

# **Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee**

## **Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2023**

### **Present:**

Councillor Hitchen - In the Chair

Councillors Azra Ali, Benham, Chambers, M Dar, Evans, Hilal, Hussain, Iqbal, Johnson, Ogunbambo, H Priest, Rawson, Sheikh, Whiston, Wills and Wilson

### **Also present:**

Councillor Midgley, Deputy Leader

Councillor Hacking, Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure

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

Councillor Karney, Ward Councillor for Harpurhey

Sharmila Kar, Joint Director – Equality, Inclusion and Engagement

Atiha Chaudry, Manchester BME Network

Cath Dyson, Manchester resident

### **Apologies:**

Councillor Connolly

## **CESC/23/14            Minutes**

### **Decision**

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2023 as a correct record.

## **CESC/23/15            Digital Inclusion Update**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided an update on the Council's digital inclusion work over the last 2 years.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Manchester Digital Strategy 2021-2026: Doing Digital Together;
- Helping the delivery of Corporate Priorities;
- Voter ID;
- Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2021-23;
- Device schemes;
- Data;
- Skills;
- Community Engagement – roadshows;
- Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector support;
- Let's Get Digital campaign and communications;
- UK Communities Renewal Fund Report;
- Sustainability of the digital inclusion programme; and
- Future priorities and projects.

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

- To welcome the work to promote digital inclusion;
- That people who were not online were often excluded from engagement events as they did not hear about them;
- Had there been follow-up with residents who had been given a device and internet access;
- Plans to promote the strategy more widely across the city;
- The digital skills gap among young people and multi-generational digital exclusion;
- Work to help residents who did not live in one of the top 12 most digitally excluded areas;
- Whether the community engagement roadshows would be continuing;
- Digital inclusion for families who had English as an Additional Language (EAL); and
- The role of housing providers in improving digital inclusion for their residents.

In response to a Member's question about wifi access in Council offices across the city, the Head of Libraries, Galleries, Culture and Youth Services reported that a meeting had taken place with the Director of IT the previous day in relation to a programme of work to improve wifi access across the city and he offered to circulate information on this to Members by email. He advised that promoting the digital inclusion work was a priority. The Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure reported that the digital inclusion steering group was looking at having a co-ordinated approach to communicating this work through a range of partner organisations.

The Citywide Services Manager (Reform) confirmed that residents who had been given a device and internet access were followed up, advising that they were provided with a mentor and that research had been carried out by Manchester Metropolitan University. The Head of Libraries, Galleries, Culture and Youth Services commented that it would be useful to have case studies and that he would take this away as an action point. In response to a Member's question, the Citywide Services Manager (Reform) advised that baseline data was not available but that the Digital Exclusion Index was based on intelligence on the types of people likely to be digitally excluded. He took on board a Member's comments about the importance of doing more to publicise that people could donate their old devices to be refurbished for other people to use. He reported that every area of the city had digitally excluded people in so, although there was a focus on areas with higher levels of digital exclusion, work was taking place across the city. In response to a request for demographic information on residents helped by the strategy, he advised that this could be provided. He reported that the roadshows which were piloted had been useful but might not be the best use of resources; however, talking to residents, directly and through partner organisations, would definitely continue in one form or another, for example, by attending other events.

The Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure reported that there was university representation on the steering group and that universities were working to bridge the gap between what young people could do online and what was

needed in the workplace. She advised that intergenerational work had also been discussed and that they were working with schools to deliver some work involving children and their parents or carers. The Head of Libraries, Galleries, Culture and Youth Services advised that there was a further meeting of the steering group the following day and that Members' feedback would be fed into that.

The Ward Councillor for Harpurhey expressed serious concern about the new requirements for voters to provide ID when voting at polling stations. He reported that only 243 Manchester residents had applied for the Voter Authority Certificate, which people who did not have an acceptable form of photo ID would need to vote in person. He stated that he felt that this new requirement had been introduced by the Government to suppress voting by some groups, including working class people, young people and black and ethnic minority communities. He expressed concern that this would also lead to polling station staff facing conflict because some voters would arrive to vote unaware of the new requirements. He suggested the Committee consider this issue further. He stated that the Council needed to be more pro-active in addressing this issue, including increased communication about voter ID requirements to Manchester residents and doing more to inform people about the option of postal voting. He advised that the Council should communicate directly with Manchester residents and not just online.

