



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 2020 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor Joel (Vice Chair)

Councillor Dawood	Councillor Porter
Councillor Halford	Councillor Thalukdar (substitute)
Councillor Joshi	Councillor Waddington
Councillor Kitterick	Councillor Westley

Also present:

Councillor Clarke – Deputy City Mayor Environment and Transportation
Councillor March – Vice-Chair, Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission
Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor

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103. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, reminding them that this was a virtual meeting, as permitted under Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, to enable meetings to take place whilst observing social distancing measures.

At the invitation of the Chair, Members and officers present at the meeting introduced themselves.

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

The Chair also advised that he would be taking items in a different order to that listed in the agenda.

104. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Halford declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting, in that she and family members were Council tenants.

Councillor Joshi declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting, in that his wife worked for the Council.

Councillor Porter declared for openness that he previously had made public his concerns that green spaces in the city were being destroyed, (agenda item 9, "Draft Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan", referred).

Councillor Thalukdar declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting, in that a family member was a Council tenant.

Councillor Westley declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting, in that family members 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.

105. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked management, staff and volunteers for their hard work in addressing the Covid-19 crisis. He also acknowledged the difficulty residents in the city had faced in a prolonged lockdown. He asked them to ensure they stayed safe, thanking them for their perseverance.

106. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview Select Committee held on 28 July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

107. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

Further to minute 95, "Black Lives Matter", it was suggested that Councillor Hunter, (Assistant City Mayor with responsibility for the Black Lives Matter project), be invited to the meeting of this Committee to be held on 3 December 2020 to update the Committee on her work.

Members note that all other actions identified in the minutes were ongoing or completed.

AGREED:

That the Scrutiny Policy Officer be asked to invite Councillor Hunter, (Assistant City Mayor with responsibility for the Black Lives Matter project), to the meeting of this Committee to be held on 3 December 2020 to update the Committee on her work.

108. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

109. PETITIONS

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

110. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

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

AGREED:

That the Monitoring Report be noted.

111. SCRUTINY COMMISSIONS' WORK

Councillor March, Vice-Chair of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission, presented a report of the review "Adult Social Care Workforce Planning: Looking to the Future", that she had led.

Councillor March stated her appreciation of the value of the adult social care workforce and explained that the report had shown that by 2035 there would be a need to employ 1.5 times more staff than currently. The main recommendations of the review were that the Council should continue to pay workers at least the Living Wage, with contractors encouraged to do the same, and that the implementation of an ethical care charter should be expedited.

The Committee welcomed the report and congratulated those involved on the work that had been done.

Challenges faced by the sector were recognised and it was questioned how these would be addressed. For example, as many care workers were not British, what would be the impact of leaving the European Union? Retention and shortages of staff also were issues, but were employers willing to invest in training and development for staff?

Councillor March advised that nationally approximately 12% of the adult social care workforce were non-British nationals, but in Leicester this figure was nearer 4%. With regard to training and development, anecdotal evidence suggested that there was a hierarchy due to a lack of parity of esteem between health and social care, with the former being more highly valued than the latter. It therefore was hoped that establishing proper pathways for development would help those employed in adult social care feel more valued.

Members suggested that the current crisis arising from the Covid-19 pandemic provided a chance to develop more quality opportunities, such as apprenticeships, as recommended in the report. It also was important that

managers were appropriately qualified, which would help raise the profile of the sector and increase confidence in all those working in it.

In response to an enquiry from Councillors about how this authority could promote quality of service provision, Councillor March explained that a substantial quality assessment framework was in place, which ensured that the best possible quality service was received.

Councillor March noted that another concern was that a large number of people working in the sector were over 50 years old, so were beginning to approach retirement age. A lot of young people did not remain working in the sector very long and often did not return once they left it. It was felt that this was at least in part due to the imbalance of esteem between the health and social care sectors. This was a national issue, but it was hoped that the recommendations in the report would help address the situation locally.

The Committee stressed the need to recognise the importance of care workers during the current Covid-19 pandemic. One way of doing this would be to ensure that they received a full living wage, which highlighted the difference between the fees paid by those receiving the services and the lower wages received by those providing the care. Opportunities should be taken to restore some balance, such as through creating a carers co-operative, where everyone would receive a share of the profits.

