



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: THURSDAY, 14 JANUARY 2021 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Waddington (Chair)
Councillor Sandhu (Vice Chair)

Councillor Broadwell
Councillor Fonseca

Councillor Porter
Councillor Rae Bhatia

Councillor Valand

In attendance:

Councillor Clarke – Deputy City Mayor Environment and Transportation
Councillor Myers – Assistant City Mayor Policy Delivery and Communications
Councillor Patel – Assistant City Mayor Communities Equalities and Special Projects
Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor

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108. 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 then introduced themselves.

109. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joel.

110. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Broadwell declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in relation to the general business of the meeting, in that she was a sole trader running a

business building and refurbishing electric bikes.

111. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

a) 19 November 2020

Further to minute 98, "Minutes of the previous meeting", it was noted that:

The Director of Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) be invited to attend the next meeting and the Partnership's Economic Recovery Plan be circulated to Members.

AGREED:

1. That the Director of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership be invited to attend the next meeting and be requested to provide copies of the Partnership's Economic Recovery Plan to all members of this Commission.
2. That the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission held on 19 November 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

112. PROGRESS ON MATTERS RAISED AT THE LAST MEETING

b) 19 November 2020

Further to minute 98, "Minutes of the previous meeting", it was noted that:

That the Commission supported the provision of English classes for Speakers of Other Languages be extended to people without the usual documentation. Progress had been made looking at next year's budget to identify funds for this.

113. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

114. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

115. TRANSFORMING CITIES SCHEMES - CONNECTED LEICESTER

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report on the Transforming Cities Schemes – Connected Leicester.

The City Centre Streets Programme Manager introduced the report and noted the basis of the Transforming Cities Bid which was submitted just over one year ago to the Department for Transport (DfT) and was supported with a grant

to LCC of £32.5m. The current scenario was that people were travelling more on a day to day basis and with plans to build 40,000 houses in and around the city and the increasing usage of private cars, it was noted that the city's road network could not manage this level of usage and there was no space to provide increased capacity. However, if it were possible to accommodate an increased capacity, this could lead to more pollution and a reduction in road safety amongst other concerns. The view was that it was therefore necessary to reduce congestion, improve access for all and find ways of improving air quality by providing good alternatives to car usage through public transport and active travel modes. Better public transport was required but this would also need to have reliable service times. To help this situation the increase of cycling and walking would also be promoted.

During the briefing session recently held with Members and Officers, three schemes were considered:

- A6 Abbey Lane/ St Margaret's Way - improving bus use down that corridor and significant improvements for cyclists and pedestrians.
- Melton Road scheme – improvement for buses.
- Anstey Lane scheme – some improvement for buses, a bus lane and a bus only road between Beaumont Centre and Anstey, in addition to walking and cycling provision along the entire route. It was anticipated that the section which would be provided imminently was the section of Anstey Lane from Buckminster Road towards the outer ring road and further linkages which were being looked at in more detail considering various options to provide the best facilities possible.

The following points were then made in discussion:

- A query raised at the briefing session as to why all the TCF schemes were taking place in the West and not the East of the City and it was further reiterated at this meeting that South of the city also required development.?

Response from the City Centre Streets Programme Manager:

It was responded that with the resources which were available, it was better to focus in one particular area. Furthermore, DFT wanted to look at specific areas, however future bids for more funding were anticipated to enable expansion of the work in other areas.

- Action on a larger scale was required including greater investment and support from central government.

Response from the City Centre Streets Programme Manager:

Further support was required, either direct or through strategy from central government.

- The report noted the increase of people cycling and walking however there were concerns about the bus usage.

Response from the City Centre Streets Programme Manager:

As a result of Covid-19, there was currently reduced capacity on buses, it was hoped that this was a short-term issue and these services would see a return to normal usage at some point. The department would be working closely with buses in relation to bus priority measures and to ensure the maximum benefit was obtained out of the bus facilities being provided.

- From the report, it was identified that there had only been an increase of 700 cyclists for the London Road corridor scheme since 2016, the Member reported that this would calculate as £8.5k per additional cyclist. There were concerns that based on the above calculations what was the likelihood of reaching even close to the target? In addition, the Member felt that the coronavirus pandemic hadn't been taken into account when carrying out the assessments and most business were now considering working from home and therefore the Council needed to be capable of adjusting to the changing environment.

Response from the City Centre Streets Programme Manager:

With regard to the issues of the Coronavirus and its effects, in the period prior to Christmas when out of lockdown it was reported that daytime traffic levels were approaching pre Covid-19 usage but we were not seeing an increase on top of that during peak periods. It was recognised that there may be less travel to work in the city centre, but it was still a requirement to promote those other forms of travel. Providing bus priority measures also had a positive spill over effect.

- At the briefing, Members had concerns of additional bus lanes due to the knock-on impact it had on congestion and air pollution. Concerns that taking out a lane instantly reduced the road capacity and people were not travelling by bus which probably would not change in long or short term.

Response from the City Centre Streets Programme Manager:

Where bus priority measures were being installed, the aim of the design of the corridors was to make them capacity neutral where possible, this term was explained in more detail - the bus lanes would benefit the buses and encourage modal shift from cars to buses but aimed to not dis-benefit car drivers.

- It was expressed that traffic in Leicester would be difficult to control by reducing traffic. It was requested to confirm whether the bus lanes would be in action at peak times or 24hours? And what were the future plans for the rest of the City?

Response from the City Centre Streets Programme Manager:

The bus lanes being proposed were intended to be 24-hour bus lanes, the reasons behind this were further explained.

- It was queried whether cycle lanes would be two way and whether they would be shared with pedestrians? Complaints were often received from

disabled persons in relation to issues of sharing space with pedestrians and cyclists and more recently there were increased concerns about people using electric scooters with a fear of competition for space on these shared lanes.

Response from the City Centre Streets Programme Manager:

This issue had been recognised, and it was sought where possible to implement segregation, however physical constraints of the road network didn't always allow for this. It was not currently lawful to use an electric scooter on the public highway except for current government pilots, however there could be changes on this in the future.

Officers were thanked for the work taking place. It was noted that there would be a further consultation with all councillors whose wards were affected by these schemes.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission note the officer comments made in response to issues raised by them at the recent informal commission briefing.
2. That comments made by this Commission be considered as the schemes were developed in detail prior to scheme delivery.

116. ADULT SKILLS AND LEARNING

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment submitted a report to provide details of the impact of COVID-19 on the Adult Skills and Learning Service, the service's initial response in the 2019-20 academic year and the impact on the Autumn 2020-21 programme.

The Head of Adult Skills and Learning Services presented the report and noted the efforts of addressing the impact of Covid-19 on the service. Enrolment figures were strong at the beginning of the academic year 2019-20 and following lockdown most courses still continued but in a virtual format and some also moved to an informal model. Due to digital exclusion factors including lack of confidence, this caused for a decrease to 60% of people that continued on the course however some people who didn't engage before were now engaging due to this online option. Following OFSTED's visit in September, a report was received which gave positive feedback. Another impact of the pandemic were the required venue changes and 2 metre social distance restrictions which restricted class sizes at the beginning of the 2020-21 academic year. Many positives derived from online and distant learning and it was therefore anticipated that this aspect would be retained moving forward. However, many learners still preferred the classroom option. The financial implications to the service remain unclear however the Government announced expansion of free level 3 qualifications. Plans for September courses had commenced.

The Commission welcomed the report and made the following points during discussion:

- A Member of the Commission asked for clarification of the mechanism whereby the government could request back funds for underperformance. What was these percentage in previous years, and could these claw back decisions be appealed?

Response from the Head of Adult Skills and Learning Services:
The percentage of fund received for each learner dependant on the chosen course, their achievement and progression was explained. It was further noted that if the learner completion amount was under 97% of allocation, the government could claw back some of the funding.

- Are the Council able to provide money to help people get on courses and reskill, for example to be able to get into employment for construction work?

Response from the Head of Adult Skills and Learning Services:
The new Textiles Training Academy launching later in the year would support individuals looking to work in fashion and textiles sector.

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:
Funding had been secured from CITB to establish a specific sector focussed training initiative for the construction sector which would be based at Ashton Green. Working with specialist training providers this would help provide people with the basic skills required for entry level to gain a specific qualification. Furthermore, work was taking place collaboratively with a range of construction companies and this would bring together businesses to target skills and would be bought forward later in the year. This could also be targeted to particular groups such as women and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.

- Scale of Operations?

