

2022/2023 End of Year Summary – Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

During the 2022 – 2023 municipal year, the Committee has considered a wide range of issues within its remit, including Domestic Abuse, Compliance and Enforcement, Culture, Events, Libraries and the Armed Forces Covenant.

Homelessness was identified as a key area of concern by Members and the Committee received a number of reports on this during the municipal year, looking at how the transformation programme was seeking to increase the prevention of homelessness, continue to reduce rough sleeping, reduce the use of temporary accommodation and support residents with a wide range of needs. Members scrutinised the progress being made in all these areas and will continue to monitor this closely in the new municipal year.

In September 2022, the Committee was asked to consider the Manchester Sport and Physical Activity Strategy Update and Proposed Refresh prior to its submission to the Executive. Following a discussion and questioning of officers, the Committee endorsed the recommendation that the Executive should approve the refresh of the Strategy. In October 2022, the Committee endorsed the Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy and the Committee have continued to scrutinise work in relation to sport and physical activity, including increasing participation across different communities and responding to the cost-of-living crisis.

As the designated Crime and Disorder Committee, the Committee has scrutinised this area throughout the year. This has included scrutinising the Community Safety Partnership Strategy, Public Space Protection Orders, Manchester's approach to achieving the Safety of Women and Girls, the Serious Violence Draft Strategy and anti-social behaviour around Bonfire Night. At its October 2022 meeting, the Committee welcomed Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, Baroness Beverley Hughes, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester, and Chief Superintendent Richard Timson of Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for a wide-ranging discussion on crime and policing, including neighbourhood policing, the number of police officers, reporting of crime, serious youth violence and violence against women and girls. In December 2022, the Committee endorsed a recommendation to the Executive to approve the policy and procedure developed following the review of Public Open Space CCTV and received an update on work to address the priorities in the Community Safety Strategy. The Committee will continue to scrutinise issues relating to crime, policing and community safety during the next municipal year.

In November 2022, the Committee received a report on the Council's anticipated budget position for 2023/24 and draft proposals for services within its remit. Following the announcement of the provisional finance settlement, the Committee received the final budget proposals in February 2023, prior to their consideration by the Executive, Budget Scrutiny and Full Council. The Committee welcomed 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 expressed concern about cuts which might be needed in future years.

In January 2023, the Committee considered a report on Advice Services. The Committee recognised that the problems which residents were contacting Ward Councillors about were increasingly complex and made a recommendation that Councillors should be provided with help on signposting residents to different advice services and information on what those services do.

During the year, the Committee has scrutinised the Our Manchester Voluntary and Community Sector (OMVCS) Fund Refreshed Funding Programme. In March 2023, Members received a report which detailed the organisations which had been awarded funding, subject to due diligence processes, as well as information on the new Supporting Communities Fund, which will provide funding to organisations which had met the eligibility criteria for the OMVCS Fund but had not been successful, as well as growing capacity in parts of the city which needed this. Members raised a number of concerns about the outcome of the OMVCS Fund, including that there was an unequal geographical spread in the organisations which had been successful and that the local knowledge of Ward Councillors on the groups working in their ward had not been incorporated into the process. The Committee recommended that Members meet with the Deputy Leader to discuss their concerns further and seek a way forward.

The Committee considered a report on Digital Exclusion at its March 2023 meeting, including work in relation to the new Voter ID requirements for voting in person at polling stations and support for residents to help them apply online for the Voter Authority Certificate. Members expressed concern about this new requirement and the City Solicitor agreed to provide Members with an update on work taking place in relation to this. Members welcomed the work taking place to promote digital inclusion and raised a number of points which the Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure has agreed to raise with steering group. The Committee will continue to look at Digital Exclusion in the next municipal year.

At the March 2023 meeting, the Committee also considered a report on the Public Sector Equality Duty. Equalities is a key area for the Committee and it will continue to scrutinise this area during the forthcoming municipal year, including considering deep dive reports on specific equality strands.