Councillor March reminded Members that a previously stated intention was to consider the creation of a co-operative of this nature, to create greater engagement of workers with companies providing the care. The report of the review also considered other options, such as employee buy-outs of care provision companies, but pursual of these it was not in the remit of this review, or the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission's terms of reference.

The City Mayor welcomed the report, expressing his gratitude for the work done. It was overdue that attention was given to the care sector and he looked forward to an early discussion with Councillor March on how the report's recommendations could be taken forward.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Strategic Director Social Care and Education be asked to pass on to the city's care workers the thanks of this Committee for the high quality services and support provided, especially during the current crisis arising from the Covid-19 pandemic;
- 2) That this Committee endorses the recommendations contained in the report of the review "Adult Social Care Workforce Planning: Looking to the Future"; and
- 3) That the Strategic Director Social Care and Education be asked to present a report to this Committee at an appropriate time on how the recommendations of the report referred to in 2) above will be taken forward and the proposed timetable for this.

112. DRAFT CLIMATE EMERGENCY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Director of Estates and Building Services submitted a report presenting a draft three-year strategy for addressing the Climate Emergency declared in February 2019, along with the first draft of a three-year action plan.

Councillor Clarke, Deputy City Mayor – Environment and Transportation, introduced the report, thanking all involved for developing the strategy to this point. These included:

- An Expert Commission, formed during the consultation period, which would continue to provide support in the development of the strategy going forward;
- The Climate Assembly, comprising 53 members of the public;
- A Young People’s Climate Assembly had been formed;
- Self-led groups also had participated, including several schools and public and private bodies and organisations;
- The Council’s Economic Development, Transport & Tourism Scrutiny Commission; and
- Council officers.

The Change Manager (Climate Emergency) explained that extensive consultation had been undertaken on the strategy and action plan through a Climate Emergency Conversation. This had provided a strong mandate from people in the city to take forward the proposals.

It was noted that there was an ambition for the city to be carbon-neutral by 2030, ahead of the government target of 2050. This would be addressed through six themes, as set out in the report, which were based on the key sources of greenhouse gas emissions generated by the city and Council, and areas for adaptation to climate change. The strategy acknowledged that the Council did not have the powers and responsibilities to address all of these things on its own, but needed to work in partnership with others.

The Committee welcomed the boldness of the report and the clear proposals that would enable the city to set an example to others. The involvement of the community and other groups in the preparation of the strategy and action plan also was warmly welcomed.

Members then made the following comments:

- Would the water environment workshops for schools be delivered with a single type of school, or age group? How would other schools be encouraged and enabled to benefit from these workshops?

Response from the Change Manager (Climate Emergency):
This information could be provided as the programme developed.

Response from Councillor Clarke:

The Council had the most successful eco schools programme in the country, working with over 100 schools of a wide range of types to promote a green school ethos. The Council also had employed a dedicated officer for this work.

- The suggestion of holding an international Healthy Cities Summit was welcomed, but it was questioned how people could be encouraged locally to engage in making Leicester a healthy city. The city had a very diverse population, with a wide range of health challenges.

Response from Councillor Clarke:

Preparations for a Healthy Cities Summit had been well advanced before the restrictions imposed in response to the current Covid-19 pandemic were introduced. As a result of these restrictions, the Summit had had to be postponed.

- The proposal to create “touchdown spaces”, as part of the move by the Council towards agile working, needed to be reflected in the Council’s recruitment processes. How would possibly not having regular team contact affect people’s health and wellbeing, particularly their mental health? It was important not to miss warning signs about these.

Response from the Change Manager (Climate Emergency):

Officers would be identifying locations for “touchdown spaces” and then making staff aware of their existence.

The Council was very aware of the mental health aspects of working remotely and would be encouraging activities such as regular meetings, including more socially based meetings, to help offset these.

- Further information was requested on the risk of future legal challenge to actions by the Council that were perceived to be incompatible with reaching the ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030.

Response from the Change Manager (Climate Emergency):

Advice from the Council’s Legal officers was that under current law the Council, or other public body, could be challenged if such an ambition was set but a credible plan was not in place and/or actions were taken that would prevent the ambition being realised.

