Manchester City Council
Report for Information

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee - 10 October 2023
                   Executive – 19 October 2023

Subject: Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023 - 2026

Report of: Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods)

Summary

This report introduces the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023-26 for Manchester City Council and highlights the key priorities for the next three years.

Recommendations

The Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee recommended to:-

(1)   Consider and comment on the information contained in this report.
(2)   Endorse the Strategy for approval by the Executive.

The Executive is recommended to approve the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023-26

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city
None

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments
The Building Stronger Communities Together strategy will foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it The impact of this strategy on protected groups has been considered through an Equality Impact Assessment

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS/Contribution to the Strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The wider work through the Our Manchester strategy delivery plans will link the priorities from this strategy focused on people and building social cohesion to supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	The strategy aims to build social cohesion through recognising the importance of and harnessing the talents and skills of our local communities; attracting talent and diversity and so contributing to the city's economic success.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	The strategy aims to build social cohesion through recognising the importance of and harnessing the talents and skills of our local communities; increasing participation and unlocking the potential of our communities.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	This report and the strategy highlights how the work to build stronger communities contributes towards this outcome by ensuring our diverse neighbourhoods and communities are welcoming and cohesive and therefore a destination of choice for people to live, visit and work.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Building social cohesion across the city will help to connect people with one another and local services. The work through the strategy to promote inclusion will create equal access to the growth, opportunities and resources regardless of background.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

• Equal Opportunities Policy
• Risk Management
• Legal Considerations

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Background documents (available for public inspection): None

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report introduces the Building Stronger Communities Together strategy for 2023-26. It provides a synopsis of the consultation carried out in the development of the strategy. It also details the strategic priorities for the next three years and an overview of pilot activities that will be tested and delivered in localities across the city over the next 12 months. A copy of the strategy can be found in Appendix 1 with a summary in Appendix 2.

2.0 Background

2.1 We have talked for many years about the values that all Manchester residents share whatever their individual identities and how at times of challenge and difficulty we all come together. We focus on what we have in common and how we will contribute to Manchester – those who are newly arrived as well as those who have always lived here. We have mutual respect – Manchester people respect themselves, their neighbours and their neighbourhood, and the communities of Manchester.

2.2 Over the last three years, we have seen several challenges, both locally and nationally that have tested our understanding of and approach to building integrated and cohesive communities. At a time of economic crisis and global instability, we need more than ever to invest in strengthening our communities and social relationships particularly across difference. Social cohesion is a dynamic and complex set of relationships that can be profoundly influenced by local, national and international events and politics. Bad actors and influencers (whether they are local or international) seeking to sow division and breed hatred between different groups and communities are nothing new. However, an increase in segregated and disconnected communities together with the impact of social media can mean that misinformation and rumours can rapidly inflame community tensions. This in turn can have a profound and long-lasting impact on trust and relations between different local communities.

2.3 Research carried out since May 2020 (Belong Network and University of Kent)[1] into the impact of COVID-19 on our social relations tells us that investment in activities and programmes that foster stronger communities and community relations can provide a bulwark of trust, social connections and strong community relations that are able to resist the pull of division. Furthermore, we know that more socially connected, cohesive local areas can bring individual and community level benefits; these include resilience against crisis, shock and change, higher levels of individual subjective wellbeing and increased levels of volunteering and active social engagement. As such an investment in our social relations can be far reaching, bringing a range of other benefits for communities, for example on health and socio-economic outcomes that are expressed in the Our Manchester vision and strategy.

2.4 Building the resilience of our local communities and social cohesion is the foundation for achieving the Our Manchester vision and is everyone's

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[1] Beyond Us and Them; Societal Cohesion in the context of Covid 19, Belong, University of Kent, 2021

business. All of us can play a role. It is everyone's responsibility, in schools, colleges and universities, in workplaces, business and in local communities and neighbourhoods to foster stronger relationships between different groups and communities. From the evidence nationally we know that the best schemes for building social cohesion and community resilience are place based, locally designed and locally led by well networked local partnerships which includes leaders within faith, civic and business networks working together with public services to foster stronger communities, building trust and legitimacy.

2.5 We recognise that we cannot do this alone, so we have been engaging with our partners from across the public, private voluntary, faith and community sectors to better understand the issues that are of most importance to everyone and the things that will help us to strengthen the bridging[2] between and bonding[3] within communities.

2.6 Levels of social cohesion are different in different places. Put simply it is about how well people from different backgrounds meet, mix and get along together. It also relates to levels of trust both *between* different groups and communities and, *between* individual, groups and communities, *and* the institutions and services that serve them.

