

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee - 8 October 2024

Subject: Update on the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023 - 26

Report of: Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods)

Summary

This report provides an update on progress on the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023-26 for Manchester City Council.

Recommendations

The Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. Note progress on the delivery of the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy and place-based activities along with the work that has supported community recovery post the incidents and events over the summer.
 2. Commit to attending the BSCT and social cohesion learning and development sessions for elected members and encourage elected members outside of the membership of this committee to also attend.
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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 aims to 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	The wider work through the Our Manchester strategy delivery plans will link the priorities from this strategy focused on people and building

distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	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):

[Building Stronger Communities Together strategy | Building Stronger Communities Together strategy | Manchester City Council](#)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Building Stronger Communities Together (BSCT) strategy for 2023-2026 was launched on 29 May 2024. The strategy aims to strengthen social cohesion by focussing on people and three key priorities identified through consultation. The first priority is about building a better understanding about and response to the complex nature of relationships and levels of trust between and within individuals, groups and communities, but also between individuals, groups, communities and public institutions. The second priority aims to increase participation, so there are real and meaningful opportunities for communities to get organised and come together to make a difference in their neighbourhoods. The third priority focuses on our local sense of belonging, so what makes people proud and feel part of the neighbourhoods they live in and the city.
- 1.2 The strategy is the first of its kind in the city and recognises the importance of strengthening and bringing existing programmes of work together but also co-designing with communities and prioritising the things they tell us will help to build stronger communities where people get on well together, get involved in making a difference and feel a sense of belonging and trust.
- 1.3 A report setting out the outcomes of the consultation programme, which led to the development of the Building Stronger Communities Together strategy and its key priorities was submitted to the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee in October 2023. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress against the strategy and the work that has taken place in response to the events and disorder across parts of the country over the summer.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Building Stronger Communities Together strategy focuses on social cohesion, which put simply 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 Based on the outcomes of consultation the strategy established three key priorities:



Relationships

'It's about all of us' – getting to know one another and bridging difference between communities. More people doing things to help them and others to belong to their community; those who are newly arrived as well as those who have always lived here, engaging, being trusted and trusting others around them, including those from different social and ethnic backgrounds.



Participation

'We get involved to make a difference' - helping all communities to feel empowered to act to improve their neighbourhood and address shared challenges together building on the strengths and advantages of Manchester's rich diversity, cultures and histories



Belonging

'Making an effort' to make ourselves and the people around us a part of our local neighbourhood and the city; valuing diversity and difference, celebrating what we have in common. Being proud of the places we live. Knowing that all together we belong to Manchester. Whether a new arrival to the city or someone whose family goes back generations we celebrate what we have in common, the ties that bind us together, shared values of welcoming and inclusivity.

- 2.4 In addition to the priorities, the way we live and how we view and interact with others, especially those we do not know or those who do not look like us or think the same things we do, is a good starting point. So, to help us to do this, we have used community feedback to come up with some basic BSCT behaviours and principles, which will help to bring the priorities into action by everyone:
1. Being welcoming to others;
 2. Being open to, and comfortable with, making new connections and relationships;
 3. Respecting our differences and valuing what we have in common;
 4. Being willing to listen to others' views, including those that are not the same as our own;
 5. Embracing all, irrespective of age, race, gender, religion or belief, disability, or sexual orientation;
 6. Speaking up against discrimination and intolerance and promoting inclusion for all;
 7. Fostering pride and belonging;
 8. Cultivating a reputation for showing up and getting things done; and
 9. Taking ownership by participating, helping others and getting together to bring positive changes in Manchester.
- 2.5 The behaviours are being embedded into a programme of workforce development focused on social cohesion for staff and elected members to be delivered during October / November 2024 by the national Belong – Cohesion and Integration Network. Place-based work will also embed the behaviours into the work with our partners including communities.
- 2.6 Over the summer and across the country we saw events and incidents, which tested levels of social cohesion. Based on the levels of disorder and violence experienced, including in Manchester, the work focused on building stronger

communities and engagement in the city was accelerated to respond to the impact on our communities and staff.

