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# Leicester City Council Scrutiny Report 2016-18

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## **Message from the Chair of the Overview Select Committee, 2016-18**

For the last two years I have had the pleasure to continue to chair the Overview Select Committee and overseen some important discussions and debates on issues of future policy and programmes implemented by the Executive. This has also been the case for the other scrutiny Chairs, ensuring that collectively we have had oversight of decision making of the Council's Executive and our partner organisations.

Last year the decision was made not to do this as an annual report, but to cover this over two years given the number of issues that were running over into the second year across numerous scrutiny commissions. As such, this report is still a retrospective look at scrutiny, but looks at scrutiny conducted in 2016/17 and 2017/18.

There have many standout issues considered throughout the two years which are summarised in this report, but I'd like to draw particular attention to the number of financial pressures the council is under that OSC have continued to monitor and input into. Also, of real importance to the city, and in fact the East Midlands region as a whole, was to ensure that the Congenital Heart Disease Services remained at Glenfield Hospital, and through strong campaigns by patients, family members and MP's and some exceptional challenging of proposals by scrutiny throughout NHS England's consultation process, services continue to be delivered in the city.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all the exceptional efforts and work undertaken by all the Scrutiny Commissions' who have been appropriately supported by Council officers to ensure the work conducted has been appropriately resourced.

Finally, it is important that I acknowledge due diligence conducted by Commission members and Chairs across the two years of their scrutiny role and functions. I would personally like to again acknowledge the strong working relationship with the City Mayor and the Executive which allows for accountability and scrutiny at the strategic level of decision making in the Council whilst maintaining good relations.



**Councillor Baljit Singh**  
**Chair, Overview Select Committee and Chair, Finance Task Group**

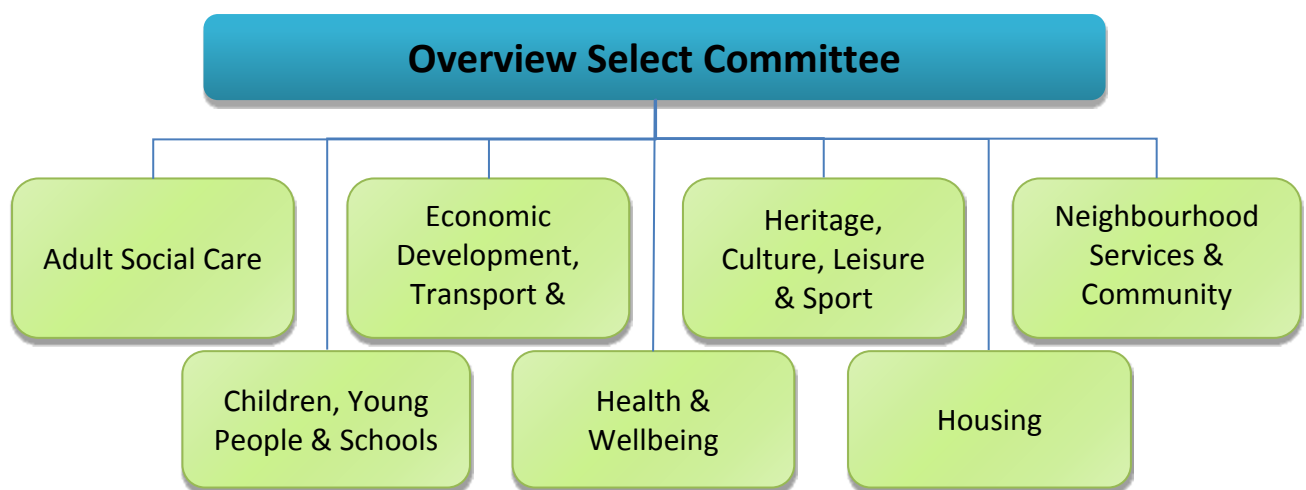
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## Introduction

The Centre for Public Scrutiny explains scrutiny as “the activity by one elected or appointed organisation or office examining and monitoring all or part of the activity of a public sector body with the aim of improving the quality of public services. A public sector body is one that carries out public functions or spends public money. Scrutiny ensures that executives are held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public and that there are opportunities for the public and their representatives to influence and improve public policy.” As such, it is important that scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that the council and its partners remain effective and accountable.

