



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 21 MAY 2020 at 3:00 pm as a Virtual meeting using a Teams Live Event

P R E S E N T :
Councillor Ted Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor Joel (Vice Chair)

Councillor Dawood
Councillor Joshi
Councillor Kitterick
Councillor Westley

Councillor Porter
Councillor Thalukdar
Councillor Waddington
Councillor Halford

In Attendance:

City Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby
Deputy City Mayor Clair
Deputy City Mayor Clarke
Deputy City Mayor Russell
Asst. City Mayor Cutkelvin
Asst. City Mayor Myers
Asst. City Mayor Patel
Asst. City Mayor Master

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73. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Vi Dempster and Mandip Rai.

74. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Joshi declared that His wife worked for the reablement team.

Councillor Porter declared that his partner worked in a school in the city.

Councillor Thalukdar declared that his sister lived Council housing.

75. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair held a moments silence in memory of the late Councillor Jean Khote.

The Chair requested that all Members, Officers and Members of the Executive present kindly introduce themselves.

The Chair advised the Committee that the meeting was a virtual meeting as permitted by section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and outlined the procedures for the meeting.

The Chair informed Members that Officers were working on arranging dates for Scrutiny Commissions to take place and requested Members to work with Officers in arranging these dates.

76. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 12 February 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

77. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Chair confirmed that none had been received.

78. PETITIONS

The Chair Confirmed that no petitions had been received.

79. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

Agreed:

That the tracking report be noted.

80. QUESTIONS FROM SCRUTINY COMMISSION MEMBERS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The Chair noted that Members of Scrutiny Commissions had raised questions regarding the Coronavirus, the impact of the pandemic, the Councils response to the pandemic and the financial implications on the Council.

The Chair explained that responses to the questions would be provided during the consideration of the reports.

81. LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL'S CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE

The City Mayor introduced the report providing an overview of the City Council's response to the Coronavirus pandemic. The City Mayor noted that these were unprecedented times and even if the situation had been anticipated, it wouldn't have been something that the Council could have been

fully prepared for.

The City Mayor commented that he had been impressed by the response from Officers both individually and as teams during such times and did not believe that Officers had got very much wrong. Officers had been very intelligent, sympathetic, careful and quick with their response to the pandemic.

The Director of Delivery Communications and Political Governance outlined the report and invited Officers to give insight into their key areas.

The Director of Social Care and Education explained aspects relevant to his section of work. It was noted that some information included in the report had changed since the publication of the report.

The Director of Housing explained the Council's response in terms of housing and homelessness as set out in the report.

The Director of Public Health outlined aspects regarding the public health response which had been heavily involved in the response to this pandemic as well as keeping existing services running.

The Director of Delivery Communications and Political Governance presented details relating to Neighbourhood Services on behalf of the Director of Neighbourhood Services. Emphasis was made on key areas of Neighbourhood Services that had worked hard in maintaining and providing its services to the most vulnerable.

The Head of Human Resources (HR) gave an outline of key workforce issues faced during the response.

The Director of Finance outlined details of the Shielding Programme, Food Support provisions and Business Support being made available.

The Head of the City Mayors Team explained how volunteers from the voluntary and community sector (VCS) had been engaged in the response to the pandemic.

In relation to Communications, this had been a critical part of the response and the Communications Team had worked very hard to keep everyone informed and were seen as a trusted source for information and guidance.

It was noted that the Recovery phase would be the subject of future discussions, although some recovery work was underway.

Members of the Commission were then invited to raise questions which included the following responses:

- Within the first seven weeks there were 8 reported suicides across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR). These figures were higher than usual, although since that time the numbers had decreased. In this

scenario, it was noted that these individuals had some form of contact with health services or were known to services.

