

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2019

Present:

Councillor Igbon – in the Chair

Councillors Appleby, Butt, Flanagan, Hassan, Hughes, Jeavons, Kilpatrick, Lynch, Lyons, Razaq, Sadler, Whiston, White and Wright

Apologies: Azra Ali and Harland

Also present:

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Councillor Richards, Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration

Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

Councillor S Murphy, Deputy Leader

Councillor T Judge, Lead Member for the Armed Forces

Hendrix Lancaster, Coffee4Craig

Yvonne Hope, Barnabus

NESC/19/42 Minutes

Councillor Wright, Chair of the Climate Change Subgroup informed Members that following the initial meeting of the Subgroup she would be meeting with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport and officers to scope the Work Programme. She further commented that she had confirmed with the Leader that a progress report on the possibility of introducing a zero carbon 2030 target would be submitted to the Executive before the end of 2019.

Decisions

1. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2019 as a correct record.
2. To note the minutes of the Climate Change Subgroup meeting held on 22 October 2019.

NESC/19/43 Housing Allocations Policy Review

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director, Growth and Development that described the Council's review of the social housing Allocations Policy and recommended changes to enable the city to best meet housing need within a backdrop of reduced turnover of stock.

The Committee had been invited to comment on the report prior to its submission to the Executive on 13 November 2019.

The Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration referred to the main points and themes within the report which included: -

- Providing a background and legal context to the Allocations Policy;
- Information regarding the demand and turnover of social housing;
- Information on the engagement and consultation exercise, noting that discussions always focussed on the objectives of helping those in greatest need;
- Information on the proposed changes to the Policy;
- Information on the Equalities Impact Assessment; and
- Next steps.

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

- Supporting the introduction of a two year continuous residency qualification;
- Supporting the review of the new policy at 12, 24 and 36 months following the implementation to identify if any of the changes had created any unintended consequences;
- Supporting the call to end the Right To Buy Scheme;
- What support was offered to assist people wishing to down size and free up larger family homes; and
- What was the support offered to ex-armed forces personnel.

The Committee then heard from Councillor T. Judge, Lead Member for the Armed Forces, who commented that some armed forces personnel experienced difficulties when accessing housing, health services and education when leaving service. He stated that the Armed Forces Covenant, a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who had served in the armed forces, and their families, were treated fairly had improved the offer to ex-service men and women, and this was to be welcomed. He further noted the creation by Government of the Office for Veterans' Affairs was to be welcomed. He commented that the number of ex-service personnel who slept rough in Manchester was low and there were a number of charities and support services dedicated to supporting them.

The Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration commented that the impact of continued austerity; the capping of personal benefits and welfare reform; a freeze on the Local Housing Allowance had contributed to an increase in the number of families and individuals experiencing homelessness placing an increased demand on a very limited housing resource. She stated that the policy of Right To Buy had also significantly impacted on the availability of social housing and all of this had contributed to the necessity to review the Policy, to ensure the most vulnerable residents in the city were supported.

The Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration informed Members that Northwards had a dedicated officer who would help and support those tenants who wished to 'right size' and free up larger properties. She further commented that ex-armed forces personnel would be allocated a Band 1 (Priority) when applying for housing.

Decisions

The Committee: -

Recommend that the Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration explore opportunities to work with those charitable organisations working with ex-armed forces personnel and their families to help them secure suitable accommodation.

The Committee endorse the recommendations that the Executive:

1. Note the statutory and online consultation responses received.
2. Approve the changes to the Housing Allocation Policy (the Policy) recommended within this report.
3. Delegate to the Head of Housing Services and the City Solicitor approval to complete the final and lawful version of the Policy.
4. Note that the Equalities Impact Assessment shows no unintended or disproportionate effects are likely to arise for applicants with protected characteristics.

NESC/19/44 Homelessness Update
(Cllr Flanagan in the Chair)

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Homelessness that provided an update, subsequent to the report to the Committee on the 17 July 2019, on the work that was taking place to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in the city. The focus of the report reflected the concerns and questions raised by Members at previous meetings of the Committee.

The Director of Homelessness referred to the main points and themes within the report which included: -

- Data on the numbers of requests for assistance for the period July to October 2019;
- Information on the location of facilities for the accommodation of homeless households, noting that accommodation was provided for the extent of the legal duty owed to any household;
- An update on the A Bed Every Night Scheme; and
- Noting that the number of people who slept rough who come from the armed forces was quite small in the city, it was understood that this group may be less willing to access services and therefore could be under-represented.

The Committee then heard from Yvonne Hope, Barnabus. She described that they had witnessed a huge increase in people accessing their service who had complex needs, often as a result of mental health issues, substance misuse and trauma. She commented that the impact of continued budget cuts to public services and welfare reform had resulted in impact on the number of people who were experiencing homelessness. She stated that the reduction in preventive measures and support

had resulted in people presenting when they were in crisis. She stated that the increased rents within the Private Rented Sector and the freeze on the Local Housing Allowance meant that people would immediately be facing rent arrears and making their tenancy very unstable. She added that this was compounded due to the lack of affordable housing across the city. She concluded by stating that whilst many Mancunians had good intentions in trying to help homeless people, it was important to note that there were plenty of sources of food available for homeless people in Manchester and the best way Mancunians could help would be to give to the Big Change Campaign.

The Committee then heard from Hendrix Lancaster, Coffee4Craig. He reiterated the point that the numbers of people, and those with complex needs who were turning to them for assistance and support had increased significantly over the previous years. He said that due to the lack of appropriate housing for homeless people the risk was that they could become entrenched in this lifestyle and lose trust in services and support agencies. He stated that the A Bed Every Night scheme was welcomed, however this was not often appropriate for people with complex needs and assessment was always made. Mr Hendrix stated that people could volunteer to work with Coffee4Craig and Barnabus and information on how to apply to do this could be obtained from the respective websites. He also encouraged all Members to get involved in offering support to homelessness charities, throughout the year or to drop in to observe the support offered.

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

- Recognising and thanking the Voluntary and Community Sector for the important work that they delivered to support the most vulnerable people in the city;
- What was the inspection regime applied to Bed and Breakfasts used for temporary accommodation;
- What was the length of time people spent in temporary accommodation;
- More information was requested on the Council's Navigator Service;
- More information was requested on the Housing First model; and
- How many children were currently placed in temporary accommodation.

The Director of Homelessness stated that properties used to accommodate homeless people and families were inspected, in line with agreed standards and all properties would be inspected. He said that if they were found to be unfit families would be removed and they would work with landlords to rectify any issues and where appropriate enforcement action would be taken.

The Director of Homelessness stated that there were currently 3648 children housed in temporary accommodation, with the average time being 12 months stay in temporary accommodation, adding that that accommodation was provided for the duration of the legal duty owed to any household. In response to a specific question regarding the longest stay in temporary accommodation he said he would circulate this information following the meeting. He stated that he understood the disruption this could have for families and a child's education and work was ongoing with Children's Services to consider the options to best support these children. He further commented that families were offered floating support.

The Director of Homelessness informed Members that the Navigator Service consisted of four navigators and one team leader. Navigators would be assigned to work with people who were rough sleeping, who would benefit from tailored support, to help them access and sustain accommodation. They would follow the client from street outreach, giving a continued single point of contact and support through pathway systems and through to resettlement support. The navigators would have particular specialisms, including mental health and drug and alcohol support.

Yvonne Hope stated that the Housing First model was designed to support those people who had struggled to be accommodated through the traditional process, often due to complex needs. She described that people who were housed were intensively supported with wrap around services to help maintain their tenancy. She described that a panel would consider all applications to the scheme. However, she called for further investment into this model of housing.

The Deputy Leader stated that the Homelessness Service was responding to unprecedented demand on the service, commenting that they experienced on average 100 presentations per day. She stated this was as a direct result of austerity and welfare reform, in particular the roll out of Universal Credit. She further called for an end to the issuing of Section 21 Notices and the establishment of three year tenancy agreements within the Private Rented Sector. She further commented that she supported the Housing First model, noting that this offered a system wide response to the issue of homelessness, and in particular those with complex needs.

Decisions

The Committee: -

1. Recognise the important work that the staff within the Homelessness Service do on behalf of the most vulnerable residents in Manchester;
2. Recognise the invaluable contribution the Voluntary and Community Sector play in supporting the most vulnerable residents in Manchester;
3. Recommend that visits be arranged for Members of the Committee to visit emergency accommodation and Bed and Breakfast accommodation that is used to house homeless people.
4. Recommend that a report on the approach to accommodating homeless families with children be provided to the Committee at an appropriate time. The report will include the numbers of children housed in temporary accommodation; the length of time spent in temporary accommodation and the support that is offered to minimise the disruption to their education.
5. Recommend that all Members of the Committee should commit to undertaking voluntary work with homeless charities.

[Councillor Igbon declared a prejudicial interest and withdrew from the meeting during consideration of this item]

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Highways that provided a further update to Members on the previous Highways Maintenance Programme report and is a follow on from the previous report of 7 November 2018.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport referred to the main points and themes within the report which included: -

- An overview of the Highways Service's role, key achievements and challenges;
- An update on the progress of the reactive maintenance programmes;
- Information on safety inspections, detailing the most common types of highway defects to be checked for during highway safety inspections;
- Information on additional inspections following reports received from members or the public;
- Information on repairs, including emergency repairs accompanied by case studies and drainage repair works;
- Information on the small patching repair programme, noting that regular coordination meetings were held to ensure that all works were aligned to other MCC highways programmes to mitigate against duplication of work;
- Performance monitoring;
- The delivery of Social Value including case studies;
- The management of utility works;
- Information on the Cyclical Drainage and Improvement Programme;
- Information on Community Action Days, including case studies;
- Highways planned Maintenance Programme update, providing year 3 progress and year 4 programme confirmation;
- Major schemes update;
- An update on cycling schemes;
- Information about how information relating to major schemes are provided to both local Ward Councillors and residents;
- Information on how disruption caused by major schemes was managed;
- An update on resident parking schemes;
- Information on the approach to tree planting in capital schemes;
- An update on the Street Lighting PFI Programme;
- An update on the Winter gritting programme, including carriageways, footways and segregated cycle ways;
- The provision of motorbike parking facilities; and
- Information on parking and bus lane enforcement.

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

- Welcoming the investment into the Highways network,
- How many jobs had been created via Social Value;
- On some streets both footpaths had been closed during development works that endangered pedestrians e.g. at the Mechanics Institute;
- The investment in improvements to city centre paved areas was welcomed and it was asked that the footpaths in the district centres could also be improved;

- The Public satisfaction in the service being higher than any other Greater Manchester Council was welcomed and comment was made that Manchester should also strive to be the highest in England;
- Noting that there was no current policy in relation to motorcycle parking and this had not been evident in previous correspondence with the Highways Department;
- The issue of communications with Members and residents about highways works remained an issue;
- Acknowledging the Performance Dashboard that was available to Members;
- The need to promote and publicise the good work undertaken by the Highways Department;
- Would consultation be undertaken on every major Highways project; and
- How long did it take to implement a resident parking scheme.

The Director of Highways stated that he welcomed the satisfaction rating when considering the major works that had been undertaken and commented that they were the highest in Greater Manchester, however the service always aimed to improve. Members further commented on and welcomed the decrease in recorded complaints. In response to a specific question the Director of Highways confirmed that consultation would be undertaken on every major project and a draft proposal was included in the report.

The Director of Highways responded to the comments regarding Social Value stating that this was overseen by the Highways Social Value Project Manager and the service was accepted as a lead in this area within the Council. He stated that this activity was reported to the Ethical Procurement and Contract Management Sub Group. In response to the question regarding the number of jobs that had been created he confirmed that this information was recorded and would be provided to Members following the meeting.

The Director of Highways further responded to Members' questions by advising them that all micro-asphalt material 'bedded in' through the movement of traffic over it, so in the early weeks the surface could appear a little rough or 'open textured', particularly if there is not much traffic on the street and once the material had 'bedded in', it generally looked much more like a 'new' road surface. He said that following this period of 'bedding in' the works were revisited to ensure the gullies were clear of any debris.

In regard to the closure of footpaths during work by developers the Director of Highways stated that they were looking into this by recruiting additional inspectors. He invited Members if they had specific concerns to report these directly to the Department and this would be investigated. In response to the specific question regarding district centres, he commented that these paved areas would be looked at.

The Chair commented that she would liaise with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport; the Lead Member for Disability; the Lead Member for Age Friendly Manchester and the Director of Planning, Building Control & Licensing to discuss the issue of footpaths with the ambition to develop a specific policy regarding how these were managed during periods of construction works.

In response to comments regarding communications between Members and the Department, the Director of Highways stated that Members should always receive a reply to an enquiry they made and that he would investigate any incidents shared with him where this did not happen. The Head of Citywide Highways stated that the Department had utilised the Members Dashboard to improve communications and inform them of works. The Director of Highways did acknowledge that providing real time data presented a challenge when seeking to inform Members of disruptions to microasphalt programmes due to bad weather and would welcome suggestions from the committee about a solution.

The Chair commented that communications about major projects remained an issue for many Members and she would discuss this further with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport. Members recommended that a report on the Highways Communication strategy, including communications with Members be included on the Committee's Work Programme for consideration at an appropriate time.

The Head of Design, Commissioning and Project Management Office described the statutory process of consultation required to implement a resident parking scheme and informed Members that this took 94 weeks to complete. He further commented that lessons learnt and feedback received from previous schemes would be included in future schemes.

In response to questions raised regarding tree planting the Chair informed Members that an update report on the implementation of the Manchester Tree Strategy was scheduled to be considered at the Committee's meeting of 8 January 2020.

Decision

The Committee recommended that a report on the Highways Department's communication strategy, including communication with Members be included on the Committee's Work Programme for consideration at an appropriate time.

NESC/19/46 Red & Amber School Crossings

The Chair recommended that this item of business be deferred to the December meeting.

Decision

To defer this item of business to the meeting of 4 December 2019.

NESC/19/47 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.

Members commented that consideration needed to be given to the number of items listed for each meeting to allow enough time for appropriate scrutiny by Members.

Decision

The Committee notes the report and approves the work programme.