### Leicester City Council’s Scrutiny Structure



As depicted above the council continued to have an Overview Select Committee and seven scrutiny commissions covering all parts of the council’s business which for the purpose of this report is covered by themes as much of the work is cross cutting. There has been much work via reports to meetings, reviews, call-ins and task groups and making recommendations from the various commissions to the Council’s Executive and partner organisations. This report looks at some of the highlights but further details, including reports, can be found on the Council’s website via the following link: <http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/ieDocHome.aspx?Categories>

## Glossary

The following abbreviations are used during the course of this report:

**ASC:** Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission

**CYPS:** Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission

**EDTT:** Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission

**HCLS:** Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sport Scrutiny Commission

**HSC:** Housing Scrutiny Commission

**HWB:** Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission

**NSCI:** Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission

**OSC:** Overview Select Committee

## A place to do business

*This theme focuses on how the council works with business, public, voluntary and community sectors to respond to the economic challenges the city faces.*

The Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission (EDTT) heard about plans for the Business Improvement District. Scrutiny questions included the impacts of 'Brexit' and competition. Evidence suggested that the costings, the management and business rates will benefit city centre businesses and Leicester in the future.

In 2016/17 scrutiny conducted a task group review to investigate how the council can address the new Social Value Act and embed this into our procurement processes. Following the review, key recommendations accepted by the Executive included:

- a) A draft Social Value Charter for the council to develop and take forward.
- b) The development of a 'toolkit' for commissioning staff, and
- c) Engagement with external stakeholders

EDTT also heard about the Marketing Leicester & Leicestershire – Inward Investment. Scrutiny was reassured that the move towards 'commercial councils' was being appropriately considered and that global partnerships and sponsorships packages had been utilised to maximise the impact of the service e.g. a Gateway to China event, and IBM Plant Locations research study.

## A low carbon city

*A key ongoing priority area of work for the city council is reducing the city's carbon footprint by focusing on reductions of greenhouse gas emissions from the council's own operations, as well as promoting sustainable travel, and reducing emissions from homes and businesses.*

Scrutiny recognised that Leicester was ahead of other cities in adopting the Air Quality Action Plan and by defining targets, and that the new Local Plan for Leicester would provide an opportunity to influence air quality, in terms of new development and transport policy. EDTT referred to the joint working arrangements with neighbouring authorities and it was confirmed that a joint response had been submitted to the Government which had been signed by 100 Councils.

EDTT have also heard about plans to ensure better cycling routes into the city and therefore offering a much safer route for a more sustainable and environmentally friendly way to travel around the city. Scrutiny also asked that walking routes are also maintained and looked at for pedestrians in the city.

## Getting about in Leicester

*This section prioritises the need for an effective traffic management network, including road maintenance programmes and an efficient public transport network which is technologically advanced, up to date and helps improve air quality. Safe provision for cyclists and pedestrians is also important.*

During 2016/18 EDTT scrutiny commented on various connecting Leicester and major transport projects, such as:

- Connecting Leicester
  - Belvoir Street Phase 2
  - Welford Place Phase 3
  - King Street and New Walk
- Townscape Heritage Initiative
  - Wycliffe Street
  - Millstone Lane
  - Friar Lane
  - New Street
- Leicester North West Project
  - Belgrave Gate
  - Church Gate/Belgrave Gate pedestrianisation
  - Mansfield Street link road
  - London Road
  - Putney road

EDTT also looked at the Belgrave Road Project hearing results from the consultation findings. Scrutiny agreed that modest environmental improvements as part of the scheme and not to proceed with significant investment was the best way to proceed at this stage.

Proposed improvements to St Georges Churchyard were also heard at scrutiny with concerns raised about proposals to remove trees. This led to a site visit by scrutiny member with lead officers to reassess the proposal.

Scrutiny continues to monitor the journey of new developments in the city, such as Waterside, the Leicester North West Road Scheme and developments at Pioneer Park/Space Park. This includes the latest position regarding Waterside School and scrutiny concerns include the road capacity following the build of the new super school and the increase in traffic and the design of the junctions, plus the effect on proposals for the North West Major Transport Project. The City Mayor expressed that adequate and safe school parking and drop-off zones have been considered.

