



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2021 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor Joel (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Gee (sub for Councillor Halford)	Councillor Joshi
Councillor Kitterick	Councillor Porter
Councillor Waddington	Councillor Westley

In Attendance:

Sir Peter Soulsby	City Mayor
Councillor Clarke	Deputy City Mayor, Environment and Transportation
Councillor Cutkelvin	Assistant City Mayor, Education and Housing
Councillor Dempster	Assistant City Mayor, Health
Councillor Hunter	Assistant City Mayor, Tackling Racism and Disadvantage
Councillor Master	Assistant City Mayor, Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Myers	Assistant City Mayor, Jobs, Skills, Policy Delivery and Communications
Councillor Patel	Assistant City Mayor, Communities, Equalities and Special Projects
Councillor Singh Clair	Deputy City Mayor, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Regulatory Services

* * * * *

137. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Halford. Councillor Gee was present as the appointed substitute for Councillor Halford.

The Committee noted that Councillor Thalukdar was present as a substitute Member.

138. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Joshi declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business and budget items of the meeting in that his wife worked in the Reablement Team at the Council.

Councillor Westley declared an Other Disclosable Interest in agenda item Appendix D Draft Housing Revenue Account Budget (Including Capital Programme) 2021/22, in that some members of his family were Council tenants.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors' judgement of the public interest. They were not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

139. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked staff and volunteers working above and beyond the call of duty to help keep the residents of the city safe and looked after during the pandemic.

The Chair added a word to those who had lost loved ones, that he was thinking of them and their families.

140. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minute Item 134 – Questions for the City Mayor (b)

Councillor Porter asked that an amendment be made to read "...not permitted under *previous* lockdown guidance".

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview Select Committee held on 3 December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the amendment above.

141. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Committee noted that, further to a question on Minute 130, Capital Budget Monitoring April-September 2020/21, the Chief Accountant had informed Members following the meeting that the value of the loans paid out under the Repayable Home Repairs scheme was a maximum loan of £10k, but the average application was under £6k.

142. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or

statements of case had been received.

143. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

144. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report updating Members on the monitoring of outstanding petitions.

AGREED:

That the petitions marked 'petition complete', namely 20/07/01, 20/09/01, 20/09/02, be removed from the Monitoring Report.

145. COVID-19 UPDATE

The Director of Public Health and the Director of Finance provided an update on the Covid-19 data in Leicester.

The Director of Public Health reported:

- There was a good resource of Corona Virus data on the Council's website, and included detail such as ward, area, age groups and ethnicity.
- It was a challenging period for families, the Council and the NHS. Numbers of Covid-19 cases seen both locally and nationally had been extremely high but it appeared some of the worst seen over the winter had passed.
- On 7th January 2021 the seven-day weekly rate was 570 per 100k. As of 4th February 2021, the rate was down to 365 per 100k.
- The figure was still high, with the national figure around 280, but the good news was significant falls were being seen day on day.
- There were concerns in the rate in the over 60s reported previously when there was a week where there were 600 per 100k cases. The figure had now fallen to 383 per 100k.
- 17-21 year olds cases had seen high numbers in the area, but more in places like Nottingham, where people were concerned about those of university student age. At the beginning of the year the number of cases were 539 per 100k, but were now at 241 per 100k, a significant drop. Students were, though, beginning to return back to accommodation, and the situation would continue to be monitored.
- Pressure remained on health services, with hospital admissions being extremely high with around 120 Covid cases per week at beginning of year. The rate was gradually starting to slow down with some plateauing. As of the 29th January there were 105 Covid-related hospital admissions.
- Sadly, there were still significant numbers of deaths amongst the community, with 21 per week at the beginning of year. On the 22nd January the figure had gone up to 38 deaths per week. In the next week or two it was hoped there would be a reduction in the number of deaths in line with national reductions.
- In most of the ward areas now, the picture was week-on-week reductions in

cases, and it appeared every area in the city was either flat or falling and was really positive.

- The NHS was responsible for the vaccination programme roll out which was going well, but there were some challenges. Data was starting to be received routinely.
- Focus had been on the over 80s and now 75-79 age group. Across the area over 100k doses of the vaccine had been given. All care homes had been visited other than any care home with a live outbreak.
- There was above 85% coverage for the over 80s programme. The 75-79 year olds was coming up to over 75% coverage. Information was received on the vaccination data from NHS colleagues and would be shared with Members.
- There was some concern around the vulnerable communities, homeless communities etc. The first outreach clinic in homeless communities was started on 3rd February. A number of hostels had been visited and vaccinations given. Work continued with the homeless and rough sleepers also.

The Director of Finance reported:

- The C19 support email had worked incredibly well for those worried about themselves or others and would continue to be offered. Up to 2,500 emails on average had been received a month, and staff had worked seven days a week to respond to them, including contacting people to find out what their needs were.
- Officers were also running the various grant schemes. There was a wide range of business grants which were unfortunately unnecessarily complex.
- There was an additional restrictions grant which would be on the website imminently for a further round of grants, and those grants with an entitlement would be paid straight away where business details were already known, for example, pubs were required to be closed and were entitled to a payment on a periodic basis, and would not be required to keep applying.
- The winter support grant scheme is in place to support families and individuals facing financial difficulties, in particular with food and utility bills. Over the winter period it included the free school meals offer over Christmas and would also be done at half-term.
- When a referral was received, a wide range of support would be looked at, for example, help with council tax, heating, food, and utilities.
- The Contact Tracing Team was still the only team for a local authority in the country undertaking contact tracing after the eight-hour digital period. The Team received data on people who had not filled out details online after a positive test. The Team would try to contact the person remotely at first by email and/or phone. If there was no contact the ground team would visit addresses.
- Cases were averaging at 1,400 per week for the team to investigate, and there was a 91% success rate. The 9% not contacted was a mix of people that could not be found, such as, people giving incorrect information, for example, giving other people's addresses / phone numbers. Some cases

were uncooperative with some not willing to share information but were the minority and not the majority.

