



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
CULTURE AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 8 JULY 2024 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Dawood – Chair
Councillor Mohammed – Vice Chair

Councillor Aldred
Councillor Chauhan
Councillor Porter

Councillor Dr Barton
Councillor Joshi
Councillor Singh Johal

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1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Halford – Cllr Dr Barton substituted.

Apologies were received from Cllr Haq due to Council business – Cllr Porter substituted.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have had in the business to be discussed.

Councillor Dr Barton declared with relation to Item 10 on the agenda, that she had attended presentations from outside bodies regarding the café, however, these were non-decision-making, informal discussions, and she approached the issue with an open mind.

Councillor Porter declared with relation to Item 10 on the agenda, that he was a regular visitor to Leicester Museum and Art Gallery (LMAG) and had put forward the call-in.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission held on 25 April 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

4. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

5. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

6. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

7. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION 2024/25

The Membership of the Commission was confirmed as follows:

Cllr Dawood – Chair
Cllr Mohammed – Vice Chair
Cllr Aldred
Cllr Halford
Cllr Singh Johal
Cllr Chauhan
Cllr Joshi
Cllr Haq

8. DATES OF MEETINGS FOR THE COMMISSION 2024/25

The dates of the meetings for the Commission were confirmed as follows:

8 July 2024
22 August 2024
4 November 2024
16 January 2025
27 February 2025
3 April 2025

9. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Commission noted the Scrutiny Terms of Reference.

10. CALL-IN OF EXECUTIVE DECISION - LEICESTER MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report informing the Commission that the Executive decision taken by the City Mayor on 28 May 2024 relating to continuation of Phase 4 and 5 capital works programme at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery (LMAG) had been the subject of a 6 member call-in under the procedures at Rule 12 of Part 4D, City Mayor and Executive Procedure Rules, of the Council's Constitution.

The Chair clearly outlined the process that he would follow in determining how to resolve the call-in. The Commission was recommended to either:

- a) Note the report without further comment or recommendation. (If the report is noted the process continues and the call in will be considered at Council) or
- b) Comment on the specific issues raised by the call-in. (If comments are made the process continues and the comments and call in will be considered at Council); or
- c) Resolve that the call-in be withdrawn (If the committee wish for there to be no further action on the call-in, then they must actively withdraw it. If withdrawal is agreed the call-in process stops, the call-in will not be considered at Council and the original decision takes immediate affect without amendment).

The Chair invited the proposer of the call-in, Councillor Porter, to the table and allotted them five minutes to make their case. The proposer raised the following points:

- Reference was made to the precarious nature of the Council's finances and the issues faced by residents of the city as a result of poverty. This in mind it was suggested that there was a moral duty to challenge and scrutinise multi-million-pound proposals from the City Mayor. It was further noted that the plans had bypassed all scrutiny commissions and had not been presented at full council and as such elected members had not been given the normal opportunity to see the details and voice their views on the proposal and it was suggested that this was detrimental to the democratic process in the city and did nothing to help the poorest and most vulnerable in the city.
- The current financial crisis raised the question of whether, with a limited pot of money, a new café was a priority in the hierarchy of needs.
- It was suggested that on a local level, money could be better spent on projects in wards.
- It was further suggested Council should focus on high-quality public services since the private sector could deliver a new café.

The Chair invited the seconder of the call-in, Councillor Joshi (the original seconder, Cllr Osman, could not attend the meeting), to the table and allotted them five minutes to make their case. The seconder suggested that this was not a priority given the economic issues faced in the city and the suffering it caused citizens.