In 2017 EDTT conducted a 'Bus Lanes in the City' review. Scrutiny gathered evidence on bus lanes from lead officers and bus users and bus on issues relating to bus lanes in the city. The review concluded that bus lanes were considered beneficial to reduce bus journey times, traffic congestion and air pollution and modal shift. Scrutiny supported additional enforcement cameras at city centre locations to ensure that road users do not obstruct bus lanes as this slows buses down. The Executive also reported that smart technology initiatives including pre-paid card technologies were being considered by the bus companies to improve bus transport journeys.

An update on Midlands Connect was brought to EDTT and Members raised questions in respect of the Ashton Green traffic impact assessment and wider consideration of the southern bypass. Officers responded that the study had commenced to assess the feasibility of enhanced connections to the M1. In response to a question concerning the collapse of Carillon, it was confirmed that there would be no effect on the contractual arrangements that the Council were currently engaged in.

EDTT also looked at the Park and Ride Schemes. Members asked that issues concerning the evening closure time be considered further by officers and that increased work is made on the marketing strategy. They also requested initiatives to promote family deals, reduced days, and enhanced links to professional sporting clubs be considered.

## The built and natural environment

*In recent years we have seen national and international focus on the city and its heritage. Initiatives such as Connecting Leicester have been important in promoting the heritage of the city and connecting shopping, leisure, heritage, housing and transport facilities.*

The 22-storey Goscote House was the subject of a number of reports to the Housing Scrutiny Commission (HSC). It had not been included in the high-rise refurbishment projects involving four nearby tower blocks on the St Peter's Estate. Goscote House was structurally different to them and initial proposals, reported in July 2017, involved a £5.9m refurbishment of the block, incorporating sprinkler systems as part of fire safety measures. Fire safety had become a high-profile issue for the council and HSC members, following the Grenfell Tower fire disaster of June 2017.

The HSC was told in March 2018 that the refurbishment would not take place. Instead Goscote House would be emptied, demolished and the site redeveloped. Reasons included higher refurbishment costs, but critically concerns about the design and construction meant there was only a very limited guaranteed lifespan for the building. HSC members asked for a future detailed report on the programme for the emptying of and demolition of Goscote House.

In the wake of the Grenfell fire the HSC requested a report on the status of fire safety within its high-rise blocks; as well as Goscote House (22 storeys), the council had Gordon, Clipstone, Maxfield and Framland Houses (all 17 storeys) and St. Leonards Court (11 storeys) in its ownership. The Commission was given assurances of the measures taken to ensure their safety. The Commission was told of extensive consultations done with residents to reassure them of their safety. Members praised the department for the actions they had taken both to ensure the fire safety of buildings and to reassure residents about their safety.

EDTT and HCLS heard details of progress made relating to the themes and key objectives outlined in the Tourism Action Plan. Scrutiny focussed on visitor numbers and experiences and wanted to see the momentum gained in tourism numbers in recent years being maintained. Members encouraged the service to address vacant units in Silver Arcade and the lack of quality hotel spaces.

The Housing department works well with the Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum. The forum is routinely used as a conduit to allow for consultation on a range of issues. In turn the Housing Scrutiny Commission receives reports of forum meetings and Forum representatives are invited to attend scrutiny meetings. Their comments and contributions were always valued and appreciated by the Members.



A detailed response to a task group scrutiny review of its performance in reducing housing void times was presented to HSC. The department was working towards reducing void times, but the total picture had been complicated by the need to hold homes vacant to allow tenants to move out of the high-rise blocks which were being refurbished. Technical issues included the discovery of asbestos in homes that were being repaired. Commission members had also expressed concern about the number of offers to potential tenants that were being rejected – which had become a significant factor in extending void times.

Members encouraged the department to introduce more hand-held technology to improve the right-first-time record of both voids teams and general housing repairs and maintenance. Commission members asked for updates on the roll-out of hand-held technology within the department's technical teams. HSC members continue to monitor how long the department was taking to repair and let empty homes.

HSC considered a three-year programme of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) spending for the three years to 2020-21. The HRA budget is a key issue for the council and for the tenants of the more than 20,000 homes owned and run by the council. Money comes into the HRA mainly from rents. It amounts to one of the biggest single budget heads with the council and funds housing management, repairs, maintenance, environmental improvements and a range of other services, including a contribution towards the cost of the customer service centre in Granby Street.

