



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2021 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Thalukdar (Chair)

Councillor Joshi, Councillor Nangreave, Councillor Westley, Councillor Waddington

In Attendance:

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor for Regulatory Services
Councillor Russell, Deputy City Mayor for Social Care and Anti-Poverty
Sir Peter Soulsby, Leicester City Mayor

* * * * *

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Solanki and O'Donnell.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair paid tribute to Councillor Ratilal Govind, who passed away the week before.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

1. That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission held 21 October 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

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. DOMESTIC ABUSE - DRAFT SAFE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

The Chair noted that this was a joint item with the Housing Scrutiny Commission, the Chair welcomed those Members of Housing Scrutiny that were present to the meeting.

Councillor Russell, Deputy City Mayor for Social Care and Anti-Poverty, introduced the item. It was noted that the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 required a change in the Local Authority's duties around domestic abuse.

Stephanie McBurney, Team Manager for Domestic and Sexual Violence, presented the item, it was noted that:

- Under the new legislation, each Local Authority had to assess the need for accommodation-based support and create, publish, and monitor a strategy for the provision of such support.
- As part of the strategy, a locality partnership board would be established, with representatives from the Council, VCS specialists, Police and Health groups, and those affected by domestic abuse.
- Due to national deadlines, the consultation period was only a month long.
- The strategic objective for the strategy were practically focused, focusing on commissioning and structure.
- The themed priorities of the strategy were focused on gathering intelligence and developing the workforce.
- The final strategy would be published on 5 January 2022.
- It wasn't intended to give less focus to none accommodation-based issues in the area, the delivery group could well look at other aspects and issues.

In response to questions from Members of both Commissions, it was noted that:

- A community event in Belgrave hosted by Ward Councillors on the issue of domestic abuse had been a great success. There was interest from other Ward Councillors about holding similar community events in their own wards.
- It was important to make sure that it was well known that resources were there to support victims to whom English wasn't their first language.
- The implementation of the strategy would be fed back to the Commission in a similar way as the domestic abuse contracts.
- Domestic abuse was an issue for every community, and it was important to understand how it could be hidden. Previous work had been undertaken with communities to help spot signs of hidden abuse. One example of a community group that had previously been involved in this area was the Polish Mums and Children's Group.

- The issue of timely move-on had been exacerbated by Covid, but connections with Housing Officers had helped ease the issue of overcrowding in emergency accommodation. Respite Rooms, a new pilot, had shown some positive signs in this area.
- Police could be invited to Commission meetings by the Chair to feed into this area and other areas.
- The National Domestic Abuse Network would remain important in cases of needing to move victims out of the city for their safety.
- A diversity of provision was necessary in order to be able to respond to different demographics and circumstances.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission recommends that Members' comments be taken into account for the new strategy.
2. That the Commission requests an update on progress in 6 months.
3. That the Commission praises the Belgrave community event that was held on domestic abuse and encourages other communities to hold similar events.
4. That the Commission recommends that Domestic Abuse services should seek to be as inclusive as possible with regards to language.
5. That the Commission praises the strategy.

8. CROWDFUND LEICESTER UPDATE

The City Mayor introduced the item, it was noted that Crowdfund Leicester launched in 2017 and was run in collaboration with the Spacehive crowdfunding platform. It was noted that the funding generated by the platform was not intended to in any way replace statutory funding but was there to respond to the enthusiasm of communities.

Miranda Cannon, Director of Delivery, Communications, and Political Governance, and Georgia Humby, Executive Support Officer, presented the item. It was noted that:

- A short presentation had previously been brought to the Commission, but the Commission Members requested more detail. Hence why the report was being brought.
- The Spacehive platform was used by a number of other Local Authorities such as Liverpool City Council.
- Other funds were channelled through the platform, including the City Mayor's Community Engagement Fund.
- The platform enabled organisers to showcase projects and ideas in a digital environment.
- Other types of resources were provided by the platform, including a land offer.
- Spacehive were commissioned for £19,000 per annum, £10,000 was for the licence of the micro site the platform was hosted on.

- It was accepted that the platform wasn't very well known across the city, but that because the team working on it was small, they didn't want to take on more work than they could handle.
- 26 projects had been successfully supported through the platform, and it was hoped that this experience would help expand the number of projects that could be delivered in the future.
- The team welcomed Councillors approaching them to make connections with local community groups who might be interested in the platform.
- Future efforts to spread awareness of the platform was hoped to include Member briefings, attending Ward Community Meetings, and internal meetings with different service areas such as economic regeneration.
- Business workshops had recently started to find partners in the private and public sectors.
- In the first step in the process for projects, project developers could create a page to describe and pitch their idea for free.

In response to Member's questions, it was noted that:

- The Community Engagement Fund had specific criteria for whether projects would qualify to receive it. The aims of the fund were around supporting the public sector equality duty. This fund was largely channelled through the platform
- Work was ongoing to see what other service specific funding pots might be available to support projects.
- Long term risks with the land offer would have to be considered. Only one project had been delivered with the land offer included.
- The platform was one aspect of the Council's support for the Voluntary and Community Sector. Meaning that other projects might be inappropriate for crowdfunding and more appropriate for other strands of funding such as Ward Community Funds.
- The cost of commissioning Spacehive was built into the budget for the Delivery, Communications and Political Governance Division.
- During the pandemic, the Council increased links with Voluntary and Community sector organisations, it was hoped that these links could be used to spread awareness of the platform.

AGREED

1. That the Commission recommends that Members' comments raised be taken into account by Officers who manage Crowdfund Leicester, and Spacehive.
2. That the Commission requests a progress update on Crowdfund Leicester in 6 months.
3. That the Commission requests that more information be provided on the criteria for the City Mayor's Community Engagement Fund.

9. HOMELESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS STRATEGY

Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service for Homelessness, and Justin Haywood, Service Manager for Homelessness Prevention and Support, presented the item. It was noted that:

- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 'Everyone In' directive was in place from March 2020 until April 2021, longer than most other Local Authorities.
- The Service was still in recovery from the pandemic.
- The MyHome app, which allowed service users to get information and early help had seen increasing usage.
- Approaches from service users were above average so far in the municipal year.
- The track record of the Council in sustaining accommodation had been good.
- 1,500 new affordable homes were planned over the next 4 years.
- New incentive schemes had been launched in the private rented sector.
- As part of the 'Homes Not Hostels' objective, all temporary accommodation was now self-contained.
- Strong links were maintained with Health and Justice Services.
- Care Leaver pathways were being continually monitored.

In response to Members questions it was noted that:

- Suitability of accommodation was considered by case workers as mandated by legislation, and those who were in unsuitable accommodation could be defined as homeless.
- There were plans to increasing marketing on the MyHome app. The app was used across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland.
- The St Mungos charity supported service users with finding employment.
- The Council worked with various external agencies to find and help hotspot areas.
- The Council had a cold weather plan which brought on additional accommodation.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission recommends that Members' comments raised be taken into account by Officers implementing this work.
2. That the Commission requests to be kept informed on any concerning issues or impacts relating to neighbourhood areas.

10. 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.

11. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.00pm.