



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 13 JULY 2023 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor Cank (Vice Chair)

Councillor Bajaj
Councillor Batool

Councillor Porter
Councillor Whittle

Councillor Dave
Councillor March

Also present:

Sir Peter Soulsby

City Mayor

* * * * *

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

There were no declarations of interest.

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed all Members of the Overview Select Committee for the municipal year 2023/24.

The Chair noted that it was intended for the Labour Members of the Committee to switch halfway through the municipal year and the Chairs of the other 3 Commissions would sit on the Committee. Chairs of Commissions not on the Committee would still be invited to attend informally when a subject related to their Commission was on the agenda.

The Chair encouraged Members to engage in positive and constructive manner during their time on the Committee and stated that the role of Scrutiny was to be a critical friend for the Executive rather than political opposition.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

5. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

It was noted that the Council was engaging with Eyres Monsell Primary School to undertake surveys of their toilet block.

It was noted that the minutes referred to Corporate Parenting training as part of the Members induction programme following the election, it was noted that a training session would be held on Monday 4 September.

6. MEMBERSHIP OF THE OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE 2023/24

The Membership of the Committee for 2023/24 was noted.

7. DATES OF MEETINGS OF THE OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE 2023/24

The dates of meetings for 2023/24 were noted.

8. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

9. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

10. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

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

AGREED:

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

11. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE PORTFOLIO OUTLINE

The Director of Delivery, Communications, and Political Governance and the Director of Finance gave a verbal presentation on the portfolio of the Overview Select Committee, it was noted that:

- The Overview Select Committee was the parent committee for the different Scrutiny Commissions of the Council. Therefore, the focus of the Committee was on wider Corporate Services such as Finance, HR, Estates, and Legal.
- The Committee also looked at multi-service issues such as Covid-19 or the cost of living.
- A focus of the Committee was on Equalities. Work was ongoing to refresh the Council's Equality Strategy and any update on that would go through the Committee. Additional training to Committee Members on Equalities was available. All Scrutiny reports came with Equalities implications considered.
- The Committee would receive financial monitoring reports on a regular basis.

There was discussion on work the Committee could take to look further into Equalities issues in the Council. It was agreed to consider this further under the Work Programme item later in the meeting.

In response to a suggestion that Executive Lead Members attend the Committee it was noted that Executive Lead Members attended the Scrutiny Commission for their portfolio areas and generally only the City Mayor attended the Committee. However a Executive Member may attend if an item of relevance to their portfolio was on the agenda.

ACTION:

The Committee thanked Officers for the overview.

12. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING OUTTURN 2022/23

The Director of Finance submitted the final report for the monitoring cycle for 2022/23 and reports performance against budget for the year.

The Director of Finance presented the report, it was noted that:

- The report presented a £4.4m overspend, this was a reduction on the estimate in the previous period.
- Cost pressures were around increased staff pay, energy costs, and long-term income loss from Covid.
- The HRA was overspent by £8.2m.
- All earmarked reserves had been reviewed at the end of the financial year. As part of this a small amount was withdrawn from departmental

reserves and would be used as part of the managed reserves strategy.

- The report included a list of proposed savings.