- The Team worked seven days a week. It was important that people received the advice on the requirement for households to self-isolate, and were also able to discuss any need for wider support.

In response to questions, the following was noted:

- Some residents were being asked to go to Loughborough for vaccinations. It was noted there had been some limitations previously with the Pfizer vaccine. The Oxford Astra-Zeneca vaccine was more portable, and GPs were undertaking home visits for patients who were housebound.
- The authority was routinely advised of the proportion of the new variant in the city, and the majority of cases were of the Kent variant at 70.1%, which was easily transmissible.
- There was a mixed picture across the country over the age range of the vaccination roll out. The Midlands were towards the front of the pack in terms of the proportion and were dropping down the age range. The City was pushing to have over 70s done close to second week in February, following which the roll-out would drop down the age range.
- The Government had stated it would move the vaccine availability across the country. The goal was to make sure all those over the age of 70 received their vaccination first. Stocks of vaccine was still the rate limiting factor.
- The Authority had always ensured the best for the city with the resources it had, with the information it had, and in making sure that people realised the significance of actions they were being asked to do, such as social distancing, staying at home, washing hands and ventilation of space, which remained incredibly important. People had initially not appreciated how devastating the virus would be, and some still did not even with the numbers cited.

The City Mayor agreed with Members' criticism of the Government and hoped there would be a public enquiry. He noted how Government almost at every stage had been slow to react compared with other governments. He added there had been a failure of Government to engage with local authorities, more obviously with the city as it was placed in extended lockdown, and the failure to recognise that local knowledge and expertise was a massive resource. Rather than being dismissive of it they should have drawn on it from the start, and trusted the authority with the information it needed, and provided the details of what the initial testing was showing to allow intervention. He added he was astonished that as the Authority was undertaking contact tracing, the Government was not trusting other authorities to do the same. The Chair echoed the City Mayor's sentiments.

- There had been some people under the age of 70 that had received vaccinations because they were vulnerable, key workers, or frontline healthcare workers.
- Complaints and concerns about GP access had been raised with Health Strategic Group.

- It was asked if the rising figures in Leicester had been affected by others coming into the country, or lockdown fatigue, why were the numbers relatively high compared to the national average and was there a danger of another rise. It was noted that Health had been concerned about the sustained and ongoing levels in the city, which had been a challenge nationally. The authority had worked with the Joint Bio-Security Centre to try to explain why the city and a couple of other areas in the country did not see the same sharp rises or sharp falls as the rest of the country. The initial report had not revealed anything not already suspected in relation to housing, people feeling that they needed to go to work therefore not isolating as they ought to. It was believed the reality was a layering of a number of factors and not one single thing. There, however, remained the issue around ongoing transmission, and work continued to reduce levels of transmission. The Director of Public Health would pull out the key themes from the report and share them with members of the Committee.
- Officers had spoken to CCG colleagues, and analysts were now getting a data feed from them around vaccination. Also, the vaccination data feed was now being released to public health directors. The local CCG were trying to help with the data void.
- Officers had moved overnight from office based to home working. Initially there were teething problems with the technology infrastructure, but 10 days IT had quadrupled capacity. People were seeing the benefits of home working with a better work/life balance. It had forced a change that did not suit all, for example, some staff were finding it difficult with home schooling and working, but most had embraced home working. In the future it was expected there would be a mixed economy and have a mixed working at home/ office with less car use.

The Chair thanked the officers for the update.

AGREED:

That:

1. the position and updates be noted.
2. The Director of Public Health circulate the key themes of the report of the Joint Bio-Security Centre with Members of the Overview Select Committee.

146. ELIMINATING RACISM AND TACKLING DISADVANTAGE - BLACK LIVES MATTER UPDATE

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report to update the Overview Select Committee on the governance approach along with an outline of key themes and early areas of work to take forward the Council's commitment to tackling race inequality and disadvantage, and to promote inclusion particularly for Black, Black British, Caribbean, African and dual heritage people and communities living and working in Leicester.

The Committee Members were recommended to provide feedback on the proposed approach and provide feedback and any further ideas on the proposed themes and areas of work leading to the development of an action

plan.

Councillor Hunter, Assistant City Mayor, Tackling Racism and Disadvantage, introduced the report, which provided an update on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement which began in 2013 and global protests. It was noted that most people had an understanding of the reaction to the issues and the impact that racism and inequality had had around the world and in the UK overall, and that Leicester as a diverse city was not without its challenges. It was recognised that further progress required concrete commitment from Elected Members, officers and meaningful dialogue with Leicester's diverse Black communities.

Councillor Hunter, working with Councillor Patel, Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Equalities and Special Projects had held meetings with officers and community members to begin building a picture of the city to help formulate a plan of action.

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance presented the report, which had been developed working closely with both Assistant City Mayors Councillors Hunter and Patel, and Corporate Management Team colleagues to look at how the work could be supported going forward in terms of how the governance and resources would be focused. A Corporate Steering Group, chaired by the Chief Operating Officer had been set up, which was due to hold its first meeting. Involving staff representatives from different departments the group would meet once a month to shape the action plan, looking at how to measure progress and outcomes, and report back regularly to both the Executive and Overview Select Committee on the progress of work and impact it was having. The working group would be supported by a Race Equality Officer once recruited, but the group was pushing ahead with work in the meantime.

