

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 10 October 2023

Present:

Councillor Hitchen (Chair) – in the Chair
Councillors Appleby, Good, Sheikh and Whiston

Also present:

Councillor Midgley, Deputy Leader
Councillor Karney, Lead Member for City Centre
Aderonke Apata, African Rainbow Family
Adeniyi Balogun, African Rainbow Family
Susie Cuthill, The Proud Trust
Mark Fletcher, Manchester Pride
Lisa Harvey-Nebil, The Proud Trust
Farhana Hemani, Manchester Pride
Darren Knight, George House Trust
Paul Martin, LGBT Foundation
Professor Stephen Whittle, Manchester Law School and Indigo NHS Greater Manchester Gender Service

Apologies: Councillor Azra Ali, Doswell, Ogunbambo, Rawson and Wills

CESC/23/39 Minutes

Decision: That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 5 September 2023, be approved as a correct record.

CESC/23/40 LGBTQ+ Communities Deep Dive

The committee considered a report of the Joint Director of Equality and Engagement - NHS GM Integrated Care (Manchester locality) and Manchester City Council which explored the inequalities faced by LGBTQ+ communities and the support provided by Council services to improve access, experience, and outcomes.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- The Council's equality commitments through the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED);
- The key strategies and plans that aim to make Manchester a more equitable place to live and work;
- An overview of Manchester's LGBTQ+ population, provided through the 2021 Census;
- The quality of life and feelings of acceptance, comfort, and satisfaction of LGBTQ+ residents;
- The intersectional approach to LGBTQ+ inclusion;
- Education, employment, housing and healthcare;

- Case studies to demonstrate the delivery of the Council's Equality Objectives; and
- Areas for further work to support the Council's workforce to lead high-quality, culturally competent community engagement work.

Key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussion included:

- Thanking guests for their attendance and their work;
- Noting that the Council had passed a motion to 'Make HIV History' but that there remained difficulties for residents in accessing HIV testing kits, and querying why this was;
- How many GPs were yet to register with Pride in Practice;
- If any investigation into a possible causal link between overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ people in the youth homeless population and higher incidences of mental health issues and suicidal ideation in young LGBTQ+ people had been undertaken;
- Whether any up-to-date data was available on the number of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) LGBTQ+ people experiencing racial discrimination from within the LGBTQ+ community, noting that recent figures were from 2018;
- The overall rate of workplace conflicts for LGBTQ+ people, and whether this was improving;
- How the Council was tackling instances of 'gatekeeping' in the Gay Village;
- Requesting more extensive data on the number of LGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness;
- The lack of information on sexual health services within the report and lack of data around patient satisfaction;
- Noting that anti-trans sentiment is higher amongst cisgender men than amongst cisgender women, despite the transphobic narrative being that trans people pose a threat to cisgender women's safety;
- Noting that the rapid decrease in public support for trans people was the result of a hostile media that platforms transphobic voices;
- How many schools in Manchester had signed up to the Rainbow Flag Award;
- Noting that Neighbourhood Investment Funding had been allocated to support the first-ever Withington Pride, which took place in September 2023 and was attended by a large number of people from across the local community;
- Whether trans inclusion training would be offered to everyone in the Council; and
- What the LGBT organisations would like to see brought forward.

The Deputy Leader stated that this was an important report to identify the inequalities faced by the LGBTQ+ community and expressed that the Council wanted to ensure suitable support was available and that communities felt comfortable, supported and that they could thrive in Manchester.

The Joint Director of Equality and Engagement explained that the report provided an overview of the Council's work to enhance LBGTQI+ inclusion. She stated that Manchester was a sanctuary for LBGTQI+ people, with the largest community

outside of London, but acknowledged the challenges faced by those in the transgender community. The committee was advised that focus groups had been held during the development of the report and that this dialogue would be continued.

The Lead Member for the City Centre provided an overview of the Council's LGBTQ+ journey and progress. He highlighted the challenges faced and welcomed the achievements made since the 1980s.

Representatives from African Rainbow Family, The Proud Trust, Manchester Pride, the LGBT Foundation, George House Trust, Manchester Law School and Indigo NHS Greater Manchester Gender Service attended the meeting and shared the work of their organisations and the experiences of their service users in Manchester.

