



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 12 JANUARY 2023 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Thalukdar(Chair)
Councillor Solanki (Vice Chair)

In Attendance:

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor for Culture, Leisure, Sport, and Regulatory Services

51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Deputy City Mayor Councillor Clarke, Councillor O'Donnell, Councillor Pickering, Councillor Rahman and Caroline Tote.

The Chair noted that Councillor Byrne, Councillor Kitterick, and Councillor Modhwadia, were also absent, and the meeting was therefore inquorate.

As there was not a quorum present the meeting stood adjourned for fifteen minutes to allow for any late attendees.

As the meeting remained inquorate it could not proceed as a formal meeting, however the Chair decided to proceed with an informal meeting.

52. 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.

53. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

No announcements were made.

54. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RECOMMENDED TO AGREE:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission held 15th November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

55. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

56. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

57. DEPARTMENTAL DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out the City Mayor's proposed budget for 2023/24. The Commission was recommended to consider and comment on the Neighbourhood Services element of the report. 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 on 22nd February 2023.

Amy Oliver, Director of Finance, presented the item, it was noted that:

- The main issues affecting the budget were the decade of austerity, two year stop gap to get through the Covid-19 Pandemic and the recent rise in inflation.
- There were expectations of further grant cuts in 2025/26, as the government hinted at a new period of austerity.
- Experiencing above inflationary cost pressures in adult social care as a consequence of growth of those in need and increases in the national living wage paid to the staff employed as care providers. The overall impact had been 50% increase on cost of providing care packages since 2016/17 which reached £142 million in 2021/22 with the trend expected to continue.
- The impact of austerity had seen the grant fall from £289 million to £179 million on a like for like basis between 2010 and 2020.
- Due to the rise in inflation, £10 million of budget was being set aside for energy costs.
- A significant factor was staff pay, in 2022/23 saw 6.4% added to the pay bill. This was £7.4 million above what had been budgeted.
- The managed reserve strategy noted in the report showed that there was an estimated £55 million in reserve. This meant that the £33 million budget gap would be managed through that reserve.
- A 5% increase was proposed for Council Tax.
- The Capital Budget was a limited programme on a one year budget.

- A £2.6 million provision was set out for parks and play areas, of which £2.5 million was proposed for investment into multiuse games areas (MUGA) program across the city.
- £1 million had been proposed for investment into a policy provision for the library service.

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

- The City Mayor would continue to make cost saving decisions throughout the financial year as they were identified and any savings made would go into reserve.
- Approximately £6 million in revenue would be generated from the rise in Council Tax.
- A local council tax support scheme would be available for people receiving benefits. The 5% increase was based on an average for band D properties and most Leicester residents would pay less.
- Work was being done to help support residents that identified as vulnerable,
- The district heating scheme was still a work in progress and had been revised since previously discussed and would be kept under review until Full Council meeting.
- The £4 million provided to support the capital maintenance program would be used for general works on council properties and maintaining them to keep to the standard required. It was a priority area of work that looked at asset condition and risk survey.
- The multiuse games program phase one was expected to be on site in the spring 2023, reports were being finalised. The Library program would be later on in the financial year.

AGREED:

1. That the reports be noted.
2. That the comments made during discussion be taken into account by officers.

58. SELECTIVE PRS LICENSING SCHEME

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a presentation about the Selective Licensing Scheme and provided an update on the data recorded up to 31 December 2022.

The Deputy City Mayor for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Regulatory Services introduced the presentation, noting that the aim of the scheme was to improve the standard of housing in the private sector.

The Head of Regulatory, Neighbourhood and Environmental Services presented information about the Selective Licensing Scheme which included a summary of the scheme headlines; application and inspection processes; hazards and images of hazards identified; and plans around future communications.

