Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2019 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)

Councillor Halford
Councillor Joshi
Councillor Kitterick
Councillor Porter
Councillor Waddington

In Attendance:

Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor

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38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dawood, Joel, Khote and Westley.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

40. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded Members that, as the pre-election period had started, (in relation to the forthcoming General Election), the key restrictions to be noted were:

- Publicity could not be given to individuals involved directly in the election as either candidates or agents; and

- Care needed to be taken to remain objective and avoid the appearance of political bias.

41. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview Select Committee held on 19 September 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

42. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Chair referred to the discussion under minute 27, "Progress on Actions Agreed at the Last Meeting", regarding whether the five properties in Market Square that were due to be demolished could be offered on short-term leases for start-up businesses.

He reported that the three units with the red shutters were still in use for trader storage, but it should be possible to move items out of the ground floor after Christmas and at that point it could be possible to look at other uses. The other two units were the ones intended for demolition. Confirming the timescale for that would inform whether short term use was viable in the interim.

43. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

44. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer advised that there were no petitions to report.

45. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

Members considered the Tracking of Petitions Monitoring Report.

AGREED:

That the petitions marked 'petition complete', namely 29/05/2019 and 10/05/2019, be removed from the Monitoring Report

Action	By
Petitions marked 'petition complete', namely 29/05/2019 and 10/05/2019, to be removed from the Monitoring Report	Democratic Support Officer

Councillor Kitterick arrived at the meeting during consideration of this item

46. DRAFT LEICESTER LOCAL PLAN (2019 - 2036) - PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report outlining the main strategies and policies of the draft local plan for public

consultation in January / February 2020.

The Team Leader (Generic Planning) introduced the report and gave a presentation on the draft local plan, (a copy of which had been circulated with the agenda papers), explaining that:

- The detail of the strategies and policies would be available for the public consultation;

- The city's boundaries were very tight, so the Council worked closely with neighbouring authorities. There also were a number of cross-boundary issues that needed to be addressed;

- Housing need had been calculated on the basis of a national methodology taking account of factors such as projected births, deaths and migration;

- Housing was a key issue for the city and neighbouring districts, particularly as it was unlikely to be possible to deliver the full extent of housing needed in the city. At present, it was anticipated that there would be a shortfall of 7,742, which would be redistributed through agreement with neighbouring district councils;

- The Council projected around 150 "windfall" dwellings each year that could be used for housing, (for example, at the backs of existing houses). Private landowners also had put forward sites for inclusion in the housing allocations;

- It was important to get the right balance between public open space and the need for housing. Under current proposals, some green space and green wedge would be lost, (for example, through development on part of a site while having open space on the rest of it), but the details of this would not be released until the final local plan was agreed;

- At present, there were five proposed new school allocations in the draft local plan; and

- Through the public consultation, suggestions would be invited of things to be included in Character Area Detailed Guidance.

Some concern was expressed about the amount of green field sites that could be lost, as there did not appear to be a specific target to encourage new house building on brownfield sites. It also was suggested that use of greenfield sites by neighbouring authorities could result in more traffic coming in to the city, with resultant increases in congestion and pollution. To reduce the potential impact of this, it was suggested that increasing the height of good quality developments could be considered, particularly in central locations, although using brownfield sites would be preferable.

In reply, the City Mayor explained that priority was being given to development on brownfield sites. However, Leicester was different to many other former

industrial cities in that it had very tight boundaries and had already used many of its brownfield sites. Growth would be cross-boundary, so this Council needed to continue to work very closely with the neighbouring district councils. Suggested brownfield sites would be put forward in the draft local plan as suitable for development, but in the meantime any suggestions from Members for sites that could be used would be welcomed.

Members queried whether it was accurate that the city would run out of space for development. In reply, the Head of Planning reiterated that the city had a comparatively restricted amount of brownfield sites available for development, some of which had problems such as flooding or contaminated land. To help alleviate this, neighbouring district councils would be accepting approximately one-third of the city's projected growth up to 2031. After that. the Strategic Growth Plan indicated the potential to accept up to approximately two-thirds.

Members also suggested that it would be useful to have a definition of brownfield sites and information on what control the Council could have over housing and employment developments on them.

