



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: MONDAY, 9 MARCH 2015 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Singh (Chair)

Councillor Dr Chowdhury
Councillor Waddington

In Attendance:

Councillor Russell, Assistant City Mayor - Neighbourhood Services

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44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bhatti, Corrall and Desai.

Apologies for absence due to other Council business were received from Councillor Gugnani.

Apologies for absence also were received from Councillor Sood, Assistant Mayor (Community Involvement, Partnerships and Equalities) as, although not a member of the Commission, she normally attended its meetings.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dr Chowdhury declared an Other Disclosable Interest in agenda item 7, "Working with the City's Voluntary and Community Sector to Support Engagement with Communities – Update", as he worked for a voluntary organisation that was a lead organisation in the delivery of a project discussed in the report. In addition, he was a director of the Council for Voluntary Services along with the Chief Executive of The Race Equality Council.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice Councillor Dr Chowdhury's judgement of the public interest. He was not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

46. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Russell, (Assistant Mayor with responsibility for Neighbourhood Services), advised the Commission that the market research referred to in minute 38, "Libraries Printed Music and Drama Service: Update Report", had been carried out. The results would be used to consider the way forward for the service. For example, one of the things to be considered was the establishment of an access point in the city from which service users could collect material they were borrowing. A further report on the development of this service would be made to the Commission at an appropriate time.

The Commission noted that unfortunately it had not yet been possible to hold the meeting agreed under resolution 2 of minute 40, "Welfare Reform Update". However, arrangements for this were being made.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 26 January 2015 be approved as a correct record.

47. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

48. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

49. NEW LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL WEBSITE

The Project Manager for the Corporate Website redevelopment project reminded the Commission that the content of the Council's website had not been reviewed, but consideration had been given to how its structure could be improved. The main change was that, having considered user feedback, the new website would be aligned to "top tasks".

The Project Manager advised the Commission that the focus of the redevelopment project was to construct a new website that was more aligned to the user experience than to the Council's structure. Content therefore had then been built around this. A particular focus of the new site would be on "top

tasks”, which were those activities most frequently carried out by users of the website.

The Project Manager then gave a presentation to the Commission on the website, a copy of which is attached at the end of these minutes for information. During the presentation, the new website was demonstrated.

Particular attention was drawn to the following points:-

- The current website contained a lot of information that was out of date and it was not always clear which pages were current;
- The beta test website had gone live on 20 October 2014. The new website would go live on 16 March 2015;
- Instead of aligning the new website to the Council’s departmental structure, it was aligned to tasks, (for example, paying a parking ticket);
- The web design team did not create the content for the new website, but made sure that it was appropriate; and
- In the future, Heads of Service would own the content of the website and would delegate responsibility for its maintenance downwards. However, the quality and suitability of all pages would be assessed by the Digital Media team before they were published, to ensure adherence to the desired standards and consistency of style and approach.

The Commission welcomed the new design of the website and the control processes being put in place, but questioned whether planning applications would be subject to these controls, as this could create unacceptable delays to their publication on the website.

In reply, the Content Migration Manager explained that a small centralised content management team would assess proposed website content for day-to-day routine updates and new website developments, but this would not include planning applications. In this way, there no longer would be many people in the Council doing a small amount of updating, although it was recognised that over time this could be devolved again to some extent.

The Commission also queried whether information on the website relating to complaints had been clarified. The Project Manager confirmed that information on how to make a complaint would be included on the home page of the new website, under “Report it”. Members noted that the Council’s Standards Committee had considered a new approach to complaints, which that Committee felt was an improvement on the old one.

It was noted that the on-going effectiveness of the website would be monitored through continuing evaluation of performance metrics and statistics to improve the site for users. It also was hoped that user testing could be undertaken on at least one day per month, when officers would sit with users and discuss the

users' experience of the website. Feedback obtained in this way would then be used to help improve the website.

The following points were then made in discussion:-

- The visual impact of the Council's website was important, so the impact of the new one was welcomed;
- The new website not live yet, so it was difficult to say how effective it would be;
- When users had engaged with officers, feedback on the new website had been good;
- The main focus of the design of the website needed to be customer requirements and business objectives;
- The new website included links to social media; and
- The accessibility of the new website was graded as triple A. (For example, the font size could be changed, rather than having to expand a page.)

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance advised the Commission that the Corporate Management Board had considered that the current website was not fit for purpose and recognised the corporate benefit of having a website that was fit for purpose and on which people were able to do as many things as possible. Service areas therefore were happy to meet the cost of the Content Migration team, as it was cheaper to action things through the website than over the counter.