In response to a member's query regarding what was causing gaps in access to HIV testing kits, Darren Knight of George House Trust stated that whilst Manchester was doing well in take-up of HIV testing, more work needed to be done and there needed to be more investment in sexual healthcare to increase access. He stated that there was a myriad of ways for people to access sexual health treatment and that targeted promotion was valuable. He explained that 'opt-out' HIV testing was a gamechanger, but prevention was key and more people needed to be encouraged to use PrEP medicine, which could be taken before sexual intercourse to help reduce the risk of catching HIV. It was noted that there had been a good take-up rate of PrEP amongst gay and bisexual men and there had been a good response to mpox vaccination in 2022.

Paul Martin of the LGBT Foundation conceded with Darren's comment that access to sexual health services was key. He stated that there was a 1 in 10 chance of calls to a sexual health clinic being answered, which was due to lack of investment and staff shortages. He also explained that organisations in Manchester had reestablished the mpox vaccination programme, following a national decision to only offer this in London, but were unable to publicise this service due to concerns that it may overwhelm capacity. He stated that national investment was needed to enable local services to develop further.

The committee was also advised that 75 out of 84 GP surgeries across the city were currently registered with Pride in Practice. Paul Martin of the LGBT Foundation explained that some surgeries felt they did not need to take part in the Pride in Practice scheme and that some would not engage, particularly since involvement was not mandatory. The Joint Director of Equality and Engagement explained that the Primary Care team worked with GP practices to encourage the take-up of this and linked it with standards. She highlighted that Manchester had a higher take-up of Pride in Practice than other Greater Manchester boroughs.

The Joint Director of Equality and Engagement explained that there were a number of reasons as to why there was a higher percentage of young LGBTQ+ people presenting as homeless but stated that there had not been any specific work undertaken by the Council or Health Service to link homelessness with mental health,

but this was something that could be undertaken. The Deputy Leader highlighted that this topic was included in the next report on the meeting's agenda and that the Council wanted to ensure that services were inclusive and supportive through the new Homelessness Strategy. This was also an area that could be assessed by the Homelessness and Health Taskforce.

The Deputy Leader also recognised the need to address the unique issues facing LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers and the ways that this could be done. She noted the potential impacts of the recent government policy change which would give migrants, refugees and survivors of trafficking a minimum of seven days to find alternative accommodation upon receipt of an eviction notice from Home Office accommodation, and the need to identify ways to support those affected. She also highlighted that the Council was now a Local Authority of Sanctuary.

In response to a member's query regarding queer and trans people experiencing racism, the Joint Director of Equality and Engagement suggested that the statistics on this from 2018 were unlikely to have changed and recognised the issue. She stated that the Census 2021 data had enabled better collection of information and the Council had revised and published its monitoring standards, which would improve the collection of data once embedded.

With regards to the overall rate of workplace conflicts for LGBTQ+ people, the committee was informed that this study was undertaken by the CIPD and it was suggested that these figures were unlikely to have changed, given the current climate.

The Joint Director of Equality and Engagement committed to liaising with the Licensing team to understand what levers the Council had in place to address 'gatekeeping' within the Gay Village. Paul Martin of the LGBT Foundation explained that the Council had commissioned LGBT Foundation to deliver anti-racism training to venues and door staff in the Village and that the study into the future of the Village that was commenced prior to the Covid lockdown would be recommissioned, which he felt would be an opportunity to understand what people wanted in the Village.

Aderonke Apata of the African Rainbow Family highlighted a unique issue facing asylum seekers, which prevented them from entering venues in the Village as they did not hold valid identification.

In response to a member's comment regarding sexual health services and difficulties in accessing tests, the Chair advised that this would be an issue for Health Scrutiny Committee to consider but suggested making a recommendation to request further detail on provisions. The committee was advised that the Health Scrutiny Committee would consider the Public Health Annual Report, with a focus on sexual health and HIV, at its meeting on 6 March 2024.

The Joint Director of Equality and Engagement confirmed that trans inclusion training had been rolled out to senior management and would be provided to specific

directorates such as Communications and the Housing and Homelessness Service. The Deputy Leader stated that this would be rolled out more widely in future and this would include members.

In closing the item, the Chair asked the representatives from each organisation what they would like to see brought forward to improve the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Manchester. Lisa Harvey Nebil of The Proud Trust stated that she would like increased LGBTQ+ training and education for schoolteachers, social workers, and youth workers. Farhana Hemani of Manchester Pride suggested it would be useful to adopt the Pioneer Creative Health Strategy and to consider how creativity can help to tackle inequalities as a key part of queer culture. Darren Knight of George House Trust emphasised the need to shift from co-design to co-ownership to ensure that everyone feels involved in plans and changes in the city. Aderonke Apata of the African Rainbow Family championed appropriate accommodation and better access to justice for LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers. Paul Knight of the LGBT Foundation stated the need to continue working collaboratively and to recognise the economic benefits that this would bring. Professor Stephen Whittle of Manchester Law School and Chair of Indigo NHS Greater Manchester Gender Service encouraged the wider rollout of the trans inclusion training to all Council staff.

The Deputy Leader thanked guests for their attendance and committed to continuing to work collaboratively.

Decision:

That the committee

1. thanks the representatives of African Rainbow Family; The Proud Trust; Manchester Pride; George House Trust; LGBT Foundation; and Manchester Law School and Indigo NHS Greater Manchester Gender Service for attending the meeting and commends the work they do for the LGBTQ+ community in Manchester;
2. notes the progress made to date on delivering the Equality Objectives;
3. expresses their support of the approaches to working with communities and areas for further development outlined in the report;
4. recommends that the Council works closely with African Rainbow Family to identify how issues affecting LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers, particularly in accessing housing, can be addressed;
5. requests that officers liaise with the Licensing team to identify what levers the Council had in place to address 'gatekeeping' within the Gay Village; and
6. recommends that the trans inclusion training be rolled out across the whole Council at the earliest opportunity.

CESC/23/41 Review of the Homelessness Strategy, Information on Winter Provision and Equalities Data for the Homelessness Service

The committee considered a report of the Director of Housing Services which detailed the Homeless Review and Strategy, provided an update on last year's cold weather provision, and plans for this winter, and included data on equalities which had been previously requested by the committee.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- The development and aims of the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-27;
- When severe weather was activated in 2022/23;
- The winter accommodation offer in 2022/23;
- The proposed model for winter 2023/24, including communications;
- Data around households presenting as homeless due to domestic abuse, broken down by ethnicity;
- Factors influencing why more people with a minority ethnic background than those who are white British are in homeless accommodation;
- Homelessness amongst young people; older people; those with a physical disability; those with mental health concerns, acquired brain injury, learning disabilities and autism; and the LGBTQIA+ community;
- Staffing equalities within the Homelessness Service;
- Information on the Housing Register and demand for social housing; and
- Information on wait times for properties.

The key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussion included:

- How the Council had achieved the elimination of bed and breakfast accommodation use for families;
- Whether the Housing Solutions telephone helpline was available 5 days a week;
- How many call handlers were employed in the service, and whether this would increase;
- When the service could expect to be fully staffed;
- Whether there was any particular reason for the rise in the number of Black people presenting as homeless;
- Noting the issues caused by wait times for those using Pay-As-You-Go mobile phones;
- Suggesting that the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy included ways to support those at risk of becoming homeless;
- What prevention methods would be included in the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, particularly for those with mental health issues and complex needs;
- Noting that the Housing Solutions Service was trialling case panels with Manchester Communication Academy to discuss a number of households who have indicated to the school that they have a housing issue and that this would be rolled out to schools in Moss Side and Wythenshawe, and expressing hope that this would be successful and could be rolled out in primary schools;

- What work was being done with landlords to encourage participation in the Sanctuary Scheme; and
- Noting that Local Housing Allowance rates had not increased and calling on the government to provide fair funding for housing.