- One difficulty with asking people to change their travel choices was that industries no longer were concentrated in a particular geographical area and public transport was not always available for the routes people needed to travel. Therefore, if members of a family worked in different areas, it could be difficult for them get to work by any means other than cars.

Response from the Change Manager (Climate Emergency):

It was recognised that people could be encouraged, but they made their own lifestyle choices based on a range of factors, which included

perceptions of different modes of transport. Information on what was preferable and/or possible needed to be positive, in order to attract people to particular modes of transport.

- How would income from a workplace parking levy be used to influence the strategy?

Response from Councillor Clarke:

A range of stakeholders had been consulted about the possibility of introducing a workplace parking levy in order to develop a feasibility assessment, before a detailed plan was developed for wider consultation. Potential income levels therefore were not known yet.

- It was not appropriate to impose a workplace parking levy in the city when Councillors were offered, and used, free parking in the city centre. This also encouraged car use at a time when the Council should be leading by example.
- What plans were there to encourage reductions in car use in the future, taking in to account it often was cheaper to travel by car than public transport?

Response from Councillor Clarke:

It was recognised that there were issues around the cost of public transport, but the opportunity had been taken during the Covid-19 pandemic to accelerate and enhance work being undertaken with transport operators, for example in areas such as joint ticketing. If a workplace parking levy was introduced, income from this could be available for investment in promoting other forms of transport.

- The pop-up cycle lanes in the city were welcome, having made cycling easier and safer. What lessons had been learned from these?

Response from Councillor Clarke:

The flexibility of pop-up cycle lanes had enabled work to be done with the public to refine their siting and operation. It now was hoped to make some of those lanes permanent, but where they had not worked so well it enabled thought to be given to where different transport modes should be given more priority.

- The Council's fleet of vehicles ran regularly through the city and so should be converted to being powered electrically.
- It would be welcome if opportunities for green jobs could be pursued.

Response from Councillor Clarke:

Those preparing the strategy and action plan had been very mindful of green jobs. Work needed to be done with a range of partners to be able to develop green jobs and central government funding was needed to facilitate their development.

- New build housing that had been built to address climate change was welcomed. However, one of the worst types of housing in terms of pollution was older style council housing. This was being considered by the Housing Scrutiny Commission, and a programme of boiler replacement in the Council's housing stock was underway, but more information was needed on other measures that could be taken to improve emissions, particularly in pre-war properties.
- At the same time as this strategy and action plan were being prepared, the Council was proposing through its Draft Local Plan to concrete over green spaces and cut down trees, some of which had Tree Preservation Orders on them.

Response from Councillor Clarke:

Unfortunately, the Council was restricted by national policy in relation to the Local Plan. The forthcoming White Paper "Planning for the Future" was likely to result in a further loss of control by planning authorities over development and ability to address climate change.

- Council buildings often had the lights left on when empty.
- Although it was being said that the consultation on the strategy and action plan was very wide-ranging, only just under 400 responses were received to the online consultation.
- There was concern that the Council was not in a position to lead by example on climate change, due to its poor record to date on addressing these issues.

Response from Councillor Clarke:

The Council's record on beating its previous targets to address climate change showed that it was equipped to deliver the actions identified to meet the stringent targets and ambitions set.

AGREED:

- 1) That the drafts of the Leicester Climate Emergency Strategy 2020 – 2023 and Leicester City Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020 – 2023 be endorsed;
- 2) That the Director of Estates and Building Services be asked to take account of the comments recorded above in developing Leicester City Council's Climate Emergency Strategy 2020 – 2023 and Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020 – 2023;
- 3) That the work done by all involved in the preparation of the documents listed in 1) above be noted and welcomed, particularly in relation to the extensive consultation undertaken and the resulting mandate for an ambitious response to the Climate Emergency;

- 4) That the Director of Estates and Building Services be asked to submit a report on the further development of the Leicester Climate Emergency Strategy 2020 – 2023 and Leicester City Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020 – 2023 at an appropriate time;
- 5) That the report referred to under 2) above include information on how it is planned to progress the development of green jobs;
- 6) That the intention to actively encourage and support organisations in the city to join with the Council in taking action, including developing their own action plans be noted and endorsed; and
- 7) That the commitment made in the Leicester Climate Emergency Strategy 2020 – 2023 to monitoring and publicly reporting on progress be welcomed and endorsed.