2.7 The work of social cohesion is about developing neighbourhoods, workplaces, institutions and social spaces where difference is welcomed and celebrated and where empathy and curiosity about people 'not like me' is encouraged and embedded. When this happens, we can move beyond narratives of 'us' and 'them' towards ideas of kindness, trust, good relations between different groups and communities, and a sense of belonging for all.[4]

2.8 Manchester has not had a separate social cohesion strategy for the city. The challenge of ensuring that Manchester people live in diverse but stable and cohesive communities is a core element of our vision for Manchester as a world class City. The Our Manchester Strategy has therefore been our strategy for social cohesion. The reset of the Our Manchester Strategy provided an important opportunity for us to review our approach and ensure that integration and social cohesion is explicitly embedded into the delivery of the strategy and its work streams going forward.

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[2] Creating new relationships beyond own current social circle and building connections that link people across different ethnic, religious or occupational groups through shared interests or goals. To bridge '*between'* communities, groups, or organisations.

[3] Deepening the relationships formed or those you already have between people who share common characteristics or interests – Bonding exists between 'people like us' who are 'in it together' and who typically have strong close relationships

[4] Successive governments have introduced and implemented policy agendas to build social cohesion, which as in the past been referred to as 'community cohesion', 'cohesion', 'integration' etc. We are using the term 'social cohesion' because we think it best describes how essential strong social relations are, particularly across differences of race, geography and class for fostering stronger, kinder and more resilient local places.

2.9   The Building Stronger Communities Together strategy is distinct and complimentary of the priorities set out in the Our Manchester Strategy. However, its focus is on people and relationships and how these can help to build and harness the skills and abilities of residents and utilise the assets in neighbourhoods to foster greater contact and participation within and between communities and local services, building trust and a sense of belonging to local areas and the city.

3.0   Building Stronger Communities Together – Consultation and Key Priorities

3.1   The Building Stronger Communities Together strategy reflects the things that people told us were important to them and sets out how we plan to strengthen and share the great things that come out of Manchester's shared identity – things that boost communities, community relations and social relationships and come into play when things become difficult.

3.2   We think the best ways to build stronger communities in the city are through the ideas, actions and activities that are generated, designed and delivered locally. The ones which are everyone's responsibility – not just the Council and its partners in voluntary, faith and community organisations. It's also the responsibility of each of us – in school, college and university, at work, in business, in communities and in neighbourhoods – anywhere and everywhere.

3.3   Throughout March to June 2022, we consulted with Manchester's communities on matters relating to integration and cohesion, to understand the things that help us to connect and get along with one another. We know that Manchester is a diverse city, so to capture views we ran a 12-week online consultation.

3.4   The online consultation was promoted though our social media channels, teams working in the neighbourhoods and our partners across the public, voluntary and community sectors so that we could reach as many people as possible.

3.5   The online survey included questions asking Manchester residents about how well they thought people from different backgrounds got on together in their local area, what things they believed were important in making it easier for communities to get along, what challenges they felt prevented people from getting on with one another and what things build a sense of pride and belonging in communities.

3.6   Where possible we used community networks and organisations to promote the consultation process and the ways to get involved.

3.7   The online consultation was completed by **441 people**. The respondents reported to identify with 27 different ethnic groups. 57.4% of the consultation respondents identified as female, 14.1% of respondents reported to be under the age of 18, 3.2% reported to be aged between 18-25, 15.6% between 26-39, 21.1% between 40 – 49, 29.3% between 50 -64,12.2% 65+ and 4.5%

prefer not to say. All wards were represented in the response to the online consultation. Of the 32 wards, Hulme engaged more than any other ward with 32 surveys completed and Harpurhey had the least participation, with only 3 surveys completed.

3.8   The findings identified that 45% of respondents felt that people from different backgrounds in their area got on well or extremely well together. 37% felt that people from different backgrounds in their area neither got on well nor got on poorly.

3.9   The findings also identified the following things to be important in helping people to get on well together:

- Respect between all, whatever age, faith, sexual orientation, gender or ethnicity
- Being able to trust local services such as the Council, police, health providers and schools to be fair and open
- Living in a community where people feel safe, and that is doing well
- Having places for communities to come together, such as parks, open spaces, schools, places of worship and online.

3.10   The findings showed that people wanted to:

- Get to know and help their neighbours more
- Hold more inter-faith events, celebrating different cultures together
- Understand where they can find out about volunteering opportunities
- Get involved in community events and celebrations
- Feel a sense of pride in their area and tackle littering and fly tipping
- Have safe neighbourhoods where people feel confident in letting their children out to play.