- Practitioners that were conducting risk assessments were doing them robustly and questions were being asked if frequent contact was being made with those who were vulnerable.
- The Health and Well Being offer was being promoted to staff to try and reduce the impact on staff health, both mental and physical, in the long run. Officers were ensuring that the support was in place from the present time rather than a reactive approach further down the line. Additionally, it was noted that for those staff on the front line, they were receiving excellent one to ones and supervision specifically focussing on their physical and mental health. Staff were also being encouraged to use their annual leave entitlements to take time away from work and the service would continue to monitor the absence profile to provide relevant interventions as and when needed.
- In relation to Children's services it was recognised the impact this period would have on children and the service were doing everything they could to minimise the impact on children and to recognise that there would be children who would require additional support once lockdown began to ease.
- In relation to returning to school, part of the reasoning for children to return to school was to minimise the risk of the impact lockdown could have on children, such as their mental wellbeing. The Council had to ensure that the return to schools would be done at an appropriate pace without increasing any risks and to ensure measures were in place to maintain social distancing. It was also noted that the Government had suggested creating "bubbles of children", comprising a certain number of children, a teacher and a teaching assistant that would effectively be considered as a household. These bubbles would minimise the risks by not mixing with others and was more practical than trying to get young children to maintain social distancing. Schools had been supported with robust, rigorous risk assessments. There were three aspects to these risk assessments; the place, the process and the person. The risk assessments were unique to every school as buildings were different and included the processes for ensuring that the bubbles did not mix together and the potential of parents mixing together and there had to be a level of assessment on each individual person.
- Regarding the concerns around BAME communities and the risk factor in relation to these communities, it was noted that data suggested that there were groups who were at higher risk, and the Council were aware of the risks to the BAME community and other vulnerable groups such as those with underlying health conditions. It was noted that the approach was to make sure that the authority could reduce the risk collectively as much as possible across all sectors. Moving staff into different roles where services would allow was also being considered to

reduce the risk for those who are within the high-risk category. There were also further levels of risk assessments being carried out for individuals who were recognised as potentially high risk.

- In terms of ensuring that children continued receiving free school meals and the holiday meals provision, the Director of Public Health commented that this had been a priority programme for the Council and the Council were successful in their funding bid for the following year. The Service were now looking at a range of options in terms of delivering this programme. Emphasis was made on this challenging situation and it was noted that key partners were struggling to obtain food supplies and further updates would be provided on this in the future.
- In relation to continuous support for those that were homeless it was noted that the aim would be to ensure that the Council had enough permanent accommodation for people to be able to move on to. There would be individual plans for those in temporary accommodation to receive appropriate support from different services and that there would be different offers in place for individuals.
- There was a very active process to ensure care homes were operating within set guidelines. The Care Quality Commission was in regular contact with all care homes and were conducting assessments on the provisions. From the Council's perspective the Contracts Team were speaking to every care provider in the city at least twice a week to receive feedback on their operations. Additionally, the Public Health Team were in contact with every care home in the city on a weekly basis.
- There had been some delay in obtaining death certificates from the coroner's officer during the pandemic. This was related to issues within health practices and the appropriate health practitioners certifying death before being able to proceed with the normal registration processes.
- It was noted there had been some adjustments made with crematorium services to cope with additional demands, but they had not had to fully change their practices such as extending hours over the weekends and were coping well with numbers.
- Voluntary organisations were receiving funding from a wide range of sources. The Council were not aware of any organisations that had not received funds that they were entitled to. Funding was being made available but not all organisations would be eligible due to the conditions set out to acquire the funding.
- It was queried whether the proposal for building houses on the Leicester General Hospital site was being reconsidered in light of the pandemic and what implications this would have on the Council's local plan. Responding, the City Mayor commented that the local plan consultation

was part of a long process, and everybody would have the opportunity to engage with the plan and debate the plan within their communities in due course.

- In relation to tackling the homeless situation, the Director of Housing commented the service commitment was to provide a home for everyone. All homeless individuals would stay in temporary accommodation and individual plans would be put in place to support individual needs. Should there be a ban on helping those without recourse to public funds then the Council would look to continue to support individuals moving towards working with the private sector and other organisations to meet those individual's needs.

There was some discussion around Leicestershire County Care and concerns were raised about their proposals to change the terms and conditions of staff that were previously TUPE from Leicester City Council. The Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission moved that the Overview Select Committee should unreservedly condemn the actions of Leicestershire County Care to try and cut the terms and conditions of hard-working staff during the Covid-19 Crisis. The Chair of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission seconded the motion.

The City Mayor thanked the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission for putting forward the motion and indicated his support. Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Concerns were expressed around herd immunity and it was suggested that the Council were in a strong position to plan their own route to prevent the virus spreading further. The use of face masks was discussed and it was suggested that the current priority was to ensure that the front-line services were well supplied with the personal protective equipment they required and the most effective way to stop the spread was still to consider hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and social distancing. It was important that these messages were promoted across the City.

It was noted that as of this week, testing was now open to anyone over the age of 5 and a testing centre had been set up at the Birstall Park and Ride site. The Council also had a portal where it could deal with referrals of staff for testing. It was noted that the option to request a home testing kit was available, mobile testing units were also going around the city and the county, staying for a number of days at certain locations.

