

Environment, Climate Change and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023

Present:

Councillor Shilton Godwin – in the Chair
Councillors Chohan, Collins, Ilyas, McCaul, Wiest and Wright

Apologies: Councillor Holt

Also present:

Councillor Rawlins, Executive Member for Environment and Transport
Councillor Foley, Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Transport
Councillor White, Executive Member for Housing and Development
Samantha Nicholson, Director of Manchester Climate Change Agency
Peter Boulton, Head of Highways, Control & Operational Support, TfGM

ECCNSC/23/56 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 October 2023 as a correct record.

ECCNSC/23/57 Revenue Budget Update 2024/25

The Committee considered the report of Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that described that the Council was forecasting an estimated budget shortfall of £46m in 2024/25, £86m in 2025/26, and £105m by 2026/27. After the application of approved and planned savings, and the use of c£17m smoothing reserves in each of the three years, this gap reduced to £1.6m in 2024/25, £30m in 2025/26 and £49m by 2026/27. This position assumed that the savings approved as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy in February 2023 of £36.2m over three years were delivered.

This report provided a high-level overview of the updated budget position. Each scrutiny committee was invited to consider the current proposed changes which were within its remit and to make recommendations to the Executive before it agreed to the final budget proposals in February 2024.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Updates on the refreshed position including progress in reaching a balanced budget, reflecting preliminary savings and investment options;
- The government was expected to announce the Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023, but no major changes were expected;
- Government funding for 2024/25 would be confirmed in the provisional finance settlement, expected late in December 2023;
- The accompanying report set out the priorities and officer proposals for the services within the remit of this committee. This included a reminder of the

savings proposals identified as part of last year's budget setting process (£36.2m across three years) and additional savings for consideration (£2.5m from 2024/25). As far as possible these were aimed at protecting the delivery of council priorities and represented the least detrimental options; and

- There remained a forecast shortfall of £1.6m next year. Any further reduction to the underspend this year would reduce the need to top back up General Fund reserve in 2024/25 and help bridge this shortfall. In addition, the Collection Fund position would be finalised in January and the final levy amounts from GMCA confirmed.

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

- That compared to other local authorities, Manchester was a financially well managed authority; and
- To pay tribute to the significant work undertaken by all Executive Members and the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer and her team.

Decision

To note the report.

ECCNSC/23/58 Neighbourhoods Directorate Budget 2024/25

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhood Services) that set out a service overview and key priorities including an update on the Climate Action Plan, along with the latest draft budgets for the services within the remit of this scrutiny committee.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Noting that as part of the 2023/24 budget process, savings were identified over a three-year period and it was intended that the 2024/25 budget would be light touch and no further savings would be required;
- In light of the current financial year's pressures and ongoing high inflation rates it had been necessary to revisit the initial assumptions and identify further savings options for consideration;
- As part of identifying further savings options the initial priority had been to protect service delivery wherever possible, and this had included looking to increase income generation opportunities where possible; and
- The proposed savings from services within the remit of this scrutiny committee were summarised and set out in more detail in Appendix 1.

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

- With regard to staff retention, what was being done to retain technical knowledge amongst staff;
- Expressing caution at introducing a charge for replacement bins, commenting that this could result in increased incidents of flytipping and decreased propensity to recycle that would be undesirable and would result in increased costs

- Any proposals for charges for replacement bins needed to be subject to a full Equality Impact Assessment;
- More information was sought on proposals for income generation from parks and green spaces; and
- What data informed the reported Growth and Pressures 2024-27 at section 3.8 of the report.

The Strategic Director (Neighbourhood Services) advised the Committee that the Council maintained a register of all contracts, and these were RAG rated and monitored. He stated that within this list there were 'Gold' contracts that warranted additional monitoring, and this included the Biffa waste contract. The report described that a new Contract Management System was expected to go live during the current financial year. Once operational, this would provide Directorates with consistent contract performance information to support contract managers to ensure that contracts delivered against expectations and opportunities for improvement could be identified and realised more easily.

In regard to staff retention, the Strategic Director (Neighbourhood Services) commented that this had always been an issue, and to address this the Council had striven to be an attractive employer by offering good terms and conditions, training and development opportunities for staff and providing career progression.

