

Draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework January 2019: response to consultation

This response can be published

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on behalf of GMCVO, the VCSE support and development organisation covering the GM city region. It makes some brief key points about process and the overall Framework, and further brief comments on the 'GM for all' section.

In addition we endorse the comments made by VCSE organisations at the workshop on 7th February 2019.

1. Process

- 1.1. We very much welcome the long timescale and iterative process that has been put in place for consultation with partners and the public. The sheer volume of paperwork and commentary; the breadth of topics covered by the framework; the overlaps / connections into many other GM and local plans; and the additional complexity (important though it is) of ten locality plans brought together into a city-region plan – make this consultation intrinsically inaccessible.
- 1.2. VCSE colleagues who attended the workshop on 7th February found the presentation and the opportunity for dialogue with people responsible for drafting the plan to be extremely helpful, and this has enabled some initial reactions and reflections from a broad sample of leaders from our sector to be put forward. We hope this has illustrated the value of consulting more actively with the whole range of leadership within the VCSE sector.
- 1.3. The VCSE sector in Greater Manchester comprises almost 15,000 citizen-led organisations, and is active across all areas of the economy, public service and campaigning <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/greater-manchester-state-vcse-sector-2017> It connects with hundreds and thousands of GM residents. We would like to emphasise the value of collaboration with citizen-led organisations during the next phase of consultation.
 - 1.3.1. On a local level, aspects of the Framework are likely to remain controversial. But if citizens are also able to gain an understanding of the big strategic objectives of the plan and the benefits it is intended to bring to their families and communities, and to see how locality and neighbourhood proposals contribute to this, they will be more likely to engage, contribute and support its development and implementation. Some distribution of quality information can and should be done using existing VCSE communications channels; but there is of course a cost to meaningful consultation.
 - 1.3.2. As an illustration, the distribution of good information and thorough consultation through the VCSE sector on 'Taking Charge' was (and continues to be) hugely

successful in raising awareness of the implications of health and care devolution, and in creating buy-in to a major reorganisation.

2. Overall Framework

- 2.1. As an organisation with a mission to reduce economic, social and political inequalities in Greater Manchester, we very much welcome the emphasis on housing, jobs and environment, which are key drivers of inclusion; the principle of sustainable development; the consideration of social infrastructure within the Framework; and the aspiration to a 'Greater Manchester for everyone'
- 2.2. Some comments are made below on these last points (social infrastructure and GM for everyone) but generally we think these areas do need quite a lot more work, to which GMCVO and others from our sector would like to contribute.
- 2.3. It would be helpful to see a piece of work looking at how all the GM strategies fit together, and how the Framework underpins them all. The Framework will make or break the successful implementation of health, care and public service reform; and place-based approaches to social and economic inclusion: just as much as it will shape 'hard' factors like housing, transport and green space.
- 2.4. The Framework perhaps needs to bear in mind more clearly:
 - 2.4.1. the increasingly flexible nature of work and jobs (possibly requiring a stronger emphasis on digital inclusion than on commuting);
 - 2.4.2. the potential of future as opposed to current growth sectors (these may be emergent but not as yet making any major contribution to GVA);
 - 2.4.3. the role of the social economy and social enterprise in creating a more inclusive economy within places;
 - 2.4.4. and the need for low-paid, low-skilled but stable, ethical jobs near to people's homes.
- 2.5. We can appreciate the difficulty of 'future proofing', especially in the context of current uncertainties. However the Framework does seem to reflect the economy as it is now, rather than the 'inclusive growth' aspired to in the GM Strategy, and the recommendations of the Independent Prosperity Review. There needs to be flexibility in the Framework to alter plans as the Strategy is implemented and in the light of new understanding.

3. A Greater Manchester for everyone

- 3.1. This ambition is well articulated in most GM strategies, including the Framework. However the thinking about inclusion, resilience and place seems as yet undeveloped.
- 3.2. We were challenged at the workshop to provide evidence for what social and community infrastructure is required to address this. In addition to the expertise by experience to be found within our sector, which I would argue is of value in its own right, there is certainly published research and evidence touching on many aspects of this, including: what needs to be in place to ensure a community is resilient to both stresses and shocks; the benefits of community ownership of capital assets; the role of community anchors in creating and making visible bonding and bridging social capital; the importance of place-based social and community enterprise in enabling disadvantaged citizens to work. A full review of relevant literature should be carried out to inform the next iteration of the Framework. This is a significant piece of work, but it would enable much more informed thinking about what neighbourhoods and towns might look like in future.
- 3.3. We would suggest that all planning decisions should include a community impact assessment and an equality impact assessment. Sometimes changes that appear to

developers or planners to be harmless or beneficial can have unintended consequences for people; and people who live in a place may have suggestions nobody else has thought of.