3.11   Alongside the online survey, we also wanted to have conversations and listen to communities about their experiences: what they would like to see more of and some of the issues they felt prevented them, or acted as a barrier to building relationships where they live. We did this through a series of 23 face to face or virtual focus groups and 1-2-1 interviews with communities (including our communities of identity) from across Manchester. These focus groups and 1-2-1 sessions enabled us to engage with a total of **241 people**. These focus groups were important as they helped us to access and engage with communities and residents who might not be able to access through the online survey and those who would prefer to have a face-to-face conversation. This approach encouraged open and honest feedback and helped participants think about the role they could play in creating stronger communities.

3.12   The focus groups included sessions with schools, youth clubs, mosques, the Manchester BME Network, elected members, South Asian women groups, disabled people organisations and other community focused groups.

3.13   We have continued dialogue with groups, such as the Disabled People's Engagement Group Sounding Board, CHEM group, faith and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations after the formal consultation process was closed to reflect and sense check our findings and adapt the content of the strategy. This has particularly helped to make sure that the priorities identified in the strategy resonate with communities.

3.14   **Strategy Priorities**

3.15   The analysis of the online consultation and the outcomes of the focus groups identified three key areas of priority for the Building Stronger Communities Together strategy.   These are explained below:

1) Relationships ... It's about all of us
A little trust goes a long way. That's why relationships and trust go hand in hand with one another. Relationships are not just about mixing with people who are like us and those we would normally mix with. They are also and importantly about speaking with our neighbours and people who are from different backgrounds.

Following through on commitments; doing what you say you are going to do, being clear, having frequent communications with communities and identifying opportunities to come together and problem-solve leads to greater trust between communities and organisations and/or systems – so that no matter what might go wrong, there is a trust that organisations will act in the best interest of communities.

Personally: speaking with our neighbours and people who are from different backgrounds. Learning to trust and be trusted.	**How:** • Choose to get to know others, be confident to reach out to neighbours. • Talk, listen, think and learn with each other. • Show respect. • Tackle hate and intolerance and bias together – educate and accept one other. • Build trust in local services to be fair and open.
For organisations: developing trust by providing equity in public services. Earning trust by doing what we promise, lots of clear communication, and creating ways to come together and problem-solve.	
Because: a little trust goes a long way and so that no matter what might go wrong, communities trust organisations to do the right thing.	

2) Participation…. We get involved to make a difference
Bringing people together to get involved in meaningful activities, for a shared purpose and to engage in decisions about things that affect their lives. Greater participation and engagement with others builds trust between and

within communities and between communities and institutions. The more trust people feel in others and in the institutions that serve them the more likely they are to get involved. Participation can lead to greater trust – which can lead to greater participation. It is about enabling and supporting communities and services to come together; valuing the importance of working together to make a difference and taking ownership of the things that matter most to us where we live.

Personally: taking ownership of what matters to us where we live. Taking part.	**How:** • Community events and activities. • Create ways to get involved, improve and influence. • Bring groups together. • Turn up and get things done. • Communicate what's going on, promote involvement. • Ensure that our services are equitable.
For organisations: bringing people together for shared aims that affect their lives. Support to act.	
Because: working together has value: participation builds trust and the more we trust each other and our services, the more involved we get.	

3) Belonging….. Making an effort

Relationships, trust and participation help to bond and bridge within and between communities and build social capital. This in turn helps to create a sense of belonging for communities.

Being part of something bigger than just yourself provides a sense of belonging and purpose along with a feeling of acceptance and support that can help fend off loneliness and help to make you feel more connected to those around you.

Belonging is fundamental to our sense of happiness and well-being. A sense of belonging means that we have respect for the traditions, cultures and diverse communities of a particular place whilst at the same time being willing to invest and contribute a shared vision of what that place can become.

Belonging in Manchester is about being included, respected, and welcomed. It is a sense of feeling valued and accepted whatever your background.

Personally: Contributing to the shared idea of what your area can become. Respecting traditions, cultures and communities around you.	**How:** • Make the effort to connect to and welcome others. • Create safe, shared places. • Develop a shared sense of purpose. • Share experiences. • Be proud and keep up your neighbourhood.
For organisations: bonding communities together and building bridges between them.	

Because: being part of something bigger gives you purpose, fights loneliness and connects you to those around you. Belonging is fundamental to happiness and being well.	• Celebrate diverse communities and what we have in common.

3.16   Based on the feedback from the consultation, the strategy sets out 10 basic behaviours and principles to support us all to play our part in the way that we think and behave towards others, the way we live and how we view and interact with others, especially those we do not know or those who might be different from us.

4.0   Measuring Progress

4.1   Understanding and measuring levels of social cohesion is not easy and there is no national framework for doing this. Therefore, we will use the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's "Policing and Community Safety Survey", which includes the qualitative measures set out below, to measure overall social cohesion in Manchester. This is in addition to each pilot area also defining its own measures, activities and outcomes which reflect the three priorities of Relationships, Participation and Belonging in this "Building Stronger Communities Together" strategy.

4.2   Support for designing a set of more detailed indicators of social cohesion will be sought from the Belong Network, drawing on their work to develop a national framework of measurement indicators and recent research and evidence gathering they have been carrying out to support place-based approaches to measuring social cohesion.

4.3   The Greater Manchester Combined Authority conducts a survey every quarter across Greater Manchester, which includes measures of residents' views of their local area and how safe residents feel in their day-to-day life in their area. The table below sets out the results for Manchester against the Greater Manchester average for the period from July 2021 to June 2022.

4.4   The latest cumulative results show that Manchester was the same or better than the GM average for six measures. These headline indicators will be used to frame our approach to measuring social cohesion alongside additional qualitative and quantitative measures to be identified through the three pilot area work programmes.

Measure	Manchester	GM Average	GLA Average
1) How safe do you feel in your local area	88%	88%	-
2) How safe do you currently feel when out and about anywhere in	81%	81%	-

Measure	Manchester	GM Average	GLA Average
your district, away from your local area?			
3) My area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (Relationships)	77%	73%	94%
4) My local area is a place where people look out for each other	68%	72%	-
5) I feel a strong sense of belonging to my local area (Belonging)	71%	71%	59%
6) I have a say in what happens in my local area (Participation)	40%	35%	30%
7) I am proud of my local area	71%	71%	-

5.0   Pilot Activities – Delivery over next 12 months

5.1   Alongside the strategy, a pilot action plan will be established to prioritise and test activities aimed at achieving the three priorities in the first year of the strategy. These activities will be developed and delivered in key neighbourhoods in north, central and south and will be focused on bridging and bonding.

- Bridging activities will help to create new relationships beyond existing social circles and build connections that link people across different ethnic, religious or occupational groups through shared interests or goals. These activities bridge 'between' communities, groups, or organisations.

- Bonding activities will deepen relationships between people who share common characteristics or interests. Bonding takes place between 'people like us' who are 'in it together' and who typically have strong close relationships.

5.2   This is because we know this is a complex area of work and we do not want to set out actions that we know we will not be able to achieve or set expectations high and then not be able to match them. We really want to start by building our understanding about the impact of change in neighbourhoods and on our communities. We also want to test ways of working and codesigning activities with communities to identify what is successful in bringing people together and getting them involved in local activities. We want to consider how we better celebrate what everyone has in common in an inclusive way and respect difference.

5.3 Manchester and its residents have a great sense of pride so we also want to capture this, but also build and strengthen the sense of belonging people have to their area and the city where this is not the case. To help achieve this, we are working with each of the neighbourhood teams to develop pilot actions plans. This activity includes:

- Identifying small areas to pilot Year 1 activities with a clear rationale and story of place for each
- Identify key activities that will build relationships, increase participation and build a sense of belonging (start small and think about bonding and bridging)
- The activities should build on what is already in existence (people, assets, and opportunities through existing plans and those planned), but can also start from scratch if that is what is needed
- Measuring change will be important – each pilot will need identify ways in which change will be measured including learning on what worked well and what did not work so well (so we can transfer this into the Years 2 and 3 plan / roll out in different areas)
- The pilot activities will encourage people to come together to volunteer in their community, celebrate different cultures as well as the things we have in common with one another, and codesign with local services to address local concerns.

5.4 A number of workshops are planned over the next couple of weeks, led by the national Belong Network to bring together key services and partners to help design and develop the pilot action plans and achieve the objectives above. The action plans will be ready by end of November 2023 ahead of the launch of the strategy in December 2023.

5.5 Discussions are currently taking place about the date and format of the launch of the Building Stronger Communities strategy in December and it is hoped that alongside a citywide event we also launch the strategy in the localities where the pilot action plans will be delivered as a means of kick starting the work.

5.6 The strategy and progress against the pilot action plans will form part of the Communities and Power workstream of Making Manchester Fairer, reporting into the quarterly Communities and Power Forum.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 The Executive are invited to approve the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023-26

7.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023-26
Appendix 2: Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy Summary