



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 5 APRIL 2018 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Singh (Chair)
Councillor Govind (Vice Chair)

Councillor Cank
Councillor Cleaver
Councillor Cutkelvin

Councillor Grant
Councillor Gugnani
Councillor Khote

Councillor Dr Moore
Councillor Unsworth

Also present:

Sir Peter Soulsby
Councillor Piara Singh Clair
Councillor Andy Connelly

City Mayor
Deputy City Mayor
Assistant City Mayor for Housing

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77. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Although not a member of the committee, Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor for Community and Equalities submitted her apologies for the meeting. The meeting heard that Cllr Sood had particularly wished to be present for agenda item 11, the Draft Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2018 - 2022.

78. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

79. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair stated that all public companies and charities were required to publish data on the gender pay gap by 4 April 2018. He wished to acknowledge the interest of the Overview Select Committee in ensuring that equality was adhered to across the Council. The difference between the average median hourly rate of pay for male and female employees at the council was currently 3.12% and although better than the national average including for the public

sector which is 18.31%, the Chair thought that this was an issue that he Executive would continue to give some consideration to.

The Chair asked for this issue to be included in any future reports on workforce representation that were brought to the Overview Select Committee.

Action	By
For future reports to the Overview Select Committee on workforce representation to include data on the gender pay gap.	Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance.

80. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview Select Committee held on 1 February 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

81. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Chair reported that there were no outstanding actions from the previous meeting as they had all either been completed or were in progress.

82. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that there were no questions, representations or statements of case.

83. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that there were no petitions.

84. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

The Chair reported that all the petitions were either on 'Green' or marked as 'Petition Process Complete'.

The Vice Chair commended officers for the report which he said was clear and easy to understand.

AGREED:

that the report be noted and petitions referenced 29/09/2017/2, 01/12/2017, 02/08/2017 and 21/12/2017 marked 'Petitions Process Complete' be removed from the monitoring report.

Action	By
To remove petitions referenced	Democratic Support Officer

29/09/2017/2, 01/12/2017, 02/08/2017 and 21/12/2017 marked 'Petitions Process Complete' be removed from the monitoring report.	
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85. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

Members raised the following questions for the City Mayor:

Training courses

Councillor Cleaver, the Vice Chair of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission asked the City Mayor if he would provide further information on the training courses, for trades such as woodworking and plumbing that the Council were providing.

The City Mayor responded that the council had a good record for providing training and officers worked closely with Leicester College who were outstanding in helping to get young people to acquire the skills they needed. He was also particularly pleased with the city council's record of helping women acquire skills in areas more traditionally associated with men. The City Mayor said he would arrange for further information on this to be sent to Councillor Cleaver and Members of the Overview Select Committee.

Action	By
For further information about the training courses that the city council was providing , to be sent to Councillor Cleaver and Members of the Overview Select Committee	Head of Adult Skills and Learning

Money to buy back former council homes

Councillor Cleaver asked the City Mayor for more information about the scheme to buy back former council homes.

The City Mayor responded that he welcomed the initiative but said that there would only be a small number of ex-council homes per year that would be available for buy-back. The council would however make the most of the opportunities that were available. As a result of the right to buy scheme, there had been a dramatic reduction in the number of socially rented houses provided by responsible landlords (including councils) and a large increase in private landlords. While there were some very good responsible private landlords, there were also people who fell victim to some irresponsible landlords. The City Mayor added that the right to buy scheme was significantly disadvantaging people who were in desperate need of social housing with a responsible landlord.

£10m grant for infrastructure work

Councillor Cleaver asked the City Mayor whether the £10m grant received from the Government was only intended for work at Ashton Green.

The City Mayor responded that a specific sum of money had been received which he understood only related to spending on Ashton Green. The funding was very welcome and important in opening up the development there and in creating much needed housing, including affordable housing.

Honoured Citizens Award

Councillor Cleaver asked the City Mayor whether he would like to comment on some of the leaders in the city, who contributed so much through volunteering. Councillor Cleaver mentioned Janet and Peter Robinson and the volunteers who gave up much of their time to run the Friendship Group in the south side of Leicester. Janet and Peter had just received an Honoured Citizen Award from the Lord Mayor.

