



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
CULTURE AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 22 JANUARY 2026 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Zaman – Chair
Councillor Halford – Vice Chair

Councillor Dr Barton
Councillor Dave
Councillor Waddington

Councillor Chauhan
Councillor Haq

In Attendance

Deputy City Mayor - Councillor Cutkelvin
Assistant City Mayor – Councillor Dempster

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171. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillor Cassidy.

172. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have had in the business to be discussed.

There were no declarations of interest.

173. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

With regard to the minutes of 27th November 2025, questions were raised over the votes counted on the proposed amendment on the Assessment and Recommendations Report for Libraries and Community Centres.

This was checked following the meeting and it was confirmed that the votes counted had been correct.

In response to a request for the executive decision on the issue, it was

suggested that this would be published following the upcoming by-election.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commissions held on 3 November 2025 and 27th November 2025 be confirmed as a correct record.

174. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair suggested that reports be taken as read where possible.

175. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

176. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

177. DRAFT GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2026/27 AND DRAFT THREE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2026/27

As the reports on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme were related, they were taken as one item.

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out the City Mayor's proposed Draft General Fund Revenue Budget for 2026/27, and a report on the City Mayor's proposed Draft Three-Year Capital Programme 2026/27.

The Head of Finance (City Development & Neighbourhoods) gave an overview of the reports, key points to note were as follows:

- It was noted that the draft settlements were complex and included the amalgamation of existing grants.
- The Revenue report set out the budget for 2026/27, and the medium-term financial strategy for the following two years.
- The draft Budget reflected the Government's Fair Funding consultation over the summer; however, despite an improved financial position, a budget gap remained, requiring continuation of the five-strand strategy agreed by Council last year, including the following:
 - Budget savings of £23m
 - Constraining growth in areas such as Social Care and Homelessness
 - A reduction in the Capital Programme
 - Releasing one off monies to buy time
 - A programme of property sales, which was now planned to reduce the

cost of borrowing

- It was proposed that the strategy be extended to March 2029.
- The budget built in scope to meet ongoing cost increases in Social Care, homelessness and housing benefits.
- The scope for additional investment was limited but included amounts for areas previously supported by grants that were no longer available.
- Revenue Budget points directly relevant to the Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny commission included:
 - £300k for a dedicated team to help deal with Ash Die Back
 - £300k to part fund a team to tackle anti-social behaviour and enforce public space protection orders
 - £1m to replace the loss of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, to enable partial continuation of the work that was funded from this grant
- The final budget would be updated and presented to Council on the 25th February and would include the updated figures following the draft finance settlement, currently being working through.
- The General Fund Draft Capital Report sought approval of just under £130m over the next three years.
- In 2025/26, the Capital Programme moved to being funded primarily through government grants and borrowing, and this approach would continue in 2026/27.
- The aim was to alleviate the revenue pressure placed by borrowing Capital Programme, by using £60m of capital receipts.
- Draft Capital Programme points directly relevant to the Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny commission included:
 - £345k for depot improvements and transformation works
 - £450k for public toilet refurbishment
 - £225k for the Historic Building grant fund
 - £75k to continue the programme to refresh festival decorations
 - £430k for Heritage Interpretation panels
 - £450k to replace grounds maintenance machinery
 - £185k for mobile CCTV equipment to tackle fly tipping and street scene offences
 - £360k for replacement tree planting
 - £650k for 3G Pitch Replacements
 - £50k feasibility for the Curve automation system
 - £350k as possible match funding for the Voices of Leicester project

In response to member discussion, the following was noted:

- Members expressed concern that the draft budget would leave the incoming administration in 2028 with significant unresolved issues.
- Savings on back-office functions appear to be under-performing with current pressures now impacting frontline services. It was clarified that reported progress was against a three-year target, with remaining savings representing residual requirements, and that Finance and Corporate Services have fully achieved their savings for 2025/26.