113. COVID-19 PANDEMIC - UPDATE

Directors gave verbal updates and the Committee made comments on the current situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, as set out below.

a) Update from the Director of Public Health

The Director of Public Health advised the Committee that in total there had been 6,557 confirmed cases of Covid-19 between the start of the pandemic and 7 September 2020.

116,168 tests had been processed through the Public Health England recording route, with an average of 670 tests being done per day. There had been issues nationally with testing capacity, but a lot of work had been done to maintain local test facilities and the benefit of this had shown in the results being obtained.

Since the start of the pandemic, 839 Leicester residents had been admitted to hospital in relation to Covid-19. There had been 11 hospital admissions per week in August 2020 and over the last seven days there had been 10.

There had been 278 deaths in the city where the person had tested positive for Covid-19 within 28 days of death.

At the end of August 2020 there had been 25.4 cases per 100,000 people. There was a very sharp increase in numbers at the start of September 2020, but over the most recent seven days this had reduced to 100 cases per 100,000 people. Nationally, there currently were 34.4 cases per 100,000 people. In August, the city had had the 23rd highest number of cases in the country and although it currently had the 26th highest number of cases, the numbers were causing a lot of concern.

Door to door testing of city residents had been successful in keeping the number of cases down and would continue. However, it was felt that the safety messages needed to be widened in communities, which would also help address the widespread increase in anxiety.

A very successful contact tracing system had been established in the Council. However, cases being received from the national team were slightly older (over 24 hours), so were having to be pursued hard.

b) Update from the Strategic Director Social Care and Education

The Strategic Director Social Care and Education reminded the Committee that the Council had a role in monitoring the Adult social Care market, as almost all provision was made externally.

There were 103 care homes in the city and they were all contacted by telephone once or twice a week, to ensure that they had the resources they needed, (for example, staffing capacity, personal protection equipment (PPE), or training). During the pandemic, there had not been any point at which care providers had been genuinely at immediate risk of running out of PPE.

Providers registered through the Care Quality Commission could access PPE through the national portal. Other providers could access PPE through the local authority, so the Council was making sure that those providers knew about this provision and could access it.

Officers also ensured that care homes had adequate staff, using bank staff when needed, though ensuring that these only worked in a single care home, in order to reduce the risk of transmission between facilities. On occasion, office staff also had been loaned to care homes.

A lot of care was taken over infection control. It had been proposed that nationally, under the Adult Social Care Winter Plan, the infection control grant would be extended to the end of the year. Information on the city's allocation was awaited from the government.

Fees had been increased, in order to cover the very significant cost of the work being done in relation to the pandemic. As the care providers were external to the Council, the Council did not have the resources to cover the costs involved. It had been made clear that this was a temporary increase.

Regular testing of care home staff and residents was undertaken, with staff being tested weekly and residents being tested every four weeks. The Council had been instrumental in establishing this policy nationally.

There had been a sudden very large increase in the number of cases of Covid-19 in care homes during the first week of September 2020, but officers had been able to react within a day to make sure that the homes had the support they needed. During the second week of September the numbers had reduced

and this week were nearly back to where they had been before the spike.

Delays in getting results of tests from the national testing system were causing problems, both in terms of getting tests done and in terms of consequential delays in acting on positive results. If staff tested positive but had been asymptomatic, they could have been working in a care home during that time. There could be a further issue if there was a large spike in numbers of cases in care homes at the same time as a full outbreak in the community, as this could reduce the available staff capacity below safe levels, but work was being done with care providers to prepare for such a situation.

Despite the precautions being taken and work being done, it appeared that some people currently preferred to stay at home, rather than go in to a care setting. Given the perception of risk associated with care, and the restrictions on visiting people in care homes, this was understandable. Efforts were being made to ensure that family carers had access to any required support.

Children's social care had moved to an online service, or doing "window calls", where the participants could see each other but the phone call was Covid-secure. This had been quite beneficial, as having officers in a room together could be quite intimidating for some families and people could be more comfortable being in their own home.

A campaign had been held to maintain safeguarding referrals. Initially there had been a drop in the numbers being made, but they were now back to their usual level. All referrals were investigated.