The Strategic Director (Neighbourhood Services) stated that the issue of charges for replacement bins had been debated at length in the previous round of budget setting discussions and that additional resources had been specifically allocated to address flytipping. He further explained the rationale regarding the statement provided in the report at section 6.1, however he was mindful of the comments raised by the Committee regarding Equality Impact Assessments and said that if these proposals were to be considered in the February round of budget discussions, following the Financial Settlement, further consideration would be given to the Equality Impact Assessment.

The Strategic Director (Neighbourhood Services) said that the Growth and Pressures analysis as described in the report was based upon a range of data sets available to the Council, including projected population growth data and footfall data in the city centre.

In regard to parks and income generation, the Strategic Director (Neighbourhood Services) said that there had been significant investment in parks to reduce ongoing costs and to generate commercial returns.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport stated that the funding cuts and nature of the budget allocations made it very difficult to plan long term and deliver the ambitions the Council had for the city. She stated that she endorsed the ask of the Leader in her recent letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer ahead of the Autumn Statement.

The Chair noted that compliance and enforcement budget information had been omitted from this report and requested that this be included in the report submitted to the February meeting.

Decision

The Committee recommend that if the proposal to charge for replacement bins were to be considered in the February round of budget proposals following the provisional financial settlement, expected late in December 2023, that a full analysis of the impact of this should be undertaken.

ECCNSC/23/59 Manchester's Emissions Report

The Committee considered the report of Director, Manchester Climate Change Agency that provided a summary of Manchester's Emissions Report, which was due to be published by Manchester Climate Change Agency in November. It covered the city's direct, energy-related emissions in 2021, plus an estimate for 2022, and was based on the latest data released by the UK Government's Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ).

Key points and themes in the report included:

- The Emissions Report enabled Manchester to track its progress against the carbon reduction targets, carbon budget and zero carbon date of 2038 that were set out in the city's Climate Change Framework (2020-25), and its 2022 Update;
- The report showed that, in 2021, Manchester had the second lowest per capita emissions among Greater Manchester authorities, with a figure of 3.4t CO₂ per person. This was 14% lower than the Greater Manchester average of 4.0t CO₂ per person and more than 20% below the national average of 4.5t CO₂ per person. This was explained by a mixture of urban density, which had led to more efficient living, and the high levels of deprivation. Those with least, emit least. High levels of carbon emissions are overwhelmingly emitted by the wealthiest in society; and
- Over the five-year period from 2018 to 2022, Manchester emitted 9.54 million tonnes of CO₂ (m tCO₂), against a total carbon budget of 15m tCO₂, allocated to last until 2038 and beyond (until 2100). This meant that 63% of the city's total 30-year carbon budget had been used in its first five years.

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

- Describing the data provided as alarming and disappointing;
- Noting that the report called for 'urgent action at pace and scale to ensure Manchester stays within its carbon budget' and asked what this would look like;
- Was there now a need to publicise those organisations and sectors that were large emitters of carbon but had not engaged with the Partnership and/or failed to develop an action plan to reduce their emissions;
- Would any funding be released to Manchester from the revised plans for HS2 to help fast track greener transport schemes;
- The Manchester Climate Change Framework 2020-25, and its 2022 Update provided a list of 175 actions, were these being delivered upon; and
- Would the Trailblazer Devolution arrangements provide an opportunity to support the scale of work to reduce carbon emissions across the city.

The Director, Manchester Climate Change Agency commented on the question raised regarding the scale of action required and referred to Local Area Energy Planning as an example of this. Members noted that the Committee would be receiving a report at their December meeting on the topic of a Power Purchase Agreement to decarbonise the energy supply. In regard to a 'carrot or stick approach', she said that all levers of influence should be utilised to engage on the issue of carbon emissions and mitigation actions.

The Director, Manchester Climate Change Agency directed the Members to the report that was considered at the meeting of 25 May 2023 that discussed the approach to the actions in the Updated Framework. (See section 4 of the report 'Manchester Climate Change Framework 2022 Update – Progress Report' considered 25 May 2023).

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport emphasised the need for a just transition in relation to climate change and commented that the Council continued to use all available levers and spheres of influence to address climate change and made reference to the Planning report that was to be considered later on the agenda as one example of this. She stated that the Trailblazer Devolution arrangements would support the work to address carbon emissions as it would be used to address a number of areas of activity, including housing retrofit works. She stated that it needed to be recognised that inflationary pressures reduced the funding available in real terms and funding to deliver the scale of work required remained a significant challenge.