The City Mayor expressed his appreciation for all that Janet and Peter had given to the people of Leicester over the past 30 years and asked for his best wishes to be forwarded onto them.

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Winter Plan and cancelled operations.

Councillor Cutkelvin, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission, said that the Commission had received an update on the Winter Plan; there had been some very cold weather and had been issues relating to delayed transfer of care and cancelled surgeries. It had been said both nationally and locally that the impact of the cancelled operations would be experienced for some time in the NHS, possibly until next winter. Some of the people waiting for operations were in acute pain or dependent on care or perhaps waiting for adaptations to their home. There was a need to listen both nationally and locally to what was being said because the situation would impact on Adult Social Care.

The City Mayor responded that the Strategic Director of Adult Social Care briefed him and senior colleagues once a week and the way that the NHS was coping was a feature of those meetings. They had that week talked about the national and local situation and the impact on the council, Adult Social Care and people in general. There were strong concerns about the level of demands on the NHS, the impact on accident and emergency admissions and acute hospital beds. The council was working with them to try to help them cope with demand. The City Mayor added that he had great concerns for the NHS and the way it was trying to cope with increased demand and the level of funding it received.

Frozen Pipes / Boilers

Councillor Cutkelvin referred to the problems people, including housing tenants had experienced because of problems with their boilers and frozen pipes during the recent bout of extremely cold weather. Housing Repairs had received a huge increase in phone calls from people not knowing what to do. Councillor Cutkelvin said that it would have been helpful if a message had been put on the council’s website or telephone system giving some advice on possible action to take (as her plumber did). This would have been helpful to tenants and eased the impact on council services. People had made multiple phone calls because they could not get through. Councillor Cutkelvin expressed a view that the risk assessment should have anticipated such a scenario and made appropriate provision.

The City Mayor said that the council were always looking for ways to help their tenants but were somewhat constrained as to what advice they could give. The Director of Finance responded that they could not advise tenants to take their own action such as to pour boiling water over their pipes; Councillor Cutkelvin agreed that would be unwise, but said that the council could have suggested the use of warm water or a hot water bottle placed on the pipe.

The Director said that a large number of calls had been received and when that happened, the provider closed the telephone line down. She understood that the same issue happened with other organisations including British Gas. Telephone calls were also coming in regarding other issues and the Director commented that there was a need to consider how they could mitigate a situation where a large number of telephone calls were coming in, for example during very cold weather.

Members heard that while it was known that the cold weather was coming, it was not known that the boilers would be affected in that way. Councillor Connolly reported that a solution had been identified for the future, and a small device, costing about £10, could be fitted which should prevent any such future occurrences.

The City Mayor offered to arrange a meeting in about two weeks’ time, with Members and Officers, to consider the issues that had emerged from the very cold weather.

Councillor Cutkelvin commented that while it was good news that a possible solution had been identified, she re-iterated that the risk assessment should have identified this issue. She also found it difficult to accept that some advice for tenants could not have been put on the website.

Sincere thanks were given to staff in the Gas Team who had worked extremely hard during this time.

Action	By
For a meeting to be arranged with the City Mayor, Members and	City Mayor’s Office

Officers to consider the issues that had emerged during the period of very cold weather.	
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The Dawn Centre

Councillor Cank, Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Commission stated that she had asked for a review of the Dawn Centre but had heard that it could be 12 or 18 months before the review could take place. The centre was used by vulnerable people and she said it was not acceptable to have to wait so long for a review to take place. Councillor Cank commented that there should be inspections for homeless centres as there were for children’s homes.

The City Mayor responded that this was a legitimate subject for scrutiny to review and that the Housing Scrutiny Commission could undertake such a review in advance of the planned officer review.

The Assistant City Mayor for Housing explained that the role of the Dawn Centre was due to be considered as part of the Homelessness Review and Strategy (which was included on the agenda), but he was very happy for Housing Scrutiny to look at this. There were individuals who for different reasons would not use the Dawn Centre, but there was no inspection regime as there was for elderly person’s and children’s homes.

