



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 27 MAY 2021 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor Govind (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Gee Councillor Halford
Councillor Joshi Councillor Kitterick
Councillor Porter Councillor Thalukdar

In Attendance:

Sir Peter Soulsby, City Mayor
Councillor Adam Clarke

Also Present:

Councillor Jacky Nangreave

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Joel.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed Councillors and Officers to the meeting, being held at City Hall for the first time since the Covid-19 lockdown, which had led to previous meetings being held virtually.

a) Councillor John Thomas

The Chair referred to the recent sad passing of Councillor John Thomas. The City Mayor joined the Chair in recognised the contribution Councillor Thomas had made for the benefit of the City, including a term as Lord Mayor. The Committee stood in silence to reflect on the life of Councillor Thomas and offered their condolences to the family.

b) Sporting Club Achievements

The Chair then referred to recent sporting achievements, including a further World Snooker title for Mark Selby, Leicester City FC's FA cup victory, promotion of the LCFC Ladies Team to the Womens Premier League and the Riders success in winning the British basketball League title.

c) Covid-19 Pandemic

In conclusion, the Chair and City Mayor praised citizens and businesses for their ongoing efforts to maintain a positive approach during the Covid-19 pandemic.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the Overview Select Committee held on 16 March 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

5. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

There were no specific updates.

6. MEMBERSHIP OF THE OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE 2021/22

AGREED:

To note the membership of the Overview Select Committee for the 2021/22 Municipal Year as follows:

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor Govind (Vice Chair)
Councillor Gee
Councillor Halford
Councillor Joel
Councillor Joshi
Councillor Kitterick
Councillor Porter
Councillor Thalukdar
Councillor Westley

7. DATES OF MEETINGS OF THE OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE 2021/22

AGREED:

To note the meeting dates of the Overview Select Committee for the 2021/22 Municipal Year as follows:

Thursday 27 May 2021

Thursday 15 July 2021

Thursday 16 September 2021

Thursday 4 November 2021

Thursday 16 December 2021

Thursday 10 February 2022

Thursday 24 March 2022

(Meetings to commence at 5.30pm)

8. CALL-IN OF EXECUTIVE DECISION - CONNECTING LEICESTER: AYLESTONE ROAD - PUTNEY ROAD - WELFORD ROAD

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report, which advised that an Executive decision taken by the Deputy City Mayor (Environment and Transport) on 14 April 2021 relating to Connecting Leicester: Aylestone Road – Putney Road – Welford Road had been the subject of a five-member call-in under the procedures at Rule 12 of Part 4D, City Mayor and Executive Procedure Rules, of the Council's Constitution.

Councillor Porter joined the meeting at 6.20pm.

The Chair invited the Deputy City Mayor (Environment and Transport) to open the item. Cllr Clarke referred to the opportunity the call-in gave to explaining and supporting the positive aspects of the scheme, including expected confirmation of the minimal cost and disruption compared to the benefit to the environment and support to the manifesto commitment.

Cllr Nangreave as Seconder of the call-in was invited to address the Committee. Councillor Nangreave referred to the cost of the scheme which appeared excessive, commenting that the cycle lane proposed for Putney Road involved a steep incline, and doubt was raised as to its potential use and benefit.

The cost of the scheme relative to the length of pedestrian footway and cycleway involved was raised, with suggestions for an alternative use of the finance to fund other more appropriate and easier to use cycling schemes, and the increased availability of cycles, particularly to young people, being cited as a preferable alternative substitute project. Question was also raised concerning the poor social value and ambitions of the appointed contractors.

The Chair then invited the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation and City Highways Director to comment on the call-in.

A PowerPoint presentation was given, which provided information and comment on the following key aspects of the scheme:

- Details of the formal decision, and confirmation of the procedural issues since its call-in, in April 2021
- Explanation of the rationale for cycling/walking improvements:
 - Scheme Background – Evolution of cycling/walking scheme
 - Scheme Background – Early Contractor Involvement (ECI)
- Details of the cycling/walking scheme cost breakdown
- Details of the Leicester Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (with detailed plans of infrastructure being displayed)

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation concluded the presentation and commented on the process to allow the contractors to work concurrently on the scheme alongside other previously approved works, due to the efficiencies that would be realised through economies of scale.

The Chair reiterated previous comments made in considering the call-in and referred to the introduction of the item by the Deputy City Mayor, and to the issues raised by Councillor Nangreave as Seconder of the call-in, and to the content of the presentation made by the Director.

Councillor Porter left the meeting at 6:35pm.

Comments of Committee members were requested.