The Chair concluded this item by reiterating that it was everyone's responsibility to take immediate actions to reduce carbon emissions. She further recognised and thanked the Partnership and the Agency for their continued hard work on behalf of the city.

Decision

To note the report.

ECCNSC/23/60 Manchester Active Travel Strategy and Investment Plan – Update on Progress

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director, Growth and Development that provided a summary of progress on delivery of the aspirations and commitments of the Manchester Active Travel Strategy and Investment Plan.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background;
- A summary of progress to date across a range of activities; and
- Next steps.

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

- Was there any evidence that delivery of School Streets increased the levels of walking to and from school;
- Should there be an ambition to have more than one school street per ward;
- Noting that outside London, dedicated national funding for active travel had reduced in 2023 from approximately £308 million over the following two years to approximately £100 million, a reduction of around 67%;
- Welcoming the update provided in relation to cycle hangars and asking what criteria was used to identify high demand areas;
- The need to ensure that there was connectivity across local authority borders for active travel schemes;
- Expressing concern that the temporary scheme on Deansgate was not meeting its ambition to increase walking; and
- Were there any further low traffic neighbourhood schemes planned, noting that these schemes needed to be communicated and managed appropriately.

The Active Travel Lead, Infrastructure and Environment stated that during the academic year 2022/23, seven primary schools had taken part in a pilot scheme to implement a 'School Street'. He said that monitoring was incorporated as an element of the pilot and that an evaluation exercise would be undertaken, adding that initial feedback obtained had been very positive. With reference to the reduction in dedicated national funding he said that he shared the Committee's frustration, however there was a pipeline of schemes that had been developed so that when funding opportunities did arise these could be bid for. In regard to cycle hangars he said that details of the locations would be released in early 2024, at around ten locations around the city, focusing on areas where there was known demand, and a large percentage of terraced houses or apartments. He confirmed that this information would be shared with Councillors at the appropriate time.

The Interim Head of Infrastructure and Environment stated that the roll out of the Bee Network would improve active travel connectivity across local authority boundaries. In regard to the specific question regarding Deansgate he commented that this was a relatively new scheme and would continue to be monitored. The Strategic Director Development stated that the current scheme on Deansgate was a temporary measure and would be subject to change as part of the wider ambitions for Deansgate that were referenced in the table provided at 3.2 of the report.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport stated that the lessons learned from the School Streets pilot would support the wider roll out of these schemes, noting that this required buy in from the schools and consideration of the surrounding neighbourhood as these could impact on them. She said that it was not the intention to limit School Streets to one per ward. She said that the ambition was to develop a network of support that included schools and local community groups to share learning and good practice and encourage schools to adopt this model. In regard to the comment raised in relation to low traffic neighbourhood schemes she said that consideration needed to be given to the use of appropriate language when articulating these and similar initiatives. She said that the ambition was to create a 'streets for all' model, with a distinct neighbourhood focus and that all local Councillors and residents would be consulted with on these plans and proposals as they developed.

The Chair commented on the ACES Europe Capital of Cycling bid adding that if successful this would significantly raise the profile of cycling across Manchester and would be very welcomed.

Decision

To note the report.

ECCNSC/23/61 Vision Zero - Update

The Committee considered the report of Strategic Director, Growth and Development that provided a summary of progress on the development of a Vision Zero strategy for Greater Manchester.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background;
- Providing a definition of Vision Zero;
- An overview of road safety data in Greater Manchester and in Manchester;
- Noting that the adoption of Vision Zero and the MCC Road Safety strategy provided the opportunity to implement effective and sustainable practices to reduce collision rates and enable the uptake of more walking, wheeling and cycling, supporting the Our Manchester goals of creating a sustainable, liveable and connected city;
- An overview of the number of programmes currently being delivered which could make significant improvements to road safety;
- Information on the three principles of the Safe Systems approach; and
- Next steps.

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

- Requesting an update in relation to the introduction of 20mph speed limits on current 30mph roads;
- Irresponsible cyclists were also responsible for collisions;
- Enforcement action by the Police was important, particularly in relation to speeding and driving standards to support the ambitions of Vision Zero; and
- The term accident was not appropriate and a more suitable term would be crash or collision.

