



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORT AND TOURISM SCRUTINY
COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 9 JULY 2020 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Waddington (Chair)
Councillor Sandhu (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Broadwell	Councillor Malik (substitute member)
Councillor Joel	Councillor Rae Bhatia
Councillor Porter	Councillor Valand

In Attendance:

Councillor Clarke – Deputy City Mayor (Environment and Transportation)
Councillor Myers – Assistant City Mayor (Policy Delivery and Communications)
Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor

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63. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, reminding everyone 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.

64. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Fonseca, who was absent on Council business. The Commission noted that Councillor Malik was present as his substitute.

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sandhu declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in relation to the general business of the meeting, in that his wife owned a property in the city's Cultural Quarter. Councillor Sandhu advised that, if this area came under discussion, he would leave the meeting during that discussion.

66. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Commission was reminded that the information on social value and procurement requested under minute 55(a), "Progress on Matters Raised at the Last Meeting – Minute 45, "Social Value and Procurement Update" (4 December 2019)" had been circulated to all members of the Commission.

Further to minute 57, "Questions, Representations and Statements of Case", it was noted that the Local Plan consultation had been deferred due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation confirmed that no information was available at present on when this consultation would now take place, but that Members would have the opportunity to scrutinise the draft Plan.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission held on 5 February 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

67. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair thanked all officers for setting up this virtual meeting and for all their work on matters falling within the remit of this Commission.

68. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

69. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

Margaret Lewis asked the following question:

"The evidence is clear that LCC has presided over a marked reduction in disabled access & design expertise over the past three years. First, with the loss of the Disability Discrimination act post, then with the shelving of the Leicester Designs Standards Document (LIDs) and finally the loss of the Disabled Access Officer role, who had a key role in involving disabled people via the Disabled peoples Access group, in decision making.

How do you plan to replace this expertise? What are the milestones and timescales?

How are you planning to involve disabled people formally in the formative stages of street and building design? What are the milestones and timescales?"

In response, the City Mayor noted that Leicester City Council had been one of the first authorities to employ an Access Officer. Much progress had been made since then, giving the Council a good understanding of how to engage with those representing disabled people and their needs. However, various speciality posts had been lost in the Council, including this one, due to the Council's financial situation. Despite this, officers working in the Planning, Development and Transportation service had developed considerable expertise in these areas.

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation assured Ms Lewis that the Council continued to invest considerable resources into accessibility and still was committed to inclusive design, aiming to deliver schemes to the highest standards possible. A considerable knowledge base had been developed over a number of years, which also helped to avoid over-reliance on an individual officer.

One way in which this was evidenced, was in the Council's published street design guide. The street assessment tool contained in the design guide was now used routinely. However, the Council also used a lot of external knowledge to help achieve the desired standards of provision. Groups representing disabled people had been engaged in the preparation of the document. It was intended that the design guide would be kept under live review for at least a year, to make sure that it was suitable for its intended purpose.

Groups representing disabled people were routinely consulted through the Disability Access Group. It had not been possible for this Group to meet since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, but the Council wanted these meetings to resume once schemes were being developed again, as this was an important avenue of consultation.

A number of schemes were being developed and these were discussed with the Group at various stages of development. In addition, when schemes were implemented, they were reported to the Group, to assess how the schemes were working and help identify any problems. Recently, the Council had invested very heavily in extensive street improvements and had engaged with access groups during this.

At the invitation of the Chair, Margaret Lewis asked a supplementary question, expressing her appreciation of officers' expertise regarding streets, but noting that she understood that LIDs included building design and asking why this had not been implemented in the city.

In reply, the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation explained that the principles had been used to inform access to buildings. However, the Council also used work by other organisations, (such as Transport for London),

to achieve the best possible results. This had been discussed with other officers and the Director was reassured that the necessary expertise was available in the Council, but external expertise also was used when needed.

During discussion on these questions, it was suggested that easily accessible on-street parking should be made available for people with mobility issues. Some of this could include parking with electric charging points, in view of the increasing number of people driving electric vehicles.

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation advised that recent studies showed a good provision of on-street and off-street parking for disabled people in the city, but the Council needed to think creatively about how it could enable people to get around the city centre. For example, one option being considered was an electric shuttle service.

