



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)

Councillor Batool
Councillor Joshi

Councillor Porter
Councillor Westley

Also present:

Sir Peter Soulsby

City Mayor

Alretaj Al-Showali
Dena Al-Showali
Henry Zawadzki

Youth Representative
Youth Representative
Youth Representative

* * * * *

58. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Gee, Halford, and Pantling.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to disclose any pecuniary or other interests they may have in the business on the agenda.

Councillor Joshi declared under the review report from Adult Social Care that his wife worked for the Reablement Service.

60. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced that the questions for the City Mayor item would be taken out of order, directly following the cost-of-living crisis update.

61. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

62. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Chair noted that Commission Members had received a note detailing the progress on actions agreed at the last meeting.

63. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations and statements of case had been submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

64. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

65. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which provided an update on the status of outstanding petitions against the Council's target of providing a formal response within three months of being referred to the Divisional Director.

AGREED:

That the status of the outstanding petitions be noted, and to remove those petitions marked 'Petition Complete' Ref: from the report.

66. COST OF LIVING CRISIS UPDATE

The Director of Public Health gave a presentation on the Council's response to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. It was noted that:

- A major area of focus was on emergency food provision. As part of this work the need for infant formula had come up, so work had been done to ensure that food banks had supplies of infant formula when needed.
- There was also a focus on the warm welcome offer, this was available at all 16 city libraries and other venues. A number of programmes were available as a part of this offer were available including cooking seminars.
- The Better Off Leicester website provided tools and advice to help save money.
- The Council was coordinating with the NHS and universities on this crisis.
- A Leicester-specific energy advice service was in the process of being launched. The Council was coordinating with the national Energy Advice

Service on this.

- A dashboard had been created to examine the impact of the crisis. The dashboard showed that the biggest price increases were in energy and food, and that money was being cut back on transport.
- The dashboard also showed that BAME communities were the most impacted by the crisis, single mothers were hard hit. Families with and without children were struggling.
- Friends of the Earth had identified a number of energy crisis hotspots in the city.
- The Bank of England had just raised interest rates by another 5%.

In response to questions raised by Members and Youth Representatives, it was noted that:

- There was a food programme for the school holidays, those in need of this could contact the schools and the schools could make referrals. This was provided in collaboration with local business. A number of schools were running food banks.
- Support for those with no recourse to public funds was limited, however this was not cause for someone to be turned away from a food bank.
- Housing Officers were working to support those refugees in Leicester who had financial struggles.
- Food banks were individual organisations so therefore had their own policies on eligibility. Food banks had asked the Council not to widely publicise them in order to not overly increase demand. Food banks did work with Ward Councillors, so Councillors could make referrals.
- Activities at warm hub events were being delivered in collaboration with the Adult Learning Officers.
- The Better Off Leicester website was intended to help people who were 'just about managing' to find savings and find out which support they were eligible for. There were a number of support pots which were underused due to not being widely known about.
- The Foodshare Service helped distribute unused food from shops and restaurants.
- There was funding available from Government to help with improving energy efficiency in homes.
- Building regulations on energy efficiency would not be applied retrospectively. It was expected that many of the new houses being built in the city would meet any new energy efficiency certificates.

AGREED:

1. That the Committee requests that Members be informed of how Government support to improve energy efficiency in homes is being publicised by the Council.
2. That the Committee requests that Members be informed of how new homes being built in the city will meet current and future energy efficiency requirements.
3. That the Committee requests that Members be informed of information

of employment rates in the areas of greatest deprivation in the city.

67. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The Chair asked the City Mayor what the extent of Strep A was in Leicester, given the recent high number of cases nationally, and what was being done to raise awareness of the condition.

The Director of Public Health responded to the question, noting that there had been no notification of any cases in the city. It was noted that it was likely that due to the Covid lockdowns of previous years, people's immune systems were weaker due to the lack of social mixing, explaining the recent uptick in Strep A. It was noted that these cases were well publicised by the NHS and national media, therefore awareness was high. Parents were encouraged not to panic regarding the situation.

Councillor Batool asked the City Mayor what was being done to raise awareness of the dangers of ice after an incident in Solihull. The City Mayor noted that the Council was giving advice on these dangers to younger people and putting up signage around lakes.

There was debate around whether or not questions to the City Mayor needed to be submitted in advance or could be asked without notice at the meeting. The Chair requested that Officers clarify the rules around this for the next meeting.

The Chair permitted Councillor Porter to ask a question. Councillor Porter asked the City Mayor that if he were successful in being re-elected in May 2023, whether or not it would be his final term in office. The City Mayor stated that although he did not intend to go on in the job forever, he would not yet be announcing his retirement date.

