



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor Gee (Vice Chair)

Councillor Halford
Councillor Joshi

Councillor Thalukdar

Councillor Pantling
Councillor Porter

Also present:

Sir Peter Soulsby
Councillor Clair
Councillor Russell
Councillor Myers

City Mayor
Deputy City Mayor
Deputy City Mayor
Assistant City Mayor

Dena Al-Showali
Henry Zawadzki

Youth Representative
Youth Representative

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42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Batool, Joel, and Westley.

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Porter declared an interest in the Draft Local Plan Consultation Feedback that he had submitted objections on behalf of local residents, and also submitted his own objections during consultation on the plan.

44. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair paid tribute to former Councillor and Lord Mayor Barbara Chambers, who had recently passed away. The Chair noted her nearly 30 years as a

Councillor and her work raising money for charity during her time as Lord Mayor.

45. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 8 September and 27 September 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

46. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Chair noted that a document had been circulated to Members detailing the progress on actions agreed at the last 2 meetings.

47. 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.

48. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

49. 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.

It was noted that the two petitions marked in red would be completed by the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Porter asked whether the petition regarding pesticides also covered herbicides.

AGREED:

1. That the Committee notes the current status of outstanding petitions.
2. That Officers inform Councillor Porter as to whether herbicides are also covered in the petition regarding pesticides.

50. MARKET REDEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Chair noted that this presentation had been brought to the Committee at the request of Members when dealing with the call-in for the purchase of 22 Market Place. Members had wanted to see the wider vision for the market area.

The Director of Tourism, Culture, and Inward Investment submitted a presentation outlining the proposals for the redevelopment of Leicester Outdoor Market.

The City Mayor introduced the item, explaining the long history of the market and noting that it was now in a poor state and suffered from issues of anti-social behaviour and therefore was in need of redevelopment.

The Director of Tourism, Culture, and Inward Investment presented the item, it was noted that:

- There had been numerous projects to improve the wider market in the last decade, including the construction of the food hall and the creation of Green Dragon Square. The food hall was an award winning building which provided a quality offer, however the outdoor market now looked poor in comparison.
- Changing shopping trends were causing issues for markets across the country. However, other markets across the country were receiving significant investment, intending to reverse the decline in those markets.
- Following Covid a number of traders had left the market and there had been a struggle to get them back.
- It was hoped that the redevelopment could design out anti-social behaviour and create an environment to attract new traders and customers.
- The proposed redevelopment was divided into 3 zones.
- In Zone A the existing roof would be removed and the focus would be on improving the view of the market from Gallowtree Gate. This would also create a space for temporary and specialist markets.
- The Café would be relocated to a new position by Dolphin Square and include outside seating to create an early evening offer.
- Zone B would be the core market space, containing the fruit and veg offer. A new roof with solar panels would be built with better natural lighting. All pillars would be removed from the space. A secure perimeter would design out after-hours anti-social behaviour.
- Zone C would create new, flexible free-standing units and create views of the market to Cheapside. Waste management facilities would be relocated and enclosed so that they were no longer visible in this area.
- To enable the redevelopment process, a temporary market would be setup at Green Dragon Square.
- Existing traders were largely positive about the proposed redevelopment. There were concerns about the temporary market and the rent for the new units.
- The next steps included securing Planning permission for the temporary market and issuing a decision report to draw down capital funds.
- The aim was to have the temporary market operational by May 2023 and have the new scheme fully operational by the end of summer 2024.
- The total capital cost was estimated at £8.5m, though some elements including material choices were still being discussed.
- Revenue forecasts assumed that pre-Covid occupancy levels would

return.

In response to questions from Members and youth representatives it was noted that:

- The efforts to design-out ASB included lighting the new building in such a way that it was attractive even at night.
- It was hoped that specialist markets could be used to attract a wider range of customers as they had been previously used to specifically target younger people. It was also hoped that live music could be introduced at times to help create an attractive atmosphere.
- Occupancy levels were currently 30-40%, pre-Covid they were 65-70%, it was hoped that pre-covid levels of occupancy could be achieved.
- The temporary market would be large enough to incorporate all the current traders.
- The City Council took extensive work to help those with street lifestyles, working with voluntary organisations. This included those who stayed around the market area.
- There was optimism that this work would bring the budget into surplus.
- The primary focus of this redevelopment was to improve the offer for the city centre.
- There was an intention to bring in craft stalls and also include local produce.
- It was hoped that city residents would serve as traders but the main priority was delivering a quality product.
- There were plans to install Heritage Panels at the redeveloped site exploring the history of the market.

Councillor Porter raised concerns about spending £8m on this scheme, noting that previous efforts to improve the market area had failed and suggesting this was another piecemeal effort. He noted that market traders had suggested to him that allowing 30 minutes free parking would improve usage of the market, lowering the stall rents was also suggested to lower the barrier for traders. He expressed doubts that the redevelopment would bring affluent customers to the market and asked to see the evidence for this from the consultation. He asked why the wider vision for the area including the demolition of 22 Market Place was not included in the presentation. He also suggested that there needed to be a wider strategy to anti-social behaviour and street lifestyles in the area other than designing out the issue.

