



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SCRUTINY  
COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 8 MAY 2014 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cutkelvin (Chair)

Councillor Corrall                      Councillor Desai  
Councillor Cleaver                      Councillor Naylor  
Councillor Grant

In Attendance:

Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor

Councillor Russell – Assistant City Mayor (Neighbourhood Services)

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**123. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gugnani, Councillor Bhatti, Councillor Sood (Assistant City Mayor for Community Involvement, Partnerships and Equalities) and Iris Lightfoote (TREC).

**124. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any interests they might have in the business on the agenda.

No such declarations were declared other than at a previous meeting Councillor Gugnani and Councillor Sood had declared their interests in the Voluntary and Community Sector Review item as they held very active roles in the Leicester Council of Faiths and that was the reason for their non-

attendance at the meeting today.

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

Members were asked to confirm the minutes of the previous meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

## **126. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

### Minute item 115

(94) The Impact of Welfare Reform

- The Chair explained that the Job Centre Plus had previously been invited to send a representative to a future meeting of the commission but it had later been decided to have a general briefing for all councillors. Talks had taken place with Caroline Jackson to arrange that and a date would be arranged in due course.

### Minute item 118

Update on Neighbourhood Policing

- In relation to the Change Programme it was felt that the commission might want to see the results of the consultation by KPMG and that would be programmed into a future meeting.

### Minute item 119

Food Bank Provision in the City

- The Race Equality Centre (TREC) was thanked for their representation with regard to the section of the report titled "Equality Assessment Impact" (EAI) which had proved confusing. Clarity had been sought from the Corporate Equalities Lead officer and it had been resolved that all future reports to commissions would include the new wording "Equality Implications".

### Minute item 120

City Warden Service

- The final annual figures for fixed penalty notices would be brought back to the commission at a future meeting. Clarity was requested of the city

warden's role on parking enforcement and whether they were actively involved in the review of it, Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services confirmed that they were engaged in the process.

## **127. PETITIONS**

There were no Petitions.

## **128. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE**

There were no questions, representations or statements of case.

## **129. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR REVIEW**

The Chair explained the procedure to be followed in relation to the discussion of the item. Two organisations had sent representatives to speak, Mr Fayyaz Suleman, Vice-Chair for the Leicester Council of Faiths and Mr Surinder Sharma, Chair of The Race Equalities Centre (TREC) with Mr Chino Cabon, Senior Race Equalities officer (TREC).

In the interests of fairness the Chair also asked if there were others present at the meeting who wanted to speak on the item, no one came forward.

The City Mayor outlined a report to the commission that included the findings and proposals from the public consultation on the future model for the three strands of activity under a review relating to the Voluntary and Community Sector as follows:

- Strand 1 support for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS);
- Strand 2 working with the VCS to engage with key communities to support a cohesive Leicester;
- Strand 3 support for Volunteering in the City.

The commission were informed that:-

- Leicester City Council had a long and proud tradition of supporting the VCS who were often better placed and more appropriate to provide services to communities.
- Leicester City Council currently provided far more funding through and to the VCS than any other comparable authority within the UK.
- It was estimated that £18 million of the council's budget was spent on the VCS each year to provide a wide range of service.
- Most organisations within the VCS were subject to arrangements and agreements with various departments of the council and as part of that they were subject to the reviews that all departments of the council were undergoing as a result of the need to achieve substantial reductions to budgets.
- Systematic reviews had been undertaken across the council that looked at services and service impacts on users before any actions had been agreed or taken. The Council listened and responded to service users

and providers before decisions were taken.

- Seven organisations were directly in the scope of the VCS review as set out in the report; the arrangements with these providers had been in place for a long time and the context of the city and the needs of the VCS had changed over time. Future arrangements needed to reflect those changes whilst meeting the needs of the VCS and the city's communities.
- With budget pressure in mind and the absence of any previous strategic review of the seven organisations a consultation had taken place over a 12 week period.
- No decision had yet been taken on the report to the executive and if a decision was taken as recommended there would still be provisions for the seven organisations to make proposals for future funding.
- The three strands reported on were wide ranging and within those were opportunities for organisations to make a case for funding.

