



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 31 JULY 2024 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Cassidy - Chair

Councillor Batool  
Councillor March  
Councillor Porter

Councillor Dawood  
Councillor Osman

Also Present:

Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor  
Councillor Malik – Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Adult Learning, Jobs and Skills  
Dena Al-Showali – Youth Representative  
Eashan Naik - Youth Representative

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**38. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There was a slight delay with the arrival of the Chair. In his absence, Councillor March was elected interim Chair. All were welcomed to the meeting. Cllr Cassidy arrived shortly afterwards and commenced the role of Chair.

Apologies were received from Cllr Rae Bhatia.

Apologies were also received from Cllr O'Neill who had been due to be a substitute in the vacant position. She attended the meeting remotely and was reminded that she would not be able to serve as a formal member on the committee.

**39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **40. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Cllr Porter recalled the previous minutes and queried the sale price of a property on Vaughan way. The City Mayor advised that he was unsure which building was being referenced and asked for Councillor Porter to provide more detail in respect of his request.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview Select Committee Commission held on 11 April 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

#### **41. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- The Chair noted that Cllr O'Neill was attending this meeting as a substitute for the one Labour vacancy on the Committee. The role of Vice-Chair was currently vacant and a nomination for this role would be put to Full Council on 5 September.
- The Chair also announced that there was a recent high-profile race discrimination case relating to a former City Council employee and that that the employee in question had made direct contact with a number of elected members.

The Chair clarified that under the scrutiny procedure rules set out in the constitution, questions or comments during scrutiny committee meetings should not:

- i) Relate to a specific and identifiable person or which relates to an individual's particular circumstances.
- ii) Relate to any matter where there is a right of appeal to the courts, a tribunal or to a government minister or on any matter which, in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer, is of a quasi-judicial nature.

Therefore, given that the matter in hand related to a specific and identifiable person and given that the legal process in relation to the case had not concluded, any questions or comments in relation to the detail of this case would be prohibited.

- The Chair further announced that there had been some delay regarding work on the Workforce Representation Informal Scrutiny. However, a date for the next meeting would be confirmed to members in the near future.
- Finally, the chair announced that this would be the final Committee meeting of the Governance Services Manager, Francis Connolly. The Chair thanked him for his work and noted that he would be greatly missed.
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#### **42. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE**

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations and statements of case had been submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

#### **43. PETITIONS**

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

#### **44. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION 2024/25**

The Membership of the Commission was confirmed as follows:

Councillor Cassidy - Chair  
Vacancy – Vice-Chair  
Councillor Batool  
Councillor March  
Councillor Dawood.  
Councillor Osman  
Councillor Rae Bhatia  
Councillor Porter

#### **45. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Commission noted the Scrutiny Terms of Reference.

#### **46. DATES OF MEETINGS FOR THE COMMISSION 2024/25**

The dates of the meetings for the Commission were confirmed as follows:

31 July 2024  
26 September 2024  
12 December 2024  
30 January 2025  
27 March 2025  
1 May 2025

#### **47. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT**

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which provided an update on the status of outstanding petitions against the Council's target of providing a formal response within three months of being referred to the Divisional Director.

It was noted that none were marked as 'red'.

AGREED:

That the status of the outstanding petitions be noted.

## 48. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The Chair reminded members that questions for the City Mayor should be emailed to Governance Services in advance of meetings.

The Chair accepted the following questions to be asked to the City Mayor:

1. Councillor Cassidy asked the following:

*The future redevelopment of Leicester's market has received a lot of media attention in recent months. Please can the City Mayor outline the latest position in relation to the plans and confirm what will be brought to scrutiny on this matter and when?*

In responding to this question, the City Mayor made the following points:

The area surrounding the site had buildings with attractive visages which 'deserved to be seen.' He advised there was a high level of support in favour of opening up the area to other possibilities.

Cllr Porter voiced concerns of market traders feeling betrayed by the relocation plans. He asked the City Mayor if the relocation plan had always been in place & whether proposals were made and recorded. Also, he enquired whether contractors had been booked and if there was now a likelihood of legal action being taken on their behalf.

The City Mayor responded and stated that:

The site should return to multi-purpose use, adding that the size and visual appeal of the space had been fully appreciated upon the commencement of works.

2. Cllr Porter queried valuations of the New Walk Centre site. He stated that the council hadn't conducted the appropriate monetary assessments prior to selling, but had spent £5 million. He asked if the City Mayor could confirm his awareness of the situation.

The City Mayor advised that property was valued and had been anticipated to have a negative valuation. It was expected that the council would face grave difficulties in selling them. The City Mayor went on to suggest that Cllr Porter raise the issue with auditors, if unsatisfied with the council's actions. The Chair reminded Cllr Porter that he could also write to the City Mayor regarding his concern.

