

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2023

Present:

Councillor Hitchen - In the Chair

Councillors Azra Ali, Benham, Chambers, Connolly, Evans, Hussain, Ogunbambo, H Priest, Rawson, Sheikh, Whiston and Wills

Also present:

Councillor Midgley, Deputy Leader

Councillor Rahman, Statutory Deputy Leader

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Finance and Resources

Councillor Hacking, Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure

Councillor Igbon, Executive Member for Vibrant Neighbourhoods

Councillor Douglas, Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure

Andy King, MCRactive

Yawar Abbas, MCRactive

Nicky Boothroyd, MCRactive

Apologies:

Councillors Hilal, Iqbal, Johnson and Wilson

CESC/23/06 Minutes

A Member noted that Michael Gove had not responded to the Committee's invitation to visit the city and expressed concern that the distribution of the Levelling Up Fund had been unfair, noting that Manchester had not been awarded funding.

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2023 as a correct record.

CESC/23/07 Culture Annual Report

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided an update on culture in the city.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- COVID recovery and impact of the cost-of-living crisis;
- Cultural Impact Survey;
- Core funding for culture;
- Zero carbon;
- Loads to Do;
- Manchester Culture Awards 2022;
- Collaborations and international partnerships;
- MADE – Manchester's Cultural Education Partnership;
- Music Education - My Hub;

- Classical Music collaboration; and
- Cultural Consortium.

Officers provided an overview of the presentation at appendix 1, highlighting that the figure on Board Members who were Manchester residents was 36%, not 24%.

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

- Asking about the organisations which were represented in the figures in the Cultural Impact Survey presentation;
- To recognise the important work of smaller, local projects, such as the community street art project Withington Walls, which might not be included in this data;
- That the percentage of audiences from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities was low and more needed to be done to improve this;
- The impact of class and socio-economic background on accessing and participating in cultural activities, how this intersected with other factors such as race and ethnicity and work to address this; and
- The impact of Brexit on the cultural sector.

The Statutory Deputy Leader informed the Committee about work which had been taking place for a number of years to widen access and participation in the cultural sector, identifying and removing barriers, and advised that this work was continuing.

The Policy and Programmes Manager (Culture) reported that all organisations on their mailing list were encouraged to take part in the survey and that it was mandatory for organisations which were funded by the Council. She advised that over 40 organisations had taken part in the survey, and that this now included the Palace Theatre and the Opera House, as well as many other larger venues, museums and galleries across the city and a number of smaller organisations; however, she advised that many of the commercial music venues across the city did not contribute to the survey. The Director of Culture informed Members about a piece of work which had been carried out in 2022 in relation to the music economy in Manchester. The Policy and Programmes Manager (Culture) advised that her team would welcome the opportunity to include Withington Walls in the survey. A Member commented that Ward Councillors could assist with distributing the survey to organisations they knew locally.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Culture informed Members about the background to the Cultural Leaders Group and the development of the new Cultural Consortium, which, he advised, would be a more democratic and representative body of cultural organisations in the city. He informed Members about the impact of Brexit on the outdoor arts sector, on exporting work and working with international artists in the UK. He informed Members about a seminar which would be taking place at HOME to respond to some of these challenges and work to continue to link with other cities internationally. He reported that work to overcome socio-economic barriers to accessing culture focused on both outreach work and making events within venues more accessible, for example, through offering cheaper tickets. He advised that a number of venues across the city had this kind of offer and that they were working together to find ways to promote them more effectively. He

advised that outreach workers from different cultural organisations were now co-ordinating their work to ensure a better spread across different areas. He also highlighted the role of libraries in reaching communities.

In response to a Member's question, the Policy and Programmes Manager (Culture) confirmed that community-organised events and activities could be included on the Loads To Do website and she requested that organisers be signposted to the Culture Team.

In response to questions from the Chair about age, the Director of Culture reported that feedback he had received from across the sector indicated that the age group which had been slowest to return following the pandemic was the over-55s, commenting that there was still a feeling of vulnerability about COVID-19 and that people had got used to staying at home. He reported that a lot of older people in the culture sector had decided to retire or take early retirement around this time.