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

- NHS funding for ASC that was unspent went into reserves, this funding was intended to fund joint-NHS projects in future years. Some Government grants had conditions which required a certain amount to be put into reserves to support future years expenditure.
- The Council maintained an insurance fund reserve. This was due to the Council self-insuring to a certain amount and this was funded from the reserve. Every 3 years the fund is reviewed which was why a certain amount had been released into the Capital Programme. The insurance fund was currently at £6m.
- With regards to bringing extra income into the HRA by lowering the number of void properties, there were a significant number of vacancies in Housing Repairs which there was great difficulty in filling. Therefore, to decrease void-time agency workers were being used.
- Regarding losses in income in parking charges, income had increased in the last few years however still had not returned to pre-Covid levels.
- On Sunday parking, it was almost universal across the country to charge for Sunday parking. The concern with free parking was that spaces would be taken up by workers rather than visitors. The Sunday parking charges would be reviewed after being in place for 12 months.
- ASC income was not separately reported as it was offset by the expenditure for those required to pay for their care.
- The increase in street lighting costs was caused by increased energy prices. This increase was decreased by now using LED lights.
- It was advised that grant funding to support homelessness and asylum seekers was for projects that spent more than one financial year and this was why they were transferred to reserves.
- There was an underspend in concessionary fares, this was because less people were traveling on buses and therefore the Council did not have to cover as much concessionary fare cost.
- On the future of the Park and Ride service, it was noted it was a partner scheme with the County Council. The service had not yet bounced back from the pandemic, but it was hoped that it would do and that the service would have a future.
- With regard to options for catering services, City Catering was an in-house provider that schools could choose to use. Charges were considered in light of the amount the Government paid schools for free school meals.
- In order to attract new market traders, the Market was receiving a major redevelopment which would start soon.
- Prices for Active Leicester membership were available to view online. Membership numbers continued to grow.
- If a ringfenced fund was spent in a given year it could be rolled onto the next year. However, the Designated Schools Grant was currently in a deficit position so work was ongoing with DfE to resolve this.

- With regard to unaccompanied asylum seeking children, a number were assigned to Leicester Children's Services by the Home Office.
- There was a 30% increase in journey costs for SEND children who used taxi services despite only a 10% increase in fare costs. This was due to the nature of journeys changing with typically longer journeys now. Reducing the cost of these journeys remained a major priority for the Council.

It was suggested that budget monitoring reporting could include the initial budget projections alongside the current projections and actuals.

Members commented that as much as an overspend was concerning, an underspend was also equally concerning as it could mean services are not being delivered to residents due to staff vacancies. The City Mayor noted that it was inevitable that there would be overspend and underspend in a budget, however current underspend and overspend levels were a very small percentage of the overall budget. The City Mayor praised Finance Officers for their accurate projections which secured low levels of overspend and underspend.

Outstanding issues that Officers would send responses regarding following the meeting were detail on the additional landfill costs and details on the joint NHS projects.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the report and asks Officers and the Executive to consider comments made by the Committee and respond to outstanding questions.

13. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING - APRIL-MARCH 2022/23

The Director of Finance submitted a report to show the position of the capital programme at the end of March 2023 (Period 12).

The Director of Finance presented the report, it was noted that:

- There were continued pressures in the construction industry leading to delay and cost pressures. Decisions relating to those pressures were included in the report.
- The report contained a number of other decisions as usual for the capital monitoring report.
- The only Capital project marked as red was Greener Homes as all of the Housing Associations in the scheme had pulled out.

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

- The redevelopment of the Jewry Wall Museum was progressing well and was expected to be completed on-time. It had previously been delayed due to the contracted constructor going into administration.

- The project on SEND PRUs had been pushed back 6 years from the original completion date, this was due to a combination of issues managing multiple sites, and the expansion of the scheme.
- On children's homes, the Extra Care policy provision for adult social care had been used to provide funding.
- In terms of the Haymarket Theatre redevelopment, the history of the status of the Theatre was noted. The City Mayor noted that the current position was that the Theatre was not in use and needed extra work to lighting and accessibility to bring it up to modern standards. It was noted that different options for future management of the Theatre were being considered and Members views on the matter were welcome. The City Mayor also stated that he intended to invite all Councillors on a site visit to the Theatre.
- Three significant schemes had were being undertaken due to receipt of significant Levelling Up Funding.
- On expenditure from Right to Buy sales, these sales were well below market value. A portion of those receipts had to be paid to the Government.
- Slippage on the Parks and Open Spaces spending was a result of work on the Victoria Park Bandstand and on Rally Park.
- There had been additional costs to the District Heating metering programme for surveying works. This would lead to additional charges for users getting meters installed.

Outstanding issues that Officers would send responses regarding were the Greener Homes scheme, and the difference in Right to Buy sales to market value.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the report and asks Officers to consider Members comments and respond to outstanding questions.

14. REVIEW OF TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2022/23

The Director of Finance submitted a report to review how the Council conducted its borrowing and investments during 2022/23.

The Director of Finance presented the report, it was noted that borrowing and investments had been impacted by various market factors including Bank of England interest rates increase. Some borrowing had been repaid shortly after the years' end to Barclays, this resulted in revenue savings of £1m a year.

In response to a question from a Member regarding a loan to a textiles company, it was noted that this was included in the report as a loan to Ethically Sourced Products who were up to date with repayments.

AGREED:

That the Committee notes the report.

15. INCOME COLLECTION APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023

The Director of Finance submitted a report which detailed progress made in collecting debts raised by the Council during the 2022-23. It also set out details of debts written off under delegated authority that had not been possible to collect after reasonable effort and expense.

The Director of Finance presented the report, it was noted that all departments that dealt with debt were actively supporting those struggling with debt

In response to questions from Members it was noted that:

- The benefit of employing more Parking Enforcement Officers was clear and it had been shown that there was considerable public support for more parking enforcement.
- Debt write-offs for Parking Enforcement included initial costs and additional fees accrued over time. These write-offs were often in cases where the drivers couldn't be traced.
- On the option of using debt recovery firms to get back at least some outstanding debt, it would have to be understood how the debt would be recovered by any potential company as there was a policy around Stop the Knock.
- There were currently approximately 40 Parking Enforcement Officers.
- On the option of extending Parking Enforcement powers to City Wardens, it was felt that City Wardens would not support this as a lot was already expected of them.
- On the debt of £251k written off for Arcadia Group who had liquidated. This was due to them building up business rates for a number of sites which were not eligible for small business relief. When a business typically went into liquidation there was a queue for recovering money and Councils tended to be low on that queue which was why that money had not been recovered at all.
- For those in rent arrears, the eviction rate remained extremely low thanks to the work of the Income Management team.

AGREED:

1. That the Committee notes the report.
2. That further information be circulated regarding parking enforcement staffing figures.

16. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The City Mayor noted that Councillor Porter had suggested at a recent Full Council meeting that as part of the new Scrutiny configuration, a session be held before every meeting of the Overview Select Committee dedicated to questions for the City Mayor. The suggestion was that in the hour before the

Committee meeting all Members would be invited to come and ask questions without prior notice.

The City Mayor stated that he agreed with the principles of this and was happy to proceed with holding the session before the next Committee meeting.

It was suggested that while Members would not have to give advanced notice of their specific questions, that it would be helpful if some indication was given beforehand as to which areas the questions would be on so that relevant Executive Members could be present.

It was noted that following the first session that the format could be reviewed.

AGREED:

That preparations be made for a Questions for the City Mayor session to take place 1 hour before the future meetings of the Overview Select Committee.

17. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that a formal work programme was not yet in place and was still in early stages. Comments and suggestions from Members would be considered for inclusion.

There was extensive discussion on how the Committee should undertake its work to scrutinise the Council on Equalities. The City Mayor welcomed this and stated that he would be happy for the Council's record on this to be examined.

The particular area suggested to be examined on this occasion was representation in the Council workforce at different levels.

There was discussion on various options for the next steps of this work, it was agreed that an informal briefing session would be held which would provide detail of the Council's corporate equality duty and to present some initial data relating to the Council's workforce representation.

Other areas suggested for inclusion on the work programme were the cost of living, customer services, and the Council wide picture on recruitment.

AGREED:

1. That an informal briefing session on demographic representation in the Council workforce at different levels be prepared.
2. That other suggestions for items to be included in the Committee's work programme be considered by the Chair and Officers.

18. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 8.06pm.