In conclusion the City Mayor acknowledged this was a time of considerable uncertainty and funding had been extended to each organisation to the end of September so full consideration could be given to identify the best model for support of the VCS. The budget was a major consideration in this, £582,000 currently. The indicative new figure of maximum funding allocation would be £450,000 but as that was an indicative amount and further flexibility might become necessary the council would not be bound by minimum/maximum figures.

The Chair invited the public speakers to make their representations to the commission.

Mr Surinder Sharma, chair of The Race Equalities Centre addressed the commission and made a number of representations including the following:

- An outline of the role of TREC and the unique services it provided which included statistics of services users.
- TREC had been in the City since 1967 and there had been no increase in TREC's funding since 2007.
- The current budget figure of £582,000 was just 3% of the total spend on the voluntary sector, of that TREC funding amounted to 0.06% of the total spend.
- TREC offered advice, guidance and assistance to many people living below the poverty line or in high deprivation areas of the City.
- By definition anything outside the strands in the report was not eligible for funding.
- The purpose of the review had not outlined the community cohesion strategy; the question was posed "what aspect of the public sector policy could be referred to as a cohesion strategy?"
- The council had failed to be open and transparent, the 12 week public consultation was open to everyone wanting involvement but no demographic monitoring had been kept and the council was unable to say whether recognition had been given to race equality under the

Equality Act or whether the Public Sector Equality duty was fulfilled.

- In relation to online responses there was no information on the extent of overlap between responders attending meetings and answering the questionnaire.
- TREC were not challenging the right of the council to review the VCS but they were challenging the way in which the review had been conducted.

The Chair thanked Mr Sharma for his representations and asked that a written copy of his concerns regarding the consultation process be provided so that a full response from officers could be provided.

Mr Fayyaz Suleman, Vice-Chair of the Leicester Council of Faiths (LCOF) provided copies of his original letter submitted during the consultation period and made a number of representations including the following:

- The Leicester Council of Faiths (LCOF) had been incorrectly bundled alongside infrastructure support and there was a lack of recognition of the work the LCOF undertook.
- The LCOF were supportive of changes but this consultation didn't recognise the key work they did.
- The LCOF board composition was outlined which was representative of the faiths in the city.
- The LCOF had a wide representation from places of worship, faith denominations and faith umbrella groups and currently drew representatives from 17 organisations.
- The LCOF received 80% of its funding from the council and had done for the past 10 years. The funding was used to pay for rent of premises and all other costs.
- The LCOF had been founded over 25 years ago and events that LCOF put on promoted a cohesive society.
- The impact and role of LCOF should be recognised and the organisation strengthened and supported not undermined.

The City Mayor responded that it would not be appropriate to comment on the merits of each organisation. The suggestions about the process of review were welcomed and the representatives were invited to put those into writing so that a full response could be provided and copied to members of the commission.

The City Mayor stated that it was not appropriate in the current climate to give a grant guided only by broad criteria, there needed to be clear and specific terms. In reference to services outside the scope of the review he also commented that there were other opportunities to bid for funding for these sorts of advice, guidance and support services.

Members expressed their views on the report and the comments of the representatives of organisations affected. The ensuing discussion included points as follows:

- Members were concerned at the amount of change in funding and the process becoming more of a tender process.

The City Mayor responded that things had moved on and it would be expected that organisations would put in tenders. Organisations and attitudes had changed and the processes had to reflect that. The review was asking for organisations to put forward proposals so their needs could be responded to.