The City Mayor responded to Councillor Porter's points, noting the success of the Food Hall which had a universal appeal. He argued that combining the separate efforts to improve the area would have a transformational effect on the area. He also noted that the upcoming Hop! bus service would include a stop yards away from the market, improving access to the market. Other Members of the Commission were supportive of the proposals and looked forward to seeing them implemented.

The Chair suggested that a report on anti-social behaviour and street lifestyles

in the market area could be brought to a Scrutiny Commission.

The Chair expressed support for the proposals and stated that he looked forward to seeing the completed development. All Members agreed with this except for Councillor Porter who put on record his opposition to the proposals.

AGREED:

1. That the Committee notes the update.
2. That the Committee recommends that a report on anti-social behaviour and street lifestyles in the market area be brought to a relevant Scrutiny Commission.

51. CORPORATE ESTATE ANNUAL REPORT

The Strategic Director of City Development and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out the performance of the Council's Corporate Estate for the year ending 31 March 2022.

The City Mayor introduced the item, noting that the Corporate Estate was largely focused within the city itself and generated important revenue for the Council as well as often helping to serve regeneration in the city.

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

- The portfolio value of the Estate had increased by £11m, this was mainly due to the purchase of the Haymarket Shopping Centre.
- Retail holdings represented a quarter of the Estate, much higher than most other property portfolios.
- Estate occupancy was currently at 95%, down from previous years but still very healthy. The turnover in managed workspaces following the pandemic was largely responsible for this change in occupancy levels. There was also a reduced demand for parking spaces.
- It was typically lower value spaces going void meaning that there was a limited impact on the portfolio income.
- The increase in running costs was proportionate to the increase in portfolio size.
- Gross income had increased by 11.4% and net income had increased by 9.6%.
- Voids represented under £100k in lost revenue.
- The revenue from Haymarket Shopping Centre had been impacted by shortfalls in service charges due to inherited voids.
- The smaller managed workspaces were in strong demand and supported small businesses.
- Rents were aligned to the market with industrial units, but lower with retail units.
- All spaces met energy efficiency standards and further work would go

into improving energy efficiency.

- The Estate represented 2.03% of the Council's overall net revenue budget so was a low risk investment.

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

- Revenue from the Estate went towards supporting Council Services.
- The Council's Neighbourhood Services buildings and schools were not part of the Estate. There were properties in the portfolio which supported education such as the Leicester Castle which was currently rented out by DMU, and the Centre for Fun and Families also rented out space.
- If traders were struggling then the Council would consider measures to support them.
- Wygston's House was a part of the Estate and the King Richard III Centre was partly in the Estate. Officers would check whether or not the rent prices could be disclosed.
- Asset value was considered to be of less importance than the profitability of the portfolio as there was no intention of selling any assets.
- It was hoped that when markets picked up that occupancy would go back to previous levels.
- Employers still wanted presences in city centre offices, meaning that there was still a demand for office space. However the nature of that space could change with more people working from home.
- Options were being considered around the possibility of bringing the Council office buildings that the Council was vacating into the Estate.

The Chair requested that a training session be set up for Members around the Corporate Estate.

AGREED:

1. That the current performance of the Corporate Estate be noted and that a briefing session be set up for all Members on the Corporate Estate.
2. That Officers check whether or not rent fees for the Corporate Estate could be disclosed.

52. COST OF LIVING CRISIS PRESENTATION

The Director of Public Health submitted a presentation updating the Committee on the Council's response to the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The Director of Public Health and the Deputy Director of Finance presented the item, it was noted that:

- This was a follow-on update following a previous All-Member Briefing on the issue.
- Consumer prices continued to rise at a dramatic rate, particularly

impacting on food and energy prices. Due to the national economic climate, there was uncertainty on what Government interventions would be taking place going forward.

- It was estimated that in Leicester, 40% of the population were earning less than £20k a year, which was the group being hardest hit by rising prices.
- When adjusted for inflation, people were spending less on groceries.
- There was various discretionary support currently available, including the Discretionary Housing Payment, Council Tax Discretionary Relief, and Community Support Grant.
- 96% of city households were eligible for the Council Tax Energy Rebate, this scheme had now finished.
- The Household Support Fund would run until March 2023 and was focused on supporting 'just about managing' households largely with energy costs. The fund would also support food banks.
- The DWP were also providing various one-off payments for 'benefit' households. All households received the energy rebate and energy credit payments.
- The Council was monitoring the impact of the crisis on residents to see what could be done to give further support. This included looking at levels of stock for food banks.
- A support programme had begun for foodbanks.
- Engagement with external partners such as the universities and NHS around the crisis was ongoing.
- Work was ongoing to promote pre-existing support schemes such as the Healthy Start and Better Off programmes.
- Foodbank staff were being offered mental health training.
- The Warm Welcome Network offered up city libraries for those who needed a warm space.
- The Council was also providing workshops on how to manage with increased cost of living.
- Foodbanks were currently coping well with the extra demand.
- Work was ongoing with the National Energy Advice Service on the Fuel Poverty and Health Programme, which would lead to Leicester having dedicated energy advisers.
- Over the October half-term, 6 Pop-Up Pantries were put on across the city to give out various meals and hygiene products in collaboration with Samworth Brothers. Over 6k children were provided with meals.

