



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 28 JANUARY 2021 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Thalukdar (Chair)

Councillor Ali
Councillor Joshi

Councillor Govind
Councillor Solanki

Also Present:

Deputy City Mayor Councillor Master
Deputy City Mayor Councillor Russell

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76. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Aqbany.

77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of interest.

78. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission 26 November 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

79. PETITIONS

The monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

80. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

81. COVID 19 RECOVERY PLANS 2021

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Environmental Services and the Director of Finance provided the Commission with an update on the Covid-19 recovery plans for 2021.

It was noted that the Waste Collection sites continued their operations and the recycling centres remained open, Bulky Waste collection was also continuing its service, whilst the Green Waste Service would resume its service in March 2021.

Community Centres across the city were only open for pre-school sessions and accommodating for testing facilities. Library Services were running a click and collect service and an online service.

The Community Engagement Team and Community Safety Teams continued to operate whilst staff working in service areas that were closed had been redeployed to frontline services fighting the virus.

The Courts Service remained open but were prioritising its cases and Regulatory Services continued their services and continuing to conduct Covid Secure site visits.

As part of the discussion Members praised staff for their ongoing efforts and commended the work being carried out. It was suggested that Members preferred to receive the latest information through Council Services rather than the media.

Members shared their concerns with the footage that had been circulated through various outlets of the incident on Spinney Hill Park. It was noted that although no action had been taken yet, the evidence was under review.

The Chair queried whether there were time limits for vaccinations for key workers and whether data was available on fines that had been issued across the city. It was noted that information on vaccinations could be brought back to the Commission at a later date and the data on fines issues was a spreadsheet produced by the police which could be provided to Members.

The Director of Finance noted that the Customer Services Team had worked 7 days a week and stood up to the challenge. This period of time had seen telephonist down by 25% compared to last year, email contact had increased by 100% and there had been a 30% reduction in complaints.

The Deputy City Mayor for Neighbourhoods commended the Service for working relentlessly to support the residents across the city.

As part of the discussions it was noted that although food deliveries for those

residents shielding had seized in September, clinically vulnerable residents had a range of support systems still in place. The Winter Support Scheme also provided a range of support and Members were requested to share individuals information through the C-19 Support email.

AGREED:

- 1) That the sincere thanks and appreciation of the Commission be shared with the staff working through the challenging times;
- 2) That the Members be kept informed of any updates;
- 3) And that, the public be made aware of any false information that is being circulated online.

82. COUNCIL DRAFT ANNUAL BUDGET REPORTS - REVENUE AND CAPITAL 2021/2022

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out the City Mayor's proposed budget for 2021/22. The Commission was recommended to consider and comment on the Neighbourhood Services element of the budget. The Commission's comments would be forwarded to the Overview Select Committee as part of its consideration of the report before presentation to the meeting of Council in February 2021.

The Director of Finance presented the report which set out the draft budget proposed at a time of extreme uncertainty. It was noted that over the last 10 years the general fund budget had seen a reduction of £100million per annum and future impacts were unknown.

It was noted that the draft budget is a one-year stop gap budget having minimal changes. The Adult Social Care budget has £10million growth recognising the increasing cost of and demands for adult social care, only £3million of which would come as funding through central government. Government is allowing Councils to increase their Council Tax by an additional 3% to provide further social care funding, although this does not meet the full cost in Leicester and places the funding burden on to local taxpayers.

It was noted that the Council are in a position to further support the budget with £20million from reserves. This was something that many other Councils are not in the position to do.

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Environmental Services noted that the £32million Neighbourhood Services budget is well managed and had been procurement savings of £60,000 however, the department is facing budget pressures on waste management. This is a result of increasing landfill charges and a rise in annual waste collected for landfill. Members of the Commission suggested that the Commission be updated on any departmental spending reviews being considered and that these be brought to an appropriate future scrutiny meeting.

During the discussions Members of the Committee shared their concerns with the rise in Council Tax and the pressures this would add to vulnerable families

across the city. It was noted that Council tax increased annually by the maximum 2% and the Adult Social Care precept allowed Councils to increase Council Tax by an additional 3%.