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:
The textiles training academy is being established in a 6,000sq ft space and when established aims to support at least 400 individuals per year. The Construction Training Hub at Ashton Green would offer classroom-based learning onsite and aims to support 400 people until March 2023. Both initiatives would naturally take time to build up a pipeline and demand.

The Adult Skills Service were thanked for adapting their role and developing new skills in this time. It was hoped that the problems encountered would provide new learning opportunities and that adult education in the future should play a part in rebuilding and re-engaging. A re-analysis of what was currently being done was encouraged.

The Head of Economic Regeneration was also thanked, and the two centres were looked forward to.

- A Member welcomed the idea of an academy training construction site,

however had concerns in relation to a textile's college and its potential competition in addition to the environmental damage. It was felt that existing manufacturers should pay more to upskill staff.

Response from the Deputy City Mayor for Environment and Transportation:

The purpose of LCC bringing this space where there was a high concentration of textile factories, allowed us to have intelligence to look at what was taking place in the industry. Works within the industry would also support a more vibrant sector.

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

A lot of textile businesses in the city had done well but had been negatively impacted by the negative press attention. Those businesses had an ongoing need to attract skilled workers in order to continue the manufacture of good quality products. This project sought to address that need and create a beacon for the sector around good practice. Leicester was noted to be the second largest cluster nationally in the textiles sector and also the largest garment sector in the UK, this was mainly a result of the skills available in the city. The aim was to retain those skills and encourage companies to grow the manufacturing base. 'Fashion Enter' who were the UK's leading specialist training provider in the fashion and textiles sector, had been procured to manage and operate the textiles training academy and were working closely with LCC to do something positive for the city and the sector.

The report from the House of Commons Education Committee in relation to Adult Skills and Lifelong Learning was presented, highlighting key elements from the report including: Labour Market changes, return on investment, benefits for health and wellbeing, policy and recommendations.

- It was requested that the City Council offer its full support to the recommendations included in the House of Commons Education Committee report to communicate this with government. It was believed if implemented that the recommendations would make a significant difference to opportunities in Leicester.

Response from the City Mayor:

That this would be a very helpful contribution to the response being provided. The Chair would be notified of the draft response.

AGREED:

1. That Leicester City Council write a response to offer its full support to the recommendations included in the House of Commons Education Committee report.
2. That the successful transition to online and distance learning is noted and the service staff commended for their commitment and hard work in challenging circumstances.
3. That the Commission be provided with further updates in the future.

117. WOMEN TALKING, CITY LISTENING: SUMMARY REPORT

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report to outline the research undertaken by the City Listening Project team over the previous 12 months and summarise the key findings and recommendation relevant to this committee.

The Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Equalities and Special Projects introduced the report and noted the importance of this work in terms of equalities and giving women in Leicester a voice. Leicester was one of three cities awarded funds to carry out this project to research women's position in the city. The project which had now concluded, was jointly carried out with the Neighbourhoods and Equalities teams. The research focussed on identifying barriers to equality and women's achievements in diverse communities of Leicester and to gain their view as to what solutions would work for the challenge's women faced on a day to day basis. These very valuable insights and dialogue were used to help produce recommendations for local and national government. Department management teams had been enthusiastic about taking forward the recommendations and also added some of their own recommendations in areas of work that they would like to see further developed. For Leicester City Council (LCC) all the recommendations taken forward would be reported back through the equalities action plan.

Area Development Manager for Neighbourhoods and Environmental Services added that there were two ways of using this research; the report had direct recommendations however some projects were using the research as evidence to better other works/ projects. The government had recently informed the service that they would like to make contact with some of the stakeholder groups who engaged with LCC during their research, to ask further questions in relation to childcare and childcare provision.

The Commission welcomed the project and made the following points during discussion on the report:

- Will the equalities action plan then be incorporating or taking forward many of the recommendations that were included in the report?

Response from Area Development Manager for Neighbourhoods and Environmental Services:

Once the current vacancy in the Equalities Manager post had been filled it would be in the equalities plan to ensure that the recommendations were followed up. This would ensure the longevity of the project and also look at more research outside of the recommendations.

- Concerns were expressed for the safety of women especially in dark areas, can the streetlights be brightened?

Response from the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation:

The service carried out equalities impact assessments on all projects which considered all aspects of equalities including those that related to women. For instance, lighting matters, Leicester City had a good network of LED lighting which served the community and allowed for lights to be altered depending on safety concerns.