The Chair highlighted concerns that Councillor H Priest had raised in relation to her ward of Charlestown. These included disputing that there was a low level of participation in culture in Charlestown, stating that Charlestown had its own cultural offer which was not being valued or recognised, that the ward was instead being offered outreach work from external organisations and that a production set in Charlestown had won an award but without the involvement of local people. The Statutory Deputy Leader agreed that he would contact Councillor H Priest to discuss this.

The Chair thanked all the organisations in the culture sector and all the volunteers who helped to make many events possible. She also encouraged residents to look at the cultural offer that was available to them.

Decision

To note the report and presentation.

[Councillor H Priest declared a disclosable pecuniary interest due to undertaking freelance work as part of the Festival of Libraries, run by the City of Literature, and left the room for the items on the Culture Annual Report and the Manchester Libraries Strategy Update.]

[Councillor Azra Ali declared a personal interest as a Board Member of the Halle Concert Society.]

CESC/23/08 Manchester Libraries Strategy Update

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided an update on the library strategy and presented a draft vision for libraries.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Delivering the Library Strategy in 2022 and beyond;
- Central, neighbourhood, community and other libraries;

- Warm spaces and the cost-of-living crisis;
- Digital inclusion;
- Children and young people;
- Age-friendly libraries;
- Equalities, diversity, and inclusion;
- Culture and creativity;
- Archives; and
- Manchester City of Literature.

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

- Recognising the important role of libraries and that the national government should provide more money so that they could do even more;
- Praise for the work of the Library Service and the vision for the future of the service;
- Concern that people were reliant on the designated warm spaces offer in libraries, commenting that people should be able to afford to heat their own homes, with help from the state if necessary; and
- Sixth form students using university libraries and whether more could be done to engage with sixth forms and colleges to make students aware of Central Library and other Council libraries they could use.

The Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure reported that, other than minor changes such as providing warm drinks, the warm spaces offer was no different from what libraries normally offered so it was promoting that libraries were warm, welcoming places.

The Head of Libraries, Galleries, Culture and Youth Services reported that people were spending longer in libraries. In response to a Member's question about school holidays, he reported that the activity offer during this period was currently being reviewed and that he would be happy to discuss this with Ward Councillors. He informed Members that the service would be working with the university libraries to develop a more joined-up approach, including looking at engagement with sixth forms. He reported that a large number of sixth form students did already use Central Library around examination time. The Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure reported that students could also be signposted to local libraries and that consideration could be given to providing library maps.

The Chair praised the libraries and library staff in her ward, including the recent visit by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and thanked all library staff for their work.

Decision

To note the report.

[Councillor H Priest declared a disclosable pecuniary interest due to undertaking freelance work as part of the Festival of Libraries, run by the City of Literature, and left the room for the items on Culture Annual Report and the Manchester Libraries Strategy Update.]

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which highlighted the annual progress that had been made in the development and achievement of the Manchester Sport and Physical Activity Strategy (MSPAS) which included an update on the strengthened governance arrangements of MCRactive and identified areas of focus for 2023. An update had been provided against the refreshed strategic themes of the strategy (appendix 1) that were endorsed by Executive in September 2022; the amendments were made to respond to the cost-of-living crisis and climate emergency and to ensure that the city built back fairer from the impacts of the global pandemic and remained on target to deliver a sustained increase in participation levels.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Progress on the Manchester Sport and Physical Activity Strategy against the strategic themes, which were:
 - Encouraging residents to move more;
 - Positive experiences for young people;
 - Active adults increasing and sustaining activity levels;
 - World class sport that inspired positive change;
 - Active place and neighbourhoods;
 - Communicating with and connecting communities;
 - Realising the potential of the workforce; and
 - Contribution to a Zero Carbon City; and
- Next steps.

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

- Whether more could be done to promote events held in Manchester, such as the Rugby League World Cup;
- Was there any monitoring of whether events and activities led to an increase in people's longer-term levels of activity;
- Lighting for outdoor sports facilities, particularly in parks;
- Work to reinvigorate the 16 and Under Free Swim Offer; and
- Making more school sports facilities available for community use.

