placed in temporary accommodation and the arrangements to ensure the quality of the temporary accommodation provided.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- National, regional and local context;
- Rough sleeping;
- Prevention;
- Accommodation, including its quality;
- Support for people in temporary accommodation; and
- Homelessness Strategy and Partnership.

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

- Concern that the average amount of time people were spending in bed-and-breakfast or temporary accommodation was too high and the impact of this on the individuals in this position;
- The importance of focusing on the services that the Council provided and the areas that were within its control, such as the Housing Solutions Team

working with the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Team to prevent people having to go into temporary accommodation or to reduce the time people spent in temporary accommodation;

- Questioning whether the rough sleepers headcount was accurate;
- To request a breakdown of table 2.3 in the report by protected characteristics;
- The factors leading to homelessness, including changes in legislation;
- That vacated social housing properties should have a quicker turnaround time for them to be ready for and matched with a new tenant;
- Noting that the PRS team had helped to secure 813 new private rented tenancies, to ask about the people they had not been able to help because Council systems were not quick enough to respond to the pace of the private rented sector;
- Concern about people living in overcrowded accommodation who were not classed as homeless;
- To welcome the focus on preventing homelessness and to ask for more information on the progress of this work to be included in the next report;
- To note that temporary accommodation was concentrated in some areas of the city and to ask for more information on this and what was being done to address it in the next report; and
- To ask that the next report include what support was provided to help people to settle into their new accommodation.

The Director of Housing Operations highlighted the significant increase in people presenting as homeless and recognised Members' comments about some of the factors affecting this. He outlined how the Transformation Programme was looking at how the service could be more creative to find alternatives to placing people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. He agreed that the average length of time individuals were spending in bed-and-breakfast accommodation was too long and reported that, in particular, there was an issue with identifying suitable supported accommodation for individuals who required this. In response to a Member's question about eliminating the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation for families with children, he advised that this work was challenging but that there was a commitment to expediting the work to address this. The Strategic Lead for Homelessness offered to share the plan for addressing the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation with the Committee and outlined how this was being progressed and monitored. In response to a Member's question about what current address was used for people living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation who were applying for a private rented tenancy, she advised that she would check on this.

The Director of Housing Operations recognised the comments about the importance of turning around void social housing properties more quickly and advised that it was now taking an average of 60 days to turn around void properties in Housing Operations. In response to a Member's comments about homelessness and the shortage of affordable housing, he highlighted the report on the Manchester Housing Strategy, which was due to be considered at the next meeting of the Economy Scrutiny Committee, and advised that the Council recognised the inter-relationship between homelessness, inequalities and inclusive growth. In response to Members' comments, he advised that the next report on homelessness would include more information across equalities strands. A Member requested that this include information on LGBT young people and what work was being done with

organisations such as the Albert Kennedy Trust, the LGBT Foundation and the Proud Trust.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Housing Operations advised that the success of Apex House related to its provision of intensive support to people on one site.

The Strategic Lead for Homelessness confirmed that officers could provide a breakdown of the figures in table 2.3 by protected characteristics. She reported that the headcount of rough sleepers was a snapshot of one night using best practice and she invited the Member who had raised this to join her staff when they were doing the headcount to see how this was carried out. In response to a further question about the purpose of the headcount, she advised that this was to provide a figure which could be compared across the country but that her team also had other data on rough sleeping in Manchester which she could provide. She advised that information on how the systems used by the Housing Solutions and PRS Teams were working to keep pace with the private rented sector would be provided in a future report. In response to a Member's question about property checks, she advised that, following the service redesign, there was now a team dedicated to property checks and repairs who were going out and undertaking inspections of properties and that more information on the work that was taking place to ensure that properties were of the required standard would be included in the next report on Homelessness provided to the Committee. In response to a question about how people could access support, she advised that a lot of people preferred to contact her service by telephone but that face-to-face appointments could be arranged and that telephone callers had the option to leave their details and be called back, rather than wait in a queue. The Director of Housing Operations advised that information on the accessibility of their services would be included in the next report.

The Chair advised that the Economy Scrutiny Committee had received a report on the Housing Allocations Policy Review at its meeting in March 2022, which provided some of the information that Members had asked for and she asked the Committee Support Officer to circulate this to the Committee. In response to a Member's suggestion that the Committee receive a separate report on the Transformation Programme, the Chair suggested that information on this could be included in the next report, including what milestones and targets had been met.

Decisions

1. To ask that the items requested by Members during the discussion be included in the next report, including the Transformation Programme, work to reduce the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation, void properties, how the Housing Solutions and PRS teams are working together and how their systems are keeping pace with the private rented sector, the imbalance in the geographic spread of temporary accommodation provision, support to help people settle into their new accommodation and information on equalities and how different communities are being served by this work.
2. To request a breakdown of the information in table 2.3 by protected characteristics.

3. To request information on what address people with no fixed abode can use when seeking accommodation through the PRS team.
4. To ask the Committee Support Officer to circulate the report on the Housing Allocations Policy Review which was submitted to the Economy Scrutiny Committee's March 2022 meeting to Committee Members.

[Councillor Whiston declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as a service user of the Private Rented Sector Team.]

CESC/22/23 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 proposed that any issues Members wanted to raise in relation to the work programme be discussed on Councillor Hitchen's return.

Decision

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