



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 1 JULY 2021 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Thalukdar (Chair)
Councillor Solanki (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Joshi, Councillor Nangreave, Councillor O'Donnell, Councillor Waddington, Councillor Westley

In Attendance:

Councillor Clarke, Deputy City Mayor – Environment and Transportation

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Clair and Master.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair noted his thanks to Neighbourhood and Environmental Services staff for their work with Ward Councillors to support communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Chair noted the membership of the Commission and the future Commission meeting dates.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission held 11 March 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

Councillors asked for an update on the situation with land contamination on the Groby Road school site. It was noted that the Groby Road school site had a contaminated land condition attached to the plans and the Planning Department may be able to explain better why the work had ceased to progress.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission be updated by the Planning Department on the Groby Road school site land contamination situation.

5. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

6. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

7. NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services presented an overview of the key areas and services relating to the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission portfolio.

The presentation was welcomed, and work areas were noted by Members, which would help them to set the Commission's Work Programme for the forthcoming year.

Members discussed various portfolio areas which included the following points:

Councillors thanked officers for their work evacuating residents from several homes on Halstead Street due to an unstable retaining wall.

Councillors noted that work ongoing with the Housing Scrutiny Commission might be of relevance to the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission. The concept of a joint review into issues such as private landlords was raised. It was noted that Private Sector Housing was no longer within the remit of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission. This was now part of Housing Scrutiny Commissions remit.

The quality and responsiveness of services across the Division were noted. Concerns however were raised with respect to the Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. Officers asked that any cases of concern be raised with them so that they can be reviewed with feedback as appropriate to Members. A detailed breakdown of the Units activity was requested to be fed back to the Commission. Officers confirmed this information was readily available and they would ensure Members of the Commission were provided with an update.

Members welcomed the anti-litter and fly tipping strategy which was being developed by the Council. More detailed information was requested on the Council's work supporting the voluntary sector.

In response to queries around the status of the Library Plan as laid out in the Constitution, Officers stated that they would consult with the Monitoring Officer.

Concerns were raised regarding the cleanliness of the city centre and other areas in the city as well as the impact of street lifestyles on visitors. Officers asked for any examples of poor cleansing to be referred in so that they could be appropriately followed up. It was noted that a deep clean of the city had been carried out and that photos of this clean would be distributed to Members. It was confirmed that work on street lifestyles was ongoing and Leicester's approach had been acknowledged at a national level. The results of a national bid to further expand this work was awaited.

In response to queries from Members around the funeral services pledge in the manifesto, Officers stated that a review of the funeral sector had recently been conducted by the Competition and Markets Authority and activity around this commitment was being reviewed in light of this.

Concerns were raised about the increase of fly tipping in the city. Officers further confirmed that an item would be brought to a future meeting of the Commission, looking at fly tipping and littering, noting the previously mentioned litter and fly tipping strategy that was being developed.

It was noted that there would be a program of removal of pop-up cycle lanes in line with the lifting of Covid restrictions on 19 July. It was hoped that some of these lanes could become permanent. It was noted that there would be a program of removal of pop-up cycle lanes in line with the lifting of Covid restrictions on 19 July. It was hoped that some of these lanes could become permanent, however this was outside of this Scrutiny portfolio.

In response to queries from Members, it was noted that the food safety program would soon resume, with higher risk premises being looked at first.

Agreed:

1. That the Commission notes the presentation.

8. COVID 19 RECOVERY UPDATE

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services presented an update on the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Neighbourhood Services. It was noted that:

- The position of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services had remained largely the same since the previous Commission meeting except for Neighbourhood Services.

- Thirteen libraries were now open on reduced hours.
- Certain facilities remained a part of the Covid effort.
- Work was currently ongoing in respect of planning the reopening of community centres.
- The Council had launched several online alternatives to previously in-person services. There had been no drop in usage of these services since some facilities reopened.

Separate to the Neighbourhood and Environmental Services COVID-19 Recovery Update it was noted that a scheme of putting flowers on bus stop roofs had received positive reception. More opportunities were being looked at.

Agreed:

1. That the Commission notes the update.

9. WARD ENGAGEMENT AND FUNDING ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

The Head of Neighbourhood Services presented a report on Ward Engagement and Funding covering the period 2020-21. It was noted that:

- From the period of April 2020 to March 2021, every ward budget was spent within 10%.
- An extra £105,000 Community Mobilisation Fund had been made available to support residents during the pandemic, helping fund foodbanks and other similar initiatives.
- Ward Community Engagement Officers had been working hard to support those hoping to make bids.
- Due to the pandemic, there had been more bids than usual focused on supporting communities and less on events.
- A number of virtual Ward Community Meetings had been held during the lockdown period, with attendance levels varying. The return of physical Ward Community Meetings was not yet an option due to restrictions, Members would be consulted on the return of physical Ward Meetings.

Members noted their thanks to Ward Community Engagement Officers for their work during the pandemic.

In response to concerns that not enough was being done to advertise Ward Meetings. It was noted that word of mouth had been found to be the best way to raise awareness of Ward Meetings.

In response to questions around the Community Mobilisation Fund, it was noted that Council led schemes generally included things such as pavement works and bollards on roads.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission recommends that Ward Community Meetings be held virtually until such a time as physical meetings are safe.

10. TREE STRATEGY REVIEW

Councillor Clarke, Deputy City Mayor for Environment and Transportation, introduced the item, stating that trees were one of the most important assets that the Council looked after.

Stewart Doughty, Head of Parks and Open Spaces presented the item. It was noted that:

- The Tree Strategy had been launched in 2018, and the Commission was being updated on the scheme,
- All registered trees in the city were surveyed as part of the strategy.
- 100% of waste material from the strategy was recycled and diverted from landfill, and created a small income.
- Individual Tree Protection Orders could cover multiple trees.
- The Climate Wood Group was working to identify suitable sites for additional woodland and the development of a tree trail.

In response to concerns raised around certain trees causing a nuisance, it was acknowledged that historically trees had not always been planted in appropriate places. It was noted that there was now a strict process of determining new tree locations, and that the level of maintenance of trees was determined by its location. It was acknowledged that when trees reached the end of their life span, they would be removed.

Councillors enquired as to what the options were for consulting with residents about trees in more urban wards. It was noted that planting trees in narrow urban streets was difficult and that other options could be considered.

It was noted that the shade provided by trees was a indicator in the healthy street assessment.

In response to Councillors enquiring about more cherry trees being planted in the city, it was noted that these trees had a shorter life span and would create issues with fruits falling on the ground.

Councillors enquired as to how schools were getting involved in supporting trees. It was noted that 60 fruit trees had been planted in schools this year, and that schools had been mapped out to see where there was room for more trees. Schools that didn't have space would be encouraged to get involved in mass planting projects off-site.

In response to a question around the Council's use of paper, it was noted that considerable effort was being made to use less paper across the Council.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission notes the report.

11. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair noted that any suggestions for future items for the Commission should be emailed to himself or the Scrutiny Policy Officer.

12. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Councillor Clarke congratulated Stewart Doughty for celebrating 45 years of employment at Leicester City Council.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.07pm.