



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORT AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY
SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: WEDNESDAY, 11 MARCH 2026 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Waddington – Chair

Councillor Bonham
Councillor Clarke
Councillor O'Neill

Councillor Osman
Councillor Porter

Councillor Gopal as substitute for Councillor Rae Bhatia

In Attendance:

Deputy City Mayor Councillor Cutkelvin
Assistant City Mayor Councillor Whittle

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202. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

Apologies were received form Cllr Rae Bhatia. Cllr Gopal substituted.

Apologies were also received form Cllr Cassidy.

Young People's Council representatives had been due to attend this meeting but had needed to give their apologies.

203. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have had in the business to be discussed. Nothing was declared.

204. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was suggested that it had been noted in the item on the Call in of the Land Exchange to enable regeneration at Midland Street/Southampton Street in the Cultural Quarter, that the value of the land had been mentioned, and it was requested that this be noted in the minutes.

It was noted that Cllr Cassidy had been present at the previous meeting but was not marked as such.

AGREED:

- 1) That the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Transport and Climate Emergency Scrutiny Commission held on 14th January 2026 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the agreed corrections.

205. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

It was noted that there would be a short break during the meeting so that those observing Ramadan could break their fast.

Professor Nik Hammer of the University of Leicester was welcomed to the meeting.

206. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

207. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

208. TRANSPORT AFFORDABILITY

The City Transport Director submitted a report to provide members of the commission with details as to the affordability of transport options across the city and to provide members of the commission with details on the actions being undertaken by the city council and partners to make passenger transport more affordable across the city.

It was suggested that since YPC members were unable to attend, that the item be deferred to the next meeting and YPC members invited again.

It was requested that the report at the next meeting include information on costs of schemes and modelling to see if they were indeed affordable.

AGREED:

- 1) That the item be deferred.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account.

209. PLANNING SERVICE PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report providing an overview of planning performance.

The Head of Planning summarised the report with a slideshow. Key points to note were as follows:

- It had been a difficult few years in terms of the national economy, the report set out comments on the government's activities and policy actions to retrieve the position. Other factors included the cyber-attack, recruitment challenges and a backlog of applications which had since recovered.
- The levels of planning applications received were at a low level compared to previous years.
- Appeal performance remained strong, reflecting the overall quality of decisions made.
- Income figures were set out in the report, the Council was below the budget expectations, but this was a function of the development market. It was hoped that government actions on policy would lead to an upturn.

In response to member questions and discussion, the following was noted:

- Confidence to sustain performance was high, there was now a fully staffed team with swift applications processing.
- Performance figures, prior to the introduction of the pre-application charges, could be circulated together with figures on the numbers of applications.
- The department had traditionally relied on recruiting Planning Graduates. Under a Government initiative, Pathway to Planning, 2 new officers had been recruited and were progressing well.
- Government legislation was in place regarding fee setting, but was not yet enacted.
- Regarding skills shortages, there was concern around big developers impacting on smaller businesses.
- A new category of medium sized development would be introduced.
- A consultation under the National Policy Framework saw a preference for developing within settlements. New urban design guidance would follow to counterbalance potential risks.
- It was hoped that local government reorganisation could help to alleviate existing boundary issues for the city and would allow for strategic planning opportunities, the Government was introducing new spatial development strategies. There would be some short-term pressures and work to ensure a smooth transition.
- Members were reminded of an invite to join a presentation on the inspector's report.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account.
- 3) Performance figures from before pre-application charges were introduced would be provided to members.

210. EDTCE SCRUTINY TASK FORCE - LABOUR MARKET WORKER EXPLOITATION - EXECUTIVE RESPONSE REVISITED

The Executive Response to the recommendations made by the Task Group on Worker Exploitation was considered by the Commission.

Professor Nik Hammer of the University of Leicester attended the meeting to assist with the discussion.

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Economy made the following points:

- Members and Professor Hammer were thanked for their work on the task force.
- It was noted that exploitation was not an issue exclusive to Leicester, and Local Authorities did not have a formal role in Labour Market enforcement. However work could be done when resources were available to focus on particular sectors such as the garment industry.
- The UK Director of Labour market Enforcement had published independent review of Operation Tacit (OpTacit) which had noted that allegations of widespread exploitation in the garment Leicester had been unfounded.
- The Task Group had looked at where exploitation was likely to be prevalent in a city such as Leicester.
- There had been a change in national policy on labour market enforcement with the pending establishment of the Fair Work Agency. The city had experienced first-hand the fragmented nature of the enforcement landscape in coordinating activity, so it was good that this was being brought together. The establishment of the Fair Work Agency would be tracked.
- Partnerships on the labour market had been developed over the past year. As part of the Get Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Working Plan, new and existing partners had been engaged around this agenda.
- This presented opportunities to work with partners in communities to help get people into work, and through this there could be opportunities to raise awareness of workers' rights.
- The task force had also identified sectors in which exploitation was more likely to be prevalent such as in social care and in the 'gig-economy' (such as delivery drivers). These could be areas on which to focus efforts, subject to funding.
- The Local Authority had influence on procurement to drive employment standards, which was delivered via the Social Value Charter.

The Chair summarised the recommendations made by the task group as set out in the report.

In discussions with Members, the following was noted:

- In response to a query regarding overseas workers in social care, it was noted that the task group had received witness statements from the Adult Social Care (ASC) department and they had highlighted some issues that they were aware of in residential homes. It was noted that work had been done with care workers from overseas to ensure that they were fulfilling their criteria with regard to Work Permits and meetings had been held with care workers to ensure that they understood what was required of them.
- With regard to routes on commissioning in social care, evidence had come from Council colleagues. There was a challenge to support people in employed by other providers, even if conditions in Council services were above board.
- In terms of education on workers' rights, it was noted that national enforcement bodies had run programmes to raise awareness of rights and how to report issues. Specific programmes had been commissioned to raise awareness of workers' rights in the textiles sector.
- It was noted that one of the recommendations of the task force had been to develop information campaigns. Jobs fairs could create opportunities for enforcement bodies to engage with local people.
- It was important not to forget about the garment sector, but it was also necessary to recognise that allegations against the sector had damaged the industry as well as damaging the view of Leicester as a manufacturing base for textiles and this had impacted on orders being placed with local manufacturers, which has a knock on impact for local workers.
- The organisation Fashion Enter had been supported to establish the Fashion Hub in the city centre, and they have been delivering skills programmes for the sector.
- A Leicester Made industry trade event had been held at Athena last year, at which many manufacturers and brands had attended, which focussed on the textiles sector and the need to grow it further. The focus needed to be on the future and positive jobs and employment.
- It was noted that the Commission had been told that many jobs in the textiles sector had gone abroad, whereas the focus of the task group was on the labour market in Leicester.
- In response to points raised about other areas such as construction and small businesses and the need for corporate businesses to be part of the approach, it was noted that the way different sectors were organised was different and the issues were very complex.
- Responding to points made about apprenticeships, it was noted that the Local Authority created and promoted apprenticeship opportunities
- Responding to points made about journalistic investigations into exploitation in the garment sector, it was acknowledged that exploitation

had taken place, but Leicester was not exceptional in this respect, as per the findings of the OpTacit report.

- The evidence of the OpTacit report had been looked at, as well as the evidence presented to the task force on where exploitation may be prevalent. The task force had not discounted exploitation in textiles, but had looked at where it may be more prevalent and had been evidence-based wherever possible.
- Points were raised about the comparison in evidence needed for a criminal prosecution compared to a journalistic investigation.
- It was noted that there was a wide spectrum of exploitation, and it was necessary to understand that many citizens worked in fields where these problems existed and it was necessary to think about how the Council could assist.
- It was further noted that people may be reluctant to report exploitation but may instead approach trusted voluntary sector organisations regarding matters such as income or health.
- It would be necessary to see how the Fair Work Agency evolved.
- With regard for the need for finances and resources to support this work, the Local Government Association (LGA) had undertaken work on Modern Slavery and had asked the government that national ambitions be matched with local resources. There were nine modern slavery coordinators across the country and the LGA had asked that these be funded across all Councils
- Worker exploitation could be considered as part of the Get LLR Working agenda as this will provide a framework to bring partners together. Get LLR Working was not primarily focused on this agenda as it was about getting people into work, however, in the agenda there was a requirement to build collaborative partnerships on the labour market, including with health partners, voluntary organisations, universities and other Local Authorities. Rather than having different partnership groups funded by short-term funding, it may be possible to draw in stakeholder partners that wished to engage with local communities on workers' rights. Partners could be invited into this agenda, which could include data gathering to understand the wider picture of the labour market.
- Looking again at the issue of resources, there was a broader issue around Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution whereby devolved funding could be provided by the government. If authorities were fully devolved, they could receive powers and resources to deal with local affairs.

AGREED:

- 1) That the response be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account.
- 3) That further updates on progress be reported to the Commission.

211. CONNECT TO WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Tourism Culture and Economy submitted a report providing an overview of the start of the Connect to Work programme for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland.

The Regeneration Projects & Programmes Manager gave a slide presentation which is attached to the agenda. The following key points were noted:

- The programme would be active across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland between 1st April 2026 to 31st March 2030.
- There was an overall allocation of £17m to support the employment model which was voluntary based with funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).
- The programme would support people both in and out of work for those that are eligible.
- Intensive support for individuals would be provided and work with employers was planned.
- The service was currently open to those with learning disabilities and Autism, but would expand to provide support to a range of people with different needs and experiences.
- The DWP had designed 2 models:
 - The Individual Placement Support Model (IPS) - normally for those with health conditions and complex needs.
 - The Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) – e.g. for those with learning disabilities and Autism.
- Eligibility checks were completed by the DWP.
- The Connect to Work website was available through the Leicester Employment Hub.
- Enquiry forms were available for partners on via the website.
- The team were looking to go live with the remaining cohort towards the end of April 2026.
- The targets for this year had been for 78 individual starts. However, due to a later commencement than expected, there were now 34 starts. A significant number of enquiries, and referrals were coming through. Marketing would increase once fully live.
- The County Council team had not been in place until February. ‘Starts’ did not count until the finalised approval from the DWP came through.
- The full outlined targets were provided in the report.
- Preparation was in place for a Fidelity Assurance review.

In response to member discussion and questions, the following was noted:

- DWP funds could not be used for wage subsidy support.
- Staff within council’s staff would be providing the employment SEQF provision.
- Challenges could arise due to the current economic climate and issues with low vacancy rates. It would be a case of showing the benefits of employing people with disabilities. Employer engagement would be a key factor.
- Participants were likely to be unknown the Job Centre and not in receipt

of their services. The scheme could provide more intensive individual support than the Job Centre offer.

- Avenues into the service included referrals from local community and voluntary organisations, social care teams, DWP, Work Well GP programme.
- Regarding AI, it was noted that many entry level jobs could be impacted and it was difficult to predict outcomes, more conversations would follow.
- A number of elements were considered in the calculations. Participant numbers were capped at 1,600 in the peak year, with delivery ramping up and down across the programme. The peak numbers, together with the unit cost set by the DWP, were used to determine the total value. The DWP had set high targets.
- The Council had decided on the best delivery approach. The IPS service had been commissioned out. The SEQF service could be supported by existing in-house services with an expansion to current the offer.

AGREED:

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

212. WORK PROGRAMME

- A future report was requested to update on the status of the textiles sector .
- It was requested that an overview of the development of an economic growth strategy is added to the work programme.
- It was requested that the upcoming report on car park usage include information on on-street parking.
- It was noted that the Pride in Place programme was an issue for Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny.

The work programme was noted.

213. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further items of urgent business, the meeting finished at 19:50.