It was noted that there were schemes set up to support those individuals across the city who may struggle with Council Tax: The Council Tax Support Scheme, supported up to 80% of Council Tax and the Council Tax Discretionary Relief Scheme supported those with short term hardships with a relief fund. Members of the Commission suggested that the Council should ensure there is effective communication with residents and residents were assisted before enforcement action was taken and that data on families receiving support as a result of the increase in Council Tax be brought to a future Commission meeting.

Members of the Commission suggested that due to the circumstances a larger number of people were using the services provided online and that it would be helpful to those people if the services were easily accessible online. It was noted that services were already migrating online before the pandemic and during the pandemic there was a significant growth in online contact. It would be very helpful if Officers could directly include Commission Members to help support the online improvements and act as a critical friend.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Commission note the report,
- 2) That the Commissions comments be passed to the Overview Select Committee,
- 3) And that, the Director of Finance be requested to provide data on the impact on families as a result of the increases to Council Tax to a future meeting.

83. LIBRARIES BOOK BUS REPLACEMENT CONSULTATION

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Environmental Services submitted a report on the libraries book bus replacement consultation.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services delivered a presentation on the reasons for the consultation and the proposal of replacing two diesel engine book busses with one ULEV book bus.

As part of the discussions Members understood the need to replace the diesel engine with an improved ULEV book bus. It was noted that Members were aware of the level of service the book bus provided local residents across the city and supported the proposals.

Members of the Committee suggested that the service try and continue with the great service that the book bus has provided across Leicester over the years and requested that any change to the locations where the book bus visited be shared with Ward Councillors, this would help further spread the message.

Members of the Commission suggested that any information of

decommissioning the old vehicles could be bought back to the Committee at a later date and that they were in support of the proposals on the grounds of promoting cleaner air.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Members of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission support the proposal of replacing the two diesel engine book busses with a new ULEV book bus;
- 2) And that, the former book bus driver be thanked for his service for over 40 years.

84. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE SERVICES - LEICESTER, LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND

The Director for Neighbourhoods and Environmental Services submitted a report on the re-procurement of Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Services.

The Deputy City Mayor for Social Care and Anti-Poverty introduced the item and the Team Manager for Domestic and Social Abuse delivered the presentation.

As part of the discussions Members of the Commission thanked the Officers for a detailed presentation and the excellent work that was being delivered. Members felt that families from an Asian background were reluctant in coming forward and reporting as a result of various barriers. It was noted that this was an area the service was aware of and work had been carried out in breaking down barriers.

Members of the Commission suggested that Ward Councillors be kept informed of the ongoing work to help spread the message further and further improve the service with local knowledge. It was noted that the idea of a newsletter and other ways of communication was currently being explored.

Members of the Commission questioned on whether the on going lockdown restrictions had an impact on the number of reports. It was suggested that the numbers fluctuated, and there was ongoing analysis to understand the impact.

It was noted that both men and women suffer from domestic violence and/or sexual abuse and the service had reports from both sexes. Although counselling was not a core element for the plan, going forward the service was developing further with the support of its external partners.

Members of the Commission noted that there had been a decrease in numbers and queried whether this was related to the new lockdown restrictions. It was noted that the new lockdown could have an impact on the reporting of incidents, but the service was providing information through foodbanks and vaccination centres. This would help keep friends and families of individuals informed on the signs to be aware of.

The Chair was concerned with those victims that would have language barriers and would not know of the support that was available and could potentially go un-noticed. It was noted that the material that the service produced was in many different languages that are spoken across the city and that the staff and volunteers were also from a wide demographic such as that of the residents in the city as this helped the service in providing a service that is effective and well received in Leicester.

Officers suggested that it would support the services if the Members of the Commission shared the information using their platforms in their local communities and with their constituents.

Members noted that the Forced Marriage Unit had previously delivered events across the city to help raise awareness that were beneficial and well received. It was suggested that it would be more effective to deliver similar sessions to encourage victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse to come forward.

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Environmental Services thanked the Members of the Commission for their support.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Commission confirms that this is an important area of work and continue to provide these vital services.
- 2) That the service be requested to continue communications with local Councillors to further develop the service.

85. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

Members of the Commission be advised to share any items they would like considered for the work programme with the Scrutiny Policy Officer.

86. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no items of urgent business the meeting closed at 08:32pm