



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 17 MARCH 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

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

Councillor Joshi Councillor Nangreave
Councillor Waddington

In Attendance:

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor
(Culture, Leisure, Sport & Regulatory Services)

Councillor Patel Assistant City Mayor (Equalities)

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13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O'Donnell and Westley.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to disclose any pecuniary or other interest they may have in the business on the agenda.

There were no declarations of interest.

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission held on 28 January 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

16. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair commented that this was the final meeting of the Commission in the current Municipal Year, and he expressed his thanks to the Vice-Chair, Commission members, Deputy City Mayor Councillor Clair, and Assistant City Mayor Councillor Master for their support during the year.

There was also an update concerning the recruitment and transition plan of the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services post, following the resignation of John Leach. It was reported that formal communication and confirmation of the newly appointed Director would be issued in due course.

17. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

18. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

19. VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY & SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (VCSE) ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Assistant City Mayor (Equalities) Councillor Patel was invited to introduce the report and reminded the Commission that the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations played an increasingly vital role in the city. It was noted that the sector had long been a valued partner of the City Council as well as many other public sector organisations and benefitted from closer working relationships.

Councillor Patel then commented that due to Covid-19, the VCSE relationships were changing and had been heightened during the pandemic. This impact had also been enhanced due to recent budget cuts where the sector had been asked to increase partnership working and strong relationships to ensure sustainability. It was noted that discussions were being held to guarantee that post pandemic, a coordinated approach and support to the sector could be continued.

The Head of the City Mayor's Office presented the details of the report and stated that ongoing research locally and nationally had been undertaken and that an evaluation of the support to voluntary sector organisations, faith groups and other partners had been delayed due to the pandemic.

The report demonstrated the methods of a proposed engagement strategy with stakeholders and referred to available resources and the intention to develop the strategy, and review it over the year, including internal and external impacts and developments.

The initial work had identified a series of themes where clear pledges would be made against those themes, alongside a series of actions and identified principles behind the pledges.

It was recognised that the revised strategy would reposition the work of the City Council with the VCSE sector, particularly due to the potential of scarce future funding, but that support as an enabling partner would continue to ensure long term sustainability.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that the infrastructure support, a needs assessment process, and support from the Community Action Fund / Crowd Funding would all receive due consideration. The issues concerning the impact on the strategy following the conclusion of the Voluntary Action Leicestershire contract were also acknowledged.

Members also expressed concern at the significant numbers of voluntary organisations that had closed due to reductions in their financial support from the Council, and that the new strategy was therefore vital. It was considered that greater accessibility to the mapping of organisations receiving support was also required. It was recognised that some smaller organisations would be able to access funding through the commissioning approach, and that in many cases a relatively small amount of funding could lead to significant outcomes for those organisations. In relation to larger organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, the objectives of the strategy to increase partnership working and other support separate from funding to continue strong working relationships were reiterated.

In conclusion, the timeframe of the revised strategy was confirmed in accordance with the manifesto commitment, with updates being submitted to the Commission in the interim, particularly to provide updates on the availability of budgets and distribution of the funding.

AGREED:

To support the launch of the VCSE Engagement Strategy in April 2022.

20. DRAFT TAXI STRATEGY

The Strategic Director for City Development and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided details of the objectives of the draft taxi strategy, which had been prepared setting out the vision for the taxi trade in the city. It was reported that should the strategy be approved, some changes could be made immediately and work could begin on implementing more detailed changes that would require additional work such as consultation or procurement.

It was also reported that the draft policy had received initial scrutiny through a consultation process including input from the Licensing and Public Safety Committee.

The links to the procurement of services was noted, including social care and education, and reassurance was provided in terms of safeguarding and the substantial levels of checks on drivers and vehicles.

In terms of the numbers of vehicles operating in the city, which had been licensed with other local authorities, the significant concerns were recognised, and the work undertaken in partnership with Legal Services and pursuing the issue including the contact with the Secretary of State was acknowledged and welcomed.

AGREED:

That the Draft Taxi Strategy be supported.

21. LIBRARY SERVICES PROVISION – SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND CAREERS

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor (Culture, Leisure, Sport, and Regulatory Services) introduced the item concerning the delivery of community and library services.

Jenny Young and Steve Pinchbeck from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were welcomed and introduced to the Commission, joining the meeting remotely.

The Head of Neighbourhood services gave a presentation which advised members of Library Employment Support, including both the national and local strategic context, and reference was made to the 2019 Manifesto Commitments.

Advice and support sessions in libraries and Work Coach Sessions were described, and the following key points were noted:

- Partnership with DWP developed during pandemic
- Work coach sessions trialled in 3 libraries Autumn 2020
- Service rolled out to 6 libraries in total Summer 2021
- From 25 February 2022 sessions also delivered at BRITE Centre
- Weekly sessions
- Call or visit the local library to book

The support for skills development and access to information, together with support for children & young people were also reported.