The City Solicitor stated that this was an issue of concern to her, as Deputy Returning Officer and the Chief Executive, as Returning Officer, and that they were keen to have the best communication strategy possible on this, although they had been restricted in what they could do and the timing of it by central Government. She committed to working with the Member and with colleagues to communicate effectively with residents the need to bring photo ID to the polling station and how to apply for the Voter Authority Certificate, if they did not have suitable photo ID. The Head of Libraries, Galleries, Culture and Youth Services highlighted the information in the report which outlined work taking place in relation to this. In response to a Member's question about undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on those turned away from polling stations and not able to vote, the City Solicitor reported that an EIA had been done on the strategy to date and that the Council would look closely at feedback in relation to those who were turned away at the polling station, although it might not be in the form of an EIA. She advised that this information would go to the Constitutional and Nomination Committee, including learning from the election and what could be done differently in future. In response to a question from the Chair, she advised that, unfortunately, residents could not apply for a Voter Authority Certificate at the polling station on the day. She advised that she was in the process of producing an update on this work and offered to share it with Committee Members when it was ready, to which the Chair agreed.

In response to a Member's example of a resident without sufficient data to access their emails, the Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure reported that some residents had digital skills and devices but were affected by digital poverty and that work was taking place to make data available via libraries. In response to a Member's question about Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES)'s digital training and flyers in community languages, he advised that he would look into this and respond to the Member. In response to a question about financial exclusion and the closing of high street banks, he reported that financial exclusion was part of the

wider digital strategy and that further information could be provided at a future meeting.

The Citywide Services Manager (Reform) reported that MCC Housing Services, formerly known as Northwards Housing, were still very active in digital inclusion work. The Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure reported that the Digital Inclusion Strategy Board was hoping to involve as many housing providers as possible, including having a meeting focused on the role of housing providers and potentially establishing a subgroup to share best practice. The Chair requested that information on this be cascaded to all Ward Councillors. The Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure agreed that this would be done, once the initial work had taken place.

In response to a Member's question, the Citywide Services Manager (Reform) outlined how the device lending library with The Bread and Butter Thing in Wythenshawe would work, advising that, if this pilot was successful, it was planned to expand it to other areas of the city.

The Chair thanked officers for their hard work in this area.

The Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure drew Members' attention to the digital inclusion action plan, at appendix one in the report, and asked Members to provide him with any feedback. The Chair asked that the questions and comments that Members had raised at today's meeting be taken on board. The Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure advised that she would take the minutes from this meeting to the steering group to look at how the issues raised could be incorporated into their work.

## **Decisions**

1. To receive a further report on digital exclusion, including financial exclusion, at a future meeting.
2. To note that the City Solicitor will share the update on the work in relation to voter ID requirements with Committee Members when it is available.
3. To note that the Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure will share the information on work with housing providers with all Ward Councillors, once the initial work has taken place.
4. To note that the Deputy Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure will take the minutes from this meeting to the steering group to look at how the issues raised can be incorporated into their work.

## **CESC/23/16                      Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) Annual Report 2022**

The Committee considered the report of the Joint Director (Equality, Inclusion and Engagement) which provided an update on the Council's activities to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and the annual report.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Manchester and the Council;
- Equality objectives;
- Workforce equality;
- Progress update 2022-23;
- Governance and
- Next steps and recommendations.

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

- The "tell us once" approach for trans employees;
- The findings and actions from the Workforce Race Equality Review;
- The Gender Pay Gap;
- Improving data collection;
- Inclusive decision-making;
- Recognising the limits of broader group descriptors such as "African" and the wide range of different communities with different experiences that this encompassed and the need to engage with individual communities, including utilising Ward Councillors' knowledge of communities within their ward;
- Request for further information on the Sounding Boards, including which groups were on the Board, which communities they represented and when they joined the Boards; and
- That the percentage of the population of the city from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities was high and projected to increase and the importance of ensuring they were represented.

In response to questions about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities and about intersectionality, Sharmila Kar, Joint Director of Equality, Inclusion and Engagement, advised that qualitative and quantitative evidence available needed to be used alongside engagement with and building trust with communities. She reported that a lot of work was needed to improve data collection, including taking into account intersectionality and improving communication with people about why data was being collected and how it was being used. In response to a Member's question, she reported that events to celebrate diversity would be reviewed. She recognised that there was still work to be done on inclusive decision-making and advised that the learning from the COVID Health Equity Group could help to inform this work. She recognised the diversity of communities covered by broad descriptors and welcomed the opportunity to work with Ward Councillors on reaching out to individual communities. She reported that the Communities of Identity report would provide further information. She agreed to circulate the requested information on the Sounding Boards, as well as information on targeted engagement work.

The Head of Organisational Development and Transformation informed Members that a more detailed report on Workforce Equality had been considered by the Resources and Governance Scrutiny (RAGS) Committee in November 2022 and that this would be circulated to Members of this Committee. He advised that the trans "tell us once" approach had arisen from engagement with staff, that a working group had been established to progress trans inclusion in the workforce and that the report

to the RAGS Committee provided further information on this, as well as further information on the Race Equality work. He informed Members about the leadership programmes for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, advising that there had been some progress in Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff starting to progress higher up in the organisation. He advised that workforce equality profiles would be produced on a six-monthly basis as part of a wider suite of data.