AGREED:

That, when it was possible to hold face-to-face meetings, the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to arrange for further discussion on the points recorded above to be held between the Chair of this Commission, relevant officers and the questioner, (Margaret Lewis).

70. TASK GROUP REVIEW OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AT LOCAL LEVEL

The Chair presented the report of the Task Group review of Economic Development at Local Level, drawing attention to the following points:

- The Task Group had consulted with various external organisations, details of which were included in the final report;
- It has not been possible to visit Preston, to discuss the Preston Model, as intended, due to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Some of the Task Group's recommendations were very relevant to the economic recovery needed for the city due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; and
- Details of the recommendations made, along with information on the reasons for these, were set out in the report.

Councillor Myers (Assistant City Mayor – Policy Delivery and Communications), expressed his support for the report, welcoming the rich and informative data it contained. He expressed the hope that the recommendations made could be adopted and implemented over the term of the Council.

Councillor Myers noted that the development of a model similar to that used in Preston in co-operation with key anchor institutions across the city was recommended. This was welcomed as, being the largest employers in the city, they had a significant influence, both on people's lives and the city as a whole. In this way, it would help drive the city's post-Covid-19 recovery and inform

other future business models.

At the invitation of the Chair, Jonathan Payne, Professor of Work, Employment and Skills at De Montfort University, addressed the meeting, making the following points:

- Leicester was the 32nd most deprived local authority area in England. The issues raised by this were likely to be exacerbated by the current Covid-19 pandemic;
- It was widely thought that the country would be entering a very deep recession following the Covid-19 pandemic, as a result of which unemployment levels could increase significantly by next year and take ten years to recover;
- Approximately 70% of the city's workforce were employed in the hospitality, tourism and retail sectors, but these sectors were expected to be facing a moderate or severe impact from the anticipated recession;
- Many young people were in financial difficulty. They often worked casual hours and lack of work experience could lead to employers feeling that it was risky to employ young people;
- Recent measures announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer could go some way to improving the situation, but questions remained, such as whether employers would co-operate and who would monitor training provided. There also was concern that adult training would be restyled as youth training;
- Prospects for long-term unemployed people remained limited, due to lack of work experience opportunities;
- 60% of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) were not actively seeking work. Many had complex needs, but very few opportunities were available to these groups;
- Tailored one-to-one coaching was important for both the long-term unemployed and NEET groups. Leicester already had some good examples of this;
- Further education colleges had a vital role in economic development, but the local employment market made skills planning very difficult. The emphasis on careers advisors by the government was welcome, but relevant skills were needed as well;
- The East Midlands currently had little infrastructure for intelligence gathering on these matters;
- Skills were not the only solution to economic development. However, demand for workers was low, with too few jobs on offer and this situation

could get worse if employers had to reduce their work force. This could result in high unemployment and low skill levels locally;

- One concern was that considering inclusive growth to mean getting people in to any work ignored the need for job quality;
- Local government could not resolve this situation by itself, but needed to work co-operatively with other key stakeholders; and
- Inclusive growth needed to be more than a slogan. People living with unemployment and low wages needed to be given a voice.

On behalf of the Commission, the Chair thanked Professor Payne for outlining challenges and opportunities for economic development at local level.

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment agreed with challenges identified and stressed the need for all partners to work together to address these. In particular, people needed to be given a voice and effective collaborative responses developed. The Director noted that the details of the provisions set out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer were not known yet, but the financial challenges set out in the Task Group's report showed an expectation that locally the anticipated recession would disproportionately affect young people, the low waged and female workers.

The Commission noted that the economic situation of a significant number of people in the city had been concerning before the Covid-19 pandemic started. For example, apprenticeships appeared to be being used by some employers as a way to pay people very little and the combination of low wages and high property prices had led to a lack of hope for the future. It therefore was suggested that a large programme of investment was needed to try and avoid local industries being closed down. The Council needed to be clear about what it would do to support this, but central government also needed to take an active role.

Members also stressed the need to ensure that training provided was relevant to the area being considered, using cultural intelligence to design and develop training that would retain employment in the city.

The need to understand different needs and different reasons for disadvantage also was stressed. These differing needs meant that the same approach could not be used across all parts of the city to address challenges identified in different neighbourhoods. This highlighted the need to have partnerships with different stakeholders and institutions, and to press central government to undertake investment in the city.