3. BSCT in Action – Place-based Approach

- 3.1 Since the launch of the strategy, work has been taking place at a neighbourhood level with our partners and communities to understand what work is already underway to support the aims of the strategy and fill the gaps where we have identified concerns or potential tensions. The ambition is to develop a place-based approach to achieving the three priorities in the first year of the strategy and ensure that strengthening social cohesion is part of delivery in every ward of the city.
- 3.2 Through the delivery of the strategy, we also want to test new ways of working, codesign activities with communities and identify how we bring people together in a positive way locally. We also want to build our understanding of the impact of these actions and interventions locally to ensure we have a consistent loop of reflection and learning based on data and intelligence and importantly what communities are telling us.
- 3.3 Across the city it is recognised that growth and demographic change can have a real impact on social cohesion, so to develop, strengthen and test different approaches to responding to how we deliver social cohesion activities with a focus on relationships, participation and belonging, we have three pilot areas. In North Manchester, the BSCT strategy pilot will work with primary and secondary schools and their connection into the voluntary sector to support understanding, respect and celebrate diversity as a key priority. The Neighbourhood Team and Education colleagues have held a series of sessions with school leaders to understand some of the challenges faced by our children and young people with a view to focusing on pragmatic actions we can take collectively to problem solve and tackle these. Addressing some of the issues raised around identity and culture a series of drama workshops will be commissioned for young people exploring issues of mental health, masculinity and race / identity.
- 3.4 In Central Manchester and specifically in Moss Side (but also potentially parts of Hulme and Rusholme), the pilot BSCT strategy activity has a similar focus on young people and work is underway to commission a piece of work with young people to understand their sense of place in the community. Key to this is understanding young people as residents, their sense of belonging and identity to drive our medium to long term approach in the area. This project is the result of a consistent and intensive engagement approach through the neighbourhood team over the last 15 months where residents told us that investing in the environment and working with young people was important. A Moss Side Lived Experience Group has also been established which is aimed at developing meaningful relationships between services providers and residents in the area to increase trust and better relationships between the community, the Council and GMP so decisions about improvements to the area but also policing in the community are made together.

- 3.5 In South Manchester, working with communities and their connection to future investments and improvements is also a focus for the work in Wythenshawe. The redevelopment of the Civic Centre presents a real opportunity for people to interact with one another, get involved and strengthen the sense of civic pride and belonging to the area. Significant progress has already been made on this project with engagement already happening and planned to ensure residents feel this investment is for them and being delivered alongside them. To support this the Neighbourhood Team are working with several community groups who are involved in growing projects and have funded some pilot activity to bring those groups together. Alongside this the Neighbourhood Team is working with the local housing provider and community groups to explore developing a shared Community Space in the Civic Centre. This space will support the residents of Wythenshawe to access opportunities to engage in the new, improving Civic Centre. Working closely with Wythenshawe Community Housing Group (a key partner in this work), a workshop was held on 31 January 2024 to engage and explore whether community groups would be interested in getting involved in such a shared space.
- 3.6 The groups were extremely supportive of the concept and had lots of ideas about what they would like to deliver and see delivered in the space. Work is now taking place with several community groups who are involved in growing projects in Wythenshawe. Funding has been provided for pilot activity and an event took place at the civic centre on 21 February 2024 to bring these groups together. There are several events planned in partnership with the Work and Skills team where opportunities for volunteering and involvement will be showcased. On 24th September, Age Friendly Wythenshawe hosted an event bringing together community partners who provide a range of support in partnerships with The Forum Trust and MCC's Neighbourhoods Team. The Work & Skills Team were invited to provide Employment and Skills support, and employers with current vacancies to promote to the residents of Wythenshawe.
- 3.7 Engagement, participation and bringing people together are strong themes across the work planned in all three localities. Be that community clean up days, young people in conversation or community groups in discussion with consultants about future developments and use. This inevitably builds on and improves relationships locally and will hopefully foster a sense of belonging and pride in where people live and the city.
- 3.8 We are currently working with colleagues in the Performance, Research and Insight team to look at what data measures and monitoring tools are needed to support this work and measure impact and change. Some of this will be quantitative such as: number of people attending events and the range of people accessing services and new facilities as part of the redevelopment of Wythenshawe Civic Centre. However, a key aspect of this will be the qualitative insight and learning from what we learn and identify from conversations with young people in Moss Side and the workshops in schools in North Manchester.

- 3.9 Whilst there are many examples of activities and projects that contribute towards the delivery of social cohesion across all wards of the city, we have included some of the examples below.