The Head of Workforce Strategy explained how representation was monitored at all levels in the organisation, in addition to monitoring recruitment data and putting in place development programmes, and that improvements had been made but more still needed to be done. He reported that every senior manager had a workforce equality target and that these would be strengthened. A Member requested that information on these targets be circulated to the Committee, to which he agreed.

The Chair questioned whether some of the information which was going to RAGS Committee should be coming to this Committee and advised that this would be discussed further outside of the meeting.

In response to a Member's question, the City Solicitor confirmed that care leavers would be added to the Council's list of priority groups.

The Chair welcomed that people living in poverty had been added as an additional priority group and recognised the additional challenges faced by people from a background of poverty when they tried to progress within organisations. She recognised that first generation immigrants had different experiences, viewpoints and aspirations from second and third generations and asked that this be incorporated into the Communities of Identity report. She requested that equal pay also be included in a future report.

The Deputy Leader thanked officers for their work and welcomed the proposal to work with Ward Councillors on understanding the communities within their ward.

## **Decisions**

1. To note that the Committee will continue to consider reports on Equalities on a regular basis and to request that the two Chairs of RAGS Committee and Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee meet to discuss items to be incorporated into a future report.
2. To request that the different experiences, viewpoints and aspirations of first, second and third generation immigrants be incorporated into the Communities of Identity report, along with the poverty strands.
3. To note that officers will circulate further information to Members, including information on both the Sounding Boards and workforce equality targets and the report previously submitted to the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on the OMVCS funding programme for 2023-26.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Application process overview;
- Assessment Panel overview;
- Identification of strategic gap;
- Supporting Communities Fund; and
- Support for applicants.

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

- To welcome that additional funding had been secured;
- Strong concern that the organisations which had received funding through the OMVCS Fund were predominantly from central Manchester and that north Manchester and Wythenshawe were seriously under-represented;
- That some of the organisations which the report stated were delivering in specific wards were not known to Ward Councillors or were not delivering services in that ward but rather delivering services elsewhere which residents of that ward could travel to access and that Ward Councillors had not been asked for their input;
- The importance of funding organisations which had knowledge of their specific localities, rather than just organisations working across many areas;
- Were some organisations duplicating work, leaving gaps elsewhere, or were under-served communities being targeted;
- Why some organisations had been successful and others not, for example, a housing association in one area receiving funding, while a housing association in another area was unsuccessful;
- What work would be done to ensure that the successful organisations did deliver what they had promised;
- Could a breakdown of protected characteristics for successful and unsuccessful organisations be provided;
- Support for organisations which had not been successful in obtaining funding;
- Concern that organisations which did not have the knowledge of how to submit good funding applications were at a disadvantage;
- That the focus of the work going forward should be on how the Fund and the process could be improved to better serve communities in Manchester, particularly more deprived areas, and not just focus on how VCSE organisations could improve;
- That smaller organisations which were doing really good work should be given the opportunity to receive funding, in preference to some of the bigger organisations which had received funding for many years;

- That voluntary organisations were having to provide services which should be provided by the state and to recognise the difficulty in having to make decisions on these applications when the funding was limited;
- Concern that there was a lack of diversity on the assessment panel and could service users be on the panel; and
- To request that a meeting be arranged for Committee Members to discuss this further.

The Policy and Programmes Manager (Communities and VCSE) reported that work had taken place with the aim of increasing funding to north Manchester and BAME-led and BAME-serving organisations and that there had been some improvements but he recognised that more work needed to be done. He reported that a degree of diversity had been built into the co-design process and the panel process, including encouraging an awareness of the risk of bias. He advised that a piece of work had been carried out looking at the organisations which had been recommended by the panel to check that it would not be duplicating Council investment for the same activity in the same organisation. In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant Chief Executive clarified that organisations could receive other funding from the Council but that checks had been carried out to ensure that it was not for the same work.

The Assistant Chief Executive reported that three-quarters of the successful organisations had said that they would be delivering services in north Manchester but that his team would need to look at the details of what this meant in practice. He highlighted the development fund, which would help organisations to be in a better position to bid for funding and advised that it would be targeting areas of the city where organisations had not applied to the OMVCS Fund. He reported that some of the organisations which had been successful in being awarded OMVCS Funding had been successful last time while others were new. He advised that there was a comprehensive scoring process determining which organisations were awarded funding, including looking at whether they met the aims of the Fund, the quality of the organisation and their ability to deliver for Manchester residents. He advised that the due diligence process included looking at where organisations were delivering services and that this would also be built into the monitoring of the programme. He informed Members that an annual report would be produced on the 60 organisations in the two programmes and that this would monitor the impact of the organisations, comparing it to what they said they would deliver. He drew Members' attention to the detail in the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) but added that more work would be taking place to understand the different groups served by the organisations. He acknowledged a Member's point about the broad area headings of north, central and south Manchester including within them very different wards and stated that some further work would be done on this. He reported that the panel members had been given training to try to ensure that organisations which had skills in writing good quality applications were not unfairly advantaged over those who did not have the same level of bid-writing skills. He highlighted the support that Macc would be providing to organisations.

