



Leicester  
City Council

MINUTE  
EXTRACT

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
RESOURCES AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2006 at 5.00pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Willmott - Chair  
Councillor Renold – Liberal Democrat Spokesperson  
Councillor Porter – Conservative Spokesperson

Councillor Hunt

Councillor Karim

Councillor Kitterick

\* \* \* \* \*

**101. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda, and/or indicate that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them.

Councillor Hunt declared that he was an EMDA board member who funded the Leicester Regeneration Company which was mentioned in the Regeneration and Culture Departmental Revenue Strategy.

**102. CITY COUNCIL BUDGET**

The Chief Finance Officer submitted a report presenting a 3 year corporate budget strategy, 3 year departmental revenue strategies for each department and a general fund budget for 2006/07.

Members raised queries about the recommendations in the report. It was noted that (c), (d) and (e) didn't make reference to consulting scrutiny members before corporate directors took decisions. The Chief Finance Officer commented that consultation was not appropriate in respect of (d) and (e) following the pattern of previous years.

Concerns were expressed about the timescales with regard to the budget process. It was felt that Scrutiny Committees hadn't had enough time to consider the finalised proposals.

The Labour Councillors on the Committee circulated a number of areas where they wished to express concerns to the Cabinet regarding particular budget items. The Committee considered these items.

## Housing Department

Members expressed concerns about the future closure of the Melbourne Road and Evington Road Housing Renewal Offices which were budgeted to take place in 2007/8.

Matters relating to housing benefit overpayments and the costs of maintenance and repairs were also discussed.

## Regeneration and Culture Department

Sale of the Lease of the Haymarket Car Park and Theatre - Members of the Committee weren't convinced of the merit of selling these leases due to the income that the car park provided. They also felt that sale price was too low. The Corporate Director agreed to provide members with a copy of the cost/benefit analysis on these properties.

Cremation and Grave Charges - Members of the Committee felt that the increases were too high, but it was noted that the saving would be reduced if the increases were phased in, or, a higher end price would be required if the phasing of increases also needed to make the same level of savings. Consideration was given to surrounding authorities' costs for these services. Concern was also expressed about the disproportionate effect on some communities in the city.

DeMontfort Hall VAT claw back - Members of the Committee expressed concerns that the quality of the programme may suffer due to the claw back. They also requested assurances that the tariff for bookings for community groups would remain in its current form.

The Committee also discussed matters relating to the proposed Senior Management Review, the Leicester Regeneration Company funding, reduction in Dog Wardens, reductions to the Environment Team and Cuts in specialist planning design and cuts to economic development workers.

## Social Care and Health Department

Concerns were raised with regard to the following:-

Laundry Service - this was felt to be a valuable service.

Private Sector Provision of Care – concerns were about the number of care workers affected.

Lunch Club Cuts – Members felt these did a great deal of good, it was felt that reviewing this service may end up costing more, because of the existing good will of communities and workers that support this service.

Increase of the Maximum Charge and Increase of the Hourly Charge were

raised as concerns.

The future of the Mayfield Centre – it was noted that this was a relatively new building and concerns were expressed about closing it.

### Education and Lifelong Learning

Some Members expressed concerns with regard to the following matters:-

The proposed reductions to various libraries and library services – it was felt that there should have been an overall strategy for libraries. Another Member noted however that usage figures were down and it made sense to re-profile the service. He also noted that the County Library service had faced a cut from the government.

Cuts to community settings – it was queried whether these were achievable and whether it would lead to closures of centres.

Voluntary Grant – it was commented that this reduction meant reductions to the adventure playground budget, which wasn't made clear.

The cut to Overseas Relations was opposed, as were cuts to youth work.

Out of School Grants – it was queried whether this reduction was due to accessing different funding streams. It was felt that this needed to be made clearer.

Concerns were expressed about cuts to Adult Learning Crèches and the loss of an exclusions officer.

Voluntary Sector Cuts – It was queried where these were to be targeted. A request was made for members to be provided with a list of the services that were to be re-tendered.

Post 16 SEN Travel – it was suggested that the removal of funding this service might be better phased in.

The removal of the seven Home to School buses was also considered wrong as it was felt that there was a greater likelihood of poorer school attendance from pupils who used this service.

There was also scepticism over whether the proposed management savings of £1 million could also be achieved.

Certain Members of the Committee noted that the removal of these budget lines would have a big effect on the overall budget. It was noted that they would lead to significant increases in Council tax. In response it was commented that reassurances were being sought from the Cabinet that proper consideration had been given to these items. It was also felt that other ways of funding these services could be found with resorting to increasing the Council tax. Members

on the Committee were in agreement that it was reasonable to seek clarification of the impact and if necessary reconsideration of these budget lines from the Cabinet.