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

- To support those with no access to benefits, the Council would attempt to support anyone who approached the Council for help. There was some discretion around the eligibility for the Holiday Activities and Food Programme. Schools could make the Council aware of any families not eligible for free school meals who needed support.
- It was hoped that grants could be provided to community organisations to support mutual aid. The value of mutual aid was noted.

- The food from the Pop-Up Pantries was paid for with a grant.
- The Holiday Activities and Food Programme included nutritional education and aimed to engage with the whole family. Individual schools also had their own work to support families.
- Work was ongoing to try and improve free school meal registration.
- Work was ongoing to food banks on what other payments were available to them. Food banks were being supported via the Household Support Fund.

Members of the Committee praised the work of Officers and volunteers, with particular praise being given to the Pop-Up Pantries.

AGREED:

1. That the Cost-of-Living Crisis be added as a standing item to the Committee agenda.
2. That Officers inform Committee Members as to how many families in Leicester use foodbanks.

53. REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Director of Housing submitted a report on the Immigration, Migration and Asylum within Leicester City with a focus on the Homes for Ukraine and Afghan schemes.

The Director of Housing presented the item, it was noted that:

- Leicester had been a member of the National Asylum Dispersal Scheme since 2001.
- Leicester was actively helping Afghan and Ukrainian refugees.
- 170 Ukrainian refugees had arrived in the city so far following the war. Multiple teams had been working to support sponsors and provide support for arrivals including education. A number of sponsors had agreed to continue their support beyond the original 6 months, leading to less support being required from the Homelessness Service. If families were unable to extend the support, then work would be undertaken to find alternative accommodation.
- The bridging hotel as part of the Afghan Relocation Scheme was currently housing 16 families. The Council was supporting these families with finding suitable housing across the Country through the Home Office matching service. The Home Office had not yet stated when the bridging hotel would be closed.
- The Government had recently stated its intention to make National asylum dispersal mandatory across the entire country.
- The Home Office had refused a regional-wide proposal that had been supported by all Each Midlands Councils to meet the Home Office refugee requirements. It was hoped the reason for this would soon be shared to understand this refusal and decision for the home office to

make up their own suggested numbers for each area.

- Currently there were over 1.1k people in Leicester as part of the National Asylum Scheme, there were 550 individuals in 3 asylum overflow hotels. It was expected these hotels would continue to be used for this purpose for the next 12 months at least.
- Leicester was providing good practice advice on refugees to other Councils across the country in advance of the National Scheme rolling out.

Members of the Committee condemned recent comments by the Home Secretary Suella Braverman which described the current refugee situation as an 'invasion'.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the update.

54. DRAFT LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

The Director of Planning, Development, and Transportation submitted a report providing feedback on the comments on the draft Local Plan made during the initial scrutiny considerations during September and the extended consultation period with all members during October and outlined the proposed changes to the plan. It was noted that the Local Plan would go the next Full Council meeting for approval.

In response to a Member question it was noted that pending approval from Full Council, a final round of consultation would take place in early 2023 before the Plan would be submitted to the Government. The Planning Inspector would have an opportunity to make amendments to the Plan and then the Council would have the chance to accept those modifications. Further consultation may be required if significant modifications were requested.

In response to a Member question it was noted that Leicester's shortfall in meeting the increased Government target for new housing would be accommodated by the County Districts subject to in an agreed Statement of Common Ground.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the report.

55. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The Chair requested an update on the status of the review into the recent unrest in East Leicester given the recent departure of Dr Chris Allen from his role in leading the review.

The City Mayor gave an update on the situation, noting that Dr Allen had been recommended to him by a wide range of people to lead the review, including the Vice Chancellor of the University of Leicester. Following the appointment of Dr Allen there had been an online outcry regarding the impartiality of Dr Allen

Following this Dr Allen decided to step away from the review. The City Mayor expressed his disappointment at this and stated that he felt that the accusations against Dr Allen were unfounded.

The City Mayor stated that he still wanted a review to take place but that it would be difficult to find someone else to lead it due to the public pressures. He would take some time to consider the next steps.

The Chair commented that multiple people could lead the review, the City Mayor responded that the intention was for the review to be a team effort and to include a large voice from the community.

56. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme for the Committee was noted.

57. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 8.42pm.