Yawar Abbas from MCRactive acknowledged the Member's comments in relation to the Rugby League World Club, noting that Manchester did not have a strong Rugby League Club network; however, he reported that the Super League Grand Final would be held at Old Trafford in future years, with the women's and wheelchair finals held in Manchester venues over the same period, and that Rugby League was now based at the House of Sport in east Manchester. In response to a Member's question about the definition of "active" in the Active Lives Survey referred to in the report, he advised that this was based on the Sport England measure of 150 minutes of activity during the week which raised the heart rate. In response to a Member's question, he agreed to provide figures on numbers who were active broken down by age, including figures for children and young people. In response to a Member's question, he reported that it had been identified that more coaches were needed to

meet demand in breakdancing, skateboarding, sport climbing and other emerging sports. In response to a question about community alliances and how Ward Councillors could be involved, he offered to progress this outside of the meeting.

The Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) reported that a major event did not on its own trigger a significant increase in participation in sport so in Manchester every event bid had to include a legacy programme and for the Rugby League World Cup this had included a community development programme.

Nicky Boothroyd from MCRactive reported that, in relation to activities in leisure centres, they could monitor whether an event had led to people continuing to engage in physical activity; for example, she advised that, when families signed up for family activity days, this information was used to monitor whether they then joined any further activities. She reported that free swimming had to compete with other activities that were available to children and young people but that an update would be provided at a future meeting on the marketing campaign to promote free swimming. She provided an update on work taking place with schools to make sports facilities available for community use outside of school hours and offered to provide further information at a future meeting. She outlined work with the Parks Service, through the Capital Development Programme, to provide lighting for sports facilities, including using LED lighting for carbon reduction.

In response to a Member's question, the Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure acknowledged that there was an issue with the booking system app, that work was taking place to resolve this and that an update could be provided at a future meeting.

In response to a question from the Chair about encouraging more women to be physically active, Nicky Boothroyd reported that there were a number of women-only gym and swimming sessions and that the design of the gym was important, with the heavy weights being located at the back of the gym.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure noted that the Committee had asked a number of questions at its September 2022 meeting, including a question on the response to the cost-of-living crisis, that a written response had been prepared to these questions and that these would be circulated to Members after the meeting. The Chair asked that these be circulated to all Councillors. The Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure suggested that the email to all Councillors should also include a copy of the report presented to the Committee, to which the Chair agreed.

The Chair thanked everyone for their work.

Decision

To request that the written response to the Committee's previous questions be circulated to all Councillors by email and that the report considered at today's meeting be attached.

[Councillor Ogunbambo declared a personal interest as the Chair of Blackley Football Club of Manchester]

CESC/23/10 Revenue Budget Update

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that set out the latest forecast revenue budget position, and the next steps.

Following the provisional finance settlement announced on 19 December the Council was forecasting a balanced budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25. The risk had moved to the next spending review period 2025/26 where a shortfall of £57m was forecast. This reduced to £40m after the proposed use of £17m smoothing reserves.

The report further described that in November 2022 scrutiny committees were presented with cuts and saving options totaling £42.3m over three years for consideration. The provisional settlement on 19 December reflected a change in government policy and provided more funding than initially expected. This had given the opportunity to review the quantum and phasing of savings. It was now proposed that options of £36.2m were progressed. The settlement also gave some scope for targeted investments which would put the Council in a more sustainable position to face the next spending review in 2025.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources paid tribute to the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer and her team for all their hard work in bringing forward the suite of budget reports following the settlement announcements. He stated that the budget settlement needed to be considered in the context of over a decade of austerity that had been imposed on Manchester. He commented that the decision to cut local authority funding was a result of ideological decisions taken by the Government, noting that the Government had failed to recognise or apologise for the instability they had caused to the national economy. He further referenced the impact of inflation, population growth in the city and the cost-of-living crisis that all impacted on budgetary pressures. He commented that the Government had failed to communicate their financial decisions for the city, noting the recent experience of announcements of the Levelling Up bids.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources stated that the funding decisions of the Government had effectively forced the Council to increase Council Tax. He advised that the Council was able to deliver a balanced budget and Council Tax would be used to support the most vulnerable residents in the city; support the social care sector and invest in the future of the city.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/23/11 Neighbourhood Directorate 2023/24 Budget

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided a further update on the priorities for the services in the remit of this

Committee and detailed the changes to the initial revenue budget options proposed by officers in November 2022.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Service overview and priorities;
- Service budget and proposed changes within the areas of:
 - Community Safety and Compliance; and
 - Libraries, Galleries and Culture;
- Workforce;
- Equality and anti-poverty impact; and
- Future opportunities and risks.