It was noted that:

- The scheme went live on the 10th October 2022.
- A team had been recruited to resource the scheme, which consisted of a Team Manager, an Admin Manager, two Senior Regulatory officers, 17 Housing Inspectors and three Admin Support Officers.
- There were three cluster areas in the scheme, Fosse, Stoneygate and Westcotes Wards, and across the area there were around 8500 properties that fall into the private rent sector.
- In terms of data, at this point 413 applications had been received; 213 inspections had been carried out. 35 draft licenses and 42 full licenses had been issued.
- A new computer system had been introduced, which helped to streamline the process and capture more data, this enabled the team to action applications in a more efficient way.
- The Selective Licensing Team were currently working to develop a digital inspection process, that would enable officers to complete inspections digitally using tablets, and to upload the data when they returned to the office.
- The Scheme was within budget, with the original aim of the scheme, to self-fund the department using resources generated from the scheme, successfully being adhered to and avoiding the possibility of the scheme being operated at a loss.
- All information regarding the scheme was available on the Councils website. A post code checker was available for landlords to check if their property was included in the scheme area before making an application. There was also a telephone line for support.
- Once an inspection had been carried out, if only minor issues were found a draft license could be issued until the works were carried out. Major issues would need to be resolved before a draft license could be issued.
- The current turn around for applications was 7 weeks, with an average of 32 days to issue a license. Which was within target.
- The scheme was due to run for 5 years.
- The aim was to undertake 3 inspections of a property over the 5 years of the scheme.
- The scheme was being operated alongside the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System, which was a national scheme and provided consistency across all Local Authorities for assessing hazards within private rented properties. It covered 29 hazards in total which were split across two categories. Category 1 – Serious and immediate risk. Category 2 – Less serious hazards.
- Hazards were found in 46% of inspections, split approximately as 40% in Category 1 and 60% in Category 2.
- Work was in progress in conjunction with City Wardens to identify properties of concern and refer those to the scheme.
- A quarterly newsletter would be sent to landlords from January 2023.
- An early bird discount was currently available to landlords until April 2023, which would reduce the fee from £1090 to £750. Additional press

releases were due to be advertised to encourage landlords to come forward.

- Support sessions for landlords were being planned in libraries across the district.

In response to Members' questions, it was noted that:

- The scheme costs had been based on how many applications were expected to be received and the number of private rented accommodations in the area. This was compared against the resources needed to inspect that property over the 5-year period, plus any follow up work.
- The overall cost of the scheme for 5 years was £8.65M, with £5.9M being staffing costs. The remaining balance were overheads plus the cost of the discounted fees.
- The expected number of applications was 7,900, which worked out at an average cost per license of £1090.
- Once a property had been inspected, they would receive a full license if no action was required. If actions was required, a draft license would be drawn up, in which the landlord would have 14 days to appeal or challenge the decision. After 14 days, if nothing were to be raised, a full license would be issued.
- If the actions requested were not completed, the Council would have the right to rescind the license. If the issues were minor, existing housing enforcement powers could be used to issue an improvement notice.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Commission receive a report providing an overview of the Selective Licensing team's work in six months' time

59. TAXI STRATEGY

The Strategic Director for City Development and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the Taxi Strategy which included an update on progress towards implementation of the strategy.

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor (Culture, Leisure, Sport, and Regulatory Services) introduced the item and explained the aim of the strategy was to support the taxi trade, whilst working with other authorities to monitor taxis in the city.

The Chief Licensing Officer presented the item.

It was reported that an additional action had been added to the action plan to reflect the commitment to annually review the hackney fares structure to ensure that charges reflect the cost of operation.

It was noted that:

- The Taxi strategy was in place, but not yet published on the council's website. There was opportunity to further review the new work undertaken between April and October 2022 focussed on both the hackney and private hire industries.
- The report set out a series of actions at para 5.4 and progress against those. Target dates had been reviewed to ensure the deadlines were realistic.
- Some aspects of taxi licensing required further consultation before that could be taken forward, such as the possible introduction of CCTV in licensed vehicles.
- Vehicle licensing impacted on air quality and therefore policies on vehicle age and emissions would be tied to Climate Change proposals.
- The vision in the Taxi Strategy was: "for the hackney and private hire sectors to provide a safe and superb customer service within an integrated sustainable transport system, whilst contributing to the economy with minimal environmental impact."
- Work was being completed on arrangements for the sharing of statutory powers to regulate out of town drivers.
- Closer relationships had been developed with the City of Wolverhampton Council at both strategic and officer levels. Joint compliance operations were ongoing.
- Colleagues in Leicestershire were interested in being involved and an officer meeting was pending.