The Commission also suggested that the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic was an opportunity to find new solutions with which to move forward and questioned whether any new solutions had been identified.

One area in which this was needed was how to address the issue of sweatshops in the city. Concerns about these had been raised under a previous task group review and passed on to central government, but there appeared not to have been any action taken until earlier this year. In reply, the Chair advised Members that the City Mayor would be answering a question regarding sweatshops in the city under minute number 73, "Questions to the City Mayor", below.

It was stressed that the foundation of good economic development policy was good, reliable data, so ways needed to be found of obtaining this.

One area in which further discussion could be held was the distribution of money remaining in the city's allocation from the European Social Fund. Although this source of funding would be lost when the United Kingdom left the European Union, requests could be made that some of the remaining funding be used to address the issues raised through this report, particularly in relation to economic development for young people.

At the invitation of the Chair, Professor Payne responded to the comments made, stressing the importance of moving away from just focussing on economic growth and consumption. This needed to be combined with other things, such as jobs.

He also recognised the concern that, after the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation could be worse than before the pandemic. For example, in addition to increased unemployment, more people could be put on zero hours contracts, or need to do agency work, or have less satisfying jobs. It therefore needed to be asked what local government could do to try and make gains if central government did not take action to address these issues.

AGREED:

- 1) That the recommendations contained in the Task Group report "Economic Development at Local Level" be endorsed and passed to the Overview Select Committee for consideration and onward transmission to the Executive;
- 2) That the Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment be asked to ensure that officers preparing the Council's post-Covid-19 Economic Recovery Plan take account of the recommendations contained in the Task Group report;
- 3) That the Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment be asked to submit a report to this Commission at an appropriate time on how the recommendations in the Task Group report have been reflected in the development of the Council's post-Covid-19 Economic Recovery Plan;
- 4) That the Chair of this Commission be asked to meet representatives of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership to discuss whether any money from the European

Social Fund can be allocated to address issues raised in the Task Group report, particularly in relation to young people; and

- 5) That the Commission's thanks be extended to Professor Jonathan Payne, Professor of Work, Employment and Skills at De Montfort University, for his assistance with the review and at this meeting.

71. ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment submitted a report outlining ongoing work to develop an initial Economic Recovery Plan in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Director emphasised that this currently was a first stage Recovery Plan, which established the work streams needed to deal with the issues covered. More detail would be added to the Plan later in the year.

The Director noted that the city's economic recovery had barely started before the city was placed in local lockdown. Although this increased the challenges faced, the city's investment pipeline was still in place, with investors such as the universities, this Council and major developers still planning to do work on site. It therefore was important not to let this stall.

The importance of designing responses that were effective for those most affected by the recession was stressed. Concerns had been identified about possible actions that employers would take, but the Council's relationship with employers was better now than it had been previously, so a good basis for engagement existed.

The Director also advised that it was hoped to use the framework for inclusive growth that had been recommended in the report of the recent Task Group review of Economic Development at Local Level, (minute 70, "Task Group Review of Economic Development at Local Level", referred).

At the invitation of the Chair, Jonathan Payne, Professor of Work, Employment and Skills at De Montfort University, addressed the meeting, welcoming the partnership with employers, but raising the issue of how to engage employers to address social problems, such as how to provide better jobs, or provide opportunities for deprived people, particularly in terms of work experience. Professor Payne also stressed the need to establish a firm definition of inclusive growth, the core of which should be quality of work.

The Director agreed with the need for job quality. Locally, too many businesses were under-employing the skills available, so these needed to be better utilised, (for example, providing appropriate jobs for graduates).

The Head of Economic Regeneration then made the following points:

- The Council had some well-established partnerships, such as the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership and the East Midlands Chamber;

- Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council had been supporting approximately 150 businesses per month, but since the start of the pandemic this had increased to approximately 250 – 300 per month;
- Work was being undertaken to engage with businesses and individuals in other ways than face-to-face, such as through a virtual business fair and live interviews using technology. Good results were being seen as a result of this; and
- As a lot of people were likely to soon become unemployed, a focus needed to be maintained on those furthest from the labour market.

Councillor Myers (Assistant City Mayor – Policy Delivery and Communications) stressed that the purchasing power of anchor organisations should not be underestimated; the Council was likely to be the city’s biggest purchaser over the next few years. Investment rates also were likely to have a significant impact on the quality of people’s lives in the city, so were a significant aspect of economic recovery.

The following points were then made by Commission members in discussion:

- It was important to have good quality jobs;
- It would be disappointing if the economic recovery was based on developments that could become obsolete in a few years’ time;
- Inspiration for new solutions to the city’s economic situation should be sought both nationally and internationally, but the Council should also create its own solutions and lead in the city’s economic recovery;
- Leicester was resilient because of the diversity of its economy, in that it did not have a single large employer; and
- Younger workers and those with fewer skills were likely to be the most affected in the anticipated post Covid-19 recession and Leicester had a high proportion of these people.

AGREED:

- 1) That the developing Economic Recovery Plan be supported; and
- 2) That the Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment be asked to prepare a further Economic Recovery Plan by November 2020 at the latest, which reviews progress and proposes initiatives to support:
 - a) City centre recovery, including plans to grow the city centre residential population and respond to new ways of working;

- b) Greater space for pedestrians and cyclists and to help people access work opportunities;
- c) Vulnerable sectors struggling to re-open;
- d) People out of work to gain new skills and secure employment;
- e) Young people, particularly initiatives to create opportunities such as training, apprenticeships, or employment; and
- f) Disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

72. COVID 19 TRANSPORT RECOVERY PLAN

The Director of Planning, Transport and Development submitted a report outlining the ongoing work to deliver the Covid-19 Transport Recovery Plan, advising the Commission that this Plan had been prepared before the city had been placed in local lockdown.

There had been a high degree of compliance with the Covid-19 lockdown travel restrictions, resulting in a reduction of approximately 75% in bus use. Although this had been increasing before the local lockdown, since that had been introduced there had been a reduction in use of approximately 22% on the previous week. Footfall in the city had increased approximately 50%, but was now decreasing by approximately 50% week on week.

The Director explained that a priority in preparing the Recovery Plan had been to encourage cycling and walking activity. One aim was to undertake 10 miles of pavement widening in 10 weeks and, to date, 8.5 miles had been done in 6 weeks. Government grants of £400,000 had been received for this work and applications would be made for further funding. Residents had been invited to suggest where pavements could be widened and a lot of responses had been received, from across the city. Many of these suggestions had been implemented, or would be shortly, as this was being delivered in phases.

Initially, cones were set out to mark the new pavement layout. This was then reviewed in the light of local needs. Some areas had been softened, (for example, by changing the style of cones used), and in other areas planters had been installed, to help create areas that could be used for things such as pavement cafés. Although these were temporary measures, it was felt that there could be a case for making some of these changes permanent.

It was questioned why local residents had not been consulted on the locations of the widened pavements and some concern was expressed that they made some junctions dangerous, due to the vehicle movements needed to use the junction. In reply, the City Mayor explained that the work undertaken was in line with government policy. The new layouts had been widely welcomed across the city and the opportunity to experiment with different pavement layouts also was welcome.

The Director advised that the process used was set out in the Transport Recovery Plan. The work had been undertaken to create safe environments, including helping people avoid the need to take public transport but still be able to move around the city. There were areas where the scheme needed to be refined, but a lot of positive feedback had been received about the work. If any scheme was to be made permanent, a staged process would be used, which would include engagement and consultation.

Other initiatives included loaning bikes to workers, to enable them to cycle to their place of work and helping other cyclists to maintain their own bikes. Members noted that the Wheels to Work scheme had reported that e-bikes were popular to hire and expressed the hope that their popularity would increase. Councillor Clarke, (Deputy City Mayor – Environment and Transportation), advised the Commission that proposals for an e-bike offer in the city were being drawn up, which it was hoped could be announced soon.

The Director of Planning, Transport and Development advised Members that the Council had been working with the bus companies during the lockdown period and there was concern at the low level of compliance with the requirement to wear a face covering. To help overcome this, the bus companies had been asked to consider asking their drivers to wear face coverings, even though this was not compulsory for them, to encourage passengers to wear them as well. The bus station also was being monitored and it had been seen that levels of compliance were increasing. Bus operators were issuing exemption cards for passengers who could not wear face coverings.

Members queried whether, in view of the reduction in the number of bus users, any form of relief was available to bus operators. It also was suggested that nationalised bus companies would enable different controls to be exerted that could provide opportunities to develop alternative forms of bus transport, such as electric trams. Councillor Clarke advised the Commission that a good partnership was emerging between the Council and bus operators locally, which would facilitate future progress.

The Director also advised that Council-run car parks currently remained open, although it was not known at present when city businesses would be able to return to full operation, and officers would work with schools over the summer to assist with transport issues before students returned in September.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Covid-19 Transport Recovery Plan be received and welcomed; and
- 2) That the Director of Planning, Transport and Development be asked to provide updates on the development of the Covid-19 Transport Recovery Plan at appropriate times.

73. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

a) Possible Exploitative Practices in Textile Factories in Leicester

Councillor Waddington asked the City Mayor the following question:

“As a consequence of the pandemic and lockdown, attention has again been drawn to some of the textile factories in Leicester which are flouting health and safety regulations, failing to pay the minimum wage and opening when they should have been closed. I hope the opportunity provided by the pandemic will lead to steps being taken to end these exploitative practices once and for all.

Can the City Mayor explain what action is currently being taken by the Council together with Government Agencies to inspect and regulate these factories, and will he ask for officers to prepare a report on the problems and solutions for the next meeting of this Commission?”

In reply, the City Mayor advised the Commission that he had been very concerned about the practices of some garment manufacturers in the city, particularly as Leicester had the second largest concentration of these in the United Kingdom.

A meeting was convened of all agencies approximately three years ago, as most enforcement powers lay with agencies outside of local government, (for example, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority and the Health and Safety Executive). Those agencies’ ability to co-ordinate action at a local level was limited, so work since then had been undertaken to create a context in which they could meet in the city.

There had been a considerable increase in interest by those with regulatory powers in working with the Council. As a result, agencies had undertaken a number of visits to employers where it was thought a problem could exist and they had advised that they were reassured that it was a small number of employers who were giving the rest a bad name. The City Mayor offered to brief the Commission further on this at a future meeting, when appropriate agency representatives also could be present.

Further attention had been drawn to this issue following suggestions that “sweatshops” were a source of transmission of the Covid-19 virus in the city, but evidence to support this had not been found. However, the government’s “test and trace” system for Covid-19 cases did not have any focus on place of work, which gave rise to some concern about the reliability of the data. Therefore, although highlighting the issue of “sweatshops” was welcome, it had the effect of diverting attention from the main problem in dealing with Covid-19 in the city, which was a lack of proper data.

Members recognised that this was a highly complex issue and expressed the hope that progress could now be made, although it was noted that recommendations in relation to addressing the issue of “sweatshops” made last

year by a parliamentary select committee had been rejected by the government.

AGREED:

- 1) That the position regarding possible exploitative practices in textile factories in Leicester be noted; and
- 2) That the City Mayor be asked to brief this Commission further on the situation regarding possible exploitative practices in textile factories in the city, if possible at either the Commission's next or subsequent meeting, this briefing to include updates from representatives of appropriate agencies if considered useful.

b) Links between Places of Work and Outbreaks of Covid-19

Councillor Porter expressed concern that it appeared that information from Public Health England (PHE) was being interpreted as PHE stating that there was no correlation between places of work and outbreaks of the Covid-19 virus. Councillor Porter also expressed concern that reports of bad employment practices in Leicester were being made through national and international media.

The City Mayor agreed that PHE had very limited evidence and had not provided the Council with evidence that was particularly useful. A group including those with the power to enforce better employment practices therefore had been convened and a Council officer had been employed to co-ordinate this work.

Councillor Clarke, (Deputy City Mayor – Environment and Transportation), reminded the Commission that a parliamentary select committee had published recommendations in relation to “sweatshops” in 2019 and prior to that a Human Rights Select Committee also had considered the issue. Among the recommendations made by local authorities had been that they should have powers to enforce improved employment practices, but all of the recommendations made by local authorities had been rejected. Now that the Council had taken steps to co-ordinate local work on these issues, it looked forward to making positive changes in partnership with the garment industry and other partners.

74. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.13 pm