North Manchester Inclusion Partnership – this partnership was formed in 2023 after the covid 19 pandemic by the local care organisation. It includes the membership of partners such as Manchester City Council, Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust and CAHN. The partnership initially aimed to help focus and connect Black and African-Caribbean residents in the north of the city into Council programmes to address the health impact that the covid 19 pandemic had on this community, but was then used to build trust, connections and share key messages to try and improve health and wellbeing outcomes across different wards in the north of the city - Cheetham and Crumpsall, Higher Blackley, Charlestown and Harpurhey, Moston, Miles Platting and Newton Heath.

The partnership has managed to do this and so much more. It has delivered many community events such as the well-attended Africa day, held funding sessions to help groups struggling with writing funding bids and continues to help spread health messages across North Manchester.

Ramage Walk Summer Event – an intergenerational project delivered in August 2024, brought 80 children, parents and grandparents together from Ancoats & Beswick, Clayton & Openshaw to celebrate their local community. Families who identified themselves as White British, Black British and Southeast Asian took part in the celebrations, which helped to build social cohesion by providing shared spaces and a shared focus for people to come together to interact with one another to develop meaningful relationships across different groups. Initial activities included a fun day and an agreement to constitute a litter picking group to continue efforts going forward to build pride across neighbourhoods.

Eden Gardens Orchard – this project connected local school pupils from a high school and students from college into a volunteering programme at the wellness centre during its open day, where typical volunteers were age 40+ and came from diverse backgrounds (such as Thai, Polish, Black and White British). The centre is focused on improving the health and wellbeing of residents living in Clayton & Openshaw and the open day was held to increase access, membership and participation from people from different backgrounds and age groups.

Gorton and Murals – during the Autumn of 2023, a project aimed at bringing communities together to start conversations, bridge, bond and link people within the places they live through murals was delivered. Vine Street in Gorton was the first area activity started in. It brought families from different backgrounds and intergenerational groups together to take ownership of and build pride in their local area and work together to make changes to the area for the better.

Levenshulme In Bloom – in November 2023, a funded programme of activity which brought together VCSF (including faith-based organisations), residents and businesses to plant flowers in planter along the A6, on Stockport Road. This activity provided a shared purpose for people from different backgrounds and sectors to come together, bond, bridge and make a joint submission to In Bloom. The people involved in this activity have now formed a group to look at longer-term cleaning and greening projects across the ward increasing local participation, pride and sense of belonging.

Hulme, Moss Side and Rusholme GMP and Partners Work – Programme across Hulme, Moss Side, and Rusholme which commenced in Spring to recreate a youth panel, increasing representation and influence to address local issues like youth violence. Partnership included work with Councillors to secure free passes for ten young people to gain free gym membership for a year. The impact of this work and the panel has increased a sense of place for young people and created better connections with residents who they previously felt excluded from. The young people also felt more engaged in decision making and more engaged with local services.

Burnage Westcroft Community Centre Active Street 'Westfest' – the Active Street 'Westfest' was all about connecting residents from across the ward together and bring them into contact with officers from a range of services to support and give information to residents e.g. Biffa, the MCR Active, Dr Bike, Southway Housing group and others. Activities included traditional street games and activities for children, and families. More than 250 people attended the event, and there were 76 positive conversations with officers attending recorded.

Fallowfield/Withington Student and Community Event – building on the long-standing strategic approach and learning from each academic year, this event is being planned to take place in October 2024 and is aimed at connecting new and existing students (who are often disconnected from the neighbourhoods they live in) with one another but also students with local residents so there are better connections and cohesion between students and residents.

'Wythenshawe Loves All People' at Brownley Green Baptist Church – this Wythenshawe Community Housing Group led event is planned to take place on 26 September and aims to act as a connector event for residents from different backgrounds and different wards across the south of the city and promote the Our Manchester strategy and the BSCT strategy work across Brooklands, Northenden, Sharston and Baguley. This event aims to bring people from different backgrounds and neighbourhoods together and raise awareness of social cohesion.

- 3.11 The work since the launch of the strategy in May 2024 across all neighbourhoods has focussed on identifying the right partners, communities and existing governance structures to embed the BSCT strategy priorities and principles of working together along with engage, listen and reflect. This will continue over the next 12 months at least, and we will look to share and

embed our approach where it works and learn from what doesn't. It must be recognised that these actions are a snapshot of the work underway as part of a citywide engagement plan following the events over summer, and of the ongoing work across neighbourhood teams with residents and community groups, all of which is done in the spirit of increasing participating, building better relationships and fostering a sense of belonging.

