

Economy Scrutiny Committee – End of Year Summary 2022/23

Over the previous 12 months, the Economy Scrutiny Committee has continued to examine a wide range of issues within its remit including housing, employment opportunities, highways, and the latest update on plans for HS2 and the Council's response to this. The Committee has worked positively with the Executive Leader and the Executive Members in scrutinising their proposals throughout the year to ensure effective and efficient services and opportunities for Manchester residents.

In June 2022, the Committee began the municipal year by considering Manchester's Housing Strategy 2022-32 which set out a long-term vision and objectives to best deliver the city's housing priorities and objectives, building on progress already made, whilst tackling head on the scale and complexity of the challenges ahead. The Committee also considered a progress update on the strategic and scheme-specific activities of the Council's wholly owned housing delivery vehicle, This City and the final evaluation of the Crumpsall Selective Licensing Area and proposals for a next phase of this. The Committee was supportive of the ambitions and intentions of This City, in particular around increasing the supply of affordable and low-carbon homes.

July saw the Committee focus on transport, considering reports on the Manchester Active Travel Strategy and Investment Plan (MATSIP), moving traffic offences enforcement and the HS2 update and petition. Whilst recognising that HS2 was an integral part of the levelling-up agenda for the North, the Committee welcomed the Council's position and endorsed the recommendations to the Executive. At the time of publication of this End of Year Summary, construction of the HS2 line to Manchester had been postponed by two years.

Following the summer recess, the Committee focused on green skills, housing retrofit and social value and climate change. Green skills, low carbon employment opportunities and business growth and innovation remain fundamental components of Manchester's current and future growth and the Committee welcomed the Council's approach to increasing Manchester residents' skills in this area.

October's meeting was held at The Forum in Wythenshawe and focused specifically on Manchester's district centres. Prior to the meeting, the Committee visited several regeneration opportunities in Wythenshawe Town Centre, supported by the Council's Growth and Development team, to look at site-specific challenges and opportunities to inform their overall thinking on Wythenshawe Town Centre's regeneration. Manchester has 17 designated district centres within its Local Plan and the Committee recognised that each centre is distinctly individual, with a variety of economic and social characteristics, and the strong sense of pride and community that exists across the city. The Committee in turn considered regeneration works that had been undertaken in Wythenshawe, Moston Lane, Gorton and Chorlton and the planned programme of future works and investment in Strangeways, Cheetham Hill, Harpurhey and Newton Heath and welcomed representations from local ward members.

In November, the Committee received updates on the development of a new Economic Strategy and the refreshed Anti-Poverty Strategy. Poverty remains a significant and complex problem for Manchester residents which is driven by many external factors and has persisted despite significant local efforts to reduce it. The Committee welcomed the focus and objectives of both strategies.

December saw the Committee focus on employment and wages, with reports on the Manchester Living Wage Action Group's work to become a Living Wage City and the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter. The meeting included evidence hearing from representatives of GMB trade union; the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW); Bruntwood; a Professor of Employment Studies and Managing Director of the Work and Equalities Institute at the University of Manchester; the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter; and Adept Corporate Services. The Committee welcomed the contributions of guests and expressed their support for the Council in using all its levers, including procurement, land ownership, civic influence, and place-based lead for health to increase the number of employers paying a real living wage. The Committee also supported the Council's ambition to increase the number of residents being paid a real living wage and encouraged members to promote this work through their own contacts and networks.

At the start of 2023, the Committee received an update on the employment and skills opportunities created from the Council's major capital investment programmes, such as the Our Town Hall and The Factory projects, and welcomed two apprentices who shared their experiences. An update on the MATSIP was also considered and following discussions on how the Strategy aimed to make all active travel modes accessible and how this would help to alleviate financial and health inequalities, the Committee recommended that the full MATSIP document should reflect the Committee's comments and include definitions as to what is meant by "inequalities of access".

The Committee also received a report on the Revised Resident Parking Scheme Policy, which it endorsed to the Executive for approval, and the Highways State of the City 2021/22 report in January. The Committee noted that the Council was below the National Highways and Transport (NHT) average satisfaction score for road safety. Members expressed hope that this could be improved in the future and requested that a report on road safety be included in the Committee's work programme for the next municipal year.

In February, the Committee welcomed the Executive Members for Finance and Resources; Housing and Development; Employment, Skills, and Leisure; and Environment and Transport to present the priorities and projects behind the Growth and Development directorate budget for 2023/24. The Committee particularly welcomed the decision to remove savings from temporarily reducing gully cleansing and endorsed the budget proposals for approval by the Executive.

The Committee also received an update on the Local Plan; an evaluation of the Housing Allocations Policy; and an update on the Levelling Up Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund in February. When considering the report on the Levelling Up Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund, the Committee expressed disappointment and frustration at the way Government progressed and allocated funding competitions.

The Committee finished the municipal year by receiving an update on the strategy and performance of the LTE Group and welcoming the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and Principal of The Manchester College, and the Managing Director of Novus to the meeting. Some of the Committee visited The Manchester College's City campus and commended the work of the organisation. It was recommended that a report on training and skills provisions for offenders and ex-offenders be considered in the next municipal year, to support the reintegration of offenders into the economy and to promote further joint working between the LTE Group and the Council.

Updates on Manchester's labour market, the Manchester Adult Education Services (MAES) and the outcomes of a public consultation to establish a selective licensing scheme in Moss Side, Levenshulme, Longsight, Cheetham and Rusholme were also received and considered.

To conclude, the Committee has examined a wide range of topics within its remit in the 2022/23 municipal year and will continue to scrutinise areas of interest and importance for Members and residents and to follow up on the implementations of scrutiny recommendations. The Committee will continue to challenge and work effectively with the Executive while remaining a critical friend to provide recommendations that result in positive outcomes for Manchester residents.

The Council will hold ten meetings of the Economy Scrutiny Committee in the 2023/24 municipal year and a draft work programme will be devised and considered in May.