

Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2020

This Scrutiny meeting was conducted via Zoom, in accordance with the provisions of the The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Present:

Councillor Hacking - In the Chair
Councillors Andrews, Chambers, M Dar, Doswell, Douglas, Grimshaw, Hitchen, Kirkpatrick, Rawlins and Rawson

Also present:

Councillor Craig, Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing
Councillor N Murphy, Deputy Leader
Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure

CESC/20/22 Councillor Sue Murphy

The Chair paid tribute to Councillor Sue Murphy, who had recently passed away, and the Committee paused to reflect on her life.

CESC/20/23 Minutes

Councillor Doswell requested that her apologies be recorded in the minutes for the 5 March meeting, to which the Chair agreed.

Decisions

1. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2020 as a correct record, subject to the above amendment.
2. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2020 as a correct record.

CESC/20/24 COVID-19 - Update

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which provided a brief summary of the current situation in the city in relation to COVID-19 and an update on the work progressing in Manchester in relation to areas within the Committee's remit.

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report which included:

- Public health;
- Financial impact on the Council;
- Response and planning ahead for the recovery;
- The reset of the Our Manchester Strategy;

- Support to residents who were at risk during the pandemic;
- Update on the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector;
- Community safety;
- Parks, Leisure and Events;
- Libraries, Galleries and Culture; and
- Equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Chair thanked Council staff, partner organisations, charities and community groups for their work during this difficult time. The three Executive Members in attendance highlighted the work in their areas including the establishment of the Manchester Community Response Hub to support vulnerable residents with COVID-19 related issues, the work to enable emergency food provision from New Smithfield Market and the work of other teams across the Council, including the Anti-Social Behaviour Team, Cemeteries and Parks and thanked the officers involved. A Member also highlighted the work of the faith sector during this time and another Member praised the role of the We Love Manchester charity and Forever Manchester.

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

- To recognise that Manchester had led the way in testing people leaving hospital and going into care homes;
- That those accessing support and emergency food provision included people who needed help because they were shielding for medical reasons but also people experiencing food poverty, who could require longer term support from other services;
- Concern about what would happen if there was a second wave of the virus and the financial implications for the Council;
- Digital exclusion, including how the Council was communicating with people who did not have internet access;
- Challenges for the VCSE sector, including additional costs such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), additional cleaning, hand sanitisers and signage and volunteers who were medically vulnerable and might not want to return to their volunteering roles due to the risk of infection;
- The Council and Greater Manchester Police (GMP)'s strategy for dealing with breaches of lockdown;
- Plans to re-open libraries and Manchester Art Gallery;
- The temporary closure of leisure centres, including the financial implications of this;
- The letter sent to the Secretary of State raising issues about the recovery of the culture sector in Manchester; and
- The race review of the Council's workforce.

The Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing confirmed that the level of infections was being closely tracked and that planning was taking place for a range of scenarios, including a second wave or ebbs and flows in virus transmission. She emphasised the financial consequences the Council was facing due to the pandemic and the importance of the national government providing the promised funding to local councils. She recognised that the people accessing emergency food provision

included different groups with different needs and reported that officers were ringing people in receipt of this to find out the reasons they were accessing it and to refer them to appropriate support. She advised the Committee that discussions were taking place with a range of partners about how to support those experiencing financial hardship and food poverty and that more information could be provided at a later date as this progressed. The Head of Neighbourhoods reported that a working group had been established to progress this.

The Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing advised Members that the Council had recognised that some of the people who were vulnerable to COVID-19 might not have internet access and so had written to people and introduced the Community Response Hub telephone helpline. She reported that the Test and Trace service would also contact people who might have been exposed to the virus by telephone or letter. The Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure reported that some face-to-face services could not be offered during lockdown but that, as the Council moved into the recovery period, services would again become accessible through a range of methods. He suggested that the Committee might want to look at digital exclusion at a future meeting, noting that it related to all Council services, not just Leisure Services and Libraries.

The Programme Lead (Our Manchester Funds) reported that there were many volunteers who were older and at greater risk from COVID-19 but there had also been a lot of students and other people who had offered to volunteer. He advised that the challenge was to organise this and match people wanting to volunteer with volunteering opportunities, utilising the Volunteer Centre and MCRVIP (Manchester Volunteer Inspire Programme). He reported that some organisations had managed to obtain small emergency grants to help cover the additional costs related to COVID-19 and that the option of bulk-buying PPE for distribution to VCSE organisations was being looked into. He also informed the Committee that Macc, the organisation that was delivering the VCSE infrastructure contract, was providing support and guidance to VCSE groups across the city.

The Head of Neighbourhoods reported that the Council's Neighbourhood Teams had been contacting local voluntary and community groups to get an understanding of the challenges they were experiencing and that, while financial challenges had been the main issue which had arisen initially, there were also concerns that some medically vulnerable volunteers would not want to continue volunteering and officers were looking at how MCRVIP could help to fill those gaps.

The Deputy Leader reported that GMP's response to breaches of lockdown varied depending on the circumstances of the case, advising Members that GMP had finite resources which needed to be deployed effectively, while not exacerbating a situation.

The Head of Libraries, Galleries and Culture reported that national guidance for museums and galleries had just been released and that the service was planning for a safe, controlled re-opening of Manchester Art Gallery in mid-August, with a one-way system in place. He reported that, following discussions with the trade unions and the Health and Safety Team, some libraries would be re-opening on the 4 July 2020 as the start of a phased re-opening of libraries across the city; however, he advised that they would not be returning to their normal operation, although people

would be able to borrow books and use the computers. A Member who was also the Lead Member for Disability advised that it was important to ensure that any new ways of operating, such as one way systems, were accessible for all customers and that she was happy to be involved in work on this.

The Head of Parks, Leisure, Youth and Events reported that leisure operators across the country were reliant on income from customers to meet their costs and, during lockdown, were seeking financial support from the local authority to cover their fixed costs, noting that Manchester had been providing this financial support to its leisure operator, GLL. He informed Members that the Council had been working closely with Sport England, UK Active and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that councils were reimbursed this money and that there was ongoing financial support for leisure providers during the recovery phase.

The Chair informed the Committee that discussions had been taking place about scrutiny of the race review of the Council's workforce and which Committee should consider this and that he would pursue this further outside of the meeting.

Decisions

1. To request further information on MCRVIP in a future report at an appropriate time, including inviting people who had participated in the programme to attend.
2. To request that a copy of the letter sent to the Secretary of State raising issues about the recovery of the culture sector in Manchester be circulated to Members of the Committee and that any response also be circulated.
3. To note that the Chair will discuss outside of the meeting how the race review of the Council's workforce will be scrutinised.

[Councillor Hitchen declared a personal interest as a trustee of the We Love Manchester charity.]

CESC/20/25 Overview Report

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

The Chair requested an update on the proposed Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) around an abortion-providing clinic. The City Solicitor advised that she would send an email to the Members of the Committee once she had more information.

Decisions

1. To note the report.

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2. To request that the City Solicitor provide Members with an update on the proposed PSPO around an abortion-providing clinic.