It was highlighted that it is of course really important the work has credibility with the wider city, stakeholders and community. Over the next few weeks there would be work to shape with Cllr Hunter and Cllr Patel, an external reference group who could both challenge and provide input for shaping the work as we move forward.

The Director highlighted 4.2 of the report which set out what had been identified in terms of key themes of areas of inequality that were well understood in terms of many reports that had gone before nationally and locally, and provided initial actions as a starting point. The Working Group would shape the actions into a more detailed plan, identifying other areas of work to focus on.

The City Mayor thanked the Assistant City Mayors for the work on the report through their related portfolios and thanked the Director and colleagues for working very quickly on the topic and noted the work underway and recruitment outlined.

Members thanked the Assistant Mayors and Director for the report. In response

to Members questions, the following responses were made:

- A comment was made around metric measurements and when setting for things like discrimination and disadvantage, to look very strategically to what needed to be delivered, to take account of the more challenged and nuanced metrics which would be more impactful in disadvantaged communities. It was agreed it needed to be shown that any action was having desired impacts. Looking at the most obvious impact and measures would be the first task of the Group.
- With regards to the External Reference Group, the importance of Black communities having a voice was emphasised. It was noted the Group would be made up of representatives from trade unions, voluntary sector, relevant community groups, the universities and people in and around the city.
- The issue of slave traders and slave labour was raised as it had been identified in many cities, amongst them Leicester.
- Members were pleased to see the issue of hate crime was identified and hoped the Council would improve its policy on hate crime and its practices to protect people who were vulnerable or had experienced hate crime which had a profound effect on people.
- Mental Health was noted to be increasing, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic and within the BAME community, and asked that it be recognised as part of the theme for tackling health inequalities for Black communities.
- Members stated education was the key factor and the best way to tackle issues were by educating children at a very young age, that they be taught and understood the history of black people and the contribution they had made. Though the Council had no direct control over the practice of schools, they should be encouraged in relation to the teaching of Black heritage and culture.

The Assistant City Mayors thanked Members for their comments and support. It was noted there was a statutory duty to challenge discrimination, and that it was important to find out the lived experiences of black people and what they faced on a day to day basis, how it impacted on the work of the council, and measured to make sure actions taken were impacting on peoples' lives for the good.

The Chair asked that a timeframe be given for the work to provide some completion target. He further added it was important that the Group link with the work of other Scrutiny Commissions, for example, Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission who were working on the achievement of black children in schools, and a future report being brought to Overview Select Committee from the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission looking at the experience of Black people working in the Health Service.

The Chair further added there were people involved in the arts and culture that would be valuable to the work, and it would be good to have funding or sponsorship for the arts to portray some of the issues.

The Chair welcomed the report, as had other Members and looked forward to the challenges that would be faced.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.

147. DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET (INCLUDING CAPITAL PROGRAMME) 2021/22

The Director of Housing submitted a report which set out the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2021/22. The Overview Select Committee was recommended to make any comments on the report, in particularly the proposals for delivering a balanced budget and the proposed changes to rent and service charges.

Councillor Cutkelvin, Assistant Mayor for Education and Housing introduced the report. She gave thanks to the Director of Housing, Finance Team, and the tenants and leaseholders for meaningful engagement. It was acknowledged there were still some significant pressures to the budget, not least from the cumulative impact with right to buy. What had been put forward was a balanced budget that continued to invest in the quality and standards of stock.

The Director of Housing presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- The headlines to the HRA budget proposal was that a balanced budget is proposed by recommending to only increase core rent by 1.5%, and service charge by 2%. On average tenants would see a £1.11 increase in their weekly rent.
- Appendix D, Page 44 set out that Leicester City Council had significantly low rents with them being almost 50% cheaper than private sector rental rates in Leicester.
- Over 60% of tenants would be unaffected by the proposal because they were in receipt of either housing benefit or universal credit.
- The Council has been legally bound for the past four years of having to reduce the rents by 1% each year whilst having to manage ongoing pressures. The proposed increase would help to address a number of budget pressures, as set out at Page 33, 4.21 in the report, namely:
 - Ongoing Right to Buy stock loss and associated rental income loss of £1.135million
 - Inflationary pressures of £1.676million
- In order to balance the budget it had been necessary alongside the proposed rent increase to identify and implement balancing items as outlined on Pages 34 and 35, 4.31 in the report. Headlines included:
 - Additional rent through properties acquired
 - A saving linked to the homes not hostels offer
 - Reductions to budget in repairs and gas materials, and the structural works budget.
- The overall proposed capital budget was £87.8million with £70million of the budget related to Council house acquisitions and new build, with the remainder mostly going into property improvements. The additional commitment would take the Council's investment into new council housing

