



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
CULTURE AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2024 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Dawood – Chair  
Councillor Mohammed – Vice Chair

Councillor Aldred  
Councillor Halford  
Councillor Joshi

Councillor Chauhan  
Councillor Haq  
Councillor Singh Johal

In Attendance:

Deputy City Mayor Councillor Cutkelvin  
Assistant City Mayor Councillor Dempster  
Assistant City Mayor Councillor Sood

\* \* \* \* \*

**88. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

No apologies were received.

**89. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members made their introductions and declared any interests they may have had in the business to be discussed.

Councillor Haq declared that he resided within an area to be discussed during the meeting.

Cllr Sood declared that she was an honorary member of The Council of Faith. She is also a member of The Bishop Forum.

## **90. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Chair requested approval of the minutes of the last meeting held 22 August 2024.

AGREED:

That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

## **91. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None.

## **92. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE**

Mr Bruce Wakley made the following statement on behalf Ms Hannah Wakley (Leicester Friends of the Earth):

Leicester Friends of the Earth have been discussing the council's use of chemical pesticides in the parks with officers and councillors for the past three years. After trialling a different product last year, the council returned to using glyphosate in parks this year, albeit at a lower concentration than previously used. The council's target for pesticide use in the Biodiversity Action Plan is to reduce it by 50% by 2030. We think that target is disappointingly unambitious when other local authorities have already moved away from chemical pesticides altogether. The Pesticide Action Network provide detailed information for local authorities on how to go pesticide free on their website.

The areas that are sprayed in the parks do seem to have been reduced in the last couple of years - we can no longer see any sign of spraying around tree bases in parks, for example, which is an improvement. (Tree bases on road verges are still being sprayed, sadly.) But we are still seeing signs of spraying around and within children's play areas, which is concerning when it is known that children are more vulnerable to the effects of chemical pesticides than adults. I notice this in my local park in Evington, which makes me nervous about taking my nephew there. Like all toddlers, he likes to play with the soil and I spend a lot of time carrying him away from the sprayed, dead grass around the edges of the patches of woodchip and under the fence. Many people will not recognise what this dead grass means, so they will not be able to protect their children from being exposed to the pesticide residues there.

We are concerned about the use of any chemical pesticides, and glyphosate in particular, for a number of reasons. There have been several studies linking glyphosate to cancers in people, particularly non-Hodgkin lymphoma. The research was collated in a meta-analysis published in the academic journal Mutation Research in 2019. Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of pesticides, because their skin absorbs chemicals more easily and because

they are more likely to be playing on the ground. The evidence for the ill-effects of glyphosate on bees and other wildlife has also been mounting over the last few years. It is now known that glyphosate harms bees' digestive systems, for example, affecting their ability to absorb food, and also damages the ability of wild bees to regulate the temperature of their colonies. When insect populations are falling so alarmingly, we do not believe we should be doing anything to make the situation worse.

Leicester has long claimed to be the UK's first environment city, but on this issue, it is clear that we are not taking the lead. In fact, we are falling far behind other towns and cities.”

The Director of Neighbourhood & Environmental Services responded on behalf of The Parks & Open Spaces Operational Manager, advising that:

- Officers have been in contact with Ms Wakerley directly for a couple of years.
- The Local Authority had reduced its usage of Glyphosate by 50% since 2017. It now used around 1800 litres per annum.
- The Local authority has been working with the Pesticide Action Network which gave guidance for the development of the Pesticide Action Plan.
- A number of alternate products had been demonstrated but with limited success, most recently Finalsan.
- Seasonal conditions impacted on pesticide success rates. 2024 had been particularly wet, resulting in the need to reintroduce Glyphosate in some settings.
- Glyphosate was seldom used in parks, play areas and around schools. Other weed killing methods produced visually similar effects. To the human eye, it may not be apparent which method had been employed.
- The Local Authority had reached out across its networks considering alternative products, but to date hadn't identified any suitable alternatives which were available on the market.
- Glyphosate remained licensed for use in the UK until December 2025.
- As an alternative, the Local Authority had invested in mechanical kit to remove weed growth on pavements (weed arm sweeper as an example).
- The Local Authority practices were still leading from within the sector.

Responding to a permitted supplementary question, The Director of Neighbourhood & Environmental Services advised that:

- The question raised related to a class action case in France against Monsanto (manufacturer of Roundup, a glyphosate product) and related to agricultural use. The case could not be commented on as there were no direct links to the council or its practices.
- All council staff undertaking spraying are trained and licensed to do so.
- The Local Authority ensured the health and safety of all staff by only

using approved products, upon receiving the correct training. He advised that every precaution was taken, and staff were provided with PPE.

- Tasks were planned and risk assessed to minimise the impact to both staff and the public.

### **93. PETITIONS**

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

### **94. BURIAL STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Environmental Services submitted a report providing an annual update on the Burial Strategy.

The Bereavement Services Manager presented the report.

The report highlighted the overall demand for burials, identifying the impact on existing cemetery provision.

The report detailed planned works to improve the visitor experience at Gilroes Cemetery and the need to rectify issues related to car parking, traffic and drainage.

Changes to legislation in 2024, were summarised and an update was given on the Law Commission review of Burial, Cremation and New Funerary Methods legislation.

Further key points to note were:

- There was not a statutory duty placed on Local Authorities to provide burial spaces.
- Remaining burial space remaining for the Local Authority was estimated to reach full capacity around 2023/31. There was a need to find a solution by the end of 2026 to allow time for new development.
- There were four cemeteries in operation within Leicester, these being Gilroes, Saffron Hill, Belgrave and Welford Road Cemeteries.
- The number of burials had peaked during Covid with a 20% increase, but this trend was now decreasing.
- Saffron Hill and Gilroes were the only cemeteries which were conducting burials in new graves.
- Demand for new graves for Muslim burials was on average 60 - 65% of all new graves per year. Saffron Hill Cemetery had been extended to accommodate the number of Muslim burials.
- Improvements were required at Gilroes Cemetery which included resolving problems with traffic circulation, parking spaces and drainage. Consultations were commissioned to resolve these issues.

- Legislation changes made in September of this year had seen the biggest change in death certification for over 50 years. All deaths (excluding still born babies) were now subject to scrutiny either by a Coroner or a Medical Examiner. This was now in line with the process followed for cremations.
- It was recognised that complex burial and cremation legislation had become outdated. The Law Commission of England and Wales was carrying out the 'Burial, Cremation and New Funerary Methods Project' in response to this. Public consultation was now live for the Burial and Cremation element of this.

Members were invited to ask questions for the Bereavement Services Manager to respond to and it was noted that:

- A previous piece of work had come to scrutiny examining points raised in this report. Having received the report, there was now clarification that these points were national issues.
- Safeguarding proposals for grave reusage were for next of kin consultation and an application to the Secretary of State. Suggestions had been included within the proposals on suitable time periods after which reusage could take place. The grave would not re-used if objections were received. This was in line with legislation already in place in London.
- The difference between reclamation and reusage was clarified. Reclamation would occur when unused burial spaces within a plot were reclaimed by the local authority. Reusage would involve disinterring remains already in a grave and reintering them deeper within the same space allowing room for a newer burial above.
- There were around 150 acres of burial ground across the city. The majority of this space had already been used.
- There were approximately 2500 graves remaining for usage across the city (these being at Gilroes and Saffron Hill.)
- 99% of Muslim burials took place at Saffron Hill. The graves could be used for double burials.
- Additional burial land was being sought. If land was secured outside of the Leicester City boundary, extra funeral fees would not be incurred as the facility would be still be managed by Leicester City Council.
- There was a surplus within the budget for both burials and cremations, but that surplus would end when the space had been fully used and the sites would still require maintenance.
- Stillbirths were not classified as 'deaths', this is why scrutiny on cause of death for stillbirths did not take place.
- The additional legislation on scrutiny of death had not impacted on Local Authority resources or caused a delay in processes.
- National Consultation on proposals was open.
- If Leicester City Council had burial facilities outside of the city, it was suggested that, working to principle, the fees would be the same.
- The Commission could be updated on the number of graves left in each Cemetery and the financial position as well as maintenance costs.

- Around 400 new graves were dug each year. Further information on this could be sent to the Commission.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.
- 3) That figures on the numbers of new graves dug be emailed to the Commission.
- 4) That a six-monthly written update on remaining space was requested to track if burial space was likely to be available until 2031 and to include information on the workplan for Gilroes Cemetery, updates from the Law Commission.
- 5) That the Commission be updated on the outcome of the CDS findings.
- 6) That information be provided on the number of graves left in each Cemetery and the financial position as well as maintenance costs.

## **95. HERITAGE PLACES FUNDING, NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND**

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment submitted a report providing an overview of the Heritage Places Programme which was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The Assistant City Mayor (Culture, Libraries and Community Centres) introduced the item and noted that:

- The Local Authority had a good success rate with funding bids.
- There was an ongoing focus on engaging with local people from within the different communities at a grass roots level.

A Steering Group would include both Leicester City Council and Community representatives.

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment provided further comments:

- The report referred to the initial bid but by the end of next year, there should be new propositions, potentially resulting in significant funding of up to £10,000,000.
- The Heritage Lottery Fund was earmarked for Leicester and there was still

access to the usual Lottery Funding.

- It was noted that other cities weren't as successful in promoting community and heritage as effectively as Leicester.
- There were however still some communities not explored and celebrated strongly enough. For example there was a recent Somali festival which had been organised as part of Black History Month but this hadn't been promoted well despite the significance.

In response to Member questions, The Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment advised:

- The initial bid was for Revenue Funding only but in the longer term the programme could support both revenue and capital spending.
- There would be a transparent commissioning process inviting collaboration over the period of the initial bid in 2025.
- It was hoped that the funding could bring cohesion to the different communities within Leicester, giving people opportunities to share in one another's culture, tradition and heritage. This could have a positive knock-on impact with the visitor economy.
- Staffing resourcing would entail allocating a Project Manager and subsequent reporting staff to drive the programme. The £250,000 would pay for the Audience Agency, a part time programme manager in the Museum service and a group of community heritage researchers who would be recruited.
- It was recognised that Leicester had a strong industrial heritage and that this was an area to be explored and promoted.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.
- 3) For an update to come to scrutiny post stage 1 decision
- 4) For the findings of the Audience Agency to be provided.

## **96. LIBRARY STUDY ZONES**

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report giving an overview of the Study Zones initiative in libraries, in the context of the digital support provided by libraries for people living, working and studying in Leicester.

The Assistant City Mayor for Culture, Libraries and Community Centres introduced the report and noted that the successful funding application had allowed more people to bring their equipment to be used in Council libraries. This was increasingly important due to overcrowded houses, as this scheme allowed people to come to libraries for a quiet space to study and work. She further noted that Libraries were often neighbourhood hubs.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services presented the report.

Key Points included:

- Libraries remained committed to four universal offers:
  - Reading
  - Culture and Creativity
  - The Digital Information Offer (including IT resources and signposting support from staff)
  - Health and Wellbeing
- Members' attention was drawn to the graphs in the report, and it was explained that these showed the changing patterns of use and illustrated the recovery of computer use following the Covid-19 pandemic. It was further clarified that use of library computers had recovered to 60% of use prior to the pandemic, and people using their own devices with the library WiFi had recovered to 80% of pre-pandemic levels and was predicted to recover to 100% by the end of this year. This showed real change in how people accessed online services.
- Customer surveys had shown that there was a preference for people using their own devices in libraries, and this had been part of the rationale for the bid.
- The pilot programmes in Knighton and Highfields libraries had been very successful, showing that this had been a key bid to make. As soon as the desks had been installed, people had used them, and they had not needed to be promoted.
- The scheme had supported the homework help club which had been important for children's health and wellbeing as well as to support their out of school learning following the pandemic.
- The scheme provided welcome facilities for residents in high-density housing.
- The scheme supported the Warm Welcome programme, as well as supporting the increase in people working from home.
- The scheme supported increasing partnership work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and library Jobshops. People could take part in sessions with work coaches in libraries, and then continue to work in the library following the session.