In response to a question about responsibility for paying for the monitoring of Wolverhampton licensed drivers, it was noted that it was a joint enterprise. DVLA inspectors had the legal power to check vehicles licensed outside Leicester. When collaborative spot checks were organised, the neighbouring authority would send their own officers to deal with any licensing issues at the time. Where officers from other authorities were not present, any concerns identified relating to 'out of town' vehicles would be referred to the relevant authority after the spot check.

RECOMMENDED TO AGREE:

1. That the commission note the new action added to the plan.
2. That the contents of the report be noted.
3. That an update report be brought to the commission in 6 months' time.

60. EMPLOYMENT AND CAREERS (IN LIBRARIES) UPDATE

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a presentation update on the Library Services Provision – Support for employment and careers update. The update focused on the information and digital goal of the four Universal Offers developed by libraries. The goal was "To ensure local communities have access to quality information and digital services, to learn new skills and to feel safe online"

The Head of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services presented the item which included a brief overview of neighbourhood services; information around library employment support; key outcomes of the Arts Council England Report (June 2022); advice and support sessions in local libraries as well as a number of case studies and workforce development.

It was noted that:

- The Council's Neighbourhood Services section delivered community and library services to people who lived and worked in Leicester City.
- Neighbourhood Services were committed to the four Universal Offers developed by Libraries Connected and supported by Arts Council England.
- Since the previous update a report had been produced by Arts Council England in June 2022. The report was titled 'Helping job seekers help themselves' and focused specifically on the future for library provision.
- The report's findings noted that 39% of library users were job seekers, nation-wide.
- The following three recommendations were made in the report:
 1. Actively coordinate the support provided to jobseekers by library services with other forms of jobseeker support through a formal partnership between jobcentres and library services as critical social infrastructure.
 2. Invest in quality and consistency. Individual library services should consider how they can increase the benefit to jobseekers by making the resources and activities identified by the research more widely available and actively promote this support.
 3. Reinstate human help for jobseekers which been paused due to the pandemic. Individual services should use the evidence in this report to inform decisions about how to reinstate provision, in particular CV writing, careers advice and training courses.
- Leicester was already compliant in all 3 recommendations.
- The pilot commenced in autumn 2020, which trialled in three libraries. Following success, the service was rolled out to three further libraries in autumn 2021. A final two libraries were included in spring 2022.
- A customer survey was undertaken in February 2022, with 1,500 responses. The survey showed that purpose of the visits were as follows:
 - 6% were job related.
 - 19% were to get online
 - 21% were answering a query
 - 35% were studying or learning
- Neighbourhood Services provided government funded Kickstarter roles in libraries and community centres in 2022. The scheme was open to 18 – 25 year olds. Two customer facing roles in different areas of the city were available and both Kickstarters had now successfully applied for positions within the service.
- Neighbourhood services were working directly with colleges to offer three T-level placement opportunities for admin and business students

to introduce them to the benefits of working for the council and to support young people in their career development.

- Apprenticeships were being offered to members of staff within the service, to support career development.
- Neighbourhoods Services were offering up to four apprenticeships in Library and Information Skills for front line staff.

In response to members questions, it was noted:

- Neighbourhoods Services had looked into extending further, following a recommendation at a previous meeting. Contact had been made with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), as it was a DWP resource and the council were currently fully utilizing that resource. The eight locations were picked because of the need requirements and easy accessibility.
- Regular monthly service meetings were held to ensure frontline staff within the Neighbourhoods and Customer Service Centres had access to the same source of information.
- Page 129 of the report showed the figures for those who had attended adult learning courses during the autumn term. Data for enrollments in the spring term were not currently available.
- The adult learning courses could be accessed via the adult learning brochure online. At the start of each term would be an enrolment day, where the doors are open and the adult learning staff would be available to discuss the courses at most locations.

RECOMMENDED TO AGREE:

That an update report on the adult learning courses be provided to the commission in six months.

61. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

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

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

62. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The meeting closed at 7:05pm.