There was a continuing reduction in the number of Looked After Children. This was in contrast to some other local authorities, which had seen a sharp increase.

There had been a very low number of infections among young people in schools, with only 1% having tested positive for Covid-19. Only 17 young people aged under 18 had been hospitalised due to Covid-19 and there had been no deaths from it in that age group.

The city had 112 schools and to date there had been 107 cases related to schools. These involved 65 children, 42 staff and over 60 schools, although most schools only had one or two cases. It appeared that infections acquired in the community were being identified before there was transmission within schools.

School attendance was falling. At the start of the term it had been 91%, but had now reduced to approximately 79%. This fall was greater than the national average, but could be due to the local restrictions that the government had put in place in response to the number of cases in the city. Only one school was not open due to the number of infections.

It was recognised that schools not opening could have a significant impact on the wider economy, so officers were making sure that the only pupils or staff

who were sent home were those who needed to be, either because they had symptoms or had been in close contact with someone who had tested positive.

There had been a very significant fall in attendance in the nursery sector. These often were very small businesses, so this reduction in numbers could cause problems for the providers, as very limited government support was available. There also was concern that this would result in very limited pre-school care being available after the pandemic.

c) Update from the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services reminded the Committee that the Regulatory team was working in partnership with other agencies, such as the Police.

This work included the following:

- A number of interventions had been made, which included 4 prohibition notices being issued to businesses that should not have been operating between 23 March and 19 June;
- Over 170 concerns had been received about social distancing in work premises, nine of which had been referred to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE);
- Information packs for businesses had been produced that set out key messages, such as reminders to wash hands and socially distance. The Elections team had been helpful in delivering these packs and the Communications team had been very helpful in ensuring that information reached the business community;
- Covid-19 checks had been made at high risk sites. Most of these were intelligence-led investigations, with enforcement only being undertaken where required. A total of nearly 1,300 covid-secure inspection visits had been made. The HSE regulated some premises, but Council officers had made 54 visits to high-risk premises that the HSE was unable to access;
- The work of the regulatory team continued to focus on high-risk premises, with 938 reactive inquiries having been actioned;
- A lot of support had been received from the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service, which had carried out some covid-secure inspections, (for example, at hotels);
- The Council had been one of the first local authorities to use new legislation that allowed protection orders to be issued to help manage the pandemic. 11 directions had been issued to 11 premises on London Road in relation to large, unmanaged queues and a Public Space Protection Order had been issued. Intensive work also had been undertaken to

ensure that restaurant bookings were being managed correctly;

- The team also had been working closely with Public Health officers, using data to ensure that any responses made were proportionate and in the right location;
- Assistance also was being given to enable closed businesses to reopen;
- Legislation continued to change. For example, a 10.00 pm curfew was coming in to force on 24 September, people were still not able to meet in groups of more than six and from 28 September it was a legal requirement for premises to be covid-secure; and
- This work would continue going forward, for example, in relation to key events or celebrations where intelligence could be used to assist in issues such as maintaining social distancing.

d) Update from Director of Finance

The Director of Finance noted that vulnerable people covered by shielding arrangements would be released from shielding requirements on 5 October 2020. Currently, only Leicester and Blackburn still had advisory shielding in place, but the environment was now more covid-secure than it was when shielding was first introduced in March 2020. Everyone in the city who previously had been shielding had been advised of the change and the last food delivery would be on Friday 2 October.

e) Update from Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance explained that a challenge facing officers currently was “message fatigue” and the complexity of messages being delivered. Some stronger messages therefore would be circulated about the increasing number of cases of Covid-19 in the city.

A lot of work was being done with community stakeholders, including proactive visits to venues such as places of worship to ensure they were covid-secure.

Councillors were thanked for helping to get the messages out to local communities.

f) Response from the City Mayor

The City Mayor stated how impressed he was with how officers and others had responded to the situation.

A review, led by Dame Mary Nye, had been commissioned by the government on the response to the “lockdown” in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. This report had been very complimentary about the work done by this Council and

the way in which knowledge had been shared, which had informed responses in other parts of the country.

The Director of Public Health endorsed this, noting that no other areas appeared to have developed the range of interventions used in Leicester. This had been hard work and was tiring for officers, but the positive feedback received was very welcome and encouraging.

g) General

The Committee thanked all involved in the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic for their work.