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

- To welcome that a number of budget savings options which had originally been put forward were no longer being considered, including proposals to reduce the Neighbourhood Investment Fund and gully cleansing but to express concern about cuts which might be needed in future years;
- Concern about the long-term impact of the financial situation on Manchester residents, especially deprived communities;
- While welcoming that there were few cuts being made, expressing frustration that the financial situation hindered the Council's ambitions for the city and to do more for Manchester residents;
- That Equality Impact Assessments should be provided; and
- The impact of cuts over a number of years on neighbourhoods and community safety.

In response to a Member's question, the Executive Member for Finance and Resources stated that, if the city had received the average cut in funding, Manchester would be £77m per year better off. He explained that the national Government had decided to use tax increases over the next two years to reduce debt levels and borrowing but that from 2025 it would use public sector spending cuts and that the Council would be left with a £40m deficit in 2025-2026, even with the use of reserves, unless there was a change of government. He outlined how the Council was investing in the city and key services and focusing on protecting the most vulnerable residents.

The Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) informed Members that Equality Impact Assessments were undertaken where relevant but, as there were no proposals for service reductions, this was not required.

The Executive Member for Vibrant Neighbourhoods acknowledged that there had been a lot of pressure placed on services but praised staff's excellent work, particularly the Neighbourhood Teams, stating that they had been looking at how they could work more effectively, address inequalities and support local communities.

The Statutory Deputy Leader stated that the Council had been creative and innovative in response to 13 years of accumulated cuts in order to sustain a good level of service but that the situation was challenging and would become more and

more difficult in future years and that what was needed was a national Government which valued the important role of local government in supporting local communities.

The Chair thanked all the teams within the remit of this report.

Decision

To note the report.

CESC/23/12 Homelessness Directorate 2023/24 Budget

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided a further update on the priorities for the services in the remit of this Committee and detailed the changes to the initial revenue budget options proposed by officers in November 2022.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Service overview and priorities;
- Service budget and proposed changes;
- Emerging pressures and growth;
- Workforce;
- Equality and anti-poverty impact; and
- Future opportunities and risks.

The Deputy Leader highlighted the national and local rise in homelessness and the factors contributing to this. She advised that this meant that there was increasing demand for homelessness services while the Council's overall budget had been reducing; however, she reported, there would be no budget reduction or service reduction for the Homelessness Service this year and she highlighted the key points within the report. She thanked all the staff in the Homelessness Service for their work.

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

- To thank the Deputy Leader and officers for their work;
- To welcome that the homelessness budget was not being reduced and the work to build more social and affordable housing;
- Temporary accommodation, including the amount of time people were spending in temporary accommodation and savings to be achieved through reducing its use;
- The implementation of changes to the Allocations Policy; and
- Ending the routine use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation for families.

The Director of Housing Operations reported that the changes to the Allocations Policy had gone live today and that the impact would need to be monitored but that it should improve the prevention of homelessness and lead to more options and better outcomes for people at risk of homelessness. He drew Members' attention to a report which had been submitted to the Economy Scrutiny Committee on this and offered to share this with Members. He advised that the amount of time spent in

temporary accommodation varied depending on a number of factors, such as the size of the household and any support needs. He confirmed the commitment to end the routine use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation for families, with plans to have significantly reduced the number by June 2023. In response to a Member's point about changing people's perception of what happened if they presented as homeless, he agreed that culture change was needed and informed Members about work which was taking place to address this. In response to a question from the Chair, he confirmed that cost of living rises presented a challenge, with landlords likely to respond to higher interest rates by setting higher rents; however, he advised that the Council was being creative to find solutions and develop a mixed housing portfolio.

The Chair thanked officers in Homelessness for their work and reported that the Committee would be receiving an update report on homelessness in the new municipal year.

Decisions

1. To note the report.
2. To request that the Committee be provided with a copy of the report on the Allocations Policy which has been submitted to the Economy Scrutiny Committee.

CESC/23/13 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.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme.