

Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 3 December 2019

Present: Councillor Lanchbury (In the Chair)

Councillors A. Ali, Andrews, Clay, Davies, B. Priest, A. Simcock and Stanton

Also present:

Councillor N Murphy, Deputy Leader

Councillor Ollerhead, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

Marc Hudson, Resident of Manchester

Apologies: Councillors Moore, Rowles, Russell, Wheeler and Wright

RGS/19/68 Appointment of a Chair

In the absence of Councillor Russell, a nomination was sought for the chair of the meeting. Councillor Lanchbury was nominated and seconded.

Decision

To appoint Councillor Lanchbury as Chair of this meeting.

RGS/19/69 Communications Service Plan – Review

The Committee considered the report of the City Solicitor and Director of Strategic Communications that provided an update on the delivery of the Communications Strategy for 2019/20.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Providing a background and introduction;
- Describing progress in 2019/20 against the key delivery themes;
- An update on participation and engagement;
- Information on service organisation and governance; and
- The next steps for the remainder of the year.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committees discussions were: -

- Information was sought on the American firm Granicus and its role within the Public Sector;
- Was the approach to local, targeted communications appropriate;
- Was there capacity to be able to provide information in other formats, with particular reference to text to voice services, and how are these services publicised;
- Was there any intention to expand the Design Studio as a means to generate income;

- Were online forms that residents used to contact the Council regularly reviewed; and
- Did the existing commercial relationship with the Manchester Evening News potentially prevent objective reporting of the Council.

The Director of Strategic Communications stated that Granicus provided their service via the GovDelivery platform, commenting that this was utilised by a range of public sector organisations, including the NHS and the Met Office. In response to a question regarding the number of Local Authorities using this platform, the Director of Strategic Communications stated that an exact number would be circulated following the meeting, she added that it was the most used system across Local Authorities.

The Director of Strategic Communications stated that services across the Council had been encouraged and supported to develop and deliver their own communications and dialogue with residents. She stated that it was important that local conversations were undertaken with residents, noting that staff had been trained to support this activity, and work continued to support and strengthen this devolved approach.

The Director of Strategic Communications stated that the Council's website had been updated so as to provide a text to voice facility and printed material could be provided in a variety of languages and formats. She stated that it was important to use the most appropriate channel and medium to communicate with residents, adding that letters were sometimes more appropriate than a digital format to ensure the views of the target audience were captured, noting the importance of this when consulting on budget proposals.

The Director of Strategic Communications informed Members that the website was regularly tested and user feedback was always welcomed and responded to, so as to ensure the online system was user friendly.

The Director of Strategic Communications informed the Committee that the Design Studio had worked primarily with the third sector and partner organisations as a priority. She informed Members that the approach adopted was always to meet the priorities of the Council before expanding this offer further, adding that this would always be undertaken with the values of the Council taken into consideration.

The Director of Strategic Communications stated that the Council was statutorily obliged to display public notices in print and online, however she clarified that the commercial business of the Manchester Evening News was distinct and separate from the news and editorial section of the paper. She further informed Members that if the Committee had concerns about this relationship this could be discussed further when the contract was reviewed in May 2020.

Decision

To note the report.

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that provided an overview of the Council's approach to consultation with Manchester residents, and next steps for taking this forward.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Describing the Council's current approach to consultations;
- Support from the Corporate Core;
- Recent examples of consultations;
- Issues and challenges identified;
- Consultations within other Greater Manchester Authorities; and
- Next Steps.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committees discussions were: -

- What information was legally required to be provided when delivering a consultation, and what could be done to ensure this was accessible to ensure members of the public were best engaged with;
- Noting the benefits of social media to engage with residents, consideration needed to be given to utilising all methods of communication with residents;
- Officers should enquire with local Members as to the areas that were to be consulted with, noting that they had extensive local knowledge;
- What was done to engage with hard to reach residents and address under representation;
- Were the comments posted on social media captured and reported; and
- Was there a risk of consultation fatigue setting in, noting the number of national and GM wide consultations undertaken on a wider variety of topics.

The City Solicitor advised that statute required consultations to be run for an appropriate period of time and that they be undertaken at a time when information and proposals were available to allow for an informed discussion on the topic that was to be consulted upon. She stated that every attempt was used to minimise technical and legalistic language so that consultations were accessible.

The Deputy Leader noted the comment from a Member regarding the amount of information that had been provided as part of a consultation exercise by Transport for Greater Manchester. He stated that officers were unable to respond to the specific point raised, however he was aware of the issue and noted that they had been statutory obliged to provide this information. The City Solicitor added that this specific consultation referred to was particularly complex in nature.

The Deputy Leader noted the comment regarding the importance of all methods of communication with residents being used and stated that the Council always allowed for paper submissions to consultations in addition to online responses.

The Committee then heard from Marc Hudson, a resident of Manchester. Mr Hudson said that upon reading the report there was no reference within it to explain how people whose first language was not English were consulted with. He also stated that

the report did not address consultations that he described as going badly wrong. He stated that it was unclear from reading the report that the approach was interested in obtaining the views of residents who were being consulted with.

Officers responded by stating that as discussed in the previous agenda item, information could be provided in different languages and formats as and when required, and the online information provided complied with statutory requirements regarding accessibility. He stated that the examples described within the report were provided to demonstrate the complexity and varied nature of consultations undertaken. He stated that the appropriate method of consultation was used at the appropriate time using a range of tools that were available, noting the increased accessibility of technology as a means of communicating and engaging with residents. In specific response to a question on Highways, Officers informed the Committee that a report had recently been submitted to the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee that described the approach to future consultations.

The Director of Strategic Communications commented that a co-production approach to the City Centre Transport Consultation exercise would be undertaken, adding that co-production described the planning and development with all key stakeholders using a service that included residents, business, elected Members and wider interested groups. She informed Members that the consultation would be published on the Council's website when it formally went live.

The Director of Strategic Communications commented that in recognition that there were sections of the community and geographical areas that were under represented consideration was always given to using the most appropriate channels to reach them. She advised that this included the pre-empting of printed material in other languages, commenting that material could be made available in other languages upon request. Officers stated that responses were regularly reviewed to understand where they were coming from and identify any gaps in an attempt to ensure responses were reflective of the area being consulted with.

The Director of Strategic Communications stated that the comments and tone of those responses provided on social media platforms and email correspondence were reviewed and reported alongside all formal response and provided for the relevant decision maker. She stated that whilst every attempt was made to ensure that online consultations were accessible, using the appropriate language and conform with statutory guidance, tracking exercises were undertaken to understand where people 'dropped out' of online consultations, and the feedback and lessons learnt from this would be reviewed to help inform future consultations.

Decision

To note the report.

RGS/19/71

GDPR communications update

The Committee considered the report of the City Solicitor and Director of Strategic Communications that provided a summary of the Council's recent work to

communicate with staff on the requirements of GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- Describing the background to the GDPR;
- The communications to staff regarding GDPR;
- The evaluation on the approach;
- Describing the second phase of activity and the ambitions and objectives of this; and
- Next steps.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committees discussions were: -

- Had the Council incurred any fines as a result of breaches of the GDPR;
- How did we become aware of breaches if they occurred;
- What protections were in place for when information is shared with partner organisations; and
- How many breaches had been reported to the Information Commissioner's Office.

The City Solicitor stated that she was not aware of any fines imposed on the Local Authority for any breaches of the GDPR. She advised that there was a team within the Governance Department to understand any cases of breaches and ensure the correct mitigation was instigated. She advised that invariably breaches became known following notification from the officer responsible for the breach or their line manager, and she provided examples of how internal breaches could occur.

The City Solicitor informed the Committee that each Directorate had a designated officer responsible for GDPR and this activity was overseen and managed centrally by the Corporate Information Assurance Risk Group, supported by the core team within the Governance Department. She stated this provided an opportunity for joint learning and sharing experience. She further commented that the Corporate Information Assurance Risk Group provided oversight and guidance for when information was shared with partners, such as the Health Service and the Police, to ensure they were fully compliant with the requirements regarding data sharing.

In response to a specific question regarding breaches of GDPR by Members she stated that this would be investigated and reported through the Standards Committee. In answer to the question regarding the number of breaches that had been reported to the Information Commissioner's Office, she stated that she would clarify the number and circulate this to the Members following the meeting.

The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that this would be the last meeting that the Director of Strategic Communications would be attending. He stated that he wished to place on record his appreciation to her for her commitment and hard work on behalf of the residents of Manchester.

Decisions

The Committee: -

1. Note the report.
2. Recommend that the City Solicitor circulates the number of reportable breaches that had been reported to the Information Commissioner's Office;
3. Notes that the resignation of the Director of Strategic Communications and thank her for her commitment and hard work over the years.

RGS/19/72 Setting of the Council Tax base and Business Rates shares for budget setting purposes

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that advised on the methodology of calculating the City Council's Council Tax base for tax setting purposes and Business Rates income for budget setting purposes for the 2020/21 financial year, together with the timing of related payments and the decision on business rates pool membership. The Chair of the Committee would be requested to exempt various key decisions from call in.

Decisions

The Committee: -

1. Note that the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources, has delegated powers to:
 - Set the Council Tax base for tax setting purposes in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2013;
 - Calculate the Business Rates income for budget setting purposes in accordance with the Non-Domestic Rating (Rates Retention) Regulations;
 - Agree the estimated council tax surplus or deficit for 2019/20;
 - Agree the estimated business rates surplus or deficit for 2019/20;
 - Determine whether the Council should be part of a business rate pooling arrangements with other local authorities;
 - Set the dates of precept payments to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.
2. Note that the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee will be requested to exempt various key decisions from the call in procedures.

RGS/19/73 Overview Report

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

Decision

The Committee notes the report.