The presentation also provided information concerning the access to computers & the internet and included the results of a survey to show what people were people coming to do at libraries. The significant numbers of people searching for employment opportunities was highlighted and noted.

In terms of learning, the beginners IT sessions and support from library staff where signposting and support to computer users was offered. Information was also submitted concerning adult learning.

Details of the Kickstart scheme were reported, and key points were noted:

- Neighbourhood Services are providing Government funded “Kickstart” roles in libraries and community centres
- The scheme is open to 18–25-year-olds
- Offers an opportunity to develop skills in community settings
- 4 customer care roles, one in each area of the city
- 1 admin support role, centrally based
- Roles will commence in 2022, each for 6-month period

The presentation concluded with details and a summary of the results of a case study undertaken at Beaumont Leys Library in November 2021

The Chair welcomed the details in the presentation and asked for comments.

In response to questions, it was noted that the locations of the Kickstart and Work Coach sessions were carefully and properly considered, dependant on the suitability of locations. It was confirmed that other locations could be assessed but this relied on suitability of rooms and working space, and the separation of staff, including DWP colleagues, from other activities in buildings. Reference was made to the potential availability of space and rooms at Fosse and Belgrave Libraries, with Fosse Library due to reopen imminently. The strong and effective partnership working with the DWP was welcomed.

In terms of the beginners IT sessions, it was clarified that these had been operating for around ten years and that there was an intention to continue to provide and extend the service to other areas of the city. It was recognised and noted that there were currently 5 libraries involved the scheme and increased demand was expected.

In response to questions concerning demand and monitoring, DWP partners provided an update and expressed the view that post-pandemic, more people were accessing the services as their confidence grew. It was also noted that services were assessed in terms of their need following the analysis of customer service surveys, which showed patterns of use and desire for any additional or revised services.

In reply to a question regarding the computer hardware being used, it was reported that during the lockdown, the opportunity to renew the network had been undertaken and many locations had received upgraded PC's, monitors, and scanning/printing equipment.

AGREED:

That the update be noted and the work to support the delivery of community and library services be supported.

22. NOISE AND POLLUTION MONITORING SERVICE OVERVIEW

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor (Culture, Leisure, Sport, and Regulatory Services) introduced the item concerning the noise and pollution monitoring service.

The Team Manager, Neighbourhood Services, submitted a report and gave a presentation providing an overview of the Noise and Pollution Control Team Management objectives. The report and presentation provided details of the monitoring service and advised of how evidence was considered, and information concerning the enforcement policy and statistics were also submitted.

It was reported that the Noise and Pollution Control (NPC) Team operated a monitoring service to deal with noise, odour, smoke, and other issues from residential and commercial premises. It was noted that the team had additional workloads including petroleum and contaminated land. The impact of the Covid-19 lockdown and the associated increased levels of homeworking, which had led to increased complaints was reported and acknowledged.

In response to questions relating to the staffing and structures, although a vacancy currently existed, it was confirmed that the team were able and confident to deal with the levels of complaints and enquiries being received.

In conclusion, the Chair reminded members that the report was an annual submission and would be included on the Work Programme for a further update in the next municipal year.

AGREED:

That the update and report be noted.

23. HATE CRIME POLICY

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor (Culture, Leisure, Sport, and Regulatory Services) introduced the item concerning the proposed Hate Crime Policy 2022/2025.

The Head of Community Safety and Protection submitted a report, which outlined the work undertaken to date, and the proposals to be taken forward around the hate crime/ incident agenda. The report also provided details of the work undertaken in formulating the Hate Crime Policy, which was appended.

It was reported and noted that the vision of the policy was as follows:
“Leicester city is a great place to live in and we value and cultivate diversity, Leicester City Council is committed to tackling and reducing hate crime across both the council and the city. The Council will work with its staff, partners, and communities to tackle hate crime and incidents.”

In discussing the content of the report and policy, members referred to the need for individuals to be confident to report hate crimes and that this should be emphasised. The awareness of the seriousness and validation of hate crimes, rather than many people considering acceptance, was also highlighted and the legislative background and support that could be offered was emphasised. In terms of the priorities, it was reported that the document would be refreshed annually to consider any national changes to hate crime legislation.

The need to ensure that the policy was available in alternative languages was raised and was acknowledged.

A particular comment was made in respect of misogyny, which required expanding and clarifying in the text, as currently the policy stated that this 'may' be considered a hate crime. It was noted that the policy was currently a working document and amendments could be made.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked members and particularly Councillor Waddington who had been instrumental in raising the issue and bringing the item to the Commission.

AGREED:

That the Hate Crimes Policy be welcomed and endorsed.

24. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Commission's Work Programme was submitted for information and comment.

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

25. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.