Compensation for businesses affected by road closures

Councillor Grant asked the City Mayor if compensation was available for businesses affected by road closures, and if so, how could those businesses access the relevant information.

The meeting heard that there was a discretionary scheme to provide hardship relief from business rates The Director of Finance said she would send Councillor Grant a link to the relevant information on the council’s internet.

Action	By
For the link to the website where there is information about hardship relief from business rates to be sent to Councillor Grant.	Director of Finance

Executive Decision: Sale of Land on Melbourne Road

Councillor Grant referred to an executive decision that had been taken earlier that day relating to the sale of land on Melbourne Road. Details of the sale had not been made public and he questioned how the sale would be perceived by community groups.

The City Mayor responded that he was very surprised that the information had been withheld. The land in question was a very small parcel of land on the

edge of the Melbourne Road shops and while it might be deemed to be an asset to the purchaser, the sale would remove a liability from the council. He was not aware that there were any commercial sensitive issues around the sale but would look into the matter.

Action	By
To investigate whether or not there were any commercial sensitivities relating to the sale of land on Melbourne Road.	City Mayor's Office.

86. HOMELESSNESS REVIEW AND STRATEGY

The Director of Housing submitted a report on the new homelessness strategy which was presented by Julie Turner, Business Change Manager, Housing. The Chair welcomed the opportunity that the Overview Select Committee had to discuss the strategy and asked whether the council was in a position to fund the strategy and secure the anticipated outcomes.

The Assistant City Mayor of Housing responded that the strategy was not a spending review and the council would continue to spend as appropriate to keep people off the streets. If demand increased and more money was needed, he would approach the City Mayor and the executive for additional funds. The strategy was about preventing homelessness and providing support to those who do become homeless.

A Member reported that she had visited the Income Management Team recently and had been very impressed at the work that was taking place there.

A Member questioned whether it was realistic to set targets in the light of the roll out of universal credit which was shortly to be implemented in Leicester for new claimants of working age. The Business Change Manager responded that the council was part of a partnership; key milestones would be set up and they would be working to those milestones.

A suggestion was made for tenancy rules to be discussed with tenants and for preventative work to take place to help people understand, for example, the importance of paying their rent. Concerns were raised that the Government had cut the funding to the council year on year resulting in an exacerbation of homelessness issues. A request was made for the Assistant City Mayor to write to the Government expressing strong concerns about the impact that the reduction in Government funding was having on the homeless in Leicester.

Councillor Cutkelvin commented that if she was Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Commission she would seek assurances that everything possible was being done to mitigate homelessness and that the council policies and practices (for example with the bedroom tax) were not making overcrowding worse.

At a recent housing conference, comments had been made that homelessness and rough sleeping were the responsibilities of everyone and all the different agencies and not just the local authorities and assurances were also sought as to how partnership working was developing and strengthening going forward.

A Member asked whether the council had some ability to mitigate issues around universal credit for people who rented their home from housing associations or private landlords. The Assistant City Mayor said that the Housing Association had different policies to the council but he hoped that they would continue to support their tenants through the changes. A report on universal credit was coming to the Executive and they would be happy to share that with the Overview Select Committee. In relation to Bedroom Tax, the council had agreed to pay a discretionary housing payment (DHP) for three months where tenants were submitting a bid for a smaller property, but it seemed to be particularly inappropriate to continue to pay DHP for individuals to continue to live, for example, in a three bed house on their own who had not sought to find alternative accommodation, when families were in desperate need of a larger home and were currently living in an overcrowded property.

Concerns were raised that the introduction of universal credit in Leicester, would lead to numerous challenges and people were urged to approach the council for help as early as possible if they realised that they were in financial difficulties. Members commented that the council needed to give advice on prioritising debts and it was suggested that an information sheet could be made available to new tenants on the importance of paying their rent and other important bills.

The Chair referred to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and questioned whether the council would be found to be compliant if there was an audit. The Business Change Manager responded that the provisions of the act came into force that week and work was ongoing. They believed that they were fully compliant and there is ongoing work to implement the provisions of the Act and improve services. The act placed more responsibilities on local authorities and most of them were of the view that the money given by the Government was insufficient for councils to fulfil all those responsibilities.