The Head of Highways, TfGM noted the comments and concerns articulated regarding dangerous cyclists, however stated that the vast majority of deaths and serious injuries on roads were caused by motorists, hence the focus of the work described. However, he stated that consideration would be given to engagement with the gig economy as he acknowledged the proliferation on motorised bicycles on the roads and the hazards these presented to other road users and pedestrians. He added that it was the responsibility of all road users to drive carefully and considerately with due regard to the prevailing conditions. He further acknowledged the comments expressed regarding the appropriate use of language and terminology.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport stated that the areas of the road network to introduce 20mph zones were being considered and mapped. She commented that all relevant Members would be consulted with at the appropriate time as this work developed. The Head of Network Management said that consideration would also be given to reducing some 40mph zones to 30mph as part of this mapping exercise.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport concluded by referring to the importance of cycling proficiency training for young people and that all Members should promote and support Road Safety Week that would commence 20 November.

Decision

To note the report.

ECCNSC/23/62 Refreshed Tree and Woodland Action Plan 2024 - 2034

The Committee considered the report of Strategic Director, Growth and Development that described that a refreshed Tree and Woodland Action Plan (TAWAP) had been developed in the context of the adopted Green and Blue Infrastructure (G&BI) Strategy. This had been reported to the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee and was agreed in March 2023.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background, noting that the report set out how the TAWAP was being updated in line with best practice and our most recent evidence;
- The Headline Actions had been revisited and streamlined down from 21 to 16 across the four key objectives as this would help provide clarity, maximise their effectiveness and avoid duplication;
- Describing the vision and objectives of the TAWAP;
- Information in relation to the governance and leadership arrangements;
- Describing how a refreshed Tree Action Plan would sit with the G&BI Strategy;
- Noting that as a key part of delivering the City's G&BI Strategy, the TAWAP benefited from a strong cohort of supportive partners, both internal to the Council and externally;
- Discussion of the challenges and opportunities;
- Delivery of the TAWAP noting that the TAWAP would be updated and reported on annually as part of the wider Green & Blue Infrastructure Implementation Plan;
- Discussion of funding; and
- Next steps.

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

- Noting that the report stated that 'The TAWAP will allow a focus to be given to trees, helping to ensure that they will continue to be planted in Manchester selectively and appropriately, with due regard given to location, landscape character and sustainability', how would these locations be identified;
- Expressing the need for community and resident involvement in these decisions;

- Developers needed to be reminded of their responsibilities in relation to greening and tree management;
- What was the approach to 'difficult to plant' areas;
- What was the approach to the size and types of trees to be planted; and
- Further information was sought on the duration of the draft Action Plan public consultation.

In presenting the report to the Committee the Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing paid tribute to her team for producing the detailed report and bringing forward the Action Plan, stating that the Manchester was pioneering on this work and approach.

The Senior Policy Officer advised that intelligence mapping and consideration of a neighbourhood focus would inform the correct location for future planting of trees, and this included community engagement activities on this specific subject. With reference to other landowners, he commented that the principles of tree management could be accessed and used by all and was a useful resource. He further commented that the public consultation would commence following this meeting and noted the views of the Committee. This would be an 8 week online public consultation, using the same questions that were asked during the 2017, online public consultation as this would provide useful benchmarking information. He stated that a communications campaign would also be used to promote this consultation, in addition to promoting this at appropriate events across the city.

The Senior Policy Officer stated that the approach in Manchester was to plant the correct tree in the correct location, and careful consideration needed to be given to this. He further commented that it was important to recognise that each ward was different, and a 'one size fits all' approach would not be appropriate. He said this work would be delivered in collaboration with different Council Departments and different partners across the city.

The Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing said that with the support of City of Trees they were seeking to develop a document that would be accessible to all, including developers and relevant stakeholders that would address the issue of difficult to plant areas. This resource would provide information and examples of good practice and technical information. She stated that it would demonstrate the 'art of the possible' and tackle the myth that nothing could be done.