50. WORKING WITH THE CITY'S VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR TO SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES - UPDATE

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report updating the Commission on working with the city's Voluntary and Community Sector to support engagement with communities.

The Director reminded the Commission that the Council had contracts or agreements with a number of organisations to support the representation of, and strengthen engagement with, communities in Leicester. A review of existing contracts / agreements had been started in 2013 and tenders had been awarded for work being undertaken on some of the specific services identified under the review.

During that process, a challenge to the lawfulness of the decision-making process for strands two and four had been received. It therefore was decided that further consultation on these elements would be undertaken and the contracts / agreements of the organisations impacted would be further extended. This consultation would start on 10 March 2015 and would last for

12 weeks.

The continued provision of advice and guidance type support by the Somali Development Service and The Race Equality Council was welcomed, as it was felt by Commission members that the Citizens Advice Bureau could not meet all needs for advice.

It was noted that the legal challenge to the original process had identified that explicit reference to the work of these organisations needed to be made, so the type of specialist advice they provided should be offered as a separate tender.

It was noted that the legal challenge to the original process had identified that explicit reference to the work of these organisations needed to be made and considered further in the review. In conclusion it was decided that this specific activity should be separated out and considered alongside other advice and guidance services commissioned by the Council in due course, when those existing services were up for renewal. The Council's auditors therefore had been asked to estimate how much was spent on advice work, so that what could be received for the cost of the contract could be assessed.

A further basis for the legal challenge had been that the tender being offered needed to state more explicitly that it was unlikely that commissioned services could help people of every protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, a way needed to be sought to reflect the protected characteristics that had the most impact, while accepting that the risk that not all would be accommodated was an accepted part of the approach being taken.

A further basis for the legal challenge had been that the tender being offered needed to state more explicitly that it was unlikely that commissioned services could represent all residents in relation to the protected characteristics being considered, those being race, faith and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT). Therefore, a way was needed to best achieve representations whilst recognising and acknowledging the limitations there could be as part of the approach being taken.

An absolute amount to be spent on the contracts for this work had not been specified, in order to retain flexibility if it was decided that more funding needed to be provided. However, an indicative amount was needed, which was why the figure of £150,000 – 200,000 for strand two had been used. However, concern was expressed that the reduction in funding of £86,000 was a large amount for the organisations concerned, as they had limited resources.

It was noted that Voluntary Action LeicesterShire had been awarded the contracts for services included in strands 1 and 3 at a saving of just over £71,000.

Councillor Russell, (Assistant Mayor with responsibility for Neighbourhood Services), stressed that the review of advice services did not include a review of the Citizens Advice Bureau contract. That contract had at least another year to run, with the possibility of extending it by a further two years.

The Commission queried why an organisation with a general remit did not provide support services, possibly using specialist teams, as this would remove much of the demarcation between types of service. In reply, the Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance explained that the Council wanted to establish a model that built good relationships with communities representing characteristics such as faith, race and LGBT people and that a centralised model would not necessarily achieve the trust and engagement of individual communities. Other delivery models could be suggested through the forthcoming consultation, which the Council would be happy to consider.

In response to a query from Members, the Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance confirmed that the city had been included in the government's Prevent programme. A Prevent Co-ordinator had been employed and was based at St Philips Centre. The Home Office approved projects and the allocation of funding for the Programme, but the Council had a representative on the steering group.

Members of the Commission noted that there had been no choice about participating in the programme, as it was a statutory responsibility for lead authorities, but concerns remained that the impact of previous work could be diminished and some communities alienated. The Assistant Mayor reminded the Commission that, when it had started, the Prevent programme had been discussed extensively by the Executive and through the scrutiny process.

It was recognised that in the past some groups and organisations had felt that they were excluded from discussions, but were still required to follow a set of criteria. These organisations often had done significant work in building community solidarity and should be respected and involved in future work.

RESOLVED:

That the Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance be asked to submit a report to the Commission in the new municipal year explaining why St Philip's Centre has been chosen to host the local Prevent programme.

51. GARDEN WASTE SERVICE - UPDATE REPORT

The Director of Local Services and Enforcement submitted a report updating the Commission on the first year of operation of the garden waste collection service and outlining planned activities and expectations for year two of the service in 2015.

Councillor Russell, (Assistant Mayor with responsibility for Neighbourhood Services), noted that the service had been promoted well and reminded the Commission that it had always been made very clear to residents that the £20 charge offered in the first year was a promotional discount and the service cost would be £30 for the second year of operation.