- How do we influence workplace and flexible working?

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

It was noted that this team managed the Employment Hub service which involved working with businesses to encourage them to recruit people into their workforce. When developing employment skills plans with businesses, it was noted that this helps steer them to address the barriers within employment that the report highlights. In addition, the workspace portfolio was bringing forward flexible workspaces and business space that can be accessed flexibly. It was further noted that the city had a high proportion of small micro businesses and freelancers, which would create good opportunities for women to work.

- The report noted women who may want to participate in learning or other things but found childcare as an issue, what were your insights from the Adult Education side?

Response from the Head of Adult Skills and Learning Services:

There was some funding to support childcare however these had to be OFSTED registered providers. This was recognised to be a barrier however online learning had offered many women an opportunity to overcome some of the childcare issues. One of the key things identified due to Covid-19 was the impact of home-schooling on women as they faced issues of not having enough devices or bandwidth to share amongst family.

The Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Equalities and Special Projects would be working with the Assistant City Mayor for Job, Skills, Policy Delivery and Communications to look at digital issues.

It was emphasised that this was a live document so other aspects may also derive from it and therefore the Equalities team would be producing regular reports. The view was that it was a process to address the recommendations, some of which could be addressed at the local level however some may also need to be addressed at government level. Thanks, were extended to all Officers who worked on the project.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission welcome and note the contents of the report, in particular the findings of the research project and the recommendations (both local and national).
2. That the Commission endorse the recommendations in principle, subject to any comment and/or revisions.

118. DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2021/22 AND DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Director of Finance submitted the reports which set out the City Mayor's proposed Draft General Fund Budget 2021/22 and Draft Capital Programme 2021/22.

The Deputy Director of Finance introduced the Draft General Fund Budget report, explaining that this year's budget had been set in a time of extreme uncertainty. The pandemic had hit, after dealing with 10 years of severe funding cuts of over £100m government funding. At present, the full extent of spending which would result from the pandemic restrictions was not known and some services may need to be reshaped to best meet the need of the new environment when the pandemic was over.

The government had now published the draft finance settlement for local government. This however was published after the publication of Leicester's draft budget report and therefore the figures in the final report would be subject to some limited change.

It was explained that this year the budget was a one year stop gap budget, as it was unclear as to the ongoing impact of the pandemic, on spending and on the economic downturn. There had been minimal changes to the budget for 21/22 and no further information had been received from government regarding the budget beyond this period.

The Deputy Director of Finance noted that significant amount of funds still needed to be provided for Social Care which included £10m for adult social care and of this, the government only provided £3m. In order to contribute to this gap, the government proposed that the Council increase Council Tax by an additional 3% which would raise £3.6m but would still result in a shortfall of funds. Leicester City Council along with other councils, were still awaiting the social care funding review. Members' attention was drawn to the table on pg. 5 which set out how the draft budget was balanced with the use of £20m of reserves. However, the Council's ability to use reserves was declining. Substantial savings would need to be made to balance the budget in future years.

Comments received from Members of this Committee would then go to the Overview Select Committee and subsequently Full Council 17 February 2021.

Following comments from Members of the Commission, officers provided the following responses:

- Concerns that it was the wrong time to put pressure on people with an increase in Council Tax and as reported the adult social care precept would only raise £3.6m which would not be sufficient for the gap. It was queried also as to why the Council were investing in specific named projects.

Response from the City Mayor:

The difference between the Capital fund and the draft General Fund Budget 2021/22 was clarified. It was confirmed that the investment of some of the Council's capital resources had been used to enable the regeneration of the city and to ensure a continued revenue stream into the future which did have a positive impact into the Council's position with regard to their revenue budget.

The City Mayor noted that he would be happy to talk in detail about the specific project the Member of Commission was referring to, so as to demonstrate what a good proposal it was in terms of the regeneration of the city and also contribution to the revenue fund.

- Clarification was requested relating to the actual figures that the Council had faced as a result of loss/ cut in government funding?

Response from the Deputy Director of Finance:

It was confirmed that the losses had been very significant, but it was difficult to clarify the exact reduction in funding. The Deputy Director of Finance offered to circulate this information to the particular Member following the meeting.

- It was requested to clarify the budget for 2021/ 22, in relation to Economic Development on page 25 of the report?