The Deputy Leader explained that the report included information on a number of areas which the committee had requested during the previous Homelessness Update report, and she noted that it was also World Homelessness Day. She acknowledged that the Council continued to face challenges with homelessness despite the brilliant work undertaken by staff.

The Assistant Director for Homelessness explained that the Council had a legal duty to develop a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the current Strategy would expire at the end of 2023. He stated that the Strategy would be framed around three principles – that homelessness would be rare; brief; and ended as quickly as possible – and would be based around the Place Called Home programme which aimed to increase prevention, reduce rough sleeping, secure more affordable and suitable accommodation and better outcomes, better lives. Work with key partners across the city would be required in the development and delivery of the new Strategy, and it was hoped that this would be approved by the end of the year.

The Strategic Lead for Homelessness acknowledged that the population of Manchester was continuing to change and become more diverse. She highlighted that the number of those identifying as homeless from an ethnic minority background was increasing and explained that this was due to several reasons, such as those who have their asylum claim approved or refugees who do not have a support network in the UK. She advised the committee that a review into the data around domestic abuse had been undertaken and this demonstrated a significant increase in the number of Black people presenting as homeless as a result of domestic abuse. This was of significant concern and work was being undertaken across the Council to understand if this was reflective in the wider population.

The Strategic Lead for Homelessness also highlighted a significant number of young people identifying as homeless, which was a direct result of the changes in welfare benefits and the Shared Room Rate. She explained that mitigation measures were in place, such as mediation with families and providing specific, suitable accommodation for young people. There were also increasing numbers of people with physical disabilities becoming homeless and often remained in homeless accommodation for longer due to difficulties in encouraging private sector landlords to make adaptations on properties and the small number of social housing properties available. Members were advised that work was ongoing with Registered Providers to improve this and that this was being reviewed through the Local Plan but there were mitigation measures in place currently, such as the hospital discharge site.

It was clarified that those with physical disabilities were housed in temporary accommodation which was suitable for their needs.

The committee was advised that work was ongoing to support LGBTQ+ homeless people, through Greater Manchester Combined Authority's 'A Bed Every Night' scheme and the Council's commissioning of the LGBT Foundation and the Albert Kennedy Trust. It was hoped that the new Homelessness Strategy would present an inclusive and open approach to LGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness to encourage more people to use the service.

In response to members' queries, the Assistant Director for Homelessness explained that some children remained in hotel accommodation in Manchester, for example asylum seekers who were under the responsibility of the Home Office. He stated that from February 2023, the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation in Manchester who were owed a homeless duty decreased from 227 to 0. He noted that this was a precarious situation with significant demand for accommodation and stated that the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation was increasing in almost every other local authority area nationwide. He explained that this decrease was achieved through changes to the Allocations Policy, which allowed those on the Housing Register to maintain their place if they took a private rented tenancy; by leasing more self-contained properties; managers undertaking case checks to ensure effective progress; and holding move-on panels.

The committee was informed that between 125 and 130 homelessness applications were received every week, which was more than any other local authority in the country.

The Assistant Director for Homelessness explained that there were currently 10 call handlers within the service. There was also 55 FTE Housing Support Officers, although some were undergoing the induction process and these officers performed a range of homeless assessment functions such as face-to-face interviews and in-depth telephone assessments.

The Assistant Director for Homelessness also offered to share current data on call handler capacity and call waiting times, which the committee welcomed.

The Strategic Lead for Homelessness explained that there was a triage process for telephone enquiries prior to a housing assessment taking place and that the service was looking to progress case panels to gather information earlier in the assessment process. Further information on these changes could be reported back to a future meeting.

In response to concerns regarding wait times for those using Pay-As-You-Go mobile phones, the Strategic Lead for Homelessness explained that the Council had a callback option which enabled the caller to maintain their place in the queue without needing to stay on the phone, and she encouraged people to use this.

It was also confirmed that the Homelessness Service operates 24/7 with an out-of-hours telephone number.

The Strategic Lead for Homelessness recognised the increase in the number of BAME people presenting as homeless due to domestic violence and stated that the service was looking to delve into this more deeply with partners from domestic abuse charities and organisations. It was not known whether this increase was as a result of more domestic violence cases being reported or because of a concerning increase in cases overall.