- 3.4. Could a community infrastructure levy be used to enable more devolution of decision-making to neighbourhoods? Or to provide community capital to purchase community-owned assets?
- 3.5. Much of the 'reform' we need to see alongside 'growth' depends on large scale behaviour change in the population. The behaviour of individual people is shaped by the environment around us and the options we have or perceive we have. Good social infrastructure can go a long way towards enabling and encouraging people to live healthy, productive lives with reduced need for state support. Good planning and design can also facilitate community cohesion.
- 3.6. With regard to what is needed from 'social and community infrastructure', it is possible to see some common threads and themes across a range of GMCVO research / VCSE-led consultations such as Taking Charge Together; social isolation and 'age-friendly' neighbourhoods; resilient communities; community hubs and 'third spaces'; hidden young people; the needs of disabled people, people living with dementia, neuro-atypical people and others: that provide a baseline from which to start:
 - 3.6.1. 'Third spaces' are vital to a resilient inclusive community. These are places and spaces within a community which are neither private, commercial nor workplaces, where a real cross-section of citizens will congregate and where informal interaction can create new networks and bridging social capital.
 - 3.6.2. To enable quality of life and wellbeing, better health and economic participation, people require easy access to a range of facilities close to where they live. This includes:
 - Decent, affordable housing with security of tenure
 - Opportunities to work within the home or close by within the community as well as an affordable and accessible means of commuting. There are good reasons why many people cannot travel far to work
 - Access to green spaces, play spaces and leisure facilities that people can be and feel safe in reaching and using
 - Access to affordable fresh food
 - Opportunities for personal enrichment through learning, culture, communal activities etc
 - An environment which is easily navigable and appears welcoming, including for example to people who are less mobile, people with children, people with dementia, people who are neuro-atypical.
 - 3.6.3. The number, density and connectivity of voluntary and community groups and facilities within a place is a factor in the cohesiveness and resilience of a community. Critical mass is much less likely to be achieved in more deprived neighbourhoods, but can be fostered and maintained through good quality VCSE membership organisations and networking community anchors (otherwise known as 'local infrastructure organisations')
 - 3.6.4. Whilst the emphasis on 'place' and its definition as relatively small, recognisable geographies is a most welcome aspect of public service reform, it is vital not to forget the importance of communities of identity and experience, which may be the primary community for many people from minority groups and an important secondary one for others. Our experience in particular through Ambition for Ageing shows that a 'diversity blind' approach to community development does nothing to mitigate inequalities or enable inclusion; there is a need actively to seek out individuals and groups who are visible or hidden minorities in a place, understand the specific barriers they face and act accordingly.

3.7. With regard to housing, we recognise and welcome that this is already considered a major issue within the Framework. Affordability, decent quality and secure tenure are only the baseline.

3.7.1. Ideally all housing developments should be mixed tenure, allowing people from different backgrounds and classes to mix as neighbours, thus reducing potential tensions and enabling bonding social capital.

3.7.2. Within a locality the accommodation available should reflect the life course transition those communities go through. It should be possible to change and adapt individual properties and whole estates easily to cater for transitions in life. This would avoid people having to move or leave their local community, severing bonds that may be essential to them personally and important to their wider community.

3.8. The importance of social enterprise, community businesses and community-owned assets is recognised in the GM Strategy, the Independent Prosperity Review and the draft Local Industrial Strategy. There is clear evidence (as referenced in the GM Social Enterprise Vision) of the potential for these kinds of social business models to operate in places and with people who are not included in mainstream growth and to create more inclusive economic growth from the bottom up. Greater Manchester has made a commitment to support the development of this sector. If this is to succeed practically, there needs to be provision within the Spatial Framework.

3.8.1. We would like to see spaces identified within communities for the growth of emergent social sectors (as identified in the SE Vision). This would include spaces for very small scale growing and making, space for start-ups to be incubated and wide access to broadband.

3.8.2. Could land be ring fenced to reflect that agenda. Could we create 'community business zones' or 'social enterprise zones'?

3.8.3. Buildings and spaces identified as existing local hubs for social enterprise should be protected for this purpose.

3.8.4. Consideration should be given to repurposing existing capital assets for community ownership

3.9. Social value should be a key thread in the Framework. This is not just about procurement and contractual obligations though these are important. All land use can offer increased social value if this is considered at the beginning (rather than trying to retrofit at procurement stage), and the process of doing so, in consultation with the community, can itself create social value in the form of increased political inclusion.

3.10. With reference to the discussion paper on social infrastructure – we would therefore argue that social infrastructure is much more than health, care and education services.

3.11. Finally, we would note the need for thinking about social and community needs alongside environmental needs. Good social infrastructure can help towards lower carbon, environmental diversity and a greener city – and vice versa. We would like to see some really ambitious GM targets for our environment. GM includes around 25% rural / semi-rural land, many other urban green spaces, and is thickly wooded – this gives us a head start. It is also very encouraging to see explicit commitments to no fracking and to cleaner air. We would like to go much further with a whole range of environment / community initiatives, such as generating green energy at scale, more roads closed to cars, electric car hook ups, better control of pollutants, pesticides and other chemicals, more community orchards and allotments, farmers markets, forest schools, and active conservation activity in urban greenspaces – to mention only a few examples.