The Committee was reminded that a suggestion had been made in a previous consultation that a greenfield site could be considered for use as a sculpture park, as this could encourage people to come to the city.

Members noted that the land at Leicester General Hospital identified as a strategic housing site was in public, not ~~in~~ private, ownership. There already had been opposition to the development of this land for housing and the loss of health use. It therefore was suggested that it was inappropriate to include this in the local plan as a confirmed strategic housing site at this time.

The City Mayor acknowledged that further discussion about the site was needed, but explained that was the purpose of this consultation. As a general principle, the Council needed to be prepared to intervene when the market failed to regenerate sites. The Council had powers of compulsory purchase, which sometimes needed to be used boldly.

The following points also were made in discussion:

- A stronger commitment to supporting progress towards carbon neutrality and climate-adaptation should be included in the draft local plan;

- The introduction of internal space standards for student accommodation and houses in multiple occupation were welcomed, but caution was expressed pending receipt of the details of these standards;

- Housing officers were considering how unused privately-owned houses could be brought back in to use;

- Council housing would be part of the new housing provision set out in the local plan;

- A lot of young people could not afford “affordable housing”, so it would be useful to have a definition of what was considered to be affordable, (for example, the price range);

- Prohibiting development above certain heights was understandable for Character Areas, but could be inappropriate for other areas. Further debate on this therefore should be held;

- The area around St George’s Churchyard contained a lot of heritage assets that needed to be protected;

- The proposed number of additional units for the central development area was not ambitious enough;

- Currently there were industrial units being developed in the centre of the city and housing away from the centre. This should be reversed, so that industrial units were on the periphery. This would bring people in to the city and large vehicles would not have to come in to the city centre to service the units. Transport links also would need to be considered to improve the viability of this approach;

- If land needed to be improved in order that it could be used for housing or employment purposes, did the Council have any powers to require owners to do this or to acquire the land itself?

- Officers were already undertaking some detailed work on employment sites in the city. Some of these were well designed and were listed, so some flexibility was exercised on allowing them to be converted to housing, (despite being identified as employment sites), in order to retain them;

- It was predicted that the population would increase, so the local plan would need to include measures to ensure that infrastructure provision was appropriate, (for example, the appropriate number of schools and health centres). Five new school sites were proposed, three of which were already the subject of planning applications, and the Council was in dialogue with the Leicester City Clinical Commissioning Group and Hospital Trust regarding health provision;

- Improvements were needed to the former Imperial Typewriters building in East Park Road;

- Although Section 106 funding was mentioned, viability assessment indicated scope for this was limited; and

- Nothing would be included in the local plan that could not be demonstrated as deliverable.

AGREED:

1) That the report and presentation be received and noted; and

2) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to take the comments recorded above in to account in the preparation of the draft local plan 2019-2036 for public consultation.

47. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The Chair took this item out of the order set out on the agenda, as the City Mayor had to leave the meeting to attend an engagement.

The following questions were put to the City Mayor at the meeting.

a) London Road Bus Lane

Councillor Porter noted that the Council's bus lane policy stated that it was not a contravention of a bus lane to allow anyone to enter or travel along a bus lane for boarding, or alighting from, a bus and suggested that this meant it would not be an offence for anyone to drop people off or pick them up in the bus lane outside the train station on London Road.

The City Mayor explained that the bus lane in question was part of a Red Route, so had additional restrictions to bus lanes. These prevented access in the way suggested by Councillor Porter. Officers would be asked to contact Councillor Porter to explain the situation in more detail.

Action	By
Councillor Porter to be contacted by officers to advise him of the restrictions applicable to the bus lane outside the train station on London Road	Highways officers

b) Bus Shelter outside Train Station

Councillor Waddington asked when a shelter would be erected for the bus stop outside the train station.

The City Mayor advised that he had said that he wanted it done by Christmas. It was possible that this could not be achieved, but he did not want it to be delayed much beyond that. A supplier had been identified.

c) "Lying Figure No. 1" Painting

Councillor Porter asked whether, in view of a recent spate of attempted art robberies internationally, the Francis Bacon painting "Lying Figure No.1", currently held at the New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, was adequately insured.

Councillor Porter then suggested that, as this was a valuable asset, but not aesthetically pleasing, the painting could be sold and the money raised used to

provide affordable housing. Councillor Porter asked whether a consultation could be held on whether the painting should be sold.

In reply, the City Mayor advised that the accreditation and registration of the city's galleries and museums was dependent on their collections being maintained. Assets should not be sold for short-term gain or to meet running costs.

Action	By
Officers to confirm that the "Lying Figure" painting is adequately insured.	Principal Insurance & Claims Officer

48. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING APRIL-SEPTEMBER, 2019/20

The Director of Finance submitted a report forecasting expected performance against the budget for the year. In introducing the report, the Director noted that an underspend was forecast through planned spending reviews and difficulties in recruiting to some posts. This was exacerbated by service uncertainties caused by the delay in the government's Green Paper on Adult Social Care.

An additional difficulty was that funding to deal with winter pressures was not released until January, which was too late to assist local authorities in their financial forecasts. Improved national forecasting therefore was needed to help local authorities work with the health sector.

The Committee noted that reports were being received of pressures on adult social care in relation to older people blocking beds in hospitals, their discharge being delayed due to appropriate care not being available. It was concerning that the people not being recruited could help to alleviate this pressure, but at the same time as there were vacancies, less was being spent on social work agency staff. The Director of Finance assured Members that budgets were not being reduced as a result of this.

AGREED:

1) That the position presented in the report be noted; and

2) That the Strategic Director Social Care and Education be asked to provide Committee members with more detailed information on the nature of the vacancies being experienced in adult social care.

Action	By
Committee members to be provided with more detailed information on the nature of the vacancies being experienced in adult social care	Strategic Director Social Care and Education

49. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING - APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2019/20

The Director of Finance submitted a report showing the position of the capital programme for 2019/20 as at the end of September 2019 (Period 6).

The Committee questioned when the Jewry Wall Museum Improvements would be completed, the forecast completion date having changed from March 2019 to February 2022. In reply, the Director of Finance explained that it had proved difficult to ensure that the improvements were sympathetic to the wall and the other archaeology of the site. The next stage of the scheme was being prepared, but the Director of Culture and Inward Investment could be asked to provide more information on the reasons for the delay.

Members also queried whether the St George's Churchyard scheme was continuing, due to recent use of funding from that budget for highway and public realm improvements on Orton Square and Rutland Street. The Director of Finance confirmed that alternative options for the Churchyard were being considered and suggested that the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation could be asked to provide members of the Committee with further information on this.

AGREED:

1) That the overall position presented in the report be noted;

2) That the Director of Culture and Inward Investment be asked to provide Committee members with the reasons for the delay in the Jewry Wall Improvements project; and

3) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to supply information on the alternatives being considered for the St George's Churchyard scheme to members of the Committee.

Action	By
Committee members to be provided with further information on the reasons for the delay in the Jewry Wall Improvements project	Director of Culture and Inward Investment
Information on the alternatives being considered for the St George's Churchyard scheme to be provided to members of the Committee	Director of Planning, Development and Transportation

50. INCOME COLLECTION APRIL 2019 - SEPTEMBER 2019

The Director of Finance submitted a report detailing progress made in collecting debts raised by the Council during the first six months of 2019-20, together with debts outstanding and brought forward from the previous year.

The Director reminded Members that not all debt raised in a particular year was collected in that year. For example, deferred payments were classed as debt, such as when people went in to care and the Council covered the fees, with the debt secured on a property. The debt would be repaid when the property was sold. In addition to this, a lot of people paid Council Tax in instalments and at this stage of the year this accounted for the largest element of outstanding debt.

Some debts were harder to collect than others, (such as overpaid housing benefit), but the Council continued to pursue these. This was becoming increasingly difficult though, as the Council did not administer benefits for people on Universal Credit, making it harder to help. However, the Council continued to collect debt at the same level as it had done for the last five years.

Debt from people on benefits often was repaid in small instalments over a long period of time, as they were on low incomes, the rate of repayment being decided by the courts. People's financial vulnerability had to be considered, so debt was not written off easily. As a result, debt written off could have been accumulated over many years.

Members noted that parking fines and fines occurring through bus lane enforcement appeared to be written off more quickly than debts from other service areas. Further information on this was requested, along with information on issues that could arise when the vehicles concerned were incorrectly registered and/or licensed.

In response to a query, the Director of Finance advised the Committee that a pilot study was being undertaken on how third-party private organisations that could be interest in acquiring Council debts performed.

AGREED:

1) That the overall position presented in this report be noted; and

2) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be requested to present a report to this Committee detailing procedures used to write-off parking fines and fines occurring through bus lane enforcement, this report to include issues that could arise when the vehicles involved were not correctly licensed.

Action	By
A report to be presented to this Committee detailing procedures used to write-off parking fines and fines occurring through bus lane enforcement, this report to include issues that could arise when the vehicles involved were not correctly licensed	Director of Planning, Development and Transportation

Councillor Kitterick left the meeting at the conclusion of this item

51. MID-YEAR REVIEW OF TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2019/20

The Director of Finance submitted a report reviewing how the Council conducted its borrowing and investments during the first six months of 2019/20.

It was noted that the Council had not borrowed money for some time and there were no plans to change this position. In addition, security was put before investment, as a result of which the Council was slightly below national averages for investments. However, the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement had increased recently, as some local authorities were borrowing in order to buy commercial properties.

The Committee asked why the Council was not borrowing while rates of interest were low. The Director of Finance explained that the Council often had income before it was needed, (for example, direct debit payments were received at the start of the month, but staff were paid at the end of the month). Along with this, the Council currently was sitting on cash balances from the requirement to set aside money to repay debt, but was unable to do this early due to the penalties involved. This meant that the Council did not need to borrow money, as it had funds available. In addition, when a scheme was undertaken, a rate of interest was applied to the scheme equivalent to what would be paid if borrowing from the cheapest lender. This interest was then saved.

Members asked why the Council did not borrow money at current rates of interest in order to buy property, when the expected rate of return on property was higher than the rates of interest. In reply, the Director of Finance reminded Members that, under the Council's Investment Strategy agreed earlier this year, the Council would undertake investments, but it would not be core business. At present, the Council could afford to buy property without a loan, but the Council would only invest if the right scheme was identified. Members also were reminded that the Strategy did not include agreement to buy out of area.

AGREED:

That the report be noted and the prudence of the Council welcomed.

52. SCRUTINY COMMISSIONS' WORK PROGRAMMES

a) Economic Development at Local Level

The Chair of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission reminded Members that the scoping document for a review of economic development at local level had been supported in principle at the last meeting of this Committee. (Minute 35(b), "Scrutiny Commissions' Work Programmes – Economic Development at Local Level", 19 September 2019 referred.) Since that meeting, the task group undertaking the review had started collecting data.

AGREED:

That the Scoping Document for a review to consider economic development at local level be endorsed.

b) Adult Social Care Workforce Planning: Looking to the Future

The Chair of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission presented a Scoping Document for a review to consider adult social care workforce planning looking to the future on behalf of the Vice-Chair of that Commission, who was leading the review.

AGREED:

That the Scoping Document for a review to consider adult social care workforce planning looking to the future be endorsed.

c) The underachievement of 'Black Caribbean' and 'White British Working-Class' pupils of secondary school age in Leicester

The Committee was asked to receive and endorse the report of the review of "The underachievement of 'Black Caribbean' and 'White British Working-Class' pupils of secondary school age in Leicester" undertaken through the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission.

AGREED:

That, as the Chair of the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission is unavailable to present the report at this meeting, he be asked to resubmit the report of the review of "The underachievement of "Black Caribbean" and "White British Working-Class" pupils of secondary school age in Leicester" to this Committee for consideration after the report's recommendations have received Executive endorsement and been discussed by the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission.

Action	By
The report of the review of "The underachievement of "Black Caribbean" and "White British Working-Class" pupils of secondary school age in Leicester" to be resubmitted to this Committee for consideration after the report's recommendations have received Executive endorsement and been discussed by the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission	Chair of the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission

53. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

AGREED:

That the Committee's work programme be received and noted.

54. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.22 pm