- Members queried the final figures being presented at the Council meeting rather than first to the Overview Select Committee. It was confirmed in response that this was the case and that the same draft reports would be submitted to the OSC.
- The savings were profiled out and there may be changes in the final report where savings are not deliverable. Alternative considerations were in the pipeline for Libraries and Community Centres.
- All divisions were required to deliver savings, with continual challenge to all directors across the different service areas.
- In response to a member question on The Dedicated Schools Grant, it was noted that this question would be best directed to the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission (CYPE). A recent CYPE task group had recently made several recommendations, and it was noted that Leicester City benchmarked well against other authorities in relation to deficit.
- There was a £60m target set for asset sales. Yield consideration was taken into account for any potential assets to be sold.
- Members suggested that it would be helpful to show savings as a percentage of the overall budget for each division.

AGREED:

- 1) That the reports be noted.
- 2) For more figures to be circulated on savings as a percentage of the overall budget for each division.

178. BEREAVEMENT SERVICES UPDATE (6-MONTHLY UPDATE)

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report providing an update on matters related to the council's Bereavement Services. The report was taken as read and a slide show was presented. Key points to note were as follows:

- An improvement project was planned for Gilroes in March 2026, involving a new road layout and enhanced drainage. The contract had been awarded to Ground Control Ltd.
- There had been a significant reduction in numbers of cremations due to the increasing numbers of people opting for direct cremation via commercial companies.
- Around half the burial numbers took place in existing graves.
- There were ongoing dialogues with the faith communities around burial space.
- The search for a new cemetery site was currently on hold due to the Local Government Reorganisation, and the Law Commission review which potentially could provide thousands of additional graves and

extend the burial capacity of all cemeteries.

- DEFRA had issued new technical guidance around emissions and the Council was required to achieve compliance by 2029.
- A new corporate website would enhance the marketing of Gilroes.
- Pricing had been benchmarked against other providers.
- Members had requested an update on the Law commission review. The slides gave an overview of Phases 1 – 3.

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

- Gilroes was open Monday – Friday 8:30-5PM and, on Saturdays strictly by appointment. The site was staffed by a small team.
- Gilroes did not have a Friends group, however, there were guided walks undertaken by volunteers from War Graves Commission
- Local competitors had offered more modern, lower-cost options, with direct cremation providers expanding rapidly; comparisons had been difficult, the service had adapted where possible, but could not operate at the same scale as large private companies.
- Cremation charges were the same for city and non-city residents due to lower maintenance requirements, while burial services required different payment arrangements.
- It was noted that Saturday services were not in high demand.
- The service generated an annual surplus of around £1m, excluding capital expenditure and not based solely on revenue.
- There was a duty to maintain municipal cemetery and buildings for perpetuity. Even when they were full.
- There were currently 4 council cemeteries in operation. Local Government Reorganisation could help to increase opportunities.
- Ground Control Ltd were experienced and would balance work being carried out with ongoing funerals during the improvement works at Gilroes Cemetery.

AGREED:

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

179. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER TASK GROUP - SCOPING DOCUMENT

The Chair submitted a report providing members of the Committee with a proposed scope for the task group on Community Asset Transfer, and the opportunity to comment on the scope for the review, suggest issues to include and consider joining the group.

The Chair noted that dates for meetings were in the process of being established. The eventual aim would be to put together a set of recommendations to bring back to the Commission before going on to the executive.

It was explained that this was an opportunity to look at the issue in detail outside of the Commission meetings.

AGREED:

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

180. LEISURE CENTRE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report which set out the primary and secondary research that would inform the next five-year plan and outlined how Active Leicester would continue to respond effectively to both commercial pressures and wider social challenges.

The Head of Sports and the Leisure Facilities Development Manager attended the meeting to present the report and assist with the discussion.