4. BSCT Activity - Responding to the Disorder over the Summer

- 4.1 We recognise that the events over the last 12 months but more recently over the last six weeks in the city have prompted an acceleration, greater need and urgency for work in the city on social cohesion and building stronger communities together. The international conflicts including the war between Russia and Ukraine and Israel and Hamas have generated concern within our communities and we have seen an increase in peaceful protest activity in the city.
- 4.2 The recent elections across the country also identified political discourse and whilst we have a new government that won by a clear majority, we know that some communities have lost their trust in politics and public institutions. However, it is also important to recognise there are wider, deep rooted contextual factors, including poverty, deprivation and the rise and changes in use of social media.
- 4.3 We recognise that the immediate response to the events and incidents taking place in the city, needed to be led by the police in partnership with ourselves to manage incidents and the disorder along with understand the community impact and sentiment. The immediate response was quickly followed by the development of a *community engagement plan*, which sought to ensure that the 'Manchester Message' was available and accessible to everyone through our library networks, youth providers, hate crime reporting centres, and community groups and influencers. Community WhatsApp groups and social media networks proved to be most effective for this. The Manchester Message included a specific email inbox, which had been created for people to get in touch, raise their concerns, or to ask for help.
- 4.4 Alongside the wider communications and as part of the community engagement plan, work took place to identify those that had *been most impacted or feeling vulnerable* in our communities to help reach out and have conversations, aimed at providing reassurance, safety advice and a voice to those who might not normally engage with public services or feel able to share their concerns or experiences. The outcomes of this led to an acceleration of activity to build stronger community engagement and cohesion in our communities and how we tackle misinformation and disinformation, which became a real challenge throughout the period of disorder.
- 4.5 The Manchester Message but also the BSCT strategy helped to frame this engagement, and the language used to describe events, the response and the behaviours and expectations on us all in the recovery process.

- 4.6 As the disorder took place over the summer period, schools, colleges and universities were closed for the summer break. In recognition of this, advice and guidance was issued to these institutions ready for the start of the Autumn term to allow the creation of safe spaces to talk about and process the events that young people and adults would have seen over the summer break and offer support to those that might request for it.
- 4.7 Given the nature and impact of the events along with the sentiment and behaviours that have been seen to take place in the city, it is recognised that long term recovery work will be required, which is carefully considered and built into existing programmes of work and where there are gaps, we will need to look at the right ways to take this forward through the appropriate governance arrangements. We will also need to rebuild confidence and trust with residents and communities who felt the most isolated or impacted by the disorder. Developing an audience specific response by working with individuals, and not just those impacted by recent events will be key.
- 4.8 It is recognised that the Recovery Plan will need to dovetail into the work to deliver the BSCT strategy, across the Council and its partners. The government has announced a Community Recovery Fund of which Manchester will be a beneficiary and so this will provide an opportunity to shape what this transition and programme of activity will need to include.

5. Enablers to delivery

- 5.1 It is important to note that there are number of areas of work that will support the delivery of the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy. These are pieces of work already in existence but are able to support the ambition and priorities set out in the strategy. They are as follows:-

Our Manchester VCSE Fund (OMVCS)

The Our Manchester VCS Grants Programme is the Council's largest grants programme for the voluntary and community sector (£2.4m per year) between 2023-2026. 64 groups are currently funded across the city and engage residents as volunteers to both govern delivery and engage in actual delivery activities. The purpose of this grant programme is to support and invest in a healthy and thriving local voluntary sector and community hubs, so that it can continue to support Manchester's residents and focus on what the sector excels at in addressing some of the city's highest priorities. The fund is primarily aimed at supporting groups that work with communities and that address one or more of the following aims:

- Addressing inequalities and building inclusion;
- Promoting communities' health and wellbeing;
- Tackling poverty.

MCRVIP

MCRVIP encourages residents to get involved and participate in making their area a better place to live. The platform enables residents to sign up to volunteer their time and skills to support local initiatives or organisations. Neighbourhood Officers will also engage and make many connections with residents and community groups and will advise them of the opportunities available and encourage volunteering.

Neighbourhood Investment Fund (NIF)

To encourage resident and community led projects at a neighbourhood level, the Neighbourhood Teams lead the annual NIF investment programme (£20k per ward- £640k in total). NIF can be spent on environmental improvements, litter picks, cultural events and activities that bring communities together. NIF is an enabler for Officers and Ward Members to work with communities on their ideas for change, foster a stronger sense of community and residents feeling they have a greater stake in what is happening in their neighbourhood.