AGREED:

That the Committee requests that Officers clarify the position regarding the need to submit questions for the City Mayor in advance of the meeting.

68. CENSUS AND LEICESTER HOUSEHOLD SURVEY REPORT

The Director of Delivery, Communications, and Political Governance submitted a report to provide the Committee with an overview of the results of the 2021 Census in Leicester and the Leicester Household Survey 2021.

The City Mayor presented the item, noting that the Leicester Household Survey was conducted in late 2021 with the intention to fill in the gaps of the data from the Census, with a particular focus on the availability of technology and financial circumstances. Council Services would be asked to consider how the findings of the Survey could be used to improve Services.

The Corporate Data Consultant presented the item, it was noted that:

- The combination of data from the Census and the Household Survey provided a comprehensive picture of the people of Leicester.
- Data from the Census and Survey would inform the work of Council Services for the next 10 years.
- The National Census was taken every 10 years, data from the 2021 Census was being released in phases. More in-depth analysis would be possible once further data was released in Spring 2023. All data from the Household Survey was available now.
- The Survey findings were presented in a headline findings report and a more detailed breakdown was possible on the Open Data platform.
- The Census determined Leicester's population to be 368,000, an 11.8% increase, this was a larger increase than the national average and most comparable cities. 41% of Leicester residents were born outside of the UK, with a large increase in the levels of migration from Europe.
- The Survey found that 95% of Leicester households had access to the internet, however there were many more who struggled with using the internet for certain tasks.

In response to questions from Members and Youth Representatives, it was noted that:

- The Survey was mostly focused on financial circumstances and other adult-focused issues, which was way under-18s were not asked to fill in the survey. There had recently been a children's survey which was focused on the issues impacting young people. Data on that survey would be available in the following months
- Due to the delay in the release of data from the Census, Census results were not a 100% up to date picture, particularly in relation to travel to work data which would have changed following the lifting of Covid restrictions. However Census results were some of the highest quality information available on topics such as ethnicity.
- The Council would be making the case to Government for more funding based on the increased population and diversity in Leicester shown in the Census results.
- Those conducting the Survey were upfront about the nature and purpose of the Survey. Those conducting in-person surveys were drawn from the communities they were surveying.
- 3.3k people responded to the survey and were a representative sample. This was a good response level.
- Council Tax was included in questions about hierarchy of bills, there was not a question about Council Tax directly, but the burden of utility bills was asked about in question 27.
- The Council supported the Armed Forces Covenant, which aimed to remove disadvantages for armed service personnel past and present.
- Those who struggled to use technology could access Council Services at the Customer Service Centre. However, due to a lack of demand the

Centre was only open 2 days a week. The opening hours for the Centre were under constant consideration. The majority of demand in Customer Services was in phone calls.

- Ward level data was available for the Census but not for the Survey.

Councillor Porter raised concerns about the burden of Council Tax not being asked about in the Survey and noted the increases in Council Tax in recent years. The City Mayor responded to this by stating that Council Tax was a burden in all parts of the country and was not impacted by political control.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the report.

69. HAYMARKET SHOPPING CENTRE UPDATE

The Director of Estates and Building Services submitted a presentation on the current position Haymarket Shopping Centre, which was purchased by the Council in November 2021.

The City Mayor introduced the item, noting that it had been a year since the purchase and that the success of the Centre was important for the Revenue Budget.

The Director of Estates and Building Services presented the item, it was noted that:

- At the time of purchase, the target net revenue to the Council per annum was £1m.
- Before the purchase the Council had 6 existing tenancies in the Centre.
- Footfall in the Centre was up to pre-Covid levels, market valuation was up by £3m. Occupancy rate was now 81% and with upcoming newcomers would be 88%. Rent arrears had reduced by 35%.
- Since the purchase 5 lease renewals had been completed, representing £206k per annum rental income.
- Next steps included completing key new lettings, delivering service charge savings, and agreeing a short-term strategy.

In response to questions from Members and Youth Representatives it was noted that:

- There was data on users of the Centre by demography.
- The central areas of the Centre were being considered for use for targeted events. Younger people were invited to suggest ideas for targeted events for young people.
- High Street shopping seemed to be moving to an experience focus to differentiate from online shopping.
- It was difficult to compare income to previous years due to the upcoming investment into the Centre which would be much greater than previous

levels of investment into the Centre.