The Chair invited Assistant City Mayor for Culture, Libraries and Community Centres, Councillor Dempster, to respond and the following points were raised:

- The Council were not spending £3.6m on the café alone, it was a complete project, a small part of which was the café.
- The stresses on Council funding were known and it was acknowledged that the revenue budget was in a precarious situation, however, the scheme being discussed was a capital scheme that would not affect the revenue budget.
- The previous café had not been fit for purpose, which had been why the private operators had pulled out. It was in the wrong part of the museum and could only be open when the museum was, which had made it financially unviable. The new café would be able to be run outside of museum hours and would be run and furnished by a private company. As such the Council were facilitating a situation whereby the operators could have a viable business.
- The museum was something that attracted people to the city. The national museum service had entrusted the museum with a painting by Renoir, showing that it was right to invest in the museum.
- Investment in the museum and café would bring jobs and generate money which in turn would increase revenue. This added to the range of reasons to improve the visitor experience.
- The programme aimed to redesign the ground floor of the building to allow items in storage to be displayed.
- When projects like this were invested in, it was often the case that match-funding was offered, which would mean that the experience would improve further.

The Director of Culture, Tourism and Inward Investment gave a presentation in response to the call-in (slides attached) and the following points in addition to those on the slides were raised:

- The Wildspace Gallery was being shut down and decanted as it was no longer fit for purpose, so the opportunity was being taken to move the café to this space as it was a better location for a private operator. It would also strip the building back to how it looked 100 years ago.
- New ventilation equipment would be installed, for which £1m of Arts Council funding would help to deliver.
- The money would need to be spent by March 2025 or there would be a risk of losing the Arts Council Funding.

- Since the previous café could only be open when the museum was, museum staff would need to be paid if the café needed to remain open.
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) bid aimed to make the area around the entrance to the museum information about history which then pointed to other areas that the city had to offer.
- The operator of the café should have more capacity to sell food and drink and many potential operators were interested in the opportunity.
- Since the previous operators had pulled the service due to it being unprofitable, it was important to attract people who were keen to invest once they were given the lease. This would take some of the cost out of the project and there would be a more efficient model moving forwards.
- The Arts Council MEND fund would cover essential repairs.
- The bulk of the fit-out cost would be paid for by the operator.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- When money was spent on capital projects it was an investment rather than a loss.
- It was wrong to connect this spend with a lack of spending on SEND Transport or adventure playgrounds as it was a different pot of money.
- The Café could provide jobs which could help to alleviate poverty in the city.
- Other cafés were not close to the museum and were often full, meaning that the new café would not take business from elsewhere.
- In a separate comment, it was suggested that the café at Soft Touch Arts could be affected.
- The project would help the energy efficiency of the building.
- Families with limited incomes looked forward to visiting the museums. Additionally, schools made trips to the museums, so it was important for them to be there. Museums also brought in tourists to the city.
- In terms of phasing, the project would take around a year, and many areas of the museum would remain open whilst the work was being undertaken.
- In response to a question about the figures for the project, Councillors were referred to the data in the papers.
- The whole spend, on the whole area of the café was around 10% of the budget.
- As the museum was a listed building, all improvements would be worked out with an architect and designed with environmental controls in mind to make the building more environmentally efficient than previously.
- Work would be undertaken on the Victorian Gallery to make it more welcoming.

The Chair asked if the proposer wished to withdraw the call-in. It was noted that the proposer wished for the call-in to proceed.

Councillor Dawood moved that, following the points raised during the meeting, the call-in be withdrawn.

This was seconded by Councillor Aldred and upon being put to the vote the motion was CARRIED.

RESOLVED:

That the call-in be withdrawn.

11. INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Directors gave a presentation providing an overview of the Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission.

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment gave a presentation using the slides attached with the agenda pack and noted that reports could be brought at the request of the Commission.

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services gave a presentation using the slides attached with the agenda pack, he added the following:

- The largest division of the department was Neighbourhoods as it was very diverse in the way it supported residents across the city such as through the library service, leisure centres, parks, which supported people's mental wellbeing, waste management services and bereavement services.
- Partners for Neighbourhoods included the police and fire service and the Council departments for Education and Adult Social Care were also closely worked with.
- Neighbourhoods Services supported volunteering and visitors.
- Many children used the library service and the Learn to Swim programme.
- Compliance visits helped to keep people safe.
- The Ward Funding Scheme helped to support over 600 projects.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- Waste management fell under the profile of the Deputy City Mayor for

Housing, Economy and Neighbourhoods.