The following points were raised and noted:

- The capital finance benefits to the Council of proceeding with the project at this juncture were acknowledged, although concern that the significant finance to deliver the scheme and the suggestions that the funds would be better used on alternative projects were noted.
- The need to ensure that adequate monitoring of the likely use of the cycle lane and pedestrian footways against the cost was highlighted. The added requirement to better explain the extent of consultation was also expressed, noting that liaison with Leicester City Football Club and other key partners located in the vicinity of the scheme had taken place.
- The links of the ambitions to the London Road and similarities in the approach and initial objections were noted. The success of the London Road scheme since its inception and delivery were noted, having regard to the similar level of initial opposition to that scheme.

- The likely effect and disruption of the works were confirmed at approximately 13 months for completion of the entire scheme, with a shorter period for the initial roadworks and cycleways at 6-12 months being explained.

The Chair thanked all members for their contributions, and MOVED from the Chair that:

“The call-in be withdrawn, with there being no further action or need for consideration at Council on 17 June 2021, and the original decision takes immediate affect without amendment”.

The Motion was SECONDED by Councillor Westley.

On being put to the vote the Motion was Carried.

AGREED:

That the call-in be withdrawn, with there being no further action, or need for consideration at Council on 17 June 2021, and the original decision to take immediate affect without amendment.

9. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Questions, Representations or Statements of Case had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

10. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Petitions had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

11. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report, which provided an update on the current status of responses to petitions against the Council’s target of providing a formal response within 3 months of being referred to the Divisional Director.

A verbal update was provided on the progress of the petition relating to Rowsley Street, since publication of the report.

AGREED:

To note the current status of outstanding petitions and to remove those petitions marked ‘Petition Process Complete’ from the report.

12. COVID-19 UPDATE

The Chair invited the Director of Public Health to provide a verbal update.

The Director of Public Health referred to the confusing announcement made by the Government on 25 May 2021, which had since been rescinded, concerning lockdown measures in seven areas of the country. It was clarified and confirmed that the city was not the subject of any separate or specific advice concerning a local lockdown.

It was noted, however, that cases were rising, and the variant first discovered in India was now the dominant strain locally. Having replaced the Kent variant. It was reported that this variant was now found in 85% of cases locally. There was evidence that the new variant could be spread more easily, and combined with the recent easing of national restrictions, this had led to a gradual increase in cases. Reassurance was provided that the overall rates were still lower than a number of other places in the country, which had not been included on the Government's initial list of local lockdown areas.

The Director of Public Health advised that although the city was not currently seeing a huge rise in numbers of cases or hospital admissions, it was important that everyone continued to follow the national guidance and take the precautions.

In terms of the vaccination programme, it was reiterated that anyone eligible should arrange their appointments as soon as possible, as it would be putting themselves and others at risk from the new variant if ignored. It was confirmed that having two doses of the vaccine would give similar levels of protection from the new variant as it does to others, so it was considered vital that vaccinations were undertaken. The availability of vaccines at the additional NHS drop-in centres was promoted.

It was reported that the city's levels of positive tests were above the national average and that an increase in over 60s cohort had been acknowledged, which was being monitored. There had not been a significant increase in figures expected since Leicester City's FA cup triumph and associated celebrations.

Hospital admissions had reduced and no Covid deaths had been registered in the past two weeks.

The Chair thanked the Director for his report and update and invited questions from members.

It was noted that considerable activity had been experienced in respect of concerns from constituents since the Government's announcement that the city was one of seven areas being designated in 'special lockdown measures', which had since been withdrawn.

Members asked whether Ward data could be provided, and it was confirmed that this would be researched and supplied as far as possible.

It was acknowledged that the reputation of the city during Covid had been sometimes problematic and ongoing work with the communications and media teams was noted.

In respect of the vaccination programme it was also suggested that data be shared with members where there were surges of demand and whether there was a recognisable correlation with the levels of positive tests.

The Director of Delivery, Communication and Political Governance reported on the Local Resilience Forum, which continued to respond to issues on a multi-agency approach. It was noted that the pandemic had been redesignated from a major incident.

In conclusion, the Chair and the City Mayor thanked the Director of Public Health and his team for their impressive ongoing efforts to advise the public correctly, and to ensure people understood the variants and their own requirements to prevent transmission.

AGREED:

That the update be noted and that that data be shared with members to identify where there were surges of demand for vaccinations and whether there was a recognisable correlation with the levels of positive tests.

13. ENHANCING WOMEN'S SAFETY

AGREED:

That the item be deferred to a future meeting.

14. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21 OUTTURN

The Director of Finance submitted a report, which was the final report in the monitoring cycle for 2020/21 and reported the final outturn.

It was recognised that the year had been dominated by the consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic, with the need to incur expenditure to respond to and mitigate the effects of the pandemic, and the loss of income due to facility closure in successive lockdowns.

The outturn report also showed the combined effect on the budget of covid related costs and losses, and other budgetary variations unrelated to covid and one-off grants received by the Government.