- The Chair queried whether other reviews of the council were under a similar robust system as here; the City Mayor confirmed that other reviews had gone before commissions and the programme of reviews was on the website. Currently 18 reviews were being undertaken, some substantial, some specific and others wide ranging.
- Members were concerned that there should be more support and connection between groups in particular giving advice on how and where to obtain funding including external funding, officers should also be supporting and signposting to other funding options.
- Members expressed a concern about duplication of services from organisations in the VCS; both representatives submitted that organisations set out their priorities which were clear but also intertwined with partnership working. The City Mayor expressed there was a degree of overlap of some functions which was to an extent inevitable and maybe desirable if the activities complimented but it would be important for the review to examine that.
- The Chair referred to the comments in the report on Strand 2 and particularly any impacts on new arrivals including refugees and asylum seekers, was there a caution on the two year transitional period to have more support/advice for other service providers if that time may not be enough?

The City Mayor responded that it was important to note that the report contained recommendations and no decision had been taken yet and the City Mayor undertook to make careful consideration on that point.

The Chair summarised the discussions and welcomed the authority's philosophical commitment to the VCS and recognised it was a very difficult and uncertain time across the whole VCS. The review was not an easy process or decision for the authority. The Chair reiterated the fantastic contributions the seven organisations had given the city and hoped that would continue. It was essential that the committee went on to consider the outcomes of the review.

RESOLVED:

That the commission note the report and recommend that:

1. TREC and the LCOF have the opportunity to submit written representations to which a formal response is given by officers

and shared with the commission,

2. officers to ensure that groups receive proper support as to funding outside of the authority,
3. the commission's concerns about the two year time frame in relation to the new arrivals (refugees and asylum seekers) is considered by the Executive and reviewed if possible,
4. the commission to continue to monitor the impact of the review once a decision has been made.

### **130. LIBRARY SERVICES UPDATE REPORT 2014**

The Director of Culture and Neighbourhood Services presented a report providing an update on library services, which included:

- Strategic and Operational Matters –
  - the role of Libraries as part of the wider Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) programme
  - the impact of the refreshed library systems
  - how Libraries support community members with extra needs
- Performance –
  - comparative key usage figures for 2012/13 and 2013/14 for each library 2012/13
  - a summary of statistics submitted to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) which provide information on performance against comparator services
  - Public Library User Survey 2013 results for Leicester Libraries.

The update to the commission included the following points:

- A new Library Management System was implemented in January 2013 and all 167 public computers were replaced in early 2013. In relation to performance, the number of hours spent on computers had increased and Leicester libraries had fewer machines than many other authorities but also a higher % usage.
- Self-service kiosks had been piloted at Aylestone and then introduced to a further four libraries for basic library operations freeing staff to help other customers.
- The Book Bus service had been improved with new routes around the City. The Book Bus routes were usually specific and linked to areas of deprivation and school links.
- Libraries provided support and a place to meet for many activities and community groups such as:
  - Regular Toddler Time sessions, there were very well attended and gave young families the opportunity to see the importance of books,
  - Study Support sessions/Homework clubs for older children who needed guidance on reading and homework, which had

- between 10-30 children attending voluntarily, getting support and access to computers that they might not get at home,
  - Maths Support sessions were to be introduced as part of a project with Children's Services,
  - For older people there were a number of activity based social groups which included craft groups and Local History groups.
- By reorganising, focusing and engaging with other partners such as SPARK the quality and content in libraries had been kept at a high level.

Councillor Russell, Assistant City Mayor (Neighbourhood Services) summarised the overall context of the report and confirmed that delivery and performance had improved despite a 28% reduction of the library services budget. Thanks were extended to the officers who led the changes and also to the library services staff who rose to the challenges and had hugely improved the service across the city. Libraries equalised opportunities for people and gave most city residents access to a library within a mile of where they lived.

The commission were informed that it was important to note library services received an enormous range of enquiries and lots of people did not know how to navigate the internet so library staff dealt with those enquiries too.

The number of staff in post showed value for money and reflected the reviews that had been carried out and showed library services had been able to provide a good service with lower numbers of staff.