6. BSCT Social Cohesion Learning and Development

6.1 The national Belong, Cohesion and Integration Network has been helping us to develop our thinking and activities to deliver social cohesion in the city along the way. As part of the work to build awareness of and strengthen both the capabilities and capacity to deliver the new Building Stronger Communities Together strategy, MCC and the national Belong Network are in the process of developing and hosting several BSCT and social cohesion learning and development sessions for staff and elected members. These sessions will aim to:

- Build an understanding of social cohesion in the context of the new strategy
- Identify and reflect on the strategic challenges – internationally, nationally and locally
- Identify the skills and behaviours needed to deliver and inform workforce development plans where there are gaps (pre work to share at the session)
- Deliver interactive exercises equipping participants to be able to use different models to deliver the BSCT priorities (People – Relationships, Participation and Belonging) and live the behaviours in partnership with communities
- Take away - Key tips sheet for participants to help to think social cohesion in what they do

6.2 Dates for the training and development sessions are currently being agreed and will be issued to everyone in the next fortnight.

7. Making Manchester Fairer and Communities and Power – Leadership and Governance

7.1 A Communities and Power Board is being established to provide leadership across the city on the actions outlined within the Communities and Power and

Fighting Systemic and Structural Discrimination and Racism themes of the Making Manchester Fairer action plan. The Board will consist of a diverse group of senior leaders and strategic leads from across the Council, and partners, and will provide oversight on programme activity, support key decision making, assurance of progress, learning and evaluation of the following three key workstreams:

1. Communities and Power
2. Building Stronger Communities Together strategy
3. Tackling Systemic and Structural Racism and Discrimination

7.2 In addition to the Board, an officers' coordination group will be established, which brings together the lead officers responsible for delivery across the three workstreams described above. This will be to ensure that there are opportunities to collaborate on the ongoing design, development and delivery of pilot projects, reflect on learning, join up where required and the long-term implementation of these projects across the wider system. This group will also develop and deliver a regular "temperature check" of progress to feed into monitoring and evaluation reports for the Communities and Power Board.

8. Measuring Cohesion – Key Indicators

- 8.1 Understanding and measuring levels of social cohesion is not easy and there is currently no national framework for doing this. Therefore, we will use the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's "Policing and Community Safety Survey", which is conducted every quarter across all districts in Greater Manchester. The survey includes the qualitative measures set out below, to measure overall social cohesion in Manchester. Three of these indicators are used as headline measures for the priorities of Relationships, Participation and Belonging in the Building Stronger Communities Together strategy. These indicators are in addition to the measures, activities and outcomes to be developed through place-based working.
- 8.2 The table below provides survey results for Manchester and Greater Manchester (GM) for the period July 2023 to June 2024. Comparative figures for the three strategic headline measures are also provided for the Greater London Authority (GLA).

Measure	July 2023 to June 2024		GLA Average
	Manchester	GM Average	
1. How safe do you feel in your local area?	86%	88%	-
2. How safe do you currently feel when out and about anywhere in your district, away from your local area?	81%	79%	-
3. My area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (Relationships Measure)	79%	76%	95%
4. My local area is a place where people look out for each other	66%	72%	-
5. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my local area (Belonging Measure)	68%	70%	56%
6. I have a say in what happens in my local area (Participation Measure)	42%	36%	31%
7. I am proud of my local area	70%	71%	-

Source: Policing and Community Safety Survey (GMCA), 'State of London' dashboard (GLA)

- 8.3 The latest survey results show that Manchester was the same or better than the Greater Manchester average for three measures including two of the headline measures (Relationships and Participation). For the headline Participation measure, Manchester was the top district across Greater Manchester for respondents 'feeling they had a say in what happens in their local area'.
- 8.4 For most of the other measures, Manchester's results are only a percentage point or two below the Greater Manchester average. The exception to this is the measure relating to 'the local area being a place where people look out for each other' where there is need for improvement.
- 8.5 For the three strategic headline measures, Manchester is exceeding performance for Belonging and Participation when compared to results from the Greater London Authority. However, whilst results for Manchester's headline Relationships Measure (79%) is better than the Greater Manchester average (76%), results achieved by the Greater London Authority are considerably higher at 95%. The aim of the work of the action plans is to improve in this area.

9. Recommendations

The Committee are invited to:

1. Note progress on the delivery of the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy and place-based activities along with the work that has

supported community recovery post the incidents and events over the summer.

2. Commit to attending the BSCT and social cohesion learning and development sessions for elected members and encourage elected members outside of the membership of this committee to also attend.