- Improving the facilities in the Centre was a key to increasing the performance of the Centre.
- There was a team who worked on the arrears for the tenants in the Centre. There was an approach to working with the occupiers on this rather than being overly punitive.
- A large empty unit on the 1st floor was an area of focus.
- The Metrobank and TK Max units were owned by another Council.
- The Travelodge sub-lease did not change any of the income received by the Council from the property.
- The increase in valuation since the purchase could be credited to the positive changes in the market since the purchase. It was anticipated that valuation would hold steady in 2023 but that in the long run it would increase.
- Maintenance had taken place on void units, this alongside increased energy bills and staff costs accounted for the increase in service costs. Considerations of efficiency savings would be ongoing through 2023.
- There was a net profit of £1m but a lot of that could be reinvested into the Centre. Therefore, the calculation of the benefit to the general fund was more difficult.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the update.

70. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2022/23

The Director of Finance submitted the second report for the monitoring cycle for 2022/23.

The Director of Finance presented the item, it was noted that this report was in-line with the previous report. Overspend had increased to £14m, this was due to increased running costs and the pay award being higher than budgeted. Additional cost pressures were in children's placements. Increased interest rates offset the shortfall.

In response to questions from Members it was noted that:

- Reductions in grants to arts funding were for the Curve and Phoenix, this was offset additional by Capital investment provided.
- The majority of buildings that were lit at night-time were at the owners expense.
- Costs in providing taxis for SEND children were going up on a national level.
- There were a number of compensation claims going through related to disrepair claims, this was putting additional pressure on the HRA.
- The Council paid self-insurance for fire damage and this fell under the HRA.

- The number of voids was just above the national average, this was due to a staffing shortage and contractors were being used to address the backlog.
- The underspend in ASC would go into reserves.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the report.

71. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING APRIL- SEPTEMBER 2022/23

The Director of Finance submitted a report to show the position of the capital programme at the end of September 2022 (Period 6).

The Director of Finance presented the report, it was noted that decisions that were proposed in the report related to a transfer of £290k into the HRA, an addition of £639k for green homes funded by a Government grant, and £100k for new school places for New Parks House.

In response to a Member question it was noted that funding for the LMAG redevelopment was partially from Arts Council England.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the update.

72. INCOME COLLECTION APRIL 2022 - SEPTEMBER 2022

The Director of Finance submitted a report which detailed progress made in collecting debts raised by the Council during the first six months of 2022-23, together with debts outstanding and brought forward from the previous year. It also set out details of debts written off under delegated authority that it was not possible to collect after reasonable effort and expense.

The Director of Finance presented the item, noting that business rates were back at near pre-Covid levels. There was a slight drop in Council Tax collection but this was not deemed to be significant. It was felt that the impact of the cost-of-living crisis had not yet been felt in income collection.

Councillor Westley paid tribute to the Housing Income team for their work collecting rent and keeping the HRA from falling into further crisis. The City Mayor endorsed this statement.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the report.

73. MID-YEAR REVIEW OF TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2022/23

The Director of Finance submitted a report which reviewed how the Council conducted its borrowing and investments during the first six months of 2022/23.

The Director of Finance presented the item, noting that interest rates had

increased by 0.5% since the report was written.

In response to a Member question it was noted that loans from the Public Works Loans Board were on fixed rates. Any repayment opportunity would be considered.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the report.

74. 'THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK PEOPLE WORKING IN HEALTH SERVICES IN LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE' - A REVIEW OF THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

The Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission submitted a report on its review into the experience of black people working in health services in Leicester and Leicestershire.

The Chair noted that the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission was not present to present the report. The Chair praised the detail of the report.

AGREED:

1. That the Committee notes and endorses the findings of the report.
2. That the Committee requests that a response report to the findings be taken to a future meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission.

75. 'UNDERSTANDING THE INCREASING COST OF CARE PACKAGES WITHIN ADULT SOCIAL CARE BUDGETARY PRESSURES' - A REVIEW REPORT OF THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

The Chair of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission submitted a report on its review into the increasing cost of care packages within adult social care budgetary pressures.

Councillor March, the Chair of the review, was present to present the report. It was noted that there had been concern about a £19m increase in the ASC budget therefore a review was held. Councillor March thanked the other Members of the review and the Scrutiny Policy Officer.

The City Mayor welcomed the report and stated he would take the recommendations seriously.

Other Committee Members welcomed the report.

AGREED:

1. That the Committee notes and welcomes the findings and recommendations of the report.
2. That the Committee requests that a response report of the

findings be taken to a future meeting of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission.

76. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme for the Committee was noted.

77. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair wished everyone a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 8.34pm.