- to £100million, set out in more detail in Appendix B, page 41 to the report.
- The Council would continue to invest at same level in existing stock with ongoing programs involving kitchen, bathroom or boiler replacements, and rewires.
 - Main changes to the budgets included an increase in the roof budget of £150k to £900k linked to an increase in need for roof replacements. There was also a proposed decrease in the fire risk budget due to reduced demand following strong investment for a number of years in communal area programmes of fire related improvements.
 - The capital budget included an ongoing budget proposal for public realm investment in the St Matthews and St Peters areas with £1.9million proposed to be invested in Council housing estates.
 - A new budget was proposed to be added, linked to retrofitting to address fuel poverty and climate emergency on existing stock, outlined on Page 54, App F, priorities 37 – 39. The Technical Team in Housing were working with the Energy Team to procure an organisation to lead on the decarbonisation of Council's housing stock by 2030. There would be an additional capital budget need in future years for this work.
 - It was proposed in the capital budget to add a budget associated to a pilot on new fencing piece of work that would help drive and determine what the council housing fencing strategy would be going forward.
 - Included was an additional budget link to ongoing work to change the family temporary accommodation offer in moving to homes not hostels, and enhancing the Bridlespur Way accommodation offer.
 - Attention was drawn to the financial pressure on the HRA proposals for delivering a balanced budget, and the consultation feedback at Appendices G and H from the Housing Scrutiny Commission, and Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum on Pages 60 and 63 in the report.
 - It was noted that whilst there was reservation from both groups on the 1.5% rent increase due to the current economic climate, and the impact on vulnerable people, overall both groups supported the budget proposals, including the rent increase.

The Chair invited Members to comment.

Councillor Westley, Chair of Housing Scrutiny Commission welcomed the report which had received thorough scrutiny. Also, whilst no one wanted to see rent increases, tenants' representatives had welcomed the report and had noted the requirement to invest in the Council's housing stock.

In response to questions the following points were made:

- With regards to adaptations for those with disabilities, it was commented on that the budget was being reduced for existing disabled people with a view to putting £300k into a new budget for adapting properties. The Director responded that investment of over £1.2million in adaptations for existing tenants had been made for some years, and requests for adaptations were up-to-date. Some money could now be diverted for people who were waiting for properties due to the lack of adapted properties coming forward. £500k had already been put into the budget in relation to completing

extensions as part of the acquisitions programme, along with a review of those most in need on the Housing register. It was stated the £300k was a starting point with a review for the need for additional funding going forward.

- The 2% increase in service charge was on all council tenancies and not just elected ones.
- It was noted that Border House was closed in February 2020. The pausing of any evictions over rent arrears had seen a reduction in family homelessness during the past year. During that period people had been moved on positively and gradually people had been moved out of Border House. It was further noted there were no plans to utilise the building and would receive corporate consideration as to what should happen to the site, but it would not be associated to housing the homeless. Information on when the decision was made would be provided to Councillor Porter.
- As an update, the purchase of Hospital Close had progressed well and the Council was at the point of tying up legal aspects, and was a prime example of utilising 170 units for those most in need that would probably have been knocked down if the Council hadn't stepped in to purchase them.
- For a 10-year period beyond the Council purchasing a property, there was a cost floor associated with buying them back under Right-to-Buy, namely the purchase price paid for the property.
- The priority to 'provide 1,500 more council, social and extra care homes' was referenced (Page 47). Since the manifesto commitment officers had been working hard to deliver to the commitment in the first year, and 340 units had been delivered, and there would shortly be a press release focussing on Ross Hill Crescent new build houses and other properties coming available. Work would continue over the four-year duration of the commitment and would try to exceed the 1,500 manifesto commitment.
- The priority to 'ensure that no-one has to sleep rough on our streets' (Page 47) was also highlighted, and it was stated that there were still people who were sleeping on the streets, even one camping outside of the Dawn Centre. It was noted on the annual count the authority had the lowest number of rough sleepers on the night for a number of years at 12 people. The Commission was assured the Council had the ability and capacity to take anyone in and the 'everyone in' offer continued. Sadly, it was reported there were some individuals who would not accept offers of accommodation or engage until there was a change in their own personal circumstances.
- Reference was made to a report from the Fire and Rescue Service around culture, ethnicity and response. The Director stated he would welcome a copy of the report. It was further noted the Council met regularly with Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service over existing stock and had a strong relationship with them.

The Chair commented that there were reports of people living in appalling private sector accommodation, and it was good to see Leicester City Council's public housing being looked after and invested in to a high standard.

The Chair noted the proposal for a balanced budget, and comments made by the Overview Select Committee, the views of the Housing Scrutiny Commission, and the Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum that the proposed rent increase was valid and ensured continued investment in housing stock.

AGREED:

That:

1. The report be noted.
2. The proposals for delivering a balanced budget, and the proposed changes to rent and service charges be noted.

148. DRAFT GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22

The Director of Finance submitted the draft General Fund Revenue budget 2021/22, which would be considered at the meeting of Council on 17 February 2021. The draft had been published in December 2020 and received by all scrutiny commissions. The Overview Select Committee was recommended to consider the draft budget and the comments made by the Scrutiny commissions, and to pass its comments on these to the meeting of Council.

The Director informed the meeting the budget was proposed at a time of extreme uncertainty following 10 years of severe spending cuts and during which time the authority had lost over £100 million of government funding per year. She added it was not yet known the full extent of the spending which would result from pandemic restrictions or the impact of a subsequent economic downturn, and services may need to be shaped to meet the needs of the a new environment which will be faced with the pandemic was over.

When the report was produced it was on the basis of the draft finance settlement, with information on the grant for 2021/22. The final settlement was published on the afternoon of 4 February 2021 and did not amend any figures in the report.

The 12-month stop-gap budget had been recommended to the Executive, when finances would be reviewed when there was more certainty, and in line with the approach there had been minimal changes to the budget.

It was noted extra monies had had to be provided, in particular to social care which had received a further £10million. The government provided a social care grant of £3million, and the opportunity to increase Council Tax by 3% (£3.6million) was welcome but still left £3million short in terms of the cost of growth.