3. Cllr Osman referenced the Caribbean carnival cancellation and asked if the Diwali light switch on is still planned to go ahead?

In response, the City Mayor stated that it was with sadness that the Caribbean Carnival would not be held this year though felt it was reasonable to expect that it would return for 2025. In respect of the Diwali events, he advised that there

were a number of stakeholder discussions taking place. The reasonable expectation is for a separate event to occur. If something had to be cancelled to allow the official Diwali day celebrations, then this could be the switch-on event. He reminded the committee of the significant expense incurred in staging the celebrations and explained that sponsorship avenues would be explored in future years.

4. Cllr Osman asked about recent housing target announcements, stating that the target for Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County's had increased. He asked if this was likely to affect the planning & provision of green sites and the overall delivery of Leicester's Local Plan.

The City Mayor commented that modifications to the proposed Local Plan were unlikely to be required.

5. A Youth Representative asked about libraries being under threat & referenced cuts to adventure playgrounds. The City Mayor was asked if there was some positive news and if assurances could be made that services won't be closed down?

The City Mayor answered that local councils had lost had lost significant financial funding over the last decade. This had come at a time when looking after vulnerable young people, the elderly and people with special needs in the community has increased. and all services have been affected by this. He advised that more difficult decisions lay ahead. However, the City Mayor stated that the Council was determined to do all it could to enable services such as adventure playgrounds to continue to operate and find viable and sustainable futures for themselves and also to enable services such as museums, libraries and sports centres to remain open and to continue to provide the services that people in the city need and that are particularly important to young people.

AGREED:

That the responses to the questions raised be noted.

#### **49. OVERVIEW OF OSC PORTFOLIO**

The Director of Finance gave a verbal overview of the main responsibilities of the Committee.

In response to comments and questions from members, the following was stated:

Progress in relation to the Ashton Green housing site should be addressed by the relevant committee and was not a matter for OSC directly. The City Mayor advised that members could also write to him regarding the matter.

AGREED:

That the overview be noted.

## **50. EQUALITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - 2024-28**

The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report updating on the final draft of the corporate Equality Strategy and the accompanying action plan to support its delivery. The strategy would be adopted for the next four years, and the action plan would be updated annually.

The Committee was recommended to comment on the draft Equality Strategy and the draft Equality Action Plan.

The Equalities Manager attended the meeting to assist with the discussion.

The Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Adult Learning, Jobs and Skills introduced the item and noted that:

- The strategy was reviewed every four years. However, the last strategy had been extended until this point, in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The current strategy set the objectives for the next four years in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Whilst the strategy was being reviewed, an extensive period of engagement had been undertaken which was in three parts:
  - Engagement with internal staff and officers to gain their view on various aspects of equality.
  - Engagement with volunteer and community sector organisations to gain their input on how they felt on the strategy.
  - Engagement with Councillors to gain their input on the strategy.
- The aim of the strategy was to embed and strengthen good equality practices across the Council and to support Council services to assess the impact of any changes.
- This was a corporate strategy, focussing specifically on how the Council could build its work around equality, diversity and inclusion, including communities having a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- This work was focussed on what the Council did as an organisation. Members were reminded that this was a corporate strategy, and it was not intended to fully capture all aspects of the Council's work.
- There are different areas of work where equality needs to be addressed and as such had their own strategies. Examples cited were the cost-of-living crisis, community cohesion and child poverty initiatives.
- Each sector and division had their own strategies. However, they worked together to address inequalities within individual strategies plans and policies.
- The strategy being presented would help to underpin how the Council as an employer met its legal duties in relation to the Equality Act 2010.

- The strategy built on work carried out previously. It had a more direct approach compared to previous strategies and aimed to be as realistic as possible.
- The action plan had aimed to be measurable in terms of progress and in terms of what was working and what required further work. From this, necessary changes could be identified in order to achieve objectives. Members would be kept up to date with progress.
- A key area of work concerned carers and children in care. This was not a protected characteristic and as such could not be included as such. However, it had been referenced in the action plan that the Council would be keen to look into this further.

The Commission were invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers and the Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Adult Learning, Jobs and Skills to respond. Key points arising from the discussion included:

- In terms of care experience, this had not gone straight into the plan as it needed to be considered further. However, this was something that could be quickly progressed.
- With regard to equity, there was still some way to go to achieve a full understanding of the concept. However, there was confidence that the action plan and strategy were moving forward, and there was a lot in the action plan and strategy regarding the removal of barriers, which was key to this. It was stated that the concept had been included in principle, but not in terminology that was well known and well regarded.
- Work on workforce representation was still ongoing and the next meeting of the task group would be in mid-September. The issue was included in the action plan along with a number of sub-actions. These included elements surrounding external recruitment and internal approaches to diversity in terms of areas of low representation and succession planning in terms of how people with certain characteristics could be upskilled to have a realistic chance of applying.
- In terms of inclusive language, it was important that correct pronouns were used for gender identity and that language that could cause offence, particularly for those with disabilities, was avoided.
- The issue of community cohesion was beyond the equality strategy and was being progressed under the portfolio of the Assistant City Mayor for Community Cohesion. A key area on this would be engaging with different communities as it was important to understand the needs of different communities. Various models of how this could be done were being looked at and progress had been made in developing appropriate networks.
- In terms of ensuring that services that were moved online were inclusive, an embedded approach was important and there were separate actions included for this.
- In terms of the diversity of the workforce, statistics would be shared at

the presentation provided to the informal scrutiny meeting in September.

- Separate information regarding community feedback could be shared with members of the Commission.
- In terms of lived experience, this was a strong element compared to the previous action plan. It was a challenging element to change immediately as it needed to be identified as to who to speak to, although it was also aimed to strengthen this over the coming years.
- The elements of racial literacy in the strategy were corporate and were separate to those conducted in schools. An element of racial literacy had arisen from a programme of work around Black Lives Matter, and it was important not to lose this element. It was aimed to specify as to how this could be achieved in the action plan.
- Institutional racism was difficult to measure as it was relatively subjective. Measurable change around equity and equal opportunities was being sought in the strategy.
- Regarding the 'Women Talking City Listening' scheme, much of this work was taken by Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission and a number of actions had arisen from it, particularly regarding community safety and lighting in areas where women may walk at night as well as positive actions to support shift-workers such as nurses. These were put into specific and separate action plans.
- In response to a query regarding ensuring that the strategy was not tokenistic, it was clarified that when this was mentioned, it was specifically in relation to the recognition of carers and children in care.
- In response to a question around what elements within the action plan were and were not working, it was confirmed that the Action Plan was a working document and it was aimed to measure success after it had been implemented over a length of time to ensure that targets were met and progress was made. The plan had been set based on the information available and success could be measured over time once it was implemented.
- In terms of the document looking outwards as well as inward, it was stated that it was not just inward-looking as it reflected considerable lived experience to help shape future service delivery. It was necessary to have a direct strategy for this rather than being treated as an add-on.
- In response to concern raised that the strategy was too broad and needed to focus on certain aspects, it was clarified that there were four key aims which had various actions. It was not suggested that all actions would occur at the same time, and a plan was needed that was measurable and achievable.
- Hate crime was not a part of this strategy and was managed separately. However, if patterns emerged, it would be necessary to consider more centrally as part of this work.
- Scrutiny Chairs were reminded that specific service area plans could go to other Scrutiny Commissions as they are developed.
- The strategy would go to Full Council for decision.
- Councillor March recommended that the Committee engage with wider



groups in order to open wider communication. This motion was seconded by Councillor Dawood and carried.

## AGREED

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers and Executive lead member.
- 3) That other groups be engaged with in order to open wider communication.
- 4) That information regarding community feedback could be shared with members of the Commission.

## 51. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING OUTTURN - 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted the final Revenue Budget Outturn in the monitoring cycle for 2023/24 and reported performance against budget for the year.

The Committee was recommended to consider the overall position presented within this report and make any observations it saw fit.

The Director of Finance noted that:

- There had been a net underspend of £1.7m. However, this did not reflect the severe pressures faced by the Council. In particular, the Chief Finance Officer noted the £14.2m spent in Education and Children's Services, of which £11.3 related to the costs of children looked after. In the last financial year the average placement cost had increased to £70,000. The number of children in care remained stable, but costs had increased significantly.
- There was a gross pressure of £7.8m in support of homeless households, slightly offset by additional grant funding leaving an overall pressure of £6.2m.
- There were cost pressures of £2.5m with regard to the local government pay award.
- The above pressures had been offset by savings, including an Adult Social Care underspend of £6.5m, mostly in relation to improvement work designed to reduce people's need for formal care, social work assessment and commissioning practice. This underspend was after a £32.9m increase in the budget in the financial year.
- There had been underspends in Education and Children's services due to staffing vacancies and additional grants.
- Due to interest rates remaining high and higher interest rates received on cash balances, there had been a saving on capital financing costs of £4m.
- A reduction in energy prices through the year had meant that £2.6m less

was needed from the energy budget provision.

- There had been changes proposed in departmental reserves. Previously, departments had been allowed to monitor their own reserves. It was now proposed that this be absorbed into the budget strategy reserves as part of the normal budget process.
- The emergency balance would not need to be used in 2024/25 as planned as part of the budget setting. However, £61m of the managed reserve was needed to balance the 2024/25 budget, meaning there would not be enough left in the reserves to balance the 2025/26 budget.