- With regard to waste management, contract arrangements were being considered. The government recycling programme was being considered in terms of how it could fit into the contract.
- One of the standout options with regard to waste management was food waste as it constituted around 37% of what gets put in household bins. There were possibilities for this to be composted or used to create gas which could generate power.
- The Ball Mill waste centre had been in place for 20 years. This centre separated out organics to be taken to an anaerobic digestion plant to create gas. In future it may become more effective to separate waste at source.

The Director of Corporate Services introduced himself and noted that his department was relatively new and managed Human Resources, emergency management, customer services, equalities and corporate communications.

AGREED:

- 1) That the presentation be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.

During the consideration of this item the Chair needed to leave. The Vice-Chair took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

12. VCSE DELIVERY PLAN

The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report providing an overview of the advancements and future direction of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Engagement Strategy.

The Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Adult Learning introduced the report.

Key points included:

- When the strategy was introduced, there were six pledges. This plan had a number of plans and actions to cover the six pledges.
- This was a four-year strategy.
- The first priority was to understand how the different departments could deliver as there was a large area of work which needed a clear picture of how much engagement existed between the departments.
- The second priority was to engage with the voluntary sector to establish which services were being delivered, what their needs were and how they could become sustainable.
- It was desirable to have a clear system in place whereby it should

be possible to measure what was being delivered.

- There would be quarterly, six-monthly and annual reviews and there would be milestones and measurements along the process.
- There would be challenges, but this work would ensure that there was a sustainable VCSE sector in the city.
- An event to bring the business sector and voluntary sector together had been interrupted by the general election, but it was hoped that this would take place in August. Members were encouraged to attend.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- The financial contribution made by the Council to voluntary organisations was small and covered the two staff in the engagement team and also infrastructure support such as Crowdfund Leicester and other necessary infrastructure support.
- These groups made an impact to the lives of people in the city and provided services that the Council could not. Therefore, such groups were important to support. They were very cost effective and do not take a large amount of the budget.
- Any money given to the organisations was purely for furthering the objectives of the organisations and was not given to individuals.
- Organisations needed initial support in order to be able to access crowdfunding.
- In response to a comment about the importance of benefitting smaller grassroots organisations, it was noted that it was hoped to create a service whereby organisations could contact the council directly so that they could be advised and guided in order to help them in terms of their basic infrastructure.
- It was recognised that it was important to focus on smaller organisations and it was hoped that Councillors could act as a bridge between organisations in their wards and the Council.
- In terms of the budget, members were directed to section 4.4 of the report which explained that the budget was not solely for Crowdfund Leicester. The cost to access Crowdfund Leicester was approximately £19-20k. This was specifically aimed to target people in the civic space. The money was used on different initiatives and money had been raised from communities and businesses to contribute to organisations through Crowdfund Leicester, so it was good that there was a platform in place.
- The Council wanted to focus more on smaller organisations. Therefore, information was needed on who these groups were on a ward-by-ward basis. This in mind, members were encouraged to make known to officers the organisations that need assistance to it could be seen how they could be supported.

- Organisations could be directed to materials online that could help them set themselves up.
- The engagement focussed on smaller organisations and whilst the Council could not do everything they would like, it was necessary to find the systems with which to engage, for example, workshops could be held whereby organisations could learn skills to help them move on.
- The pledge was referred to, which contained wording about supporting smaller organisations.

AGREED:

- 1) That the presentation be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken.

13. WORK PROGRAMME

A Grassland Maintenance Report was added to the workplan to include areas for sports and recreation.

The work programme was noted.

14. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no further items of urgent business, the meeting finished at 19:26.