One Member of the Committee commented that he felt that the Council was poor at obtaining external funding and requested that the Committee make a formal request for a Council wide strategy to be developed to identify all possible external funding opportunities, which included a range of targets to be achieved as appropriate, and figures of what was possible to be achieved. This was agreed.

The Committee also wished to reiterate recommendations that it had previously made on January 12 with regard to the achievement of savings and efficiencies. They also noted that they wished to avoid the problems experienced with the reviews of Transport and Lifelong Learning.

A paper was also circulated to the Committee with details of options for the Council to possibly go over and above the Government's required minimum standard for the provision of concessionary bus fares for elderly people. A Member commented that it would be helpful if it could be proved how many cars were taken off the road as a result of this service. It was also suggested that health providers be requested to consider giving older people priority for appointments during quieter daytime hours. Members agreed that it was acceptable for Cabinet to be asked to consider the options available.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) that it be requested that recommendations (d) and (e) in the Cabinet / Council report, relating to varying of proposals in management savings in Regeneration & Culture; and spending monies on Crime and Disorder in Adult Services, be amended to include consultation with scrutiny committee triumvirates before any action is taken;
- (2) that the Committee expresses its concerns about the little amount of time it has had to scrutinise the final draft of the budget;
- (3) that concerns be expressed about the closure of the Melbourne Road and Evington Road Housing Offices;
- (4) that Cabinet be requested to ensure that the sale of the Haymarket Car Park lease represents a good deal for the Council;
- (5) that Cabinet be requested to consider phasing in the increases in costs to burials as it was felt that these increases would have a disproportionate effect on certain communities in the city;
- (6) that concerns be expressed about the removal of

economic development workers in saffron and Belgrave and the reduction in the Environment Team;

- (7) that Cabinet be requested to ensure that the reduction in subsidy to DeMontfort Hall does not mean that there will be reduction in the quality of the programme of events and that community groups will still be able to use the hall on the basis that they currently use it;
- (8) that with regard to the Social Care and Health Department Cabinet be requested to re-consider the following proposals:-
- Laundry Service – this should be reconsidered to ensure that people don't lose out on a service;
  - Private Sector Care – it was felt that the Council should retain a level of its own care to ensure that it wasn't at the mercy of the market;
  - Lunch Clubs – it was felt that it may be too difficult to make any real saving in this area;
  - Hourly Charge – this should be raised at the rate of Council tax;
  - that a use be sought for the Mayfield Centre as it was a good building that currently provided good services;
- (9) that with regard to the Education and Lifelong Learning Department, Cabinet is requested on the following items to assess and seek clarification on the impact of the proposals and give reconsideration to them:-
- Southfields Library
  - Humberstone and Netherhall Library
  - Fosse Library
  - Thurnby Lodge Library
  - Stocking Farm Library
  - Community Settings
  - Voluntary Grant
  - County Library Service
  - Bengali Library Service
  - Overseas Relationships
  - School Based Youth Work
  - Community Schools
  - Reduce Youth Work Sessions
  - Out of School Grants
  - Adult Learning Crèches
  - Voluntary Sector Cuts
  - Senior Exclusions Officer
  - Remove Post-16 SEN Travel
  - 7 Home to School Buses
  - Senior Management Review;

- (10) that Cabinet be requested to develop a Council wide strategy to identify all possible external funding opportunities, and a report be brought back to this Committee;
- (11) that the Committee reiterates to Cabinet, its recommendations (3), (4) and (5)\* that it made at its January 12 meeting and requests that efforts are made to avoid the problems that have been faced as part of the reviews of Transport and Lifelong Learning;
- (12) that the paper detailing options for the Council to go over and above the Government's required minimum standard for the provision of concessionary bus fares for elderly people be submitted to Cabinet for their consideration, with a recommendation that Cabinet considers half price travel before 9.30 with free travel within the county after 9.30 at a cost of £359,000 per annum; and
- (13) that Cabinet's attention be drawn to paragraphs 8.5 and 10.7(b) of the Chief Finance Officers report concerning risk.

\* The recommendations from the Resources and Equal Opportunities meeting on 12 January to be reiterated are as follows:-

- (3) *that the Cabinet should ensure they have sufficient information to satisfy themselves about the deliverability and political acceptability of the proposals;*
- (4) *that Cabinet needs to ensure that efficiency savings are genuine and that they would not affect frontline services;*
- (5) *that specific undertakings should be sought from officers that savings in the budget can be achieved;*