The Assistant Director of Homelessness acknowledged that there was a greater focus on helping those experiencing domestic abuse and at risk of homelessness in other cities to stay in their own homes. He stated that there was a need to provide realistic expectations on the time taken to get a social housing tenancy and that further investment in sanctuary measures was needed, noting that this was cheaper than providing temporary accommodation. He explained that the Sanctuary Scheme currently focused on lock changes and other basic security measures and that further investment would enable more families to remain in their homes, areas and schools. He stated that this was a major focus for the service.

In response to the Chair's query regarding rolling out case panels to primary schools, the Strategic Lead for Homelessness advised that the work being undertaken with Manchester Communications Academy would help to devise the package and ensure its success. She stated that once this package was well-developed, it would be rolled out across the city and would include primary and secondary schools.

The Strategic Lead for Homelessness also confirmed that significant work was being undertaken with the Homelessness and Health Task Group to identify how the Council could work better with mental health services. She also informed the committee that additional funding had been provided to the Homeless Mental Health team who undertook assessments of those with mental health issues presenting as homeless. There was also significant work being undertaken to ensure that those with mental health issues were also placed in appropriate accommodation.

In closing the item, the Chair thanked officers for their work.

Decision:

That the committee

7. notes the report;
8. welcomes the Assistant Director of Homelessness' offer to provide data on call handler and Housing Support Officer capacity and call waiting times within the Homelessness Service;
9. requests a further report on the Sanctuary Scheme and the work undertaken to address the increase in the number of BAME people presenting as homeless due to domestic violence.

The committee considered a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which introduced the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023-26 and highlighted the key priorities for the next three years.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background to the Council's social cohesion work;
- The consultation carried out as part of the development of the Strategy and the findings of this;
- The strategic priorities of the Strategy
 - Relationships;
 - Participation; and
 - Belonging
- How progress would be measured; and
- Pilot activities to be tested and delivered in the north, central and south of the city in the next 12 months.

The key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussion included:

- Noting the need for a Community Cohesion Strategy, and welcoming this work;
- Noting that the Strategy would be a great starting point to deliver and measure progress;
- The need to identify what works well in communities and what could be improved on; and
- The importance of monitoring the progress delivered through the Strategy.

The Director of Communities explained that the reset of the Our Manchester Strategy provided an opportunity to review the approach to social and community cohesion and how this was embedded in terms of delivery. She stated that the changing nature of Manchester provided a strong background to develop the Council's first Community Cohesion Strategy and explained that a 12-week online and face-to-face consultation had been undertaken, with around 700 responses received.

The three priority areas of the Strategy were highlighted and focused on relationships and building trust within communities; participation; and belonging. The Director of Communities explained that place-based action plans would be developed with the Belong Network and would contribute to the key themes of the Strategy, with this due to formally launch in December 2023.

The Deputy Leader highlighted the fantastic communities within Manchester and the importance of residents having a sense of belonging. She noted that the action plans would be key in the delivery of progress and against the themes and priorities of the Strategy.

The Director of Communities explained in response to members' points that the Strategy would be a live document that would evolve over time.

The committee also wished to place on record their thanks to the Prevent and Community Cohesion Coordinator, who could not attend the meeting, and the wider Community Cohesion team for their work on this.

Decision:

That the committee

10. endorses the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023-26 for approval by the Executive;
11. requests further information of the wards where the pilot activities will be tested and delivered;
12. requests a further report on the development and key priorities of action plans for the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023-26 in 6 months' time; and
13. requests a further report on the progress of the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023-26 in 12 months' time.

CESC/23/43 Overview Report

The committee considered a report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which 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.

In response to a query regarding a previous recommendation requesting further information on the Council's new CRM system, the Governance and Scrutiny Team Leader endeavoured to get a response to this for the next meeting.

A further query was raised regarding the recommendations made under the Domestic Abuse and Safety of Women and Girls report at the meeting on 5 September 2023. The Governance and Scrutiny Team Leader confirmed that officers were making enquiries on these recommendations and that the information would be shared with members once available.

Decision: That the report be noted, and the work programme agreed.