The Chair in concluding this item stated that the Committee endorsed the commencement of the draft Action Plan public consultation. She further commented that those areas with fewer trees should be prioritised, particularly when engaging with developers, noting the importance of trees and the shade they provided during periods of extreme heat that were a consequence of climate change.

Decision

To note the report.

ECCNSC/23/63 Planning Policy, Construction and Climate Change

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director, Growth and Development that described how planning policy could seek to address climate change, with specific consideration of the emissions associated with the construction phase.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- An update on the Local Plan and climate related issues;
- A summary of the emerging evidence base that would help inform draft planning policies in the Manchester Local Plan around construction standards;
- Noting that the evidence base had been prepared with the support of the members of the Manchester Climate Change Partnership and wider industry experts;
- Information on the Manchester Climate Change Partnership's City Challenge Net Zero New Buildings task and finish group that had been established to convene the expertise and capacity of local stakeholders towards increasing the low carbon standards of new buildings and support the refresh of Manchester's Local Plan, noting that their findings and recommendations would be published in a final report, due to be published before the end of 2023;
- An update on The Places for Everyone joint local plan; and
- Discussion of the consideration around the Planning Application Process.

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

- Noting that the 2022 Framework Update stated that to meet the city's plan to be Zero Carbon by 2038, all new buildings in the city from 2023 should be Zero Carbon and asking for an update on this;
- Did the work reported ensure that Manchester was compliant with The Paris Agreement;
- Members appointed to the Planning Committee should receive awareness training on this subject area;
- Noting that emissions associated with the construction phase could be significant, especially in those locations where there were multiple projects underway in close proximity, and what was being done to mitigate this;
- Examples of good proactive innovation, such as the West Gorton Sponge Park should be replicated across developments; and
- Recognising the important work of the Manchester Climate Change Partnership and wider industry experts in informing this important work.

The Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing commented that she was mindful that there were a number of new Members on the Committee and stated that she would provide a briefing note on the Local Plan that would be circulated to all members of the Committee for information.

The Planning and Infrastructure Manager commented that buildings and the building process was recognised as a significant contributor to carbon emissions, hence the focus of the work described throughout the report. He said that the approach would be to consider emissions in the context of the whole life cycle of building. He said this

approach would be tracked and reported as part of the ongoing reporting of the city's overall carbon budget. In response to the discussion regarding net zero buildings, he said the adoption of The Places for Everyone joint local plan and the emerging Manchester Local Plan would include an evidence based Net Zero new development policy. He added that there was good practice already being applied within new developments across the city including the use of standards such as BREEAM (BREEAM was the world's leading science-based suite of validation and certification systems for a sustainable built environment) and NABERS (NABERS UK was a simple, reliable system for rating the energy efficiency of office buildings across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). In response to the comments raised regarding Biodiversity Net Gain he described that significant work was already underway in Manchester in regard to this, noting that a report considered by the Committee at their February 2023 meeting discussed this.

The Planning Section Manager said that all proposed developments were required to submit an Environmental Impact Assessment, and this included consideration of the 10% requirement of Biodiversity Net Gain, adding that they always challenged developers to deliver more. He said that all major developments were subject to a Construction Management Plan. This provided a framework of control, which was subsequently embedded in a condition of planning permission. He commented that enforcement action could be taken by relevant departments for any breach of these conditions, noting that some breaches would be subject to different legislation. He added that Construction Management Plans were used to mitigate the worst impacts on residents when developments were in the construction phase.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development made reference to the number of new build, zero carbon social housing that had been delivered and stated that the Council remained committed to being net zero by 2038. He further acknowledged the comments raised regarding training for members of the Planning Committee and stated that this would be considered with a view to progressing this.

The Chair expressed her appreciation for the work undertaken by the Manchester Climate Change Partnership and wider industry experts to consider the current wider policy background and guidance documents for net zero, financial implications for net zero, evidence base of developments and their performance in terms of carbon, and recommendations for planning policy in relation to Net Zero development. She further noted an invitation to visit some examples of development good practice in relation to commercial properties that had been developed and that she would liaise with officers outside of the meeting.

Decision

To note the report.

ECCNSC/23/64 Overview Report

The report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which contained key decisions within the Committee's remit and responses to previous recommendations was submitted for comment. Members were also invited to agree the Committee's future work programme.

Decision

The Committee notes the report and agrees the work programme.