Key Points included:

- This was a discretionary service which had been on a significant transformation journey over the last ten years.
- In the first five years, the service had been re-structured, and issues had been considered, such as: Opening hours, expenditure controls, and ways to drive and improve performance and manage expenditure.
- The following 5 years the focus has been on smart investments and strong branding.
- Key products such as Learn to Swim and Healthy Fitness membership had grown significantly. This had generated income.
- There was a need to underpin the next five-year Leisure centre plan by doing a deep dive with primary and secondary research, looking at the

condition of the centres and their performance. Residents' surveys had been carried out, and non-users had been engaged with as well as users.

Questions and comments were invited from the Commission; it was noted that:

- It was positive that membership had recovered following the Covid-19 pandemic, and it was noted that people were becoming more mindful on fitness and health.
- It was positive that work done on women in sport had been implemented.
- There were many challenges, some of which could be related to finance. The growth in health and fitness had been tangible, but the biggest challenge was to reconcile improvement in financial performance whilst remaining accessible.
- Active Leicester services had done well at working with other departments to manage this challenge and the piloting of active wellbeing. In response to queries around cleanliness and pool temperature, it was recognised that ideally, more cleaners would be employed and temperatures increased, however, there was a need to balance this with staffing costs and bills.
- It was suggested that without continuous improvement, the centres would lose custom.
- It was suggested that there was a need to be innovative. It was necessary to collect data and the views of the public before making proposals.
- It was noted that the service was subsidised by £2m.
- With regard to points made about some people being hard to reach, it was acknowledged that there was work to be done, and it was necessary to explore this more fully as much of this was done through the council's Livewell service. 12 weeks were given free to clients of Livewell, followed by 18 months of subsidised access, however, it was necessary to get the message out. The social responsibility aspect was factored in.
- The number of County residents using the Centres could be up to 30-40% in some centres such as Braunstone, Evington and Leicester Leys due to their catchment, however, users of other specific centres such as Cossington were likely 85-90% from the city.
- It was suggested that success stories from the centres could inspire people in sport.
- The next step was the development of a five-year plan for the leisure centres that will inform how take issues forward. The plan will be informed from the primary and secondary research.

- In response to suggestions surrounding the installation of Padel courts, it was explained that the council was aware of the padel market and facilitating external interest to invest in the city and therefore at the moment the focus would be to monitor the market. Analysis had been undertaken and whilst the emergence of Padel as a sport had been noticed, there was no current plans for the Council to provide Padel. Points were noted about its potential to encourage Young People.
- In response to questions about how to bridge the gap between the plan to increase income by £2m and also address the concerns around cost from non-members, it was explained that it was important to ensure that the price-point was correct in terms of value for money. More people coming through the doors would increase income. Currently, the council operated and provided substantial concession rate for eligible groups as part of its core pricing structure.
- In terms of working with various groups, this had been discussed with regard to gyms and leisure centres. There is strong internal working between public health to active wellbeing and promote physical activity. The joint working and future plans at getting people active could come to the Commission. It was additionally noted with respect to this that there was crossover with public health on programmes in chair exercises and to increase people's core strength.

AGREED:

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

181. DE MONTFORT HALL & HAYMARKET THEATRE

The Director of Tourism Culture and Economy submitted a report updating on the operational and financial progress at De Montfort Hall and the Haymarket Theatre, which are being managed as an integrated service.

The Venue Director of De Montfort Hall attended the meeting to present the report and assist with the discussion.

Key Points included:

- Both venues were doing well, and a significant milestone has now been achieved, as it now costs the Council less to operate De Montfort Hall and the Haymarket Theatre as a joint service than it would be to maintain them as empty buildings. This means they are budget neutral and also enabled the delivery of a high quality cultural and teaching/

learning offer for the city.