In relation to business support the Director of Finance noted that funding had been made available from Central Government, administered locally and 84% of all eligible applicants had received funding support.

With regard to the status of schools and their reopening the City Mayor indicated that he had issued a statement about the expectations on schools in the city and he had emphasised that not all schools were expected to reopen on 1 June 2020. Schools should only reopen when school leaders and

governors were convinced that reopening would be safe for the children, their families and safe for the staff that worked in the schools. A considerable amount of engagement had already taken place with schools and robust risk assessments were in place to enable them to take measures to mitigate those risks before they sought to re-open schools.

Concerns were raised about the increased level of unemployment in the City as an effect of the pandemic and the City Mayor confirmed that the economy of the city was high on the list of priorities.

Committee members congratulated Officers on all the efforts that they had put in during the unprecedented times and especially thanked all front-line and volunteer staff helping communities and the city during the pandemic.

The Chair endorsed the Committee's comments and commended the Council's approach on contacting the most vulnerable members of society to check on their well-being.

Agreed:

- 1) That the Strategic Director Social Care and Education be asked to advise Leicestershire County Care that this Committee condemns the actions of that company in trying to cut the terms and conditions of hard-working staff during the Covid-19 Crisis;
- 2) That Officers be requested to update the individual Scrutiny Commissions on plans for recovery; and
- 3) That the contents of the report be noted.

82. IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON THE 2020/21 BUDGET

The Director of Finance introduced the report outlining the financial impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the 2020/21 budget.

The City Mayor commented that there were large amounts of uncertainty during this time and although the Government had provided some support, the Council were still uncertain of the level of additional service required during the current situation.

Members were invited to ask questions which included the following comments in response:

- In terms of the Council's position on allocating funding the Constitution allowed the Director of Finance to increase the Council's spending above the approved budget during an emergency. The Director of Finance advised she would bring forward a proposal to increase the Council's approved budget funded by the government grant to the Overview Select Committee in due course.
- Regarding the Council's position on borrowing additional money, that

was relatively cheap to do, however it was not the ideal step to take and other councils that had borrowed money recently were in difficult positions and risked bankruptcy. Borrowing money would only be considered for capital investment if there were no other alternatives.

- In the event of a potential second peak of Covid-19 and the impact of that if the Council were to go into another lockdown with loss of income then the Government would have to provide significant funding to support local authorities as it had done now.
- In relation to the current Capital Programme and developments such as Jewry Wall Museum, the City Mayor informed Members that there would have to be a review on the Capital Programme, but it was not anticipated that would be a fundamental review. Time frames would require adjusting to complete projects and carry out the activities set out in the manifesto on which Members were elected.
- The Leicestershire County Council Pension Fund Administrators were preparing the annual accounts and the pension fund would in time be evaluated to determine what impact the pandemic would have on the Council's pension fund. Up to this financial year there had been an improvement in the performance of the fund to the benefit of the city so it was anticipated that the Council may have lost some of that benefit if the pension fund was valued down, although there were no significant impacts anticipated.
- In relation to further measures for small businesses, contact had been made through various means with hard to reach businesses and their owners. It was noted that the Government had not indicated an end date to the business support grant, and it was hoped that Ward Councillors could use their networks to help make contact as lockdown began to ease.
- The service was working alongside the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership to predict what kind of economic impact there could be on the city if the two major universities moved lectures online. Although some universities had announced online learning it was suggested that it would be impractical for De Montfort University (DMU) to do this, as it offered many practical courses to the students. The City Mayor commented that he was aware that DMU would be resuming on 5 October 2020 and they were determined to have face to face lectures as much as possible.

The City Mayor recognised the work of the faith groups in the city who had come together at short notice, helping contribute to the running of services. It was noted that the Head of the City Mayors Team had been the point of contact for many of these faith groups and assurances were given to Members that there would be continuing opportunity in the future to thank all those involved.

Agreed:

- 1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- 2) That the Overview Select Committee supports the City Mayor's stance that the Council expects Government to meet the full additional costs incurred during the emergency.

83. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

Members of the Committee were invited to put their questions to the City Mayor.

Councillor Porter took the opportunity to congratulate the Council and Council Officers for their handling of the pandemic.

Councillor Porter enquired about the scientific advice that the Government had issued and sought assurance that Members and citizens of Leicester were getting advice from qualified experts in the field.

The City Mayor thanked Councillor Porter for his constructive engagement over this period and assured him that the Council would be taking its independent advice from Officers who had demonstrated their high level of expertise.

84. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 5:52 pm