The budget was balanced with the use of £20million reserves. It was noted the authority was fortunate to have reserves which reflected the difficult decisions that had been taken in the past, as many local authorities were now financially unsustainable moving forward.

The Director predicted future years remained harder than ever as it was not known what the government intended to do with the spending review, the impact on business rates and the impact on city centres and downturn in the economy. It was stated an estimate of a funding shortfall in 2021/22 of around £40million could be expected, and that every year reserves would decline.

The City Mayor said it was a difficult budget following a disruptive year, and also the uncertain future. He added the Council's finances were comparatively stable to compared other local authorities due to the difficult decisions Members had had to take and the sound advice given to them from the Director of Finance and colleagues.

The City Mayor stated he had listened very carefully to what has been said by consultees and scrutiny commissions, and would formalise by way of the proposal to be put to Council the intention to recognise the role of scrutiny commissions. In particular the present role of the public health officers who had been stretched to considerable extent, and he believed it was necessary to put some additional resources behind that with a recommendation to Council to add initially a further £200k to that budget to enable them to make some changes to strengthen their team.

The City Mayor was also aware, as Scrutiny Commissions had also pointed out, the increasing needs of the most vulnerable in the community. He intended to top up the Discretionary Council Tax hardship fund in light of exceptional economic difficulties that people were facing, by £500k in the first instance.

The City Mayor also intended to recognise the continued call on the crisis support payments made with an extra £300k in the budget. The City Mayor also noted the likelihood that the Discretionary Housing Payments fund would come under pressure, and it was intended to top up the fund by £900k to provide for those in desperate hardship. The City Mayor noted the initial additions would be kept under review to see if further funds would be required.

He further noted the revenue budgets remain pressurised and by putting additional funds into those service put additional strain on the authority's ability to cope with the scenario ahead and greater austerity from the government, but it was impossible to recognise the needs both of public health and those in most distress as a result of the pandemic.

The City Mayor asked the Overview Select Committee to note the commitment made and hoped that the Committee support the revenue budget being taken to Council. It was added that the growth in social care costs had increased year on year and there was a need to seek ways of managing demand.

in response to Members questions the following was noted:

- The potential impact of a 5% council tax rise had been raised in Economic Development Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission who asked for consideration of the budget around hardship grants for those suffering to have some form of mitigation, and Members were pleased the City Mayor had provided figures of increased budgets in those areas. It was asked if the council tax letter when sent could include information on the opportunity to apply for various hardship grants or council tax/ housing support. The Director of Finance informed Members that information was included with council tax bills.
- It was raised that the increase in Council Tax would make it unbearable for

some people who were under pressure. It was stated that one of the main drivers for having to increase Council Tax was the increased costs of social care. The City Mayor added that the sums of money raised by the supplements made to Council Tax did little to contribute to increasing costs in those areas over the past 10 years. It was further added that Council Tax was going up in Councils across the country of all political control as a result of funding cuts made by government in the name of austerity.

- It is not possible to break down a household's council tax bill to show what their money is spent on penny by penny, but it was noted two-thirds of the Council's budget was spent on social care; vulnerable children and vulnerable adults. The Director of Finance agreed that the long-deferred review of social care funding was absolutely essential to all councils for future sustainability.
- It was suggested the continuing spiralling in costs in adult social care was unsustainable and was there more fundamental work that could be done. The City Mayor agreed with the need to look at social care costs as being paramount, especially at a time when other services were being squeezed.
- Members welcomed the decision on the 0-19 commissioning withdrawal of the budget reduction at this time.
- A note of concern was expressed regarding the sexual health and contraception services as an area for budget reductions. It was appreciated that Covid-19 had changed lots of behaviours, including sexual behaviours, however, it was stated the consequences of poor sexual health or lack of access to contraception could have lifetime consequences.

The Chair noted the report and comments made in Scrutiny Commissions and by Members of Overview Select Committee. It was noted that Members were very pleased that the Council's finances were managed responsibly and prudently by its finance officers, and hoped the government recognised that Leicester City Council were in a better position than neighbouring councils. The Chair thanked Director of Finance and colleagues for their hard work.

AGREED:

That:

1. The report and comments from Members of the Overview Select Committee be noted, and pass to the meeting of Council on 17 February 2021.
2. The Director of Finance review information regarding opportunities to apply for hardship grants on Council Tax Bills and the Council's website.

149. DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Director of Finance submitted the draft Capital Programme 2021/22, which would be considered at the meeting of Council on 17 February 2021. The Overview Select Committee was recommended to consider the draft Capital Programme and pass its comments on to the meeting of Council.

The Director of Finance presented the report and informed the meeting it was the smallest capital programme seen for some time. A recommendation had

been made to the City Mayor to propose a one year programme, and to focus on the schemes within the programme that were usually done as annual schemes and programmes as it was not known at this stage what would need to be done to stimulate the economy and recover.

It was also reported that recent monitoring reports had reported significant slippage on the previous large programme. It was noted there were many schemes that would continue to be delivered, including the significant housing programme.

As in the previous year, key priority themes were outlined in the report, and whether they were immediate starts or policy provisions that would come through for further decisions in due course.

The City Mayor stated that although there was considerable slippage during 2020/21, where there had been significant delays there were some additional costs that were comparatively modest. He added there were exciting things in the programme that as soon as Covid allowed, he was determined to deliver along with important things contained in the manifesto.