Members were concerned to ensure that tenants forced into debt through a combination of issues were not evicted without them being given every opportunity to put the matter right. Regular reports on rent arrears and the impacts of benefits changes, including Universal Credit, household income cap and the so-called Bedroom Tax, were reported at regular intervals to the Commission. The Commission supported the continuing HRA strategy, but members were concerned about the level of contributions from tenants which were used to support the central customer support centre.

HCLS looked at some number developments in relations to arts, heritage and cultural venues, commenting on plans relating to:

- Jewry Wall Museum
- King Richard III Visitor Centre
- Abbey Pumping Station
- Haymarket Theatre
- Churchgate Conservation Area
- Market Redevelopment
- Arts and Cultural Quarter
- Bereavement Services
- Museums Service (Inc. New Walk Museum)
- Abbey Pumping Station
- Animating Public Spaces
- Heritage Interpretation Panels
- Curve/Phoenix/De Montfort Hall
- Belgrave Hall

## A healthy and active city

*Leicester has poorer health on average compared to the rest of the country - so it is important to provide excellent healthcare and promote healthier lifestyles to close the gap with the rest. Scrutiny calls to account all health partners in the city.*

The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission (HWB) has been monitoring the progress of the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) after they have had numerous Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspections where they have not been proved to deliver to a high quality as hoped. This has been scrutinised to ensure improvements are made and that the same issues do not reoccur.

Following on from monitoring progress in the previous year the commission requested for the Anchor Recovery Hub premises to be moved quickly as the site of the Anchor Centre was not sufficient and did not even cater for basic human rights for people as there were issues such as scalding hot showers and equipment in the kitchen that couldn't be used. We know that since then the services have moved on a permanent basis to Hill Street and called 'No.5' offering a much better service for users.

The HWB have continued to look at different elements of the local Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP), with a particular focus on primary care, mental health, reconfiguration of hospital sites and maternity services. Other workstreams have also been considered, with a particular focus on ensuring that local voices are being heard and that there is greater information for the public as work be all the local health services continue. Scrutiny have emphasised the importance of ensuring that a full public consultation happens on elements of substantial variation but have been informed that these changes are dependent on securing capital funding and consultation cannot commence until NHS England indicate the funding is secured.

Health scrutiny have also monitored the changes to the new A&E departments at Leicester Royal Infirmary and what the impact has been on patients. This includes the waiting times and the patient experience. It has been clear that the patient experience has been better but there is still further work required at the hospital to ensure waiting times come down.

The City Council are currently administrators of the Joint Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (LLR) Health Scrutiny Committee and therefore also Chair this committee. The LLR Health Scrutiny Committee had NHS England in to explain their proposals on the Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) Services and why they wanted to close the unit at Glenfield Hospital. After gathering much evidence from University Hospitals Leicester, NHS England and patients the scrutiny committee did not agree with the decision and wrote to the Secretary of State for Health to state their displeasure and in their submission to the consultation asked NHS England to change their minds about the closure to CHD Services at Glenfield Hospital. The decision has subsequently been overturned, pending UHL meeting a few conditions which they have put actions in place to meet.

The Lifestyle Services spending review is ongoing, but the commission has heard plans to change the services offered by amalgamating services to give a combined offer to users and this would subsequently achieve some savings required in public health. The key for scrutiny will be to ensure vital services are still available to those most vulnerable.

There has been a dispute between the 3 Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) about changing the threshold of the Settings of Care Policy. There were initial plans to change it which would have had a negative impact on people accessing it and scrutiny wrote to ask that the threshold remains the same. Leicester City CCG opted to keep it the same for the time being.

There will be a change of location for the Sexual Health Centre, but a wider review of the sexual health services also includes changes to the way sexual health advice and services are provided with a better digital offer. The scrutiny commission asked that it doesn't exclude people that can't or would prefer not to access services digitally and that the privacy of the centre is maintained.

HWB continue to receive the Public Health Performance Report with information that the commission uses to consider areas to scrutinise. They also continued to monitor the progress made around winter time where the NHS and adult social care services are stretched to their limits and patient experience is at its worst. Scrutiny asked to ensure that each winter lessons are learnt, and that progress is made to ensure services are as well prepared as possible to deal with winter pressures.