The following points were then made in discussion:

- Are covid marshals working in shopping centres on the outer estates?

Response from the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services:

Different staff had been working as marshals during the pandemic. The CCTV infrastructure also had been useful to supplement the work they had done in monitoring areas. Before the government had introduced its marshal programme, the Council had employed people to help with these activities, taking an intelligence-led approach.

Marshals were on the outer estates. Currently they were concentrated in the north-east area of the city, but could be deployed in key shopping areas across the city as needed.

- The production of information in community languages had been very important in the success of getting this information to people.
- What were the reasons for the high number of cases of, and deaths from, Covid-19 in the city?

Response from the Director of Public Health:

The number of deaths in the city were on a level with other areas. A tracker had been produced that showed the local picture, but care needed to be taken to ensure that comparisons of these figures with those nationally used the same analytical methods.

- Studies in China had shown that wearing face masks had a significant effect in reducing the number of cases of Covid-19. The Council therefore was asked to provide funding to enable people to buy masks of a sufficient standard to give them as much protection as possible from the virus.

Response from the Director of Public Health:

There was a requirement for a higher level of protection if doing closer, invasive work, such as that by dentists or beauticians, but most people did not need the higher level of protection.

Face coverings stopped droplet transmission and, where reusable, should be washed before reuse. Keeping a distance from other people still was a priority, so most of the time a face covering, rather than a mask, was sufficient.

- There had been a number of cases where people were turned away from the walk-in test centre in Belgrave. Why was this?

Response from the Director of Public Health:

A lot of work had been done with the national testing team to keep testing capacity as high as possible. Consequently, there were more testing stations around the city than were found in most areas, but this still could not meet the full demand. The government was very clear that only symptomatic testing should be undertaken now.

- One important achievement was that every request for a food parcel had been met.
- The Council in a good position to manage a second wave of Covid-19 because of the work done during the first wave.
- What would be the impact of population movement to the city as the university year started?

Response from the Director of Public Health:

The large increase in Covid-19 cases following the return of students to some other universities nationally was a concern. However, the local universities had engaged very well with Public Health officers, developing plans in case of outbreaks and continuing to work alongside the Council.

- Media representation of Black and Minority Ethnic communities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic had caused some people to respond negatively to these communities.

Response from the Director of Public Health:

Work to challenge these misconceptions was ongoing, but it was recognised that it would take time to counter media representations and ensure parity of treatment.

AGREED:

That all involved in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic be thanked for their work and achievements.

Councillor Kitterick left the meeting during discussion on this item

114. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING APRIL-JULY 2020/21

The Director of Finance submitted the first report in the monitoring cycle for the 2020/21 Revenue Budget, which also forecast expected performance against the budget for the year.

The Director reminded Members that the forecast cost of the Covid-19 pandemic to the Council was £40million. However, a lot of unknown factors remained, such as how long the current restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic would continue and whether people's behaviours would change after the pandemic, (for example, whether they would return to leisure centres). The impact on Council Tax collection, business rates and the longer term effect on the local economy also were unknown.

To date, £24million unringfenced government funding had been received by the Council towards meeting the cost of the pandemic, but it would be applying for further funding through the government's income loss scheme. The criteria for funding from this were complex, but it was thought that the Council could be eligible to receive approximately £10million.

The Director of Finance advised that the budget gap could be met this year through the Council's managed reserves strategy, but the financial position after this year was unknown, as the government was having to fund a significant national challenge. It had been reported that a number of local authorities considered themselves to be close to no longer being economically viable, due to the impact on them of the Covid-19 pandemic. The City Mayor confirmed that Leicester City Council was not amongst these, due to the effectiveness of its economic strategy over recent years.

In response to a question, it was noted that additional unbudgeted resources had been deployed in the Special Education Service in 2020/21 for Education Health and Care plan assessments and reviews. This would enable the current backlog to be reduced, following which some additional resource would remain in that budget to ensure the situation did not arise again.

The Committee thanked officers for the important work being done managing the Council's finances, noting that the government did not appear to fully understand the financial pressures currently faced by local councils.

AGREED:

That the overall position of the Revenue Budget 2020/21 presented in the report be noted.