The Chair drew the discussion to a close and asked Members to send any further questions to officers and the Assistant City Mayor for Housing.

AGREED:

that the report be noted.

87. DRAFT EQUALITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2018 - 2022

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance (DCPG) submitted a report that provided an overview of the feedback from engagement with staff, which helped to support the development of the Draft Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2022.

Hannah Watkins, the Equalities Manager presented the report explaining that

Members were recommended to note and comment on the strategy and action plan before it went to the meeting of Council in June 2018.

A Member referred to a relation of hers who had a hidden disability and needed a quiet environment to work, but unfortunately his manager did not always appreciate his needs. This had had a detrimental impact on the employee's wellbeing and his success at work. The Equalities Manager explained that raising awareness of hidden disabilities was a key action in the strategy action plan and the actions include holding a Disability Awareness Event in July where they would be looking at hidden disabilities and she would feed in the Member's comment.

A Member endorsed the fact that the council aimed to have a diverse workforce that represented the community it served, but said that when he last looked at the breakdown for services, the least represented in terms of gender was in youth work. Male staff were under represented, particularly in view of the large numbers of young males that the service was trying to help. He stated that the strategy should not just look at traditional under representation, but there needed to be a plan to enable a representative work force that delivered the best possible service to all the users. Managers needed to be aware and have a plan to implement this. The Equalities Manager responded that this was a valid point which would be fed into the strategy.

A Member asked how the strategy would help members of the community who had little or no English. The Equalities Manager explained that measures were in place to help, including promoting the use of Plain English translations and raising awareness of the translation and interpretation policy, to ensure that people are supported to understand the council forms, documents and website. for some of the most widely used languages and information was available on the website. The Member noted those but expressed concerns that the elderly and infirm could not use computers.

A Member commented that she understood that employee groups were self-forming and questioned whether employees should be encouraged to form a mental health group. The Equalities Manager responded that there was now a recently formed Mental Health Group already in place, which had held an event recently with 60 attendees. Members heard that some good work had emerged from that meeting.

The Chair drew the discussion to a close and commented that the strategy as well as equal pay were appropriate and important topics one for the Overview Select Committee to consider because if involved issues which cut across different scrutiny commissions. He asked for updates on the Action Plan to be brought to future meetings of the committee.

The Director responded that the strategy and action plan are live documents and they would be pleased to bring this and the workforce representation updates back to future meetings of the committee.

The City Mayor reported that the Assistant City Mayor for Communities and

Equalities was very grateful for the work that had been carried out on the strategy and was very disappointed that she could not be present at the meeting given her close involvement in this work.

AGREED:

that the report be noted and updates be brought to future meetings of the Overview Select Committee.

Action	By
For updates on the Equality Strategy and Action Plan to be added to the Overview Select Committee Work Programme	The Scrutiny Policy Officer.

88. EMPLOYEE ABSENCE REDUCTION PROJECT

Craig Picknell, Senior Human Resources Manager for Organisational Development delivered a power-point presentation on the Employee Absence Reduction Project, a copy of which had been included in the agenda.

The City Mayor commented that it was extremely important that this issue was addressed and that the discussion took place in public. There was a responsibility as a council to address the issue as well as a responsibility to the workforce.

The Chair commented that this was an emotional and sensitive issue but he was assured by the strategies that were in place to help the individuals concerned. He believed that the approach was a meaningful response to issues around employee absences.

Councillor Cleaver said that she welcomed the approach and said that it could be disappointing to try to speak to an officer, for example in Housing, to find that the officer was repeatedly absent, but she recognised that officers in the front line could work in stressful situations. The management and political leaders of Adult Social Care, which was one of the most challenging departments, had experienced severe cuts in government funding, but had carried out a great deal of work to support their staff to ensure that that they felt supported and wanted to come into work.

Councillor Grant referred to Councillor Cleaver's comments re the cuts in government funding and commented that this problem was not new, as ten years ago, under a different Government, the average absence of city council employees was reported to be 12 days. The Deputy Leader of the council at that time had talked on the BBC about introducing yoga classes to reduce the number of staff absences.

A Member noted that there were delays in referrals for employees to receive help with health issues (for example to the Occupational Health Service) and it

was questioned whether some of those delays were due to the way managers applied the policy. He questioned how those referrals could be speeded up, as apart from the benefit to the council, the authority had a duty of care to its employees. A question was also asked as to whether senior managers looked at how their managers were dealing with this issue; there may be for example different managers within his team who had different outcomes when dealing with staff absences. The Senior Human Resources Manager agreed that more needed to be done to speed up referrals. For example, it was being considered whether employees with musculoskeletal problems might be able to refer themselves to the IPRS Group for rehabilitation in future, rather than through their line manager. Managers were also being made aware of the need to make prompter referrals.

Councillor Dr Moore praised the approach and stated that it should be published and would make a very good paper for a Human Resources journal. The Member also stated that she felt it was crucial for managers to talk to staff at an early stage about work-life balance, which could help to alleviate issues around mental health.

Councillor Cutkelvin commended the work that was being undertaken with the trade unions in relation to the strategy and asked what their assessment was in relation to the culture at the council. The Director of DCPG responded that the unions were supportive of the findings, but had concerns, as did the council, that greater consistency was needed in helping employees on a number of issues including mental health.

It was questioned whether the unions were satisfied that the council was doing enough to support employees with mental health problems. The Director commented that the role of the trade unions was to support their members, and the council understood that individuals needed support from their employer, but they also had to consider the long term impact on the service. The City Mayor added that prolonged absences impacted on work colleagues who might be taking on additional work- loads while someone was on sick leave.

The Chair drew the discussion to a close and asked members of the committee to endorse the Employee Absence Reduction Project.

AGREED:

that the Employee Absence Reduction Project be endorsed.

89. REPORT OF THE FINANCE TASK GROUP

The Chair introduced the report of the Finance Task Group and referred to a £5m virement to Children, Young People and Schools (CYPS) and City Development and Neighbourhoods (CDN). The Director of Finance explained that the £5m had come from Adult Social Care because they had been able to deliver some savings earlier than planned. There had been an overspend in CYPS due to an increased number of children coming into local authority care. This was a national issue and not just an issue experienced in Leicester. The council were working to avoid the need for children to come into care, but as

well as this, there were children who are required to be placed in an out of area placement for very specific safeguarding reasons.

In relation to the pressures in CDN, the Director explained that considerable costs had been incurred due to the legislative changes resulting in more waste attracting a higher rate of landfill tax. A Member sought assurances that a solution was being sought to mitigate this problem. The Director confirmed that Biffa were working to reduce the financial impact from the legislative changes by trying to reduce the volume of inert waste from 12 % to 10%. In response to a question around timelines, the Director agreed to investigate and circulate details of timelines (if applicable) to Members.

Concerns were expressed that there would be additional budget pressures as a result of the implementation of universal credit in Leicester. The Director commented that the impact of this was not yet known but there were concerns that some people, who were not used to budgeting, would be responsible for managing significant sums of money for the first time. The impact of universal credit was not yet known, nor could officers accurately forecast for example how many children might be taken into local authority care, so for reasons such as these there was a provision within the budget.

A Member commented that she had heard that school dinners were being cut and she was concerned about the impact on the children. Funding was needed for children in early years and she was concerned that the spending cuts could impact on adults in their later years.

The Chair drew the discussion to a close and asked Members to note the report.

AGREED:

that the Report of the Finance Task Group be noted.

Action	By
For the timeline (if applicable) for implementing measures to reduce the volume of inert waste, to be circulated to Members.	Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services

90. SCRUTINY COMMISSIONS' WORK PROGRAMMES

The Chair said that he looked forward to the next meeting of the Overview Select Committee when some of the Scrutiny Commissions would be presenting their completed reviews.

91. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Overview Select Committee Work Programme.

92. PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Chair asked the Scrutiny Chairs to check the Plan of Key Decisions for any forthcoming items that related to their Commission.

93. VOTE OF THANKS

The Chair stated that this was the last meeting of the municipal year for the Overview Select Committee and he thanked the City Mayor, all the officers and the Members of the Committee for their hard work during the year.

94. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.