The Strategic Lead (Resources and Programmes) reported that a number of workshops had been held over the summer to help VCSE organisations overcome the barriers to submitting funding bids and that these had been quite well-attended.



The Policy and Programmes Manager (Communities and VCSE) reported that equality monitoring data collected during the application process related to the recipients of the services, not those who were running the organisation, and that information on the former could be provided. He outlined the monitoring arrangements for successful organisations to ensure that they were delivering what they had set out in their bid.

The Assistant Chief Executive reported that a “lessons learnt” exercise from this process would be carried out and that he would welcome Members’ thoughts on this, including on how to involve Ward Councillors and service users. He advised that, if Members had concerns about any specific groups which had been awarded funding, they could raise this during the due diligence process. In response to a question about whether some of the funding that had been allocated could be recalled and allocated to different groups, he reported that there was no appeals process in relation to the funding decisions; however, he reiterated that Members could raise concerns about specific organisations if they claimed to be doing work in their ward where this was not the case, as part of the due diligence process before the funding was confirmed. The Policy and Programmes Manager (Communities and VCSE) requested that, if Members did have any concerns, that they raise them as soon as possible via the Our Manchester Fund email address or by emailing him directly.

The Chair outlined the process for members of the public to speak at scrutiny committee meetings. She stated that members of the public did not have a right to speak at meetings but could do so if invited by the Chair. If members of the public had a special interest in an item on the agenda and wanted to speak, they should tell the Committee Officer, who would pass the request to the Chair. Groups of people would usually be asked to nominate a spokesperson. Although no requests had been made in advance, on this occasion, she agreed to permit Atiha Chaudry from the Manchester BME Network to speak on behalf of the VCSE groups present and Cath Dyson to speak as a member of public, not affiliated to any of the groups.

Atiha Chaudry from the Manchester BME Network spoke on behalf of representatives from a number of VCSE sector organisations who had attended the meeting. She reported that she had attended a meeting of the Committee in 2018 in relation to the previous round of OMVCS funding where VCSE groups had raised similar points to the ones being raised today. She informed Members that some marginal improvements had been made since then but a lot of the same issues were still present. She welcomed the points that the Committee Members had made. She advised that the funds needed to be invested well, through understanding local communities, and that she was not sure that this had been done well enough. She stated that her group had been involved in the co-design process but not the decision-making process. She stated that she and the other attendees she was representing wanted to work in partnership with the Council to ensure the investment went to the places and people who most needed them, to reduce inequality, reduce poverty and improve lives. She asked that the decisions be looked at again. She reported that a lot of the funding had gone to larger organisations which had been funded for a number of years but would have been better allocated to smaller organisations. She expressed concern at the lack of funding for small BME-led organisations. She stated that some organisations were ticking boxes on forms to

say that they worked with all communities when this was not the case. She stated that the geographic and demographic issues with the distribution of funding had not been adequately addressed. She questioned the way the development fund was being used, as Macc were already funded to do development work.

The Assistant Chief Executive advised that it had been a very difficult process, given the level of demand for funding and the complexities involved. He stated that the Supporting Communities Fund had been set up to support smaller, community organisations. He informed Members about work taking place in relation to other Council and partner funding streams to look at how development funding could be used to support other organisations.

Cath Dyson, a Manchester resident, addressed the Committee in relation to the EIA at appendix one in the report. She expressed concern that the document conflated the terms “sex” and “gender”. She stated that, in her view, LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) should be categorised separately from T (trans) in the document, with the latter being under the heading “gender reassignment”. A Member expressed concern that this was not inclusive or relevant to the report and referred to a motion previously passed by the Council in relation to trans issues. The Chair suggested that this issue would be more relevant to the Communities of Identity report, rather than a report focusing on funding for VCSE organisations.

The Deputy Leader reported that difficult decisions had had to be made due to the volume of applications and the amounts that had been applied for; however, she advised that she took on board the comments raised and would look into these, including improving the process for the next funding round and looking at how development funding could be used in the best way possible to support smaller organisations. She highlighted that the list of groups which had been funded included some excellent organisations doing really good work.

The Chair thanked volunteers across the city for all their hard work and staff for providing this report.

## **Decision**

To arrange a meeting between the Deputy Leader and Members of the Committee to discuss this further.

[Councillor Hussain declared a disclosable pecuniary interest as a Director of Muslim Writers North and left the room for this item.]

## **CESC/23/18            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.