HCLS and HWB did a joint review lead by Heritage scrutiny on the 'Role of Arts and Culture in Delivering Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes'. The review highlighted how the smallest investment can have a real impact on someone's mental wellbeing and that the preventative nature of arts and cultural activities can have longer term benefits which might save health services money in the long run. Particular focus was given to concentrating on those that hard to reach in terms of arts and culture and encouraging them to gain the benefits of engagement in such activities.

An update of the sports review was received by HCLS and the update was well received by the commission with Members being pleased that ownership of the council's leisure facilities was being maintained and invested in to provide a good offer for city residents. Member expressed the importance of involving people from all of Leicester's diverse communities and making links with Health professionals to promote the sports facilities available, particularly the free to use outdoor gyms. HCLS continues to monitor the progress of outdoor gyms in the city.

## Providing care and support

*Care for older people needs to be adequate for their needs and this is moving from traditional social support services towards promoting independent living. These services are also being increasingly aligned with healthcare to ensure easier transition between the two. There is also a need to ensure carers are well supported.*

Over a period of months HSC and OSC heard reports on the development of a new homelessness strategy. It was heard that whilst funding was reducing due to what is available to the council, the driver for change was a re-engineering of the service. In August 2016 the department reported on the first 24 months of a strategy which had seen a move from crisis management to an emphasis on prevention and support. The report referred to a continuing theme in relation to homelessness; many homelessness cases arose through private landlords ending a tenancy. The report touched on an issue which eventually ended in a full-scale policy change – namely that almost everyone on the council's housing waiting list had no chance of being housed because of the pressure of demand created by the most serious cases. This eventually led to a full-scale restructuring of the housing waiting lists system which removed most of the non-urgent applicants from the list.

The re-procurement of Domiciliary Care Support Services was brought to ASC. Members iterated the importance of promoting the living wage amongst providers as national data showed that after costs of buying uniforms and paying for travel, carers were often left with less than the minimum wage for what can be an intensive job role. Members were assured that as much of the ethical care charter as possible was being applied in the budgets available.

ASC receive regular performance and quality assurance framework reports. Following one of these it was decided to write to the Secretary of State expressing the Commissions' concerns relating to the proposals to cap housing benefit payments to residents in Extra Care. This cap lead the council to rethink its strategy on Extra Care until this matter was clarified.

The Better Care Fund in Leicester has been operating well and ASC heard that it is considered best practice in the country. It was heard that there was an issue in funding being released in a timely manner as some authorities weren't performing as well and this meant Leicester was not able to have assurances that funding was going to continue at the same level even though performance was good. Following this a letter was written to the Secretary of State to ensure this was rectified in future.

The Adult Social Care Procurement Plan which enlists upcoming activity to procure services has been shared with scrutiny and they have been deciding on elements that they wish to know more about and receiving briefings as such. As appropriate, Members have decided that more information is required at the meeting and then have received a report enlisting this, as was the case with the re-procurement of domiciliary care services.

Adult Social Care Scrutiny took an in depth look at communication relating to autism and began their December 2016 meeting with a rap song about autism by two local artists. Following the ensuing discussion, it was requested that officers to look at what other local authorities were doing around communication in relation to autism and to see if there was anything that Leicester City Council could learn from those experiences. It was also requested that Leicester to take part in the 'Night Walks for Autism' initiative that was carried out by Manchester and London, to raise awareness. In relation to the Autism Awareness Day, it was requested for buildings in the city to be lit up in the Autism colour of Blue and more to be done across libraries, museums and community centres.

Members also asked for the council's website to include greater links to other websites that provided support for people with autism and that the council's internal Face magazine support staff to increase knowledge about communication in relation to autism in the work place, and with the service users they might come across. The Council's Chief Operating Officer had already agreed on this. It was recommended that social care officers to work with officers in the education section to encourage Leicester schools to conduct plays and assemblies which offer two or three short messages to raise awareness of autism. A final request was made for the council to explore the use of Makaton signing and whether there could be specific signage in the city's community centres and sports facilities to support people with autism.

The Joint Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland strategies on Dementia and Carers were discussed at ASC. Members requested that detailed action plans and strategies were brought back as they developed and that Housing Scrutiny Commission to look at carers legal rights in the housing legal structure, and rights to have cross-over of a tenancy.