The Commission welcomed the report and the success of the service and expressed the hope that it would continue.

52. LIBRARIES SUMMER READING SCHEME IMPACT REPORT

The Director of Culture and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report examining the impact of the library service's annual summer reading scheme and outlining the programme for 2015.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services introduced the report, explaining that:-

- It was recognised that children's reading abilities could diminish over the summer break. However, teachers were noticing a difference in children's reading levels as a result of the scheme, as they needed less time to recover their skills at the start of an academic year;
- Through the partnerships established, thousands of children were involved in the summer reading scheme and many finished the programme;
- The Summer 2015 scheme would be slightly different to previous ones, as it would involve adults and children; and
- The theme for the Summer 2015 scheme would be the Guinness Book of Records and would particularly target reluctant readers and increasing the number of boys participating.

The Commission expressed the hope that the scheme would receive good media coverage. Councillor Russell, (Assistant Mayor with responsibility for Neighbourhood Services), confirmed that the Leicester Mercury was invited to a number of the scheme's events and usually reported on them, including photographs of participants. Other means of promoting the scheme also were used, such as the Book News newsletter, to promote the scheme to the widest cross-section of the community possible.

The Assistant Mayor further advised that:-

- 43% of those completing the scheme were boys, whose literacy results tended to be behind those of girls;
- It was hoped that improving reading skills could help improve overall educational attainment;
- This year, it was hoped that the scheme would engage more with high schools; and
- One of the city's special schools would be participating this year.

Members suggested that it could be useful to include promotional material in children's school book bags towards the end of the summer term, as this did

not appear to have been done in previous years. This material could emphasise that the scheme was free to attend. The Assistant Mayor agreed that this could be investigated.

It also was proposed that work would be done with children in schools towards the end of the school summer term to encourage them to sign up for a library ticket. This would include a Golden Ticket competition, through which children taking their first books out of a library would be entered in to a draw to win a family day out. Community librarians in some areas also took groups of children to a library to show them how it worked.

The Commission welcomed the scheme, particularly endorsing the involvement of adults, as children's participation could be a problem if they had to rely on being taken to a library by an adult. The Assistant Mayor recognised that this could lead to the exclusion of some children from the scheme.

RESOLVED:

That the Head of Neighbourhood Services be asked to consider whether promotional material for the Summer 2015 reading scheme can be sent home from schools in eligible children's book bags, this material to emphasise that the scheme is free to attend.

53. WORK PROGRAMME

The Commission noted that the work programme had now been concluded.

54. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Executive Decision: Spending Review Programme – Welfare Advice Service

The Chair submitted this item as urgent business, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rule 14, (Part 4E of the Council's Constitution), in order to undertake scrutiny of the issues arising from proposals approved by the City Mayor to achieve savings of £0.2 million per year from a review of the in-house welfare rights service, as part of the Council's spending review programme, before the service review started.

In addition, this decision had been taken on 6 March 2015, so the deadline for calling it in if needed was 13 March 2015. The issues therefore needed to be considered by 13 March, in case Members wished to call-in the decision.

The Chair verbally reminded the Commission that there had been unprecedented cuts to welfare benefits and that Universal Credit soon would be introduced nationally. He therefore felt that the decision to seek savings from the in-house welfare rights service needed to be scrutinised.

Councillor Russell, (Assistant Mayor with responsibility for Neighbourhood Services), advised the Commission that this decision had been taken in order

to:-

- a) remove the duplication of work, as the Citizens Advice Bureau held the contract for the provision of welfare advice within the city and this had resulted in senior Council officers operating a “triage” service to signpost people to relevant commissioned advice services; and
- b) ensure that the most appropriate services were available in the community.

This decision had been made by the City Mayor, due to its cross-service nature.

Councillor Russell stressed that this decision related to advice services provided directly by the Council, not to the wider advice options available in the city. The Council worked closely with the providers of the wider services, but these were not being considered under this decision.

Councillor Russell offered to discuss with the City Mayor the possibility of scrutiny of the decision being undertaken, but stressed that it was the Commission’s responsibility to determine what it wished to scrutinise. Scrutiny of reviews such as this was welcome, due to the additional value it could bring to decisions.

RESOLVED:

That the Assistant Mayor with responsibility for Neighbourhood Services be asked to discuss with the City Mayor the possibility of scrutiny being undertaken of the decision taken on 6 March 2015 regarding proposals to achieve savings of £0.2 million per year from a review of the in-house welfare rights service, should a request for such scrutiny be received.

55. VOTES OF THANKS

The Chair extended his sincere thanks to all members of the Commission and officers who had worked with the Commission for their work.

In reply, Councillor Waddington thanked the Chair on behalf of Commission members for his work and his appreciation of Members’ contributions.

56. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.14 pm


leicester.gov.uk in 2015

A new approach




Leicester.gov.uk right now

- It has evolved over several years but its purpose is not always clear
- Improving our public website is vital – it has become unsustainable and unmanageable
- There are over 6,000 pages but only a small fraction is used.
- From January to June 2014:
 - only 0.5% of pages received more than 1,000 page views
 - 67% received less than 100 page views
 - 25% received no page views at all




Deadlines

- 6000 pages to review – we are almost there
- Beta go-live = 20th October 2015 (www.beta.leicester.gov.uk)
- Refreshed leicester.gov.uk = 16th March 2015



They are frustrated

- "I wasn't able to find the exact information about what I was looking for"
- "This is a very poor site when compared with ones for other counties"
- "The navigation of the website is poorly executed and the content is clearly only updated periodically"
- "Finding information on this council site is difficult. The site looks dated and the information is generally inadequate"
- "Trying to access planning applications is too complex"
- "Totally cheesed off with the whole thing!"




Project objectives – our new site will...

- **Be user-focused** – serving the needs of our customers rather than the needs of our organisation
- **Be task-focused** – key tasks are prominent and easy to complete
- **Support efficient ways of working** – helps support people to do things on line rather than needing to contact us by phone or in person
- **Be streamlined** – out of date, irrelevant and organisation-centric content will be removed
- **Be simpler** – content is organised logically with clear navigation
- **More engaging** – better page lay-out, clear hierarchy of content, easier to read with clear calls to action
- **Have better content governance and control** – to ensure we do not end up where we are now in a few months



Project governance

- Project sponsor - Cllr. Rory Palmer
- Web Governance Board – Miranda Cannon and Jill Craig
- Project Team
 - Tine Juhlert – Project Manager
 - Matthew Alexander – Content Migration Manager
 - Steve Scott – Enterprise Architect
 - Simon Kerr – Web Designer
 - David Doherty – Social Media Manager
 - Michelle Hodgson – Service Improvement Manager
- Project Team works with Information Owners (Head of Service or equivalent)



Can we see the new website?

- The alpha site was available for view at <http://alpha.leicester.gov.uk> – stakeholder/Information Owner review
- The beta site will be viewable for the public from 20th October at <http://beta.leicester.gov.uk> – Feedback form on all pages in beta site
- 14 drop-in sessions in the City Hall Lecture theatre from Monday 3rd November 2015 – the feedback from these sessions lead to landing page changes



Our customers have many different goals

But there are top tasks that are common to all

- "Make a payment"
- "Make a booking"
- "Report a problem"
- "Request a service"
- "Make an application"
- "Find information"



Focus on tasks not organisational needs

- Helps us break out of departmental silos and uncoordinated content management.
- Enables us to focus on making popular and simple tasks easier to complete.
- Enables us to consolidate guidance, policies, procedures and supporting documents around topics or functions – this leads to a more meaningful browsing experience.
- Organisational structure can change but common tasks tend to remain the same – therefore we can develop an information architecture that will last and evolve.

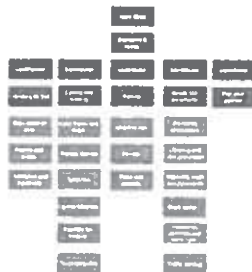


Focus on primary tasks for priority users

User priority	User type	Primary task	Secondary task	Tertiary task
1	Resident	Order orange bags	Find out about council tax exemptions	Read performance and spending figures
2	Business owner	Apply for a licence	Read health & safety regulations	Get planning permission
3	Tourist	Find events and exhibitions	View travel information	Read local history
4	Journalist	Get up to date news and opinion	Access policies and strategy docs	View minutes and agendas of meetings



With clear ownership and governance



Right content in the right place

- Web pages**
 - Top tasks and customer services
 - Information about the organisation, its work and people
 - Articles and features about things that really matter
- PDFs**
 - In-depth guidance and documentation
 - Statutory requirements (Article 4s, TROs/TTOs)
 - Branded publications
- Archived data**
 - Minutes of meetings
 - Historical data (election results, census information etc)
 - Reference material



Get in touch

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