The Commission was invited to ask questions and make comments. Key Points included:

- It was aimed to track how people used services so that changes could be pre-empted and to establish what was required in different locations. There were approximately 60,000 individual library users, of which around 20,000 were estimated to be IT users, either through using library computers or bringing their own devices. IT users were profiled, and it had been identified that whilst library users had a slight female majority, a slight majority of IT users were male. In terms of age, children and young people tended to be the biggest library users, but a high proportion of IT users fell into the 16-45 age-range. In terms of the location with the highest usage hours, Central library was the highest, followed by those in high-density housing areas such as Belgrave or Highfields. Peaks in usage depended on the library and the local population around it.
- The report was welcomed as libraries were seen as an asset to the community as a safe place for people to study, particularly in the context of the cost-of-living crisis. They had lots of resources that benefitted the community.
- In response to a query about providing services for people of various cultures and people who spoke languages other than English, it was explained that there was an ongoing piece of work to establish customer needs, particularly through customer surveys and conversations with customers and staff. New members were asked if they wished to state their preferred reading language when they joined the library.
- In response to a query about privacy, it was acknowledged that libraries were small spaces, which was a reason as to why some of the study desks included privacy partitions. It was further explained that users tended to either work individually or collaboratively, therefore it was necessary to have different kinds of spaces for the different kinds of user.
- In response to a query about the different kinds of media used, it was reported that a lot of work had been done on modernising and updating the service over the last three-to-four years, including building the collections of e-books. CDs were no longer purchased for stock as demand was much reduced due to the prevalence of streaming.
- In response to a query about the possibility of making use of more buildings for such spaces, it was clarified that whilst the service tried to do as much as possible with the buildings it had, the scheme had been funded through the Libraries Improvement Fund, and therefore it was limited to the 16 existing libraries.
- In response to a query about the possibility of other partners installing stations to help families with financial pressures such as expensive WiFi and printer ink, it was suggested that this could be looked into. It was also noted that software had been installed to allow people to print from their own devices in libraries.
- In terms of after-school activities for children, there had been funding from Public Health to help to deliver homework help clubs with a focus on children's mental health and wellbeing. These had been popular.

Further to this, there had been times where Knighton and Evington libraries had been able to open out of hours, but in these instances children had needed to be accompanied by an adult.

- With regard to people using library IT systems to complete online applications for Universal Credit, it was clarified that whilst staff could not give direct advice, they could signpost to where people could get information. The Council worked with the DWP to support entry into work. Staff had been doing this for a long time, so it was not seen as an additional pressure.

The Chair suggested that a report be brought to the Commission in 12 months on how sustainable and successful the scheme has been as well as looking at areas for development and provision in case of the cessation of funding.

The Chair further requested that information on the age profile of users and out-of-hours provision be provided to members of the Commission.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.
- 3) That a report be brought to the Commission in 12 months on how sustainable and successful the scheme has been as well as looking at areas for development and provision in case of the cessation of funding.
- 4) That information on the age profile of users and out-of-hours provision be provided to members of the Commission.

## **97. WARD ENGAGEMENT AND FUNDING REPORT 2023-24**

The Head of Neighbourhood Services and the Area Development Manger submit a report outlining how Ward Funding was spent across the city between April 2023 and March 2024. The report seeks to provide an insight into the variety of projects and initiatives that took place in the wards, and some of those that were important to residents locally.

The Assistant City Mayor for Culture, Libraries and Community Centres introduced the report and noted that:

- It was important to protect these monies as they did a lot of good for small groups.
- A training session would be held with Ward Councillors in which they would be encouraged to look at ward priorities. A clearer focus should help to inform decision making.

- Funding should be quick, easy, accessible and engaging.
- Small projects funded by ward funding could help with community cohesion and prevent isolation.

The Commission was invited to ask questions and make comments. Key Points included:

- The report was welcomed, and projects funded by ward funding, such as Christmas decorations, were praised as they had helped community spirit.
- There had been variations in spending depending on the makeup of the Ward. Additionally, IT issues in March 2024 had made it difficult to get projects out to Councillors. Some of these had been carried over after March. Anything not spent had been carried over, as long as it was under the 10% carry-over limit, which all were.
- It was noted that not every council provided ward funding.

The Chair made the suggestion that unspent money from underspent wards could be divided amongst wards that had spent to capacity.

AGREED:

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

## **98. WORK PROGRAMME**

It was noted that the agenda for the next meeting looked heavy according to the work programme. Items could be considered for postponement at the following agenda-setting meeting.

The work programme was noted.

## **99. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 19:27.