Members raised observations on the report and asked questions to which responses were given:

- The £300k to continue to the flood strategy was raised at the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission and highlighted the increase in heavy rainfalls and subsequent increase in flooding in areas of the Leicester, Leicestershire and other regions of the country. The flood investment £300k funding was predominantly for the Flood Plan and the work the Flood Team undertook. Significant flood schemes were the responsibility of the Environment Agency and Severn Trent. When considering the draft capital programme the City Mayor had asked for further information on the leverage funding, and a piece of work would be undertaken during 2021/22.
- £1.44million had been approved for works on De Montfort Hall. It was noted the building needed further investment and could not be allowed to decay.
- The fleet replacement programme was planned at £3million. Investment in the fleet had not been in the capital budget for two to three years, and the programme of replacement was significantly smaller and cheaper than it had been previously. The age of vehicles had been extended and it had come to the point where it was costing more money in repairs to vehicles and hiring vehicles than it would to replace them. Funded technically through the Revenue Budget and HRA it appeared in the Capital Programme as buying the number of vehicles expected was classed as capital expenditure. Only vehicles were replaced if absolutely necessary, and an electrified and low emission fleet remains a priority. Replaced vehicles were sent to auction to be disposed of.
- £270k was included in the work programme for heritage panels around the city. The panels would raise awareness of the city's 2,000-year history, both for visitors and residents.

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance and the City Mayor.

AGREED:

That:

1. The report and comments from Members of the Overview Select Committee be noted and passed to the meeting of Council on 17 February 2021.

150. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021/22

The Director of Finance submitted a report which proposed a strategy for managing the Council's borrowing and cash balances during 2021/22 (the Treasury Management Strategy).

Members of the Overview Select Committee were recommended to note the report and make any comments to the Director of Finance prior to Council consideration.

The Director of Finance reported that the report and following agenda item at 15 Investment Strategy did not significantly change from year to year but accompanied the budget report to Council which was required to approve them.

The following points were noted:

- The report outlined what the Council did with its money to keep it safe and make it work as safely as possible.
- In terms of cash flow, the authority was a cash rich organisation as a result of government rules where the authority was required to set aside money for specific reasons. The authority also received government grants before it was required to spend them.
- The Treasury Management Strategy set out the advice taken from leading national advisers and the sort of investments considered, and the types and credit rating of banks the authority would use.
- It was noted it was important to spread investments as no bank was too big to fail. The money had to be secure. Liquidity was also considered, in how easy could the money be accessed, for example, the monthly salary payments.
- Not the top priority, but how much the money could earn in an account was also considered.
- An amendment to the report was noted at 5.13 (a) 'We will lend on an unsecured basis to the largest UK banks and building societies for periods not exceeding 35 days' and was largely due to nervousness around Brexit. If treasury advisers notified the authority that it could lend for a longer period than it would.

In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:

- The Government Debt Management Office (DMO) was used when excess cash was left following dealings across the banks and other authorities. The

DMO would only be used when there were no other investment opportunities, and the interest paid was less. It was reported in December 2020 the DMO was offering negative interest rates. The authority only had a very small amount of money with the DMO at that point which was quickly removed. The authority had been using banks and money market funds predominantly since then and would continue to look at and pay particular interest in what markets were looking at as commercial investors.

- Interest on investments was reported to OSC twice yearly. The Director of Finance informed members the information would be included in the next Revenue Budget Monitoring Report.

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance for the report.

AGREED:

That:

1. The report be noted.
2. Interest in investments be reported in the next Budget Monitoring Report brought to the Committee.

151. INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2021/22

The Director of Finance submitted a report which on the Investment Strategy 2021/22 which defined the Council's approach to making and holding investments, other than those made for normal treasury management purposed, the latter of which was described in the Annual Treasury Management Strategy.

Members of the Overview Select Committee were recommended to note the report and make any comments to the Director of Finance prior to Council consideration.

The Director of Finance presented the report and made the following points.

- A couple of years ago the Government were nervous about some councils investing heavily in property and recommended that councils should have an Investment Strategy so it was very clear and Council approved what could and could not be done by the council and thresholds around it.
- The report was very similar to the previous year. It was noted the council would invest in property to generate income but the investment would remain in the local economic area. Examples of investments were set out in the report and included Leicestershire County Cricket Club who were supported through a secure loan which was backed by the English Cricket Board.
- Other schemes highlighted included Ethically Sourced Products and a company that needed to move to larger premises to continue to grow.
- The security of the investment remained the number one priority.

In response to Members' questions the following points were made:

- Reference was made to the £600k lent to the Haymarket Theatre

Consortium which was lost, and if consideration had been given where there wasn't an asset a charge could be put on to ask for personal guarantees which was a standard practice with banks. The meeting was informed that personal guarantees had been used particularly with the authority's role with LLEP as accountable body, but were fraught with difficulties and could mean the difference between someone wanting to continue with a scheme, but could also force an individual into a bankruptcy situation and was not something done lightly, but are certainly a tool to consider.

- The Cricket Club was a good example, in that they had offered a charge on the ground but because of planning constraints the Council would not have been able to sell or develop the property to recoup its money. A tripartite agreement had been reached with the English Cricket Board. Initially £700k had been lent then £1.7million, with a reasonable 5% return and an asset maintained in the city. If there had been an issue with the club in the future, the English Cricket Board would pay the balance of the loan. It was confirmed the Cricket Club had not been approached about cheap finance but had approached the Authority as a significant partner with new leadership at the club.
- Travelodge was complete but had delayed opening due to the current Covid-19 situation. No money had been given to the Authority to date. It was further pointed out that hoteliers rarely owned their assets and had long leases on hotels being common industry practice.
- With regards to the performance of the corporate estate because, the valuation basis most often seen was for the purposes of the annual accounts unlike the private sector. It was reported that the value in commercial terms was about £133million. Questions from the Mayor had led to a piece of work underway towards a report to Council on the performance of the corporate estate and policies employed, to see whether the authority was getting a decent return when benchmarked against other local authorities and potentially other commercial property landlords.

The City Mayor confirmed the report was near to completion and would be available to Members and the public within a matter of weeks and would be the first of an annual report on the portfolio. He added it was important because of the income and contribution to the revenue budget.

The City Mayor further noted that with the Travelodge, the Authority had not given them any money, but had invested in an asset that would provide the Authority with an income, had brought the building back into use and regenerated the Haymarket Centre of which it was a part. The City Mayor confirmed the deal had been sealed with Travelodge in December 2020 and a commencement date agreed on when they would begin the income stream to the Council regardless of when they opened.

The City Mayor further informed the meeting the Haymarket Theatre was closed before he was elected as Mayor and had been a drain on Council resources. The Council had invested in the theatre, with the overall majority of the investment secured and was an additional asset to the city.

- It was asked how many council housing tenants were in arrears because of Covid-19. The Director of Finance would write to Members with the details.
- A reference was made to the investment by the Council in Pioneer Park which was seen as positive investment aimed at creating employment and business and was expected to bring a net surplus of £100k per annum. It was asked if the Council could pursue this sort of strategy. The Director of Finance agreed it there could be more investment of this kind in the City's own economic area. Councillor Myers, Assistant City Mayor also noted it was a model that had worked very well at LCB Depot also, where a particular sector of the economy had been targeted, the space had been managed really well, had brought businesses to the city and returned a profit for the Council.

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance for the report.

AGREED:

That:

1. The report be noted.
2. The Director of Finance to write to Members with details of tenants in rent arrears due to Covid-19.

152. CALL-IN OF EXECUTIVE DECISION - CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21 - PERIOD 6 - RELATING ONLY TO PART 3 OF THE DECISION IN RESPECT OF THE FUNDS FOR THE JEWRY WALL

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which informed the Overview Select Committee that the Executive Decision taken by the City Mayor on 17 December 2020 relating to Capital Budget Monitoring 2020/21 – Period 6 – relating to only part 3 of the decision in respect of the funds for Jewry Wall had been the subject of a five-Member call-in under the procedures at Rule 12 of Part 4D (City Mayor and Executive Procedure Rules) of the Council's Constitution.

The report confirmed that the options for the Committee were to:

- a) Note the report without further comment or recommendation.
- b) Comment on the specific issues raised by the call-in.
- c) Resolve that the call-in be withdrawn

Councillor Kitterick, as proposer of the call-in, was invited to address the Committee, and made the following points:

- Firstly, after reviewing the decision to add more money into the budget for Jewry Wall museum, the decision was made to call it in.
- Secondly, there was mention in the 2019 Labour Manifesto which talked about the museum but did not talk about the sums of money that would be required. Other Manifesto commitments had previously been deemed too expensive, but the Jewry Wall commitment had been given priority.
- People would be charged to enter the museum. There were questions about the King Richard III visitor centre which had cost £5million, had more

attraction for visitors, and had struggled with visitor numbers. There were questions over whether the Jewry Wall would have the same widespread attraction for visitors who would be able to see the main attractions of Roman ruins and wall for free from the path.

- Officers had previously outlined in terms of the capital budget and revenue budget that there was extreme uncertainty around Government funding, with impacts on business rates, and it was not known what needed to be done at this time to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Jewry Wall project was not considered to be a priority in terms in what the Council was facing post Covid-19, when the models of tourism and museums would have changed. Members who had requested the call-in were asked for the decision to invest a further £2.5million to be delayed until the priorities for Leicester's economy were evaluated post Covid-19.

The City Mayor was given the opportunity to respond. He said it had been made clear in the Manifesto commitment that the Jewry Wall project would be developed. He added it was an exciting project in that it was the largest piece of non-military Roman masonry still standing in the UK and was important in what it represented in the 400 years of Roman governance in the City.

The City Mayor stated the city would need to use its assets to draw local and national tourists to the city post-Covid in many new ways and with the investment proposed would be a major draw to tourists rather than relying on city centre retail, the patterns of which were changing. The City Mayor added as well as the King Richard III Centre, and the Cathedral were poised to invest in its business centre.

The City Mayor noted the Jewry Wall project was well underway, with the first phase of £4million already invested which would be wasted if the project had to cut back on further investment. It was further noted the money received from the LLEP was specific for Jewry Wall, and he hoped that Members recognised the political commitment already made and the money that had been invested, and that the Committee could see the call-in withdrawn.

The Chair invited Councillor Waddington as one of the signatories to the call-in to comment. Councillor Waddington, as advised by the Monitoring Officer, declared she had no interest in the project and approached the discussion with an open mind. Councillor Waddington stated the facts received had not enabled anyone to make a clear decision about whether spending the additional £2.5million was a sensible proposals, and that she had hoped the call-in would have resulted in the Committee receiving a business case for the Jewry Wall museum so Members could see why the extra £2.5million was needed. She noted the project was not down for completion for two years, and that in the meantime there were other issues to be dealt with, including the economic recovery of the city.

Councillor Waddington had looked into pooled business rates to find out how the money could be spent, and that the amount of money available to the City and County was £24.4million, with the City's share at £8.2million. She noted that even though it was public money, there was no published information on

what projects were put forward. It was noted the money could be spent on capital or revenue project relating to economic development, the Council put forward proposals and LLEP considered projects put forward. Councillor Waddington quoted from LLEP report that the Executive were advised they could review the timing of some projects in the light of recovering from Covid-19. Any proposed changes would be assessed by LLEP and presented to the Leaders Group for determination. Councillor Waddington said it was clear the money could be used for a variety of things, one of which could be for Jewry Wall, as well as other projects for economic development. It was noted the money would be needed as the levels of unemployment in the city had risen considerably because of Covid-19. The Economic Development Recovery Plan was comprehensive and ambitious but relied on funding which it did not have. She added that she was not convinced that spending on Jewry Wall at this time would benefit the economic recovery of the city, and asked that a further report be brought back to the Committee with a business case for the Jewry Wall Museum, how the £2.5million on top of the millions already committed would enhance the economic recovery of the city, and what other options might be available to create more jobs in the city.

Members were given the opportunity to provide their points of view. Councillor Gee as Vice-Chair of Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sport Scrutiny Commission noted the Jewry Wall Museum was a long-term project. He added as well as being a tourist attraction, it was an education facility and provided school children with the history of the city.

Further comments from Members made included:

- Museums and other cultural institutions were part of the heritage and culture of the city as well as the tourism industry.
- Where jobs and livelihoods were at risk, the City Council was duty bound to protect and preserve economic livelihood and lifeline of the city and to direct investment was one way that could be done.
- To pull out of the project would run risk of reputational damage for the city and the Council. As a manifesto promise the Council needed to revive interest and build upon it for the city.
- The costing of the project was presented to Members and discussed when the Manifesto was put together.
- The closure of Jewry Wall for many years had resulted in loss of income. To develop the project would provide an important heritage and education facility for young and old alike and would bring people into the city centre, enhance the economic fabric of the city, and support small businesses such as catering and hospitality.

Councillor Porter queried why the museum was closed previously and raised concerns that target visitor numbers when the museum was opened would not be met. He also suggested that as the majority of the tourist attraction was outdoors people should not have to pay to access the museum. He suggested that Jewry Wall be opened as before without spending too much money on it. He added a sculpture park in a green space such as Aylestone Meadows or Watermead Park could be developed as a visitor attraction as in York to bring

people to the city.

The Chair noted the retail sector was facing severe difficulties during Covid which might take many years to build up the lively city centre again and he was sure that the Executive and the Economic Development Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission would do all it could for the future city and tourism and education were crucial to the future of the city.

Councillor Kitterick responded to the comments that had been made, and said he was still genuinely concerned. He referenced the investment and additional proposed £2.5million and asked Members to consider how the money could be spent. He stated that if the business community were to be asked how they would spend the £2.5million and initial investment money he would be surprised if any of them had considered spending it to rebuild Jewry Wall. He added the future of business rates was not known and the city should step back and check priorities for spending the business rates pool.

The City Mayor welcomed the opportunity to have had the debate and the support from the overwhelming majority of Members at the meeting. He pointed out the project was already underway and there was a firm commitment to deliver it. He added it was not the first scheme that had had significant investment in order to bring families and visitors to the city and compared with other schemes was being delivered on budget and good value for money. The City Mayor noted the need to invest in the city in order for it to continue to thrive not be dependent on retail.

Chair stated the debate had been the true purpose of scrutiny, and a good example of how to deal with an issue, take on different views and arrive at options.

The Chair read out the various options within the report. He stated the City Mayor had heard some of the ongoing issues raised that could be looked at following the meeting. As the debate had highlighted a majority of support from Members for withdrawal of the call-in, the Chair MOVED and Councillor Gee SECONDED that the Committee withdraw the call-in of the decision, and on being put to the vote, the Motion was CARRIED.

AGREED:

1. That the call-in be withdrawn.

153. SCRUTINY COMMISSIONS WORK PROGRAMMES

The Chair invited Councillor Kitterick, Chair of Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission, to present a review scoping document report into “The experience of black people working in health services in Leicester and Leicestershire”.

In presenting the report, Councillor Kitterick informed the meeting the report was an initial response to the Black Lives Matter movement. It was stated that in all organisations, including Leicester City Council, there were issues with

how BAME workers were treated, and when moving up in those organisations became less representative of those populations at senior levels.

Health Services in Leicester are major employers of people from BAME backgrounds and the review aims to find out how they act as an employer amongst its black members of staff. Events had shown that more external scrutiny of the health service and its practices would be a good exercise for the city and the local NHS.

Councillor Kitterick added that external scrutiny of the City Council treated its black workforce would be equally valid but that this review would focus specifically on the Health Services. He added the Scrutiny task force would undertake a worthwhile piece of work that fitted with Leicester City Council responding to the just cause set out by the BLM movement.

The Chair endorsed the review and that it would be complementary to the work being undertaken by Cllr Hunter, and noted the Overview Select Committee would have an opportunity to revisit the review once it had been reported back to the council. The Chair asked Members of the Committee in turn if they endorsed the work.

AGREED:

1. That the review report be received and endorsed.

154. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The Chair reminded Members that any questions over an individuals' Register of Interests be made outside of the meeting.

155. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The City Mayor informed the meeting that Andy Keeling, Chief Operating Officer would be moving to the Falkland Islands. He added there would be a recommendation to Council to appoint Alison Greenhill as Chief Operating Officer and he offered her his congratulations.

The Chair asked that the thanks of the Committee be passed on to Andy Keeling, congratulated Alison on her new role. Councillor Porter noted that Alison would be the first woman appointed to the role in the Council.

Alison thanked everyone, and reassured Members of Overview Select Committee she would continue to be present at the meeting.

156. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.17pm.