The adult social care revenue budget remains in a precarious position due to the lack of government funding. The Commission have acknowledged the great job done by the department to manage the budget amongst pressures such as an increasing ageing population with more complex needs and the large number of working age adults needing social care in the city. The Assistant City Mayor for Adult Social Care and the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission jointly wrote to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in January 2018 calling on him to:

- Implement and conclude the promised review of social care funding by no later than Summer 2018;
- Provide clarity beyond 2019/2020 for the funding of adult social care.

## Our children and young people

*This priority is based on every child to be safe, loved and live a happy and healthy childhood, free from harm and given every chance to pursue their aspirations and fulfil their potential.*

During 2016/18 CYPS Scrutiny members recognised the difficulties encountered by the city council and the pressures placed on schools, as with other cities, due to:

- The education landscape changing with more schools opting to become academies.
- The limited resources and budgets available to support schools and young people, and to raise attainment levels and standards.
- National Policy uncertainties such as the Department for Education's consultation reports 'Schools that work for everyone', and 'Schools and high needs funding reform'.

In 2017 Leicester City Council's 'looked after children' Ofsted Inspection resulted in a 'Requires improvement' rating which was a positive show of progression being made as the rating was inadequate in 2015. Scrutiny praised the service for this improvement and urged not to be complacent as further improvements were still needed but the positive trajectory was welcomed. CYPS Scrutiny agreed to monitor progress on the new action plan to address the Ofsted findings.

Scrutiny members receive regular quality assurance reports on Looked after children social care performance data, case management data and key issues impacting on the service. As with other councils, this service is struggling with limited budgets, high staff turnover and increases in the number of looked after children. CYPS recognised that the service needed to take time to move from requiring improvement to good, as in terms of barriers to progress there were some basic elements still not being met and there would need to be a cultural shift in working practices. There was also acknowledgement that there has been evidence of a continued journey in a positive direction from where the service was 2-3 years ago, and the focus for the next 6 months would be to resolve some of the fundamental basics such as addressing issues related to the administration of case conferences and ensuring children's voices were better heard.

During 2016/17 scrutiny agreed to conduct a review into 'Literacy Teaching in Primary Schools in Leicester – with a focus on reading'. Scrutiny raised concerns relating to the percentage of pupils in Leicester achieving a level 2b+ in reading, writing and maths as this was significantly below the national average and the gap had widened. Key scrutiny evidence was based on visiting a selection of primary schools in the city to observe teaching practice and gather evidence. Members praised the commitment and hard work of teaching staff. The Executive acknowledged the recommendations and agreed to look at the findings of the review to see how things could be improved.

The Leicester Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report was considered by Children's Scrutiny and Members praised the report; commenting that the partnership arrangement for managing the service has significantly improved from previous reports. Scrutiny requested a more in-depth review of the services and budgets to better understand the wider impacts of the increasing number of children coming into care.

Children's Mental Health continues to be an area of concern with long waiting times for children needing an assessment in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and then for treatment following that and scrutiny feels there is also a lack of clarity as to the pathway for children needing to access mental health outside of the CAMHS framework. HWB and CYPS are continuing to look at this issue and monitoring the LPT on their ability to reduce waiting times in their CAMHS service.

## Our neighbourhoods and communities

*Neighbourhood facilities allow people to access services locally and to run them themselves where possible, reducing costs and improving services through better use of buildings and joining up services locally where possible. It is also important to communicate the many welfare reforms taking place and to look at ways to potentially reduce the impact of those reforms.*

*Environmental and enforcement services help keep people safe, tackle anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and substance misuse and keep the city clean and green through waste collection and recycling, and tackling fly tipping. There is also an aim in this section to ensure council homes are good quality and energy-efficient.*

The issue of discretionary housing support was looked at by HSC and NSCI. Faced with a range of benefits changes and reducing resources the council reviewed the support it offered to tenants and residents. The aim was to reshape the payments made through Discretionary Housing Payments, Council Tax Discretionary Relief and Community Support Grant and scrutiny was told that these provided a crucial safety net for vulnerable households. Members supported the stance of the council, which would see a 13-week transition award for newly under-occupied or benefit-capped households rather than the previous 26 weeks.