The Commission were invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers and the City Mayor to respond. Key points included:

- It was confirmed that if the Council continued spending as it was, there would not be enough money in the funded reserves to manage the gaps in spending without budget savings or a change in policy.
- With regard to a question on spending on Adult Social Care, it was confirmed that the precept covered both adults' and children's social care. There was no need to ringfence spending for Adult Social Care as the growth in that budget area had been significant and far greater than any raise in the social care precept.
- The rise in the numbers of those experiencing homelessness presented a cost pressure. £45m had been approved to spend on temporary accommodation by the housing division to reduce the pressures. £12m had been put into the budget for 2024/25.
- Further financial pressures were anticipated around homelessness.
- The Period 3 figures would be provided at the meeting of the Committee in September.
- Posts were often vacant due to difficulties recruiting, particularly with regard to the social work service.
- Information would be obtained on whether Post-16 Home to School SEND transport would be offered outside the three-mile rule.
- The public-sector pay increases recently discussed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not refer to the pay award mentioned in the report. The Local Government pay award was currently out for negotiation with unions.
- Clarification would be sought on voluntary services via the Education Support Officer and developments from the new government and on communications with the government on SEND transport. From a financial perspective, the Council were engaging with the government on the financial pressures faced.

AGREED

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into

account by the lead officers.

- 3) That information be provided on whether Post-16 Home to School SEND transport would be offered outside the three-mile rule.
- 4) That clarification be sought on any guidance from the government on voluntary services via the Education Support Officer and any communication with the government on SEND Transport.
- 5) That information be given on the outcomes of Alternative Partnerships.

## **52. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING OUTTURN - 2023/24**

The Director of Finance submitted a report showing the final position of the capital programme for 2023/24.

The Committee was recommended to consider the overall position presented within this report and make any observations it saw fit.

The Commission were invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers to respond.

In response to concerns raised over the intent to charge for the Jewry Wall Museum once it opened, the example of the King Richard III Visitor Centre was given in terms of high visitor figures which have in turn helped the economy. It was anticipated that the Jewry Wall Museum would be similarly successful.

AGREED

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.

## **53. INCOME COLLECTION - APRIL 2023 - MARCH 2024**

The Director of Finance submitted a report detailing progress made in collecting debts raised by the Council during 2023-24, together with debts outstanding and brought forward from the previous year. It also set out details of debts written off under delegated authority that it had not been possible to collect after reasonable effort and expense.

The Committee was recommended to consider the overall position presented within this report and make any observations it saw fit.

The Commission were invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers to respond. No questions were asked. The Chair noted the achievements of those involved in ensuring that the authority was in a strong position.

AGREED

That the report be noted.

#### **54. REVIEW OF TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2023/24**

The Director of Finance submitted a report reviewing how the Council conducted its borrowing and investments during 2023/24.

The Committee were recommended to note the report and make comments to the Director of Finance and the Executive as they wish.

The Head of Finance (Accountancy and Strategy) presented the report and noted that:

- This was the second report for 2023/24 financial year.
- There had not been any new loans taken out – cash balances had remained higher for longer.
- Most investments were with local authorities, but some remained in properties, which were expected to be sold over the course of the year.

The Commission were invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers to respond. Key points included:

In response to a question on the Lothbury Funds and how much how much of the £3.2m had been lost, the Head of Finance advised around 45% on the initial investment was already back with the authority, and further tranches would be repaid to us as assets in the property fund were sold. In response to further questioning, The City Mayor advised that the City Council had not invested as heavily as other local authorities.

In response to a request for the committee to receive further updates, The Head of Finance advised there will be a mid-year treasury report coming to committee as usual later in the year where an updated position will be provided.

AGREED

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) Clarification on loans and investment figures to be forwarded to members.
- 3) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.
- 4) That a mid-year report be received by the committee as well as subsequent follow-up reports.

## **55. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT - 2023/24**

The City Barrister and Head of Standards submitted a report providing a summary of the Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-24.

The Committee was asked to review the report and provide any comments or recommendations ahead of consideration by Full Council.

The Chair presented the report and noted that there had been a lot of positive work across Scrutiny. Members and officers were thanked and the City Mayor reiterated this.

The Commission were invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers to respond. It was suggested that officers explore options for continuing to engage with youth representatives as part of the scrutiny process.

AGREED

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That officers be asked to explore options for continuing to engage with youth representatives as part of the scrutiny process.

## **56. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The work programme for the Committee was noted.

In response to a comment from the Chair, Councillor Batool confirmed that an item in relation to adventure playgrounds would be going to the next Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission.

## **57. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of other urgent business. The Chair declared the meeting closed at 8:00pm