

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2024

Present:

Councillor Muse – in the Chair
Councillors Amin, Collins, Fletcher, Foley, Gartside, Lovecy, Mandongwe, McHale, Nunney, Sadler and Sharif Mahamed

Co-opted Voting Members:

Mr G Cleworth, Parent Governor Representative
Mr Y Yonis, Parent Governor Representative

Also present:

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Finance and Resources
Councillor Reid, Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People

Apologies:

Councillors N Ali and Bell
Ms S Davies, Parent Governor Representative
Canon S Mapledoram, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester
Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

CYP/24/56 Appointment of a Chair for the Meeting

As Councillor Bell had sent her apologies for the meeting, the Committee Support Officer asked for nominations for a Member to chair the meeting. A Member nominated Councillor Muse, which was seconded by another Member and agreed by the Committee.

Decision

To appoint Councillor Muse as Chair for the meeting.

CYP/24/57 Interests

Councillor Mandongwe declared a personal interest as a trustee of the Dimobi Children's Disability Trust and stated that she would declare any conflicts of interests during the meeting and recuse herself from any related decisions.

CYP/24/58 Minutes

Decision

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

CYP/24/59 Revenue Budget Update

CYP/24/60 Children and Education Services Budget 2025/26

The Committee considered the report of the City Treasurer that provided a high-level overview of the latest budget position for the Council in respect of its 2025/26 budget.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources referred to the points and themes in the report which included:

- Noting that the Council was forecasting an estimated budget shortfall of £101m in 2025/26, £126m in 2026/27, and £164m by 2027/28;
- Mitigations approved in previous budget rounds included approved savings of £32m, the use of c£18m smoothing reserves in each of the three years, and a Council Tax increase of 4.99% (c£11m) a year. After these mitigations the gap reduced to £29m in 2025/26, £41m in 2026/27 and £77m by 2027/28;
- Noting that councils faced a funding gap of £6.2 billion over the next two years, and this needed to be considered in the context of an estimated £24.5 billion in cuts and efficiencies in service spending that councils had made since 2010/11;
- Noting that over the same period the Council had delivered over £440m of savings;
- The 2023/24 outturn position reported to Executive 5 June 2024, reported an overspend of £5.3m. The second monitoring report of 2024/25 was considered by Executive on 13 November, reporting a forecast overspend of £20m. The ongoing implications of this overspend must be considered as part of the budget setting process;
- Consideration of the Government's Autumn Statement, noting that a key headline for Local Government was that Core Spending Power would increase by 3.2% in real terms in 2025/26;
- Noting that Ministers had indicated additional funding would be targeted through a deprivation-based approach; and
- A summary of the budget position, noting that the final budget position for 2025/26 would be confirmed at February 2025 Executive. This would be after the Finance Settlement was received and key decisions confirming the Council Tax and Business Rates tax base to be used to determine the collection fund position had been made in January.

The Committee also considered the report of the Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) which provided officer-developed options to contribute to the balancing of the overall Council budget. Final options would be proposed following the announcement of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, expected prior to Christmas. The Committee was invited to consider the current proposed changes which were within its remit and to make recommendations to the Executive. The Committee would have the opportunity to review proposals in the context of the financial settlement again in February and make final recommendations for the Executive to consider on 19th February 2025 when the final budget decisions would be made.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Service overview and priorities;

- Service budget and proposed changes;
- Commissioning and procurement priorities;
- Workforce implications; and
- Equality and anti-poverty impact.

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

- How the additional funding announced by the Government would be used;
- The impact of the new route plan software for Home-School Transport;
- The impact of early intervention and prevention initiatives in reducing demand;
- Thanking officers for their work;
- To welcome the actions outlined at 3.4 in the report, in particular in relation to fostering and the development of the new Greater Manchester shared children's residential care service, Project Skyline, noting the importance of being innovative;
- Sharing best practice with and supporting other local authorities;
- The use of interim and agency staff; and
- The Social Work apprenticeship scheme.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources reported that the announcements from the new Government were very welcome but there was still a lot of uncertainty, with neither the provisional Local Government settlement nor the formula for distribution of funds across local authority areas yet confirmed. He advised that every year the overspend was being covered from the General Reserve Fund but that this Fund needed to be replenished from the 2025/26 budget. He reported that, while this year was a one-year settlement from the Government, in future years, local authorities would receive multi-year settlements and this certainty would help the Council to plan early help work and to reduce demand. He highlighted that a lot of the proposals put forward related to income generation, efficiency savings and transformational work rather than cuts to services.

The Director of Education reported that the new planning software for Home-School Transport had already had a positive impact, with £1.1 million in savings from its first use. She advised that there had been a reduction in single occupancy vehicles and that it did result in some children's journeys being longer but that the transition to the new routes had been smooth and complaints about the service were rare now. In response to a question from the Chair, she advised that some elements of Home-School Transport were in-house, in particular the policy, the eligibility assessment, the management and the passenger assistants; however, she advised that the vehicles and drivers were commissioned, that there were no plans to bring these in-house and she did not believe that this element could be delivered more efficiently in-house.

The Acting Deputy Director of Children's Services outlined how the early intervention approach was preventing families from requiring Child in Need statutory services, while highlighting that in recent years families had been presenting with greater complexities. She advised that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) demonstrated that the long-term investment into Early Help had impacted positively on demand and referrals into statutory services and the numbers of Looked After Children. She

informed Members about the support offered to foster carers, including the Mockingbird programme, which provided peer-to-peer support and tailored training and which was currently being expanded. She outlined the Trailblazer Projects that Manchester was involved in, advising that these presented opportunities to share best practice and advised that the Council also shared best practice through a range of other means, including the Early Help Community of Practice, Core Cities and the Local Government Association.

The Acting Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) reported that 86% of children with a Child In Need (CIN) plan who received Early Help did not then require another CIN plan over the following year. He also reported that the number of Looked After Children proportionate to the population was lower than in 2010, if Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children were excluded from the figures, and that Social Workers average caseloads had significantly reduced. He informed Members that the cost-of-living crisis had resulted in more families requiring support from Early Help, in particular short-term help in relation to financial issues and housing. He reported that in 2020, 13% of staff were agency workers but that this had now reduced to 8% and that staff turnover had also reduced significantly. In response to questions from the Chair, he provided further information on Project Skyline, a major capital investment, led by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), to create a new Greater Manchester shared children's residential care service, which would sit alongside the Council's own sufficiency projects. In response to a question from the Chair about including the voice of young people, he confirmed that young people had been engaged with in relation to this project and he offered to provide further information after the meeting. He reported that the numbers on the Social Work apprenticeship in Children's Services had been doubled from 6 to 12 and that this was a rolling programme. He advised that the Council would continue to invest in this programme and he was optimistic about Government support for extending this. The Acting Deputy Director of Children's Services provided information on a separate programme that the Council had been participating in for several years for people with degrees to move into Social Work via an intensive two-year programme. She reported that the Council had previously run a Step Up to Social Work scheme for existing Council staff.

The Assistant Finance Director (Children, Education and Schools) advised that spending on residential placements was £60 million in 2010/11 and this had remained the same up to 2022/23, which was a significant achievement, considering inflation over this period; however, she advised that costs had since increased due to significant increases in the cost of external placements.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People informed Members about the journey that Children's Services had been on since 2014, when it had been judged as inadequate by Ofsted. She reported that she would share a letter from Bridget Phillipson, the Secretary of State for Education, outlining the new Government's approach to children's social care, "Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive", advising that this included a cap on charges for external placements. She encouraged the Committee to undertake more visits to frontline social work teams across the city.

Decision

To note the reports and the proposed budget changes relevant to the remit of this Committee.

CYP/24/61 Progress update on the development of the Our Manchester Strategy 2025-2035

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on the development of the new Our Manchester Strategy for the city covering the period 2025 to 2035. It built on a previous report to Scrutiny Committees in July 2024.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background, noting that The Our Manchester Strategy 2025 was the ten-year strategy for the city and was due to expire in 2025;
- Providing a summary of the second round of engagement activity;
- The findings that were most relevant to the remit of the Committee;
- An overview of the new strategy, noting that the OMS would focus on twelve priorities over the next ten years; and
- Following formal approval, the OMS 2025-2035 would be launched in April 2025.

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

- To welcome the ambition of the Strategy and the strong partnership work in the city, including with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector;
- Concern that only 64.5% of respondents had agreed with the priority relating to climate change and that the Council needed to win over hearts and minds of residents and engage with partner organisations on this issue, noting that this was an important issue for many children and young people;
- Noting the consultation on the Climate Change Framework and that the 5-year plan for Greater Manchester was being reviewed, ensuring that these fed into the final document and that the importance of tackling climate change was emphasised;
- Positive comments about the engagement work that had taken place and thanking officers for their work;
- Engagement with children, including younger children, and young people, including university students;
- Highlighting and supporting the key priorities of the economy, equality and the environment;
- That reference should be made to providing pathways for 14 – 19 year-olds, especially those who were at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training);
- That the priority relating to sport and culture should place greater emphasis on opportunities for Manchester's children and young people to play sports and

participate in activities, rather than focusing on the two major football clubs, also noting that the cost of Premier League tickets was beyond the means of many local families but that this was not within the Council's control; and

- How it would be ensured that under-represented groups were meaningfully included in shaping key priorities.

The Assistant Chief Executive advised that the original wording of the priority relating to climate change ("Manchester will be protected from the harmful effects of climate change") might have resulted in some people disagreeing and that the wording had since been amended. He highlighted that only 13.5% of respondents had disagreed with the priority, with 22.1% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. He advised that climate change was a strong theme from the engagement with children and young people on the Strategy and from the engagement in relation to Child Friendly City, which officers had also taken into account in the development of the Strategy. He confirmed that the results of the engagement work could be broken down by different characteristics, including age, so the views of young people could be appropriately weighted. He also confirmed that engagement had taken place through the universities as part of phase 1. In response to a Member's comments about the reference to 'residents' median wages', he advised that the wording of this section had been amended and that, following a comment at the previous day's Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee that earning levels should be referenced in the priority, further consideration would be given to the wording. He advised that the priority "Have world-renowned things for everyone to see and do, showcasing our talent for sport and culture" was intended to reflect both activities that people in the city could participate in and events that would attract people into the city but that officers would review the wording of this for the next version of the document to ensure that it struck the right balance. He advised that partners in the public, private and VCSE sector had been widely engaged with in the development of the Strategy, noting that this was a Strategy for the city, not just for the Council. He reported that there would be further engagement with partners over the next few months over how the Strategy would be embedded into organisations. In response to comments about engaging under-represented groups, he reported that feedback indicated that people wanted to be involved and included on an on-going basis and he drew Members' attention to the priorities that our people would "be proud of our diversity, feel valued, included and that they belong" and would "be supported to participate, engage and influence decisions about their communities and neighbourhoods." He advised that there was already good practice in the Council in relation to this, including Child Friendly City, Making Manchester Fairer and Community Health Equity and that there would be a focus on extending good practice and applying it consistently across the Council.

The Strategy and Economic Policy Manager advised that the development of the Strategy did not only take into account the responses to the consultation but also data from other work the Council had undertaken, such as Child Friendly City, and other evidence, for example, climate change targets were based on scientific information. He recognised the important role of partner organisations in facilitating the engagement work. He reported that there had been some engagement work at children's centres and primary schools and that parents with young children had also been engaged with in many other locations.

In response to questions from the Chair, the Assistant Chief Executive provided further information on the pop-up stalls, advising that the locations had been chosen to get coverage across different areas of the city. He acknowledged that the consultation in phase 2 had not been as wide-reaching as phase 1, due to time constraints, but advised that it should be considered alongside the much more extensive engagement at phase 1. He reported that earlier in the year officers from his service had met with Ward Councillors to ask for their suggestions for the best places within their ward to engage with residents, advising that the intention had been to engage with residents in locations where they would ordinarily be rather than asking them to attend a consultation event.

The Chair recommended increased community engagement to ensure under-represented groups were reached, that the Council benchmark against other cities and that measurable goals be set in order to evaluate progress, with periodic updates provided.

The Assistant Chief Executive reported that an implementation plan would be developed which would provide more specific information in relation to the twelve priorities. He advised that the State of the City Report would be revised to align with the new Strategy and that this annual report would provide a range of indicators and narrative on progress towards the twelve priorities within the Strategy. He informed the Committee that benchmarking with other cities was carried out as part of the State of the City work, as well as in relation to individual services. He advised that further work would be done to engage with communities which were under-represented, linking in with other areas of work such as Making Manchester Fairer.

Decision

To note the report, recognising the importance of community engagement, particularly with under-represented groups, benchmarking against other cities and monitoring progress against measurable goals and noting the assurances from the Assistant Chief Executive that these are being addressed.

CYP/24/62 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.

A Member asked for an update on the Education Climate Change Action Plan to be added to the work programme. The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People suggested that this be raised with Councillor Bell on her return.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme, subject to the above comments.