HSC received quarterly report on the interweaving topics of rent collection (and therefore also rent arrears) and the impact on tenants of the continuing changes to housing benefits and Universal Credit (UC). Over the two years of the reporting on these issues there have been concerns expressed about the impact of UC, and in particular problems relating to the administration of the new system. However there have been no more than a handful of cases covered by UC, with the roll-out across the city gradually picking up pace after June 2018.

Reports to the Commission concentrated on rent arrears and the efforts by the department to prevent arrears, moderate their impact and to avoid the worst outcomes of arrears: eviction and homelessness. The Commission found most evictions involved tenants not engaging with the council's aid services or that there were contributory factors such as anti-social behaviour.

The council went through an extensive consultation with the voluntary sector as it looked to re-procure a series of contracts to provide welfare advice across the city. Officers reported back to NSCI and Members welcomed the aim to create a more streamlined Social Welfare Advice service but were concerned that the options presented could have the opposite effect, resulting in a more fragmented system. Members supported the model which would see the council procure advice in lots while retaining an in-house specialist advice provision; they asked for regular updates on the re-procurement model and were invited to propose a possible outreach centre in the Highfields area.



The council's Food Safety team polices a wide range of businesses within the city, including 90 manufacturers, some of them major national brands, and more than 2,000 restaurants and takeaways. A report to the NSCI set out the background for a long-term improvement plan. Members praised the improvements in food hygiene ratings which had been achieved by and within the department. However, the Commission was given details of a major investigation into fraud involved meat. Inspectors took more than 100 samples of meat from butchers' shops and catering establishments. After criminal investigation two defendants were jailed for five years for fraud. This had involved the substitution of halal lamb with non-halal turkey. As such, the commission called for a further desktop study report on the way in which culturally significant halal meat was controlled and monitored.

Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) is an on-going programme to review and rationalise the use of buildings within the council's ownership across the city. It links in with other programmes of departmental rationalisation, including housing depot sites and the broader Using Buildings Better strategy. Following reports on the final phase of the TNS review covering the East and Central areas of the city, NSCI asked for lessons learnt within the consultation exercise to be shared with other council departments. Members warned however that the merging of services involved some of the biggest changes made by the Council to service delivery, but damage had been done by a lack of understanding by some officers of communities' perspectives of the changes.

NSCI received a report on progress relating to Community Asset Transfers (CATs). These involved the leasing of council buildings across the city to local or community organisations for community use. The transfers arose from the TNS programme. Independent advice was available to community groups hoping to take on building leases and the groups were required to prepare sustainable business plans. The Commission supported the strategy adopted by the council to support community groups undertaking a CAT. Members asked for an evaluation of the fob system of access which provided community access and for feedback from community groups on how they'd seen the success of the policy.

Channel shift (now referred to in the Council as Digital Transformation) describes the strategy of moving contacts between the council and its residents away from face-to-face or phone exchanges to IT-based platforms using computers, laptops and smart phones. NSCI received regular updates on the programme with Members noting that it had a positive environmental impact in that its growth tended to reduce greenhouse and other gas emissions. Members voiced concerns that residents who were most vulnerable and "hard-to-reach" might not benefit from Channel Shift in that they did not have access to phone or other IT to access the council's web site or services (by email or another channel). This included older people and residents from some newer communities.

Members agreed on-line services would be important in the future but stressed the need to present them in a way that made them widely accessible. For example, it was known that some city residents had language barriers to accessing services. Members asked that ways of overcoming these be considered. One way of could be to train community "champions", including younger people, in how to undertake on-line transactions and help support others in their communities.

Members at NSCI continued to express concern that key communities and groups within Leicester were being disadvantaged by the digital transformation agenda with transactions between the community and the council increasingly being done online. A report was commissioned looking at how the council was communicating with incoming communities and how they were being helped to access employment and training opportunities. The Commission was told the Council's Adult Skills and Learning Service prioritises English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and IT courses and activities to support adults in new communities to participate in day to day life and work.

Commission members praised the work of agencies, but were concerned that there was not enough support, through language and translation services, for older members of longer-established communities within the city. They suggested a lack of confidence might also be a barrier to accessing training and education courses. Some concern was expressed that people could be deterred from visiting certain venues if no specialist support or advice was available there (such as language support). The Commission urged the Economic Development Transport and Tourism Commission to consider a more detailed report on language and IT training.