- Over the last ten years, the position of DMH has improved, with the real terms cost of operation falling by over £1m through a more commercial approach being adopted with more popular programming, increased secondary spend, and full refurbishment carried out.
- The 2024/25 outturn saw turnover increase by £1.2m and the cost of operations falling to £247k (down from £1.3m in 2014/15). Also noted that a reserve fund had been created through a small levy on tickets to fund a basic renewals programme.
- Approximately 25% of visitors are local and come from within the existing city council boundary, this goes up to just over 50% if you include the wider Leicester urban area – meaning the city council area plus the districts immediately on the city's boundary. Haymarket Theatre had come back into Council control in 2020 and had now found its purpose around teaching and learning, particularly for Young People.
- The Addict Dance Academy operate from the Haymarket Theatre Monday to Friday teaching musical theatre and dance at higher education level. UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) had facilitated studios and rehearsal rooms for them, as well as equipment to bring the stage back into use for student performances.
- Leicestershire Music use Haymarket on Saturdays and Monday nights to teach, and plan to also use the auditorium for student shows.
- Haymarket was a work in progress, but progress was being made and the agreements in place did not mean that further users could not be accommodated.
- Overall, combining the buildings as one service gave an economy of scale and expertise that was delivering well.
- Key headlines were displayed on a slide (as attached with the agenda).

Questions and comments were invited from the Commission; it was noted that:

- It was recognised as positive that the services had recovered well from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- It was noted that DMH had been a serious concern, but had improved hugely over the last ten years. It was suggested that this was largely down to the leadership.
- In response to questions regarding parking at the Haymarket Theatre, it was clarified that hirers and users did not have parking spaces at the theatre and that car parking for staff and users was difficult in the pay and display as no spaces or reduced rates are allocated to the theatre for use.
- With regard to parking on Victoria Park, DMH received a cut of evening rates. DMH also had a pre-bookable car-park of its own on site. Both

are well used.

- In response to a suggestion for bringing in an Asian franchise or concession to serve food at Asian shows to increase profit margins, it was noted that when Asian shows are booked in, they often bring their own caterers and deals are done to hire the catering facilities at the hall.
- Outdoor shows had been put on every year, but outdoor theatre had been downscaled in recent years to lower risk and generate income.
- In response to a suggestion on keeping bars open following shows, it was noted that this had been trialled a number of times, but few people made use of them and the cost of the staff was not covered.
- In response to a suggestion that a lack of mobile signal prevented customers using online taxis companies, it was noted that this was not an issue that was known, but would be investigated.
- It was clarified that in terms of subsidy, £250k went to DMH and the rest to Haymarket, so Haymarket received most of the subsidy.
- Philharmonia would continue, but the deal had been restructured so they were not subsidised and were self-sustaining.
- In response to points made about steep steps at DMH, this had been looked into, and no workable solution found – although noted that there were few issues and staff in these areas were aware of the potential risk. It was also noted that the upper steps at DMH in question were less steep than many sports stadiums.
- Haymarket did not currently have a brochure, as the shows it will present are student presentations aimed at students' friends and family rather than touring or commercial shows aimed at the public. However, a new website had recently been launched which will carry details of these shows.
- 650 Young People per week attended Haymarket Theatre, and this had a knock-on benefit to the local economy.
- A membership deal was in place with restaurants near DMH.
- With regard to Local Government Reorganisation, data had been mapped to show where people were coming in from, with a significant proportion of visitors coming from neighbouring council districts.
- In terms of accessibility, DMH had lifts and wheelchair facilities and adult changing spaces. Accessible seating was also available upstairs through lifts. Haymarket had more significant challenges in terms of access, which will be expensive to fix but would need to be addressed at some point.
- There were around 250 shows per year at DMH, largely because more tribute acts had been booked due to a change in the UK touring industry post covid. The venues were also hired out to groups such as the Bardic Symphony Orchestra and the Leicester Philharmonic.
- Issues raised about single ticketholders not being able to choose where

to sit could be looked into.

AGREED:

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

182. WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was noted.

183. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no further items of urgent business, the meeting finished at 19:45