

Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 8 October 2024

Present:

Councillor Johns – in the Chair

Councillors Abdullatif, Benham, Northwood, I Robinson, Shilton Godwin and Wills

Also present:

Councillor Hacking, Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure

Councillor White, Executive Member for Housing and Development

Giles Grover, Manchester Cladiators

Jenni Seex, Head of Protection, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS)

Michael Jaffrain, Chair of the Post-16 Strategy Group and Principal, Loreto Sixth Form College

Rachel Curry, Principal, The Manchester College and Deputy CEO, The LTE Group

Nicola McLeod, Assistant Director (Education, Work and Skills), Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)

Apologies:

Councillors Bano, Sadiq and Taylor

ERSC/24/36 Minutes

Decision

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2024 be approved as a correct record.

ERSC/24/37 Legislative Changes in Building Safety Requirements

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development) which provided a full outline of the major legislative changes within Building Safety following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017. The report provided an update on what progress had been made relating to the remediation of high-rise buildings and the implementation of the legislative changes for Council-owned residential high-rise buildings

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Contextual information;
- The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report;
- Fire Safety Act 2021;
- Building Safety Act 2022 (and Secondary Legislation);
- Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022;
- The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Report;
- Enforcement;

- Remediation funding;
- The Council's role as Principal Accountable Person for the 36 high-rise buildings it owned;
- Leaseholder protections; and
- Building Control.

Prior to the discussion, the Committee held a minute's silence for the 72 people killed in the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

Giles Grover from Manchester Cladiators informed the Committee about his experience as a leaseholder, resident and member of the resident-led management company for a city centre apartment block which was identified as having the same cladding as Grenfell Tower, with other fire safety defects also becoming apparent. He highlighted the deregulation which had taken place from the 1980s onwards, the extent of the problem in the city, with Manchester having more unsafe buildings that anywhere outside of London, and the uncertainties and complexities of the situation for those affected. He emphasised that the focus had to be on making people's homes safe and outlined how he and other people in affected buildings in the city had got together to try to progress this, reporting that they had received support from Manchester and Salford Councils and from Councillors and MPs and were also working with other groups of affected people across the country. He outlined the approach of the previous Government under different Ministers and the progress so far, including the introduction of the Building Safety Fund. He highlighted issues with the number of different organisations involved, such as developers, freeholders, contractors and housing associations, and organisations placing responsibility elsewhere and with the discovery of and need to address non-cladding defects. He outlined the policy that the new Government had set out prior to coming to power and asked Members to use their influence to help ensure that certainty was provided for those affected, that there were penalties and consequences for those responsible and that people would know when their homes would be made safe. He advised that a joined-up approach was needed, led by the Building Safety Regulator. In response to a question from the Chair, he informed the Committee about the impact on the people affected, including the financial worries, the uncertainty about what was going to happen and not feeling safe in their own homes.

Members recognised the impact on the people affected, including the toll on mental and physical health and how it affected people's ability to move on with their lives. Mr Grover informed Members how it impacted on people's life choices, with some becoming 'accidental landlords' because they could not sell their flat, and he informed Members that, while his group focused on private leaseholders, they also worked with others who were affected to present a unified voice for the innocent parties who were affected by this.

Members expressed their support for Mr Grover and his group and recommended that the work of the Cladiators be formally commended by the Council.

Key points and queries that arose from the Committee's discussions included:

- Progressing remediation work, including in relation to Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes;

- That if not all leaseholders in an apartment block qualified for the leaseholder protections in the Building Safety Act 2022, this created challenges in getting the work done;
- The quality of data available;
- Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategies;
- The pressures on resident management companies who were not experts on fire safety-related issues but had been placed in a position of responsibility for dealing with this in a constantly changing regulatory environment;
- That the Council should set up a webpage on cladding issues so that people who found themselves in this position could be signposted to information and support; and
- Enforcement action.

Jenni Seex, Head of Protection, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) explained that, under the leaseholder protections, leaseholders should be the last resort for costs and that most should be protected from having to pay for cladding-related costs; however, responsibility for paying for non-cladding costs depended on an assessment of assets. She outlined some of the complexities of the protections and how this could delay work taking place and noted that the Cladiators were seeking for money to be provided for work to be carried out and then, where applicable, for reimbursement to be sought from the relevant parties. She reported that data collection had evolved but that there was not one clear dataset and that the issue of data quality was being raised with Ministers. She informed Members that there was a list of Manchester buildings which had moved into the developer's contract and that this could be shared, although she advised that there were still challenges with buildings that had moved into this stage.

The Building Safety Programme Manager outlined the approach to Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategies for buildings owned by the Council, considering resident demographics, ensuring that all residents over the age of 16 were engaged with and ensuring that it was accessible, for example, in relation to community languages. She reported that the consultation period for this had started in one of the Council's blocks last week, that a range of approaches to engaging with residents were being used, such as coffee mornings and key contact points, and that learning from this would then be used across other blocks. She advised that learning was shared with other housing professionals and providers who were responsible for non-Council-owned buildings. Jenni Seex highlighted the complexities of the regulations about information to be provided to residents, which came from four different strands of legislation, advising that in many cases, responsibility for this fell to a resident management company, with the associated costs coming from service charges, and that streamlining of this was needed.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development supported the suggestion to provide information and signposting on the Council's website.

Jenni Seex reported that consideration had been given to taking enforcement action to expediate remediation but that it had been decided that it would not be appropriate until settled funding was in place to protect leaseholders from being billed for the cost; however, her service wanted to work with all interested parties on a building-by-building basis to find the best solution for that building. She stated that her service's

view was that the Building Safety Regulator should be a key part of this and that the Health and Safety Executive should prioritise buildings with a known fire safety defect. She acknowledged the challenges for directors of resident management companies and offered to discuss with the Cladiators supporting a session with right-to-manage directors on their responsibilities and engaging with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) on this. In response to a Member's comments, she suggested that this session could be used to identify questions for an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) list and content for a resource pack. In response to a Member's question, she clarified that the new regulations would apply to student accommodation if it was of the specified height. In response to further questions, she expressed concern that the guidance on the assessment of safety cases, as well as that for the building control process, were not sufficiently detailed. She reported that there could be some buildings which had been built post the Grenfell Tower tragedy but before any significant changes in regulations which would have some significant fire safety defects. She also highlighted that buildings below 18 metres were not covered by the new regime.

The Assistant Director (Planning and Building Control) informed Members about the requirement for Building Control Officers dealing with tall buildings to be Class 3 Building Inspectors, which required them to sit an examination, highlighting the capacity issues this created and the work taking place to address this, including support for existing staff to become Class 3 qualified.

In response to the question about PFI schemes, the Building Safety Programme Manager clarified that the 36 buildings for which the Council was the Principal Accountable Person (PAP) included 11 in PFI contracts and that these were dealt with in the same way as the buildings that were managed in-house, except that the PFI companies dealt with the day-to-day running of the building. In relation to enforcement, she advised that the Council had new powers to use remediation orders and remediation contribution orders and did consider their use but had not yet felt the circumstances were right to use them. In response to a Member's question, the Assistant Director of Strategic Housing clarified that a decision about sprinklers had been deferred and that more information would be available in Spring 2025.

Giles Grover emphasised the importance of improved data, a joined-up approach, the use of prioritisation and enforcement action where necessary. He advised that there should be one scheme, with funding based on risk, funding cladding and non-cladding defects.

Decisions:

1. To note the report.
2. To recommend that the Council, working with partners, creates a webpage on this issue to assist affected residents, leaseholders and right-to-manage directors, including an FAQ section, information on the Council's role and signposting people to relevant support and information.
3. To commend the Cladiators for their work supporting residents.

[Councillors Johns and Northwood declared a personal interest due to being leaseholders of apartments affected by the cladding crisis and having benefited from some of the funding referred to in the report.]

ERSC/24/38 Work and Skills Strategy Update

The Committee received a report of the Director of Inclusive Economy which provided an overview of the Work and Skills Strategy with a focus on skills, economic inactivity and construction in the labour market.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Skills matching to meet labour market need;
- Economic inactivity, focusing on over 50s;
- Construction industry supply and demand of jobs

Key points and queries that arose from the Committee's discussions included:

- To welcome the progress being made;
- Supporting people with health conditions and disabilities into work;
- Proposals for Greater Manchester to have greater control over job centres, benefits and work and skills;
- Gender differences in relation to work and skills, including the impact of motherhood and caring responsibilities;
- The skills gap, in particular in relation to construction and health and social care;
- The impact of the Town Hall Project; and
- The growth in economically inactive over-50s.

The Work and Skills Lead informed Members about the set of programmes designed by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), along with the Council, to meet the needs of the local population, including the Work and Health programme, which was recently extended and aimed to support people with long-term health conditions and disability into employment. He also informed the Committee about the forthcoming WorkWell pilot which would commence in early 2025 and help people with mental and physical health conditions into work.

The Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure advised that early discussions were taking place about changes to job centres and that the Council would welcome anything that would improve the experience and the outcome for individuals.

The Director of Inclusive Economy reported that the Council had a good working relationship with JobCentrePlus, with good local arrangements in place, but that the proposals referred to by Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, would take this work to the next stage and integrate more services to support people. She recognised the Member's point about gender, assuring Members that her service took account of data and intelligence in relation to gender and signposting Members to the Work and Skills report to the Committee in March 2024 for further information,

noting that the report presented at today's meeting provided specific information that Members had requested, rather than covering all aspects of the work taking place in relation to Work and Skills. She informed Members that her service had worked with the Director of Adult Social Care to understand the skills gap in relation to Health and Social Care, reporting that more people were moving into entry-level roles in this area but there were some specific gaps to be addressed and a need to strengthen longer term relationships between learning and education providers and the social care sector.

The Work and Skills Lead reported that approximately 11,000 new construction jobs were expected to be created by 2027 and that there was an ageing workforce in this sector. He informed Members about the GMCA's Construction and Green Skills Bootcamps which brought people into the sector and provided the skills that the sector would need in future, including retrofitting, as well as courses delivered by Manchester College, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) sector-based training academies which enabled people to move into areas such as construction and apprenticeships with construction companies.

The Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure drew Members' attention to PlanBEE Manchester, which provided a higher apprenticeship in Design, Construction and Management. He informed the Committee that Work and Skills Briefings for Members would continue to take place.

In response to a question on the Town Hall Project, the Director of Inclusive Economy drew Members' attention to the report submitted to the Committee in January 2023 on Employment and Training Opportunities from Major Capital Programmes, stating that the Council had done a very good job of driving social value through the Town Hall contract and that the latest data could be shared. She reported that there was not a quick solution to reducing economic inactivity among over-50s but that this group was a focus for some of the work funded through the Shared Prosperity Fund, that they would continue to be a focus, including in relation to retention, and that some good work was taking place with employers on this.

Decision:

To note progress on the delivery of the Work and Skills Strategy, with a focus on skills matching to meet labour market need, a focus on economic inactivity, particularly in over 50s, including the reasons for this and potential solutions, and the supply and demand of jobs in the construction industry.

[Councillor Wills declared a personal interest as an employee of Manchester Metropolitan University.]

[Councillor Abdullatif declared a personal interest due to working on a project with Alchemy Arts.]

ERSC/24/39 Post-16 Education Employment Training Strategic Plan 2022-25 – Progress Update

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) which provided an update on work done by the Council to increase the

number of young people accessing Education Employment Training (EET) opportunities in the city, aligning with the city's economic priorities. It also outlined the plans for this work moving forwards, specifically with the Department for Education (DfE) and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Post-16 sufficiency;
- Young people not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET);
- Bringing together schools and employers; and
- Post 16 qualification reform and MBACC.

The Director of Education informed the Committee that, since the report had been written, the DfE had been working closely with her service and partners and providers which had resulted in a significant amount of additional places for this year being secured.

Michael Jaffrain, Chair of the Post-16 Strategy Group and Principal, Loreto Sixth Form College, informed the Committee about the extension of Loreto's campus to accommodate more post-16 students, emphasising that this would be sustained growth over three years to ensure that Loreto continued to achieve high outcomes for its students and provide them with wraparound support. He commented on the high quality of the Level 3 provision in Manchester, with all providers being judged to be good or better but advised that the increased post-16 demand was a challenge for the sector. He reported that the Post-16 Group, in collaboration with Council officers, was working to provide cohesion across the broad post-16 sector in Manchester and to share best practice and that its main aims were to reduce the number of young people who were NEET and to improve the outcomes and life chances of young people as they left further education. He expressed concern at the planned curriculum reform in relation to Btech qualifications, which, he advised, were particularly important for young people at risk of becoming NEET, stating that the Post-16 Group had written to the Secretary of State for Education and the DfE with their concerns.

Rachel Curry, Principal, The Manchester College and Deputy CEO, The LTE Group, reported that her College provided high quality technical education aligned to the skills needs of Manchester delivered in industry standard facilities which met the needs of employers. She informed Members about the substantial increase in applications for courses with the College, with particularly high demand in areas aligned to growth sectors in the city such as digital, creative media, construction, computing, science and engineering. She reported that this year the LTE Group had invested £1.3 million in changes to the College's accommodation to create 162 new places this year and there were further plans to accommodate an additional 200 places in 2025/26, advising that these places would need to be funded in full by the DfE; however, she advised that a significant, comprehensive solution was needed to the capacity challenges facing the post-16 sector over the next five years, that changes to accommodation and new accommodation would need to be funded in full by the Government and that decisions needed to be made urgently to give providers time to build the facilities. She expressed concern about aspects of the proposed curriculum reform and reported that her organisation was contributing to the review

of the proposals. She welcomed that the new Government have made a decision to pause the planned defunding of some Btech qualifications at Level 3, advising that Btech courses enabled many of the College's students who might not meet the qualification requirements for T-Levels, to go on to higher education, or to an occupation related to their course. She highlighted the impact on capacity of the Government policy on re-sitting English and mathematics GCSEs.

The Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure informed the Committee about early discussions with the new Minister, who it was hoped would be visiting Manchester later in the year to see the work taking place and solutions being developed.

Key points and queries that arose from the Committee's discussions included:

- To welcome the strategic approach to bringing together schools and employers;
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's education and on young people being at risk of becoming NEET;
- Capacity to support this large cohort of young people, particularly those who were NEET or at risk of becoming NEET, including the role of youth work providers; and
- What was expected to happen after the capacity peak for the post-16 sector in 2028.

Michael Jaffrain acknowledged the impact of the pandemic on young people and reported that Loreto had diverted resources to pastoral care, including counsellors, to support young people, particularly with their mental health. He reported that secondary heads shared information with Loreto and the Manchester College about particular year groups so that they could prepare and that post-16 providers shared best practice on supporting students. He advised that the ongoing issues resulting from the pandemic had been raised with the DfE and Ofsted.

Rachel Curry reported that, after lockdown, the College had seen an impact on students' maturity and relationships with peers and with teachers, particularly during the first couple of years, but that this had now settled and more recently behaviour, maturity and respect for each other had noticeably improved. She reported that the College had had to invest significantly in pastoral support, including mental health practitioners and safeguarding representatives across all sites.

The Post-16 Lead clarified that, although the impact of COVID-19 was not a specific NEET risk indicator, its impact could result in increased service need and mental health needs which were referenced in the NEET tracker. He reported that Manchester's NEET figures for 2021/22 and 2022/23 had been unusually low and that the increase in 2023/24 to 7.6% was in line with the pre-pandemic figures. He highlighted the additional funding referred to at 4.6 in the report which would build capacity in existing contracts and further prevent and reduce NEET. He highlighted how BREE (Bringing together schools and employers) could enable young people at risk of becoming NEET to see job opportunities and have aspirations for themselves. In response to a Member's question, he outlined how youth work organisations were involved in work to reach young people who were NEET.

In relation to BREE, the Director of Education reported that school and college leaders had indicated that they wanted to develop strong partnerships with key employers. In response to comments about the increase in the numbers of young people who were NEET and whether there was an increase in vulnerable groups, she reported that there had been an increase in children, across all ages, with additional needs and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP). She also highlighted high numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and capacity issues with English as an Additional Language (EAL) courses which also affected New Arrivals coming into the city during the year. She reported that large cohorts of children were moving through secondary school but that numbers in primary schools had stabilised so it was anticipated that post-16 demand could plateau after 2028. In response to comments from the Chair, she outlined how young people who had struggled at school could often benefit from and be successful through undertaking Btech courses. In response to a question from the Chair, she advised that secondary school heads did focus on getting their pupils through GCSE English and mathematics, targeting significant resources into this. She reported that some young people narrowly missed passing these GCSEs and, with some targeted work, could pass; however, she advised that there were other young people who were a long way from a pass mark and that making them repeatedly resit and fail the examinations was not beneficial for them and that an alternative should be considered. She informed Members that secondary schools were passing on more detailed information on GCSE mathematics and English results to colleges so that colleges could see what their score was and which areas they need targeted support in.

In relation to a Member's comments about The Works in Ardwick, the Director of Inclusive Economy advised that their relationship with the University of Manchester was key to their success. She highlighted the importance of working with the city's anchor institutions and businesses to ensure that there was a visible pipeline of jobs and referred to the Airport Academy at Manchester Airport and a Construction Skills Centre being developed in north Manchester as other examples of this.

Decision:

To note the progress of the work undertaken to date and planned for the current academic year and support continued engagement with the DfE, local collaboration, information-sharing between stakeholders and engagement with youth providers.

ERSC/24/40 Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted. The overview report contained key decisions within the Committee's remit, responses to previous recommendations and the Committee's work programme, which the Committee was asked to approve.

Decision:

That the Committee note the report and agree the work programme.