## A strong and democratic council

*It is important for the public to have confidence and value the work of the council and also for them to be able to participate in decisions affecting them. As such ensuring the way the council's work supports openness and accountability, communicating effectively, and encouraging the people of Leicester to participate in the democratic process and in the shaping of services is an important priority.*

EDTT received regular reports on the 'draft Local Plan' details proposed and the consultation process and timetable. Discussions included the need to have robust future planning policies, greater jurisdiction concerning site ownership and the control of services following the occupation of sites by developers. Scrutiny continues to monitor progress prior to public examination and adoption of the new plan around the end of 2018.

Each meeting of the Overview Select Committee continues to receive reports about progress made on petitions which have been presented to the council. It was recognised that some petitions could not be resolved and closed in the timescales set out by the council because they involved decision-taking and programming which might take months to resolve. This was particularly apparent in transport-related petitions where proposed changes, responding to petitions, would themselves be subject to consultation, and where projects might be required to be programmed in future financial years

Questions to the City Mayor is a standing item on the Overview Select Committee's agenda and can cover a wide range of topics. It provides an opportunity for members of the committee to raise issues of concern to them, and for the Mayor (and other executive members) to respond or act on. Issues questioned during this time period include:

- Academy Schools
- Council loans to businesses and organisations
- Council's procurement processes
- Compensation for businesses affected by road closures
- Dawn Centre
- Draft Economic Action Plan
- Economic Action Plan and investment in neighbourhoods
- Empty shops in the city centre
- Franklyn Fields
- Government funding for ASC
- Haymarket Theatre
- Highway works: Rutland Street and Granby Street Junction
- Homelessness
- Housing Repair Service
- Leisure centres
- Local Plan
- Market development
- Mental health support for children
- Mobile CCTV Cameras
- Outdoor gyms
- Outer city estates
- Planning and Development Control issues
- Sports Services Review
- St Margaret's Bus Station
- Street drinking
- Weekend cleaning around shops in the outer estates

There was a specific question related to the winter period and in particular about communicating some simple steps to the public to help them with things such as frozen pipes and boilers without them having to wait a long period of time in a phone queue and subsequently for someone to come out and fix something which could be simply prevented. As such scrutiny members were invited to a meeting with the Executive and relevant officers about lessons learnt from the winter processes.

The Finance Task Group made a series of reports to the Overview Select Committee and OSC members highlighted a few issues arising from these reports. As in previous years, much focus has been over-spends in areas such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The OSC Chair stressed budgets for Children Services and Adult Social Care needed to remain a priority for the relevant commissions and suggested they request updates and examine these accordingly.

Again, the increasing numbers of looked-after children was of concerns and was having an effect on the budgets. It had previously been explained that a lack of fostering places and increasing costs were identified as issues but the rise in numbers of looked-after children was part of a national picture. As stated earlier in the report the increasing number of working age adults and older people with more complex needs is also something identified as a risk factor when considering the Adult Social Care budget.

Lord Willy Bach presented the Draft Police and Crime Plan 2017-2021 to OSC. Lord Bach emphasised the need for the Police to work with local authorities, because without close partnership working, the Police would not be able to achieve what they hoped to do. Members commented that Leicester had an excellent reputation for policing, but he was concerned about the impact of austerity measures and sought assurances around the visibility of officers and that the level of policing would continue. Lord Bach stated that there was a need to get the balance right. He felt that this balance was slightly wrong, as too many Police Officers and PCSOs had been taken off the street to deal with issues such as online crime, domestic violence and child sexual exploitation. Policing issues had changed, but people still wanted the Police to be visible to the public.

OSC received a presentation on Emergency Management and Planning which explained the processes when dealing with a major incident. It was heard that the recovery phase after incidents could be long and good practice was to initiate recovery at the outset of an incident. Members were assured that a database had been compiled that helped to identify some of the most vulnerable people in the community.

The Draft Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2018-22 was presented at OSC. Members endorsed the importance of the strategy and the work being done to ensure the council's diverse workforce could deal with the diverse communities of the city. Along with workforce representation and information on equal pay, it was agreed that OSC would continue to get updates on performance to the Equalities Strategy and Action Plan.

## Contacting Scrutiny

For more information please contact the Scrutiny Team on **0116 4546340** or email **[scrutiny@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@leicester.gov.uk)**

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