Response from the Deputy Director of Finance:

It was noted that these were already approved savings as part of previous spending reviews in previous years budgets. In regard to page 25, the Officer clarified the figures were referring to additional income generation from the workspace units.

Response from the Director of Tourism, Leisure and Inward Investment: The turnover of the economic regeneration service was noted to be quite significant, this reflected that the service had been particularly effective both at generating income from the commercial workspace portfolio and external grants. Hence, the net cost to the Council was noted as relatively small.

- There would be savings from the conservation team of £25k, how?

Response from the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation:

The Council previously had one conservation officer, which increased to two for the purpose of specific projects. One of the posts had now been reduced to part time (at the employee's request) and the £25k was noted as the savings from this job role.

- Comprehensive financial review, how proposing to go about that?

Response from the Deputy Director of Finance:

The Director of Finance would lead on this and would look at projections

put forward by the government with regards to future funding, the ongoing implications of the pandemic, and the position of the Council's reserves.

- The budget proposed a 5% increase in Council Tax and noted the groups who would be significantly impacted by this. Is the Council Tax support scheme robust to meet the increased needs which may come about?

Response from the City Mayor:

The importance of committing to put adequate funds to one side to provide for those in the most need of relief was noted.

Response from the Deputy Director of Finance:

There had seen an increase in demand for Council Tax support this year as a result of the pandemic. There was also a lot of demand for the various Covid-19 support schemes which became available. Since the budget report was published, the government would be making additional funding available to councils.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the comments made by the Commission be noted.
3. That the Executive be requested to reflect in the final budget report the relief schemes that may be necessary as a result of the Council Tax increase.
4. That the Finance Officers be thanked for preparation of the report.

DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Deputy Director of Finance introduced the draft Capital Programme report explaining that the future position remained uncertain both nationally and with the Council's own finances and therefore a one-year skeleton capital programme had been proposed. Much of the spending which took place in the next financial year would be a catch up of the current year's programme.

The proposed Capital Programme 21/22 was in the order of £20m and separately around £58m of works on Council housing and affordable properties which was set out in the Housing Revenue Account Report.

Details of the Capital Fund projects were summarised in the report and the schemes had been noted in different categories throughout the report based on the type of scheme and whether further approvals were required before the commencing of the scheme and where the capital resources to fund the schemes were also included. The Capital Strategy was included as an appendix.

- In regards to spending capital towards housing, it was stated that at a previous meeting it was reported that the government had set out a strategy which meant that the Council was unable to provide houses built to the

highest environmental standards due to the costs of building exceeding the rent that the Council receives. Clarification was requested as to why are we not able to build houses to these environmental standards in Leicester?

Response from the City Mayor:

We are seeking to ensure that in the building of properties that we meet high environmental standards. There were currently a number of discussions as to what were the highest environmental standards. The City Mayor would be happy to report on this matter to the Housing Scrutiny Commission to ensure funds were spent efficiently and properties built with awareness to help tackle climate emergency.

- The Council previously had a proposal to allocate £7m to purchase ex local authority housing, how has this progressed?

Response from the City Mayor:

It was reiterated as to the difference between the two funds and noted that when investments are used wisely it can produce regeneration of the city and produce income which did support the revenue budget.

There was a commitment to increase the availability of Council owned homes and to meet the growing need for people to have decent affordable homes managed by a responsible landlord. As part of this, the Council would be purchasing some already existing properties but also investing substantially in the construction of new properties.

- With reference to two policy provisions identified as part of this programme, £0.5m to assist with Black Lives Matter, what was envisaged?

Response from the City Mayor:

It was noted that the Council wanted to put significant resources into the commitment that was shared to ensure all that could be done to progress the Black Lives Matter agenda in Leicester. That £0.5m would most like go towards enabling an upgrade to the African Caribbean Centre which would allow for it to be even more effective. In order to do this, discussions would take place with the African and Caribbean community to determine what would be the most useful improvements.

- Commercial activity, any plans for using this policy to acquire properties?

Response from the City Mayor:

The City Mayor was determined that the Council should on an annual basis, produce a report in relation to the Council's corporate estate fund as was previously done. It was anticipated that this report would be brought forward in the next few months with a return to this being an annual report to Council.

AGREED:

1. To bring back a future report to the Housing Scrutiny Commission on how the Council was tackling climate emergency when building houses.

119. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

No questions were submitted.

120. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6:46pm.