Members discussed the report with officers which included responses as follows:

- How important as an indicator was book lending? Reading was the core function of library services especially in encouraging reading in younger children and an increase in lending to younger children had been seen although there had been a reduction in adult lending. Libraries were measuring engagement and involvement in schemes, library services were about community engagement, cohesion and enabling cross sections of society to get together. The e-book issue was an important consideration; it was a challenge because of the licensing.
- Computers and PC usage – What scope was there to provide more? Had sponsorship been considered? Where there are computers but not space could more tablet PC's be used? With regard to sponsorship of pc's the difficulty was that problems occurred when equipment needed replacement. There were lots of issues as to whether more pc's were needed or other equipment, time for technology was fought for and if you only had ½ hour then needed technology that was of the right level and quick for people to come back to use the service again. In relation to providing more computers or tablets this was something to be looked at when equipment was renewed. All libraries now had Wi-Fi which was an



important point because it allowed people that did not have large data usage or contracts to use their own devices in libraries.

- Volunteers – There was an absolute commitment to sustaining staff roles but volunteers were used to support groups. Volunteers added to library services rather than replacing what staff did. Volunteers had been utilised to deliver books to the homes of older/less mobile people, especially since the mini bus service had ceased.
- New Parks library was seen as a positive model example which was hoped to be extended across the city, it showed co-location worked as it enabled more to happen at multi-centres.
- Children's outreach figures were down 20% - the service had changed significantly and some impact had arisen from funding changes in children's services; and feedback on the events held was very good.
- In relation to access in wards that did not have libraries (in particular for Stoneygate residents) it was confirmed there was a map that showed the radius of libraries for the city and Stoneygate was actually well covered. User statistics also showed that people from the Stoneygate area were heavy users of library services nearby.

Chair commented that the discussion illustrated how the library service had been reflective of needs. It was also noted that children's groups, toddler times and sure start centres were not always seen as separate services and changes to Children's centres might mean services were stretched and that might impact on toddler time usage.

Members thanked the library service who provided a wonderful service and the officers were thanked for providing the information to the commission.

The Chair concluded the discussion; the report was welcomed highlighting positive progress. The commission recognised that library services were taking on the co-location model and that they were a major sign poster to other council services in being proactive in adapting to meet people's needs.

The Chair requested that library services provide a future meeting of the commission with examples of other measures of success beyond those stated, for example the number of children seen through summer schemes.

The Chair also recognised the response to the digital agenda (which included eBook's and extended Wi Fi coverage) and the use of volunteers.

RESOLVED:

1. that the contents of the report be noted.
2. that a copy of the map showing the radius of City libraries be provided to members.

3. that the user statistics for Stoneygate be provided to Councillor Desai.
4. that examples of other measures of success be provided to a future meeting.

### **131. PARTNERING AGREEMENTS IN COMMUNITY CENTRES**

The Chair addressed the commission and reminded Members that there had been a number of verbal updates previously. It had been hoped that it would be possible to follow up with the views of the experiences of groups that had entered into a partnership agreement but unfortunately this had not been possible to arrange.

The Chair explained that she would contact the groups to re-engage on the subject and would debrief the new Chair of the commission and would include an explanation of the commission's concerns.

RESOLVED:

1. the Chair to contact and re-engage with the groups that have entered into partnership agreements.
2. the Chair to provide a full handover and debrief including Members concerns to the new Chair of the commission.

### **132. NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Support officer submitted a summary overview of the Commission's activities and outcomes from the year.

The Chair thanked all those involved in the work of the commission throughout the year and advised Members that she would provide a full handover on the commission's work to the new Chair.

The Chair extended thanks to the Scrutiny Support Officer and the various Democratic Support Officers, throughout the year, who had been involved in the commission.

Members thanked the Chair for her work on the commission.

There were no suggestions for items to be added to the work programme for the new municipal year.

RESOLVED:

- that the annual summary overview of the commission's work be noted.

### **133. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm