



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: WEDNESDAY, 6 JULY 2016 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cutkelvin (Chair)
Councillor Gugnani (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Aldred
Councillor Fonseca

Councillor Halford
Councillor Hunter

In Attendance:

Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor - Communities & Equalities
Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor - Jobs & Skills

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1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and, at her invitation, Councillors and officers introduced themselves.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Dr Chowdhury.

An apology for absence also was received for Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services, who although not a member of the Commission would usually attend its meetings.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Aldred declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting, in that she was Secretary of the Community Association in Thurncourt Ward.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, this interest was not considered so significant that it was likely to prejudice Councillor Aldred's judgement of the public interest. She was not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

In response to a question, Members were reminded that they did not need to declare an interest at a meeting if that interest was already entered in the corporately held Register of Interests, although some chose to do so for clarity.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 12 May 2016 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the first line of minute 68, "Channel Shift Delivery Programme", be amended to refer to the Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance, (not the Director of Finance).

5. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

a) Channel Shift Delivery Programme (minute 68)

A further review of the Channel Shift Delivery Programme was programmed for November 2016.

b) Transforming Neighbourhood Services – North West Area (minute 69)

A report on how voluntary groups would be supported under the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme would be included in the Commission's work programme.

c) Impact of Gambling on Vulnerable Communities Scrutiny Report Update (minute 70)

Members' thanks were extended to the Scrutiny Policy Officer and all participants in the review of the impact of gambling on vulnerable communities. A review of progress with the report's recommendations would be made in one year. In the meantime, the Vice-Chair, who had chaired the review, would discuss with the Scrutiny Policy Officer how the work could be taken forward.

Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor for Jobs and Skills, advised the Commission that the recommendations in the report were being considered individually by the relevant service areas and officers were collating responses. These responses would be considered by the Executive and then submitted to this Commission, to determine whether there were any specific matters that Members would like to examine in more detail.

The Head of Licensing and Pollution Control had been leading on this work, but would be leaving the employment of the authority in July. A new lead officer would then be identified.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE

AGREED:

That the Terms of Reference for the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission be noted.

7. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION 2016/17

The Chair thanked Members for agreeing to join the Commission and noted that the range of experience held and Wards represented by members of the Commission would be very useful.

AGREED:

That the membership of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission for 2016/17 be noted.

8. DATES OF COMMISSION MEETINGS 2016/17

Members noted that all of the Commission's meetings would be held at 5.30 pm in meeting room G.02 at City Hall.

AGREED:

That the dates of meetings of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission for the 2016/17 municipal year be noted.

9. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

10. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

11. PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW REPORT

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services, Director of Finance and Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance

submitted a report providing an overview of the key areas and services related to the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission. Members were reminded that no budgetary information was included in the report and that, although no reference was made to service reviews, these would impact the work of the service areas and the Commission.

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services drew attention to the following points:

- There were over 140 staff employed in Neighbourhood Services, which had a budget of approximately £5.1 million;
- A major initiative in Neighbourhood Services was the Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) programme, which was part of the Using Buildings Better initiative;
- The Private Finance Initiative contract with Biffa for the collection, treatment and disposal of the city's household waste ran until the end of 2028;
- Cleansing services had a net budget of approximately £2.4 million and employed approximately 160 full-time employees; and
- An important element of cleansing services' work was responding to particular events in the city, such as cleaning after the parade for the reinterment of King Richard III and the recent parade to mark the success of Leicester City Football Club.

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance noted that:

- There were no Heads of Service posts within her division, each team being managed by its own team manager;
- The work of the Digital Media team included looking after the Council's social media profiles; and
- She was the Chair of the corporate Channel Shift Board and led the TNS programme.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support advised the Commission that the Channel Shift programme fell within her service area, as did management of the advice contracts held with partners.

Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor for Communities and Equalities, explained that:

- Her portfolio included responsibility for how the Council worked with external partners and employees;

- Work with employees was focussed through nine employees' equalities groups;
- Work with external partners was done through a variety of forums, such as the City Centre Board, the Faith and Community Forum, and the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Police Crime Panel; and
- The portfolio also included responsibility for granting final approval to requests for funding through Ward Community Grants.

The Commission welcomed the work that was being done with employees' equalities groups and noted that it was hoped that the Council could become one of the top 100 organisations in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index.

The following comments were then made in discussion:

- The wide range of work covered by this Commission meant that it needed to focus on the most important and/or urgent issues;
- The City Wardens and Parks officers worked jointly to try, where appropriate, to deter people from feeding geese and swans if this was causing a littering problem. If the amount of food put down by someone was greater than the number of birds, it was classed as littering, for which the City Wardens could issue a Penalty Charge Notice;
- Problems were being encountered at recycling banks ("bring sites") due to fly tipping at some of these sites;
- Hotspots in the city for fly tipping were being targeted, as a result of which the amount of fly tipping was decreasing there. An intelligence-led approach was being taken, through the City Warden service, but a constant watch needed to be kept on what was happening;
- Grass cutting programmes in parks had been reduced and cuts on highway verges had reduced to either two, six or ten cuts per year. However, cuts on housing land were unchanged at 14 per year, although a problem this year had been that the very wet weather made it difficult to cut the grass;
- It was not possible to accurately predict when the grass would be cut in certain areas, but general information could be provided;
- The public should be encouraged to use the Love Leicester app to report environmental problems;
- The Customer Service desk at the Merlyn Vaz centre had transferred to a self serve offer at St Matthews library, but this did not appear to have been advertised beforehand. The Head of Revenues and Customer Support undertook to clarify how this transfer of service provision had been publicised;

- Work on domestic violence and sexual abuse previously had been done in various service areas across the Council, but it had now been brought together within the Community Safety Team. This enabled the Council to ensure that services commissioned across the city were inter-related and to provide one contact telephone number through which people could be channelled to the right service for them;
- SOCITM had used its own data to assess that Leicester had a low digital exclusion rate. It was not known what this assessment was based on; and
- Following the recent reduction in the number of Ward and Community Engagement Officers, it would be useful to confirm their activities and what they could assist with.

AGREED:

- 1) That the overview of the key areas and services related to the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission be noted;
- 2) That the Scrutiny Policy Officer be asked to:
 - a) include an item in the Commission's work programme on the being undertaken to combat fly tipping, including that by the City Warden's service; and
 - b) circulate details of Area Cleansing Managers to all members of the Commission;
- 3) That the Head of Revenues and Customer Support be asked to investigate how the transfer of the Customer Service desk at the Merlyn Vaz centre had been advertised;
- 4) That the Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance be asked to include information on digital exclusion, particularly in relation to the SOCITM assessment of Leicester's low rate, in the report on Channel Shift scheduled to be submitted to the Commission in November 2016; and
- 5) That the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services be asked to undertake a review of the services provided by Ward and Community Engagement Officers, following the recent reduction in the number of these officers.

12. USING BUILDINGS BETTER (UBB) OVERVIEW

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report providing an overview of the Using Buildings Better (UBB) programme, noting that:

- The programme had been running since the end of 2015;
- The Chief Operating Officer chaired the UBB Programme Board. All directors were members of that Board;
- Decisions were taken on individual work streams within the UBB programme as needed;
- Before any decisions were taken, consideration was given to the impacts of those decisions. The Corporate Equalities Lead officer advised when a full Equality Impact Assessment was needed;
- The UBB programme did not include schools, but it was recognised that they could be affected by decisions taken under the programme;
- The Council's commercial portfolio, (approximately 250 buildings), also was not included in the programme;
- It was hoped that the programme would lead to an improved customer experience, improve the Council's carbon emissions and provide financial savings;
- Consultation was underway on Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) in the north-east of the city. When this was completed, one area of the city remained to be considered under the TNS programme;
- Channel Shift was included in the UBB programme, as this would help assess whether there was a need to keep customer service access points in any buildings;
- There currently were 23 Children, Young People and Family Centres in the city. Remodelling Early Help targeted services could include delivering some of these services, currently delivered at the 23 Centres, from other Council buildings, so this also was included in the TNS programme;
- Consideration was being given to moving some Adult Social care staff to the office accommodation in Beaumont Leys Library in Beaumont Way;
- Consideration was being given to the most appropriate service model(s) for the Council's depots, workshops and stores, in order to identify the best future use of these premises. No target had been set for reducing the number by a certain amount but, as set out in the report, financial savings were being sought through the UBB programme;
- Disposal of the eight depots identified in the report would have little or no impact on staffing, as they were not staffing bases. No staff would be lost as a result of the disposal of these premises;

- Public consultation had not been carried out on the disposal of the eight depots identified in the report, as they were not open to the public and their disposal should not affect service delivery;
- Following consultation with Youth Services officers, further consideration needed to be given to the future use of two buildings that were key to their activities;
- In the West area, further work was needed under the TNS programme on the proposed community asset transfers of the Manor House Neighbourhood Centre and Braunstone Grove Community Centre; and
- The disposal of surplus assets was a reactive work stream, which responded to decisions taken in other work streams of the UBB programme.

Some concern was expressed that young people had not been invited to a discussion on the impact of the closure of buildings under the TNS programme that they used. The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services undertook to look in to this, as it was understood that youth services staff and young people were being involved in briefing sessions.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director of Communications, Delivery and Political governance be asked to:
 - a) circulate Equality Impact Assessments produced under the Using Buildings Better programme to members of the Commission;
 - b) provide details of the use of buildings being reviewed following discussion with Youth Services officers to Councillor Hunter; and
 - c) continue to provide reports on Channel Shift and the Using Buildings Better programme to the Commission;
- 2) That a report on the legacy of the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme be presented to the Commission in one year's time, in the meantime, the Commission to continue to receive reports on that programme as it progresses; and
- 3) That, in view of the wide ranging implications of the work being done under the Using Buildings Better programme, the Director of Communications, Delivery and Political governance be asked to liaise with the Chair of the Overview Select Committee, so see if he would like this report to be considered by that Committee.

13. RESPONSE TO THE LEICESTER ADVICE SECTOR: A REPORT OUTLINING THE RISK AND DEMANDS IN THE CITY

The Director of Finance submitted a report providing a response to the risks and issues highlighted in an independently prepared report by the Social Welfare Advice Partnership (SWAP).

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support introduced the report, explaining that the SWAP wanted to increase its profile and alert the Commission to the needs and experiences of people they worked with in the voluntary sector. In considering the SWAP report, and the Council's response to it, the Head of Revenues and Customer Support explained that:

- This would be an annual report and would be presented to the Commission with the Council's response;
- The Council had had a contract for the provision of advice services with the SWAP for approximately one year;
- Benchmarking was undertaken of this Council's work against that of other authorities. Most of the authorities compared to were outside of London;
- 60% of appellants won appeals against the level of Personal Independence Payments awarded. SWAP specifically monitored these because, as a new scheme, it was likely to generate appeals. It had been anticipated that, as a result, there would be a higher demand for support for appeals, but this had not materialised;
- Single people assessed as being ineligible for Job Seekers Allowance were unable to re-apply for it. Many of these people therefore applied for crisis funding, as they often did not have family, or other support networks, to help them. The numbers of people applying for crisis funding were fairly evenly divided between males and females;
- In order to receive Housing Benefit, anyone not on Job Seekers Allowance had to prove they had no income;
- Monitoring was done of whether people had access to IT and whether they had the knowledge to be able to use it. All City Council libraries and Customer Service at Granby Street had dedicated IT facilities for public use and a referrals system was used for people needing to be shown how to use it;
- The Department for Work and Pensions recognised that at least 5% of claimants would find it hard to access the IT help described above, so provision had been arranged to enable people identified as needing more intense support and was provided by Citizens Advice LeicesterShire. For those who needed a little more help to increase their confidence using computers, one to one tuition could be arranged and referrals made on to adult learning courses;

- Client behaviour was being monitored, to help Council staff and employees at the Job Centre+ understand what Universal Credit meant to people in real terms;
- A leaflet was being prepared about debt advice. This would include information on discretionary funds available from the Job Centre+;
- The Council used its own experience to identify individuals who could benefit from referral to the Advice Leicester partnership;
- It was anticipated that there would be approximately the same number of appeals lodged in relation to Universal Credit claims as currently were lodged regarding Job Seekers Allowance claims. It was felt that the advice sector could cope with this volume of appeals;
- All claimants had the right to challenge a decision made about benefits and to have advice sector support in doing this. The sector anticipated a 40% success rate for these appeals, which it was felt would be a good rate; and
- The first point of contact for someone wishing to appeal against a decision on their benefits claim was the Job Centre+. All appeals / challenges against decisions were submitted on-line.

Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor for Jobs and Skills, suggested that it would be useful for a representative of SWAP to be present when the next SWAP report and Council response were considered by the Commission. The Chair undertook to consider this.

Some concern was expressed that the Council was not receiving the level of service it should from the Citizens Advice service. The Head of Revenues and Customer Support asked Members to pass any concerns to her, as she was the manager of the advice contract that the Council held with that organisation.

The Commission endorsed the authority's response to the SWAP report regarding the value and contribution of the SWAP to advice provision in the city.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted;
- 2) That the Chair and Vice-Chair give consideration to:
 - a) the most appropriate time for the next report from the Social Welfare Advice Partnership, and the Council's response to this, to be considered by this Commission, and whether a representative of the Social Welfare Advice Partnership should be invited to the meeting for this; and

- b) including an update on the work of the Citizens Advice Bureaus under the advice contract held with the Council in the Commission's work programme; and
- 3) That, as further reports on welfare reforms and advice are brought to this Commission, the Head of Revenues and Customer Support be asked to consider what training can be given to Members to facilitate their understanding of these reforms and advice.

14. THE CITY'S EMERGENCY FOOD BANK BRIEFING REPORT

The Director of Finance submitted a report providing an overview and brief history of Council-funded Food Bank provision and forthcoming developments for emergency food provision in the City.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support introduced the report, explaining that:

- There were approximately 22 emergency food outlets in the city. This number could vary, because as outlets closed others opened. However, there were fewer organisations providing this assistance than there had been three years previously. Also, there were gaps in provision across the city, but it was hoped that the new network would make it possible to identify gaps and take action to minimise their impact;
- The Council procured emergency food provision on a crisis basis. The central provision was through Action Homeless, based in the Malcolm Arcade;
- Action Homeless also was responsible for facilitating the Leicester City Emergency Food Partnership network. This network encouraged organisations providing emergency food to act co-operatively;
- Approximately 800 one-day food parcels were given out, along with approximately 2,000 3-day parcels across the city. Recipients also could top up fuel cards, as crisis was linked to food and fuel poverty;
- Food currently was sourced from food drives and the FairShare charity, but this was not sustainable. For example, the cost of membership of FairShare doubled over the last few years, which made it difficult for food banks to raise the necessary funding;
- Nationally, a community supermarket model was considered to be a good alternative to food banks. Anyone identified as eligible would be able to shop there and buy food at up to a 70% discount;
- Some of the funding needed to operate a community supermarket model of food distribution could be obtained from the operation of a café at the shop.

Advice also would be available in the café;

- The possibility of establishing a community supermarket in the city would be explored with Action Homeless and a feasibility study would be undertaken during 2016/17. As Action Homeless had only just started its contract with the Council, it was anticipated that feasibility options would be discussed within the next year;
- A Food Strategy was being drafted; and
- The key points for resolution set out in the report were very similar to those that had been raised over the last few years. However, the sector now was more engaged with the process and understood the need for a co-ordinated approach, which should make it easier to address these points.

Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor for Jobs and Skills, noted that there was no indication that the number of people needing crisis assistance would reduce. Also, co-ordination was needed, as what food banks offered could vary greatly, as did the rules they operated under. An additional consideration was that some people receiving food parcels could have no access to a fridge or freezer.

Councillor Waddington welcomed the idea of a community supermarket and café. However, it could be difficult for volunteers to set up and run this type of enterprise, so a paid managerial presence probably would be needed. It also needed to be noted that some people would be unable to afford to buy food, even at 70% off usual prices.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support advised the Commission that Action Homeless held a list of volunteers who could assist organisations when needed. Members suggested that Voluntary Action LeicesterShire could train volunteers, but it was recognised that not all volunteers wanted to work on food banks.

The Commission thanked all volunteers working to ensure that those in need received food parcels and hot meals.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted;
- 2) That a feasibility study in to the introduction of community supermarket provision in the city be supported;
- 3) That the concerns for providers of food and fuel crisis support be noted and the Head of Revenues and Customer Support asked to identify ways to address these as quickly as possible;
- 4) That the Head of Revenues and Customer Support be asked to:
 - a) invite Action Homeless to contact faith communities

providing emergency food provision, to invite them to be included in the Council's food bank provision; and

- b) liaise with Voluntary Action LeicesterShire about the provision of volunteers, particularly in relation to problems being experienced in the Braunstone area; and
- 5) That the Director of Delivery, Communication and Political Governance be asked to liaise with the Chair about the possibility of offering a standing invitation to representatives of Voluntary Action LeicesterShire to attend meetings of this Commission as observers.

15. WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

The Chair introduced the Commission's work programme, stressing that this was not an exhaustive list of items. Members were invited to pass any questions on items to the Chair, so that they could be responded to in future reports.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support noted that a re-procurement exercise would be undertaken during the year for the Social Welfare Advice contract. This would include a review of what demand there was for the service and what was considered to be good advice. Scrutiny by this Commission could be included in the re-procurement process.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support noted that, before Council took a decision on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, public consultation on proposed changes would be undertaken, hopefully from early August to late September 2016. She therefore suggested that could be included in the Commission's work programme.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Chair liaise with the Head of Revenues and Customer Support to determine whether briefing sessions for members of the Commission should be held on the Social Advice Welfare Contract and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
- 2) That consideration be given to establishing a Task Group with the remit of scrutinising whether buildings remaining with the Council under the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme are vibrant and that staff have the resources needed to provide an appropriate service to customers; and
- 3) That the following be included in the Commission's work programme:
 - a) a review of the work being undertaken to combat fly tipping, including that by the City Warden's service, as agreed under

minute 10, "Portfolio Overview Report", above;

- b) a report on the legacy of the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme, to be presented to the Commission in one year's time, and in the meantime the Commission to continue to receive reports on that programme as it progresses, as agreed under minute 11, "Using Buildings Better (UBB) Overview", above;
- c) the next annual report by the Social Welfare Advice Partnership and the Council response to this, as agreed under minute 12, "Response to the Leicester Advice Sector: A Report Outlining the Risk and Demands in the City", above;
- d) a report on the re-procurement of the Social Welfare Advice contract; and
- e) a report scrutinising proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

16. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm