



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2020 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor Joel (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Dawood	Councillor Halford
Councillor Joshi	Councillor Kitterick
Councillor Porter	Councillor Thalukdar
Councillor Waddington	Councillor Westley

In Attendance:

Sir Peter Soulsby, City Mayor

* * * * *

118. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

119. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Joel declared an interest, in that she was a member of an organisation that had been involved in the consultation on the Women Talking City Listening Project.

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

Councillor Westley declared interest in the general business of the meeting, in that family members were Council tenants.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors' judgement of the public interest. They were not, therefore, required to withdraw

from the meeting.

120. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) DSO - Elaine Baker

The Chair informed the Committee that Elaine Baker, the Democratic Support Officer had retired. He asked that his thanks and appreciation be recorded as Elaine had supported the Overview Select Committee for some time, along with many other roles during her considerable length of service with the Council. The Committee joined the Chair in extending best wishes to Elaine for a happy retirement.

b) Carbon Programme

The Chair encouraged all members of the Committee to attend a Carbon Programme and advised that a joint arrangement may be held with the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission in due course.

121. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

122. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

There were no specific updates which were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

123. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

124. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

125. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report, which provided an update on the monitoring of outstanding petitions.

AGREED:

That the report be noted and petitions marked 'Petitions Process Complete' be removed.

126. COVID-19 PANDEMIC - UPDATE

The City Mayor was invited to open the item and he referred to the ongoing issues affecting the current situation and commented on the importance that Committee members had the opportunity to contribute.

Directors provided updates as follows:

a) Public Health

The Director of Public Health began the update indicating that the numbers of cases in the city had been in decline, from a high of 725 per 100,000 the current figure was at 296 cases per 100,000. The figures relating to key markers including the rates for the over 65s were also reported and it was noted that these had also shown a significant drop in cases.

In terms of testing it was reported that community testing continued and a revision to the methods and areas following a revaluation of the tiers would be introduced in due course.

In respect of the vaccination programme it was noted that the main responsibility was in the remit of the NHS and the Council acted as a supporting partner. The positive announcements concerning vaccinations had been welcomed.

b) Social Care and Education

The Strategic Director Social Care and Education provided an update in terms of the areas of social care and schools.

It was noted that schools had experienced a low rate of positive tests, at around 1.5%, relating to approximately 400 pupils, alongside 150 staff testing positive. It was reported that this had resulted in around three quarters of pupils attending school regularly. The current statistical information compared favourably to other neighbouring and similar sized authorities.

c) Housing

The Director of Housing provided an update on the continuing work with partners, involving ongoing outreach work with the homeless. The initiative to increase support and the positive ambition to offer secure solutions was welcomed.

d) Neighbourhood and Environmental Services

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services provided an update and commented on the continued liaison and enhanced partnership working relationships, particularly with the Police.

e) Finance

The Director of Finance provided an update and reported on the opportunity for businesses to apply for support. A communication had been sent to members in respect of this scheme and details were included on the Council's website.

In regard to the test and trace it was confirmed that there were adequate capacity and resources to continue local pilot tracing. The community languages service was involved to ensure that up to date advice could be given correctly.

Details of packages of support for those in hardship were described, which included financial support for food and fuel payments.

f) Communications and Business Support

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance provided an update and referred to the business continuity response, where it was considered that the operation had been successful, and the organisation had reacted well in terms of resilience.

It was noted that a significant number of employees continued to work from home.

In terms of the communication strategy, the importance of the messages concerning future roll-out of any vaccination programmes was recognised.

The Chair thanked Directors for their updates.

Reference was made to the encouraging news concerning the reduction in figures.

Following earlier frustrations expressed in respect of the delays in receiving local tracing information. It was noted that data could now be received in a short timeframe, and that the previous 6 days of delays were no longer an issue. It had been considered that the delays did not allow individuals to isolate and this could cause risks to family, friends and/or colleagues. The update was welcomed.

The Chair asked for questions and contributions from Committee members.

In response to questions the following key points were noted:

- It was expected that the city would be placed in Tier 3 as the profile of the city's positive cases was 14th highest in the country.

- Self-test kits and lateral devices would be made available and would be offered to front line staff and care homes. It was expected that testing kits would allow for increased visiting at care homes.

The separate rapid-flow testing methods undertaken by the UHL and LPT through GP surgeries was explained and noted.

- Information on the NHS roll-out of the vaccination programme would be shared with members as promptly as possible, including regular updates.
- The business support grants system was noted with the eligibility of work-related benefits for positive tests and associated self-isolation leading to approximately £148,000 of payments being made to date. There was increasing pressure to evaluate the eligibility of the scheme. It was also considered that definitions during lockdown required clarification. The Director of Finance asked that any individual or complex cases could be forwarded to her for a response.
- The difficulties and constraints in accurately recording numbers, locations and timings of the distribution of lateral flow tests was accepted and recognised.
- The rate of mortality including the numbers of deaths recorded in hospitals was noted and it was suggested that a comparison to other areas of the country be provided to members.

In conclusion the Chair, Committee members and City Mayor reiterated their previous comments made in recognition and support of the professional attitudes, adaptability and reaction of the Council's staff in dealing with the pandemic.

AGREED: That the position and updates be noted.

127. DRAFT LEICESTER LOCAL PLAN (2020 - 2036) PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Head of Planning, Development and Transportation gave a presentation, which provided a summary of representations received on the Local Plan to date, including feedback from Scrutiny Commissions. The key issues for progressing the plan and the timetable for future discussion was also presented.

It was noted that the current Public Consultation (for Reg 18) had commenced in September 2020 for 12 weeks ending on 7 December 2020. The submission of the Local Plan Consultation (for Reg 19) would be undertaken in the Autumn of 2021, with expected adoption in the Summer/Autumn of 2022.

The Chair asked Committee members to comment.

Councillor Kitterick expressed concerns at the timing of the Hospitals reconfiguration plans and their separate ongoing consultation on their proposals. The opportunity for the Hospital to redevelop their site without reference to the Local plan was recognised as their consultation only included the plans for provision to 2024. It was considered that this should be re-examined and reflected appropriately. In terms of extra housing provision, the suitability of Freeman's Common was also raised, as it was not considered that the current use was mainly light-industrial.

In respect of the Hospital reconfiguration consultation, the City Mayor referred to ongoing discussion concerning the need to protect all or some of the site for hospital use and commented on ongoing debates, including Citizen Panel discussions.

In respect of Freeman's Common it was explained that a balanced mix of employment and residential land could be considered.

Councillor Porter commented on his previous objection and campaigns against any development of greenfield sites and commented that there appeared to be a pressure remaining on the green space. He questioned the success of other sites identified for development, citing Ashton Green as an example. The importance of good quality and easily accessible green space for physical and mental wellbeing was emphasised.

Councillor Porter also commented that the consultation was not accessible for anyone without internet access.

In response the City Mayor commented that Ashton Green had recently gained rapid progress and advised that in some cases greenfield sites were necessary for consideration. It was appreciated that this led to difficult decisions, however the city did not enjoy the opportunities of brownfield development in comparison to other cities.

Councillor Waddington referred to the debate at the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission where concerns regarding the proposed redevelopment of the Hospital site and the encouragement for use of brownfield sites had been discussed. It was noted that the debate had stimulated a need for an examination of brownfield sites to properly assess their suitability for redevelopment, particularly for affordable housing.

The Chair also referred to recent debates concerning the need to encourage and support a return to traditional family housing in the city and to reduce the numbers of conversions to houses in multiple occupation.

In conclusion members were reminded to submit responses to the consultation before 7 December 2020.

AGREED:

That the presentation and update be noted.

128. WOMEN TALKING, CITY LISTENING: SUMMARY REPORT

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submits a report outlining the research undertaken by the City Listening Project Team over the previous 12 months and summarising the key findings both directly and indirectly related to the Council's business.

The Assistant City Mayor (Equalities) Councillor Patel was invited to open the item.

She referred to the report's draft recommendations which would be integrated into the Equality Action Plan, to be reported to the Committee in due course. It was reported that the national recommendations had been provisionally made to the Government Equalities Office and a further report and update would be provided following feedback.

The full research was appended to the report and it was noted that this included accounts of the lived experiences and views of some of the women who participated in the project.

In conclusion, the Assistant City Mayor thanked the Team involved in the research for their considerable efforts and commitment involved in the preparation of the report's findings.

The Chair asked for Committee members to comment.

The need to ensure effective monitoring of the recommendations and their implementation and effectiveness was emphasised and noted.

It was confirmed that the report would be submitted to internal Management Teams and could be forwarded to individual Scrutiny Commissions as appropriate.

AGREED:

That the contents of the report, in particular the findings of the research, be noted and the recommendations be endorsed.

129. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2020/21

The Director of Finance submitted a report forecasting expected performance against the budget for the year.

The Chair requested comments from members.

Councillor Westley expressed disappointment with the overspend on housing voids.

The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic was also recognised and the difficulties in forecasting expected budgets were accepted.

The Director of Finance confirmed that in terms of the overspends, expenditure was undertaken in a measured way and that the situation was carefully managed.

AGREED:

That the report and overall position be noted.

130. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2020/21

The Director of Finance submitted a report showing the position of the capital programme for 2020/21 as at the end of September 2020 (Period 6).

The Chair invited members to comment.

Councillor Waddington referred to the need for a greater explanation of the expenditure on the Jewry Wall scheme and commented that the significant amount of expenditure, with business rates pooling support, should have a more detailed business plan included in the report.

Councillor Waddington also stated that more detail was required in respect of Connecting Leicester, and also to references to new build council housing, as these seemed significant schemes without adequate explanation.

The Director of Finance explained the process concerning business rates pooling as administered by the County Council. It was noted that this process was overseen by the LLEP Enterprise Partnership in terms of the strategic priorities.

Councillor Porter commented on the need to ensure that any new build housing was undertaken to achieve the highest environmental standards. It was considered that if there were contingencies in funding then an increase in environmental standards should be pursued.

The Director of Finance referred to the strict ratios imposed on the provision of social housing in relation to rents and costs of construction.

In response to other comments, the City Mayor confirmed that the improvements to St George's Churchyard did not include any plans for the removal of trees.

In respect of the Haymarket hotel proposals it was clarified that the wider scheme involved external partners and that there would be tenant responsibility for maintenance.

Councillor Kitterick reiterated previous objections he had made to the Jewry

Wall and Museum scheme and suggested that there should be a review of the business case and suitability of the project. He expressed his disapproval as once spent, the expenditure on the project could not be recovered and was disproportionate given other priorities in the city.

In response the City Mayor referred to the opportunity and importance of improving the visitor attraction at Jewry Wall and compared the scheme to the success of the KRiii Visitor Centre. He expected the project to be a success and reminded the Committee that there were always severe challenges on projects being able to sustain themselves financially.

AGREED:

That the overall position presented within the report be noted.

131. INCOME COLLECTION APRIL 2020 - SEPTEMBER 2020

The Chair indicated that this item would be considered concurrently with the next item "Mid-Year Review of Treasury Management Activities".

132. MID-YEAR REVIEW OF TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2020/21

The Director of Finance submitted a report detailing progress made in collecting debts raised by the Council during the first six months of 2020-21, together with debts outstanding and brought forward from the previous year. The Income Collection report set out details of debts written off under delegated authority that it had not been possible to collect after reasonable effort and expense.

The Director of Finance also submitted a further report reviewing how the Council conducted its borrowing and investments during the first six months of 2020/21.

The Chair invited members to comment.

Councillor Porter referred to the reduction in terms of parking and bus lane enforcement and suggested that a review of the initiative should be undertaken, as he felt that it unfairly targeted residents. He did not consider it a suitable basis for gaining income to fund future services.

In terms of the investment strategy generally, Councillor Porter also questioned the suitability of major schemes such as the Haymarket Travelodge, particularly in light of the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic and insecurities on future income. He asked for clarification of the Council's cash position and the impacts on interest received.

The Director of Finance advised that parking and bus lane enforcement was not identified as a budgetary item where income was estimated. It was clarified that any funds received could only be utilised to improve transport schemes.

It was reported that the Haymarket Travelodge would be operational when it was attractive for the operators to do so following the pandemic.

In terms of cash the position with bank securities and protection was explained and accepted. It was recognised that the Council were risk aware and risk averse.

AGREED:

That the Income Collection and Mid-Year Review of Treasury Management Activities reports be noted.

133. SCRUTINY COMMISSIONS' WORK PROGRAMMES

The Chair invited Councillor Thalukdar, Acting Chair of Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission, to present the review report "Viability and Appropriateness of a Community Lottery".

In presenting the report Councillor Thalukdar asked the Committee to reflect on the sad loss of Councillor Jean Khote who had instigated the review as Chair of the Commission.

It was reported that the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission had considered that the setting up of a local lottery in Leicester should not be pursued at this point. It was considered that the scheme would have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable individuals, households and communities in Leicester and would not be consistent with the aims and objectives of the city council's developing Anti-Poverty strategy.

AGREED:

That the review report be received and the recommendation not to pursue a Community Lottery be endorsed.

134. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

a) Confidential Waste

Councillor Westley asked the City Mayor whether he would consider an appropriate method for members to dispose of confidential waste at home or to organise a collection service.

The City Mayor advised that he would be happy to discuss options.

b) Covid 19 Lockdown Compliance

Councillor Porter asked the City Mayor whether he had visited any locations that were not permitted under the current lockdown guidance.

The City Mayor reiterated his comments made concerning a previous report and confirmed that no visits had been made.

C) Full Council

The Chair asked the City mayor if he could progress the need to convene a meeting of the Council, whether virtually or in hybrid form with some access to meeting rooms.

The City Mayor agreed to pursue the matter with relevant officers.

135. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of other urgent business.

136. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.02 pm.