Councillor Joel left the meeting during discussion on this item

115. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING APRIL-JULY 2020/21

The Director of Finance submitted a report showing the position of the Capital Programme for 2020/21 as at the end of July 2020 (Period 4), explaining that there was some slippage in the programme due to the Covid-19 pandemic and

resulting national “lockdown”.

The Director of Capital Projects confirmed that some sites had had to shut down during the pandemic, due to social distancing requirements. As a result, it had been necessary to reschedule when various trades could be present on site, so some schemes had slipped. In some cases, if they were not business critical, schemes had been moved back in the programme.

The Committee received the following responses to questions raised:

- For which scheme was the Cank Street feasibility study proposed?

Response from the City Mayor:

A very successful link had been created between Town Hall Square and the area in which market Food Hall previously had stood (near Green Dragon Square). The feasibility study was to consider extending that link through Green Dragon Square to Cank Street.

- In addressing the city’s declared Climate Emergency, using natural gas was not an appropriate way forward. Were the old boilers in Council houses being replaced with gas ones?

Response from the City Mayor:

The city had a very extensive district heating network, from which Council housing benefited.

- The forecast completion date of Haymarket Hotel project appeared to have slipped.

Response from the City Mayor:

Funding for this project was a commercial investment and was considered to be a responsible use of revenue to obtain a good return in the future.

Response from the Director of Capital Projects:

The hotel was due to be completed in November 2020. The site had been visited and progress reviewed approximately two weeks ago. The development was on target, so currently there was no reason to think that this completion date would be missed.

- How were the Jewry Wall Museum improvements progressing?

Response from the City Mayor:

Contractors were due to start on site in October 2020, as a lot of fitting out work needed to be done to the former Vaughn College to make it suitable for its new use as part of the museum.

- Further information was requested on the funding held for the Waterside Primary School.

Response from the Director of Capital Projects:

Some funding was held by the Council for the purpose of undertaking a feasibility study on the project on behalf of the Department for Education.

- Further information was requested on the Leicester North-West Transport Scheme.

Response from the Director of Finance:

Further information was not available at the meeting, but could be circulated afterwards to members of the Committee.

AGREED:

- 1) That the overall position of the 2020/21 Capital Programme be noted;
- 2) That the Director of Housing be asked to make a presentation to the Committee at an appropriate time on the effectiveness of the district heating network, including the network's contribution to addressing the city's declared Climate Emergency and opportunities that could be available to extend the scheme; and
- 3) That the Director of Finance be asked to send an update on progress with the Leicester North-West Transport Scheme to members of the Committee.

Councillor Dawood left the meeting during discussion on this item

116. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

a) Grants for Exit from Lockdown Expenses

Councillor Waddington asked the City Mayor the following question:

“On 24th August the City Mayor invited Leicester VCS and Faith groups to apply for grants to enable them to exit lockdown and make their services sustainable in a Covid-safe manner. Can the City Mayor please provide an update on the allocation of this grant funding? Have any of our adventure playgrounds been successful in applying for grants from this fund to enable them to reopen safely?”

Response from the City Mayor:

Voluntary Action Leicester had received over 170 applications for funding for this purpose from a wide range of groups, including several playgrounds.

These applications would be assessed by Voluntary Action LeicesterShire over the next few days, but no decisions on funding had been taken yet.

b) Ward Data on Covid-19 Cases

Councillor Westley asked the City Mayor when Councillors could, if possible, receive a breakdown of Covid cases in each ward.

Response from the City Mayor:

An update including a breakdown of cases on a ward basis would be circulated to Councillors on 25 September. However, although it was interesting to know the number of cases on a ward by ward basis, it was more useful to have information on the number of cases by Lower Super Output Areas. These were smaller than wards, so provided finer detail.

c) Former Great Central Station Premises

Councillor Porter referred to the redevelopment of the former Great Central Station and the option that the Council had to take office accommodation there if it could not be let. In view of the government's directive to work from home if possible, Councillor Porter asked the City Mayor what was likely to happen to this development.

Response from the City Mayor:

The developer remained very confident that a tenant would be found for this building. Rent in Leicester was slightly lower than in comparable cities and the city provided good access to London, which made a good offer for prospective tenants. This would not change as a result of current working restrictions.

117. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.29 pm