In response to comments and questions, the Director of Finance agreed to contact the Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Commission in regard to the outturn reported for the HRA and homelessness/staffing underspends, recognising that there had been an identifiable delay in recruitment. It was also noted that the underspend on repairs and maintenance had caused some concerns and further information would be provided.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the approach concerning court costs were complex and not intended to generate income from the summons being issued. The details of how the matter and income was accounted for would be supplied separately.

It was also noted that the reopening of community centres and libraries was expected and that although the closures had been expensive, the use of reserves was noted, and it was acknowledged that this was subject to the subsequent capital monitoring reports.

It was also acknowledged that 'New Ways of Working' and improved use of IT would be subject to future reports to the Committee in due course.

In concluding the item, the Chair asked whether penalties from Government were expected, given the high levels and use of reserves. The Director of Finance clarified that the levels were in accordance with expectations and good accounting practices, citing the 'Resilience Index' as a measure for future management of the reserve funds.

There was also the suggestion by the Chair that, in response to points raised, the CYPE Commission examines the costs related to MFT/FFT interventions – as described in para 13.6 of the report.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Commission be advised in due course in regard to the outturn reported for the HRA and homelessness/staffing underspend, and the underspend on repairs and maintenance.
- 3) That information and clarification concerning the approach taken on court summons and details of how income was accounted for be supplied to members separately.
- 4) That 'New Ways of Working' and improved use of IT be subject to future reports to the Committee in due course.

15. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING APRIL - MARCH 2020/21

The Director of Finance submitted a report, which provided the position of the capital programme at the end of 2020/21.

It was reported that this was the final capital monitoring report of the financial year following similar monitoring reports as at Period 4, Period 6 and Period 9.

As reported throughout the year, the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the capital programme, with many schemes delayed. Some £36.9m slippage had been reported on work programmes. This had an impact on capacity to deliver additional schemes and would be considered when putting together the 2021/22 capital budget.

Work was continuing to monitor any additional cost pressures as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In response to questions it was noted that the additional extra care schemes costs and disabled facility grants being underspent had raised concerns.

The Director of Finance responded by advising that extra care contractual arrangements were currently in a stage of negotiation, and that the underspends on disabled facilities were often due to tenants being hesitant to allow contractors into homes during the lockdown.

AGREED:

That the report be noted, and members be contacted separately concerning the future update on the extra care contractual arrangements.

16. INCOME COLLECTION APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021

The Director of Finance submitted a report, which detailed progress made in collecting debts raised by the Council during 2020-21, together with debts outstanding and brought forward from the previous year.

The report also set out details of debts written off under delegated authority that it has not been possible to collect after reasonable effort and expense.

It was noted that performance had been substantially affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, with most areas responsible for collection having to do more to support those struggling to pay, and income collected towards the end of 2019/20 due to the pandemic had reduced.

It was also reported and noted that business rates collection had reduced, alongside the reduction in Council Tax collection which had been affected by the inability to arrange Court action.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

17. REVIEW OF TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2020/21

The Director of Finance submitted a report, which reviewed how borrowing and investments were conducted during 2020/21.

It was reported that 2020/21 had seen an unprecedented disruption throughout the world due to the emergence of coronavirus with lockdowns for many parts of the economy and huge injections of cash from the Government and the Bank of England required to prevent parts of the economy from collapsing.

It was noted that towards the end of the year, there had been increased optimism regarding recovery with the roll out of various vaccines in the UK and throughout the world.

After the emergence of coronavirus, the focus of treasury management changed initially to ensuring the ready availability of cash rather than maximising income. Nevertheless, income generated had exceeded budget despite record low interest rates mainly due to a number of 2-year loans with other local authorities at the end of 2019/20 at good rates. Income had also held up due to high levels of grant income on which interest was earned.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance agreed to provide details of the Haymarket investment and expected return in future years separately to members.

AGREED:

That the report be noted, and members be informed separately of the Haymarket investment and expected return in due course.

18. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The Chair invited Questions to the City Mayor.

a) LCFC – FA Cup Triumph

It was requested that a celebration be arranged to recognise the achievement of Leicester City FC in winning the FA Cup. The City Mayor advised that he was discussing options, but clearly the need to be cautious in terms of Covid-19 and public events was significant.

b) Police and Crime Commissioner

The result of the PCCC Election was noted, and it was considered that Councillor Ross Willmott had campaigned strongly but had not been elected. The City Mayor confirmed he would be meeting the newly elected Commissioner, Rupert Matthews, to discuss issues in the city.

19. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's Work Programme was submitted for information and comment.

a) Enhancing Womens Safety

It was noted that the item deferred from earlier in the meeting would be re-scheduled. In this regard, comments were made that the report would need to be revised to provide more detail on the plans for the progression of the issues going forward. The City Mayor offered his time to assist in developing future options.

b) New Ways of Working / IT

It was also recognised that updates on 'New Ways of Working' and IT use would be added, due to the previous discussion in the meeting.

AGREED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

20. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.20pm.