



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: WEDNESDAY, 24 JANUARY 2018 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Gugnani (Chair)
Councillor Thalukdar (Vice Chair)

Councillor Bajaj Councillor Cutkelvin
Councillor Cank Councillor Khote

In Attendance

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor with responsibility for Culture, Leisure, Sport and
Regulatory Services
Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor - Neighbourhood Services

Also Present:

Councillor Kitterick

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51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fonseca.

Members of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission had been invited to attend the meeting for agenda item 8, "Language and IT Training". Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Patel in relation to this.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

53. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 7 December 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

54. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Chair reported verbally that, where appropriate, all actions agreed at the last meeting of the Commission, (held on 7 December 2017), had been included in the Commission's work programme.

55. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded Members that he had agreed to take an additional item at this meeting as a matter of urgency, relating to the government's consultation on the level of future stakes for Fixed Odds Betting Terminals. This consultation had ended on 23 January 2018, but the department had agreed to receive a representation from this Commission after the deadline.

The Chair also reminded the Commission that a Members' training session on scrutiny would be held at 5.30 pm on Thursday 8 February 2018.

56. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

57. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

58. LANGUAGE AND IT TRAINING

The Interim Director of Learning Services submitted a report detailing how the Leicester Adult Skills and Learning Service (LASALS) was helping the adult population from diverse and new communities in the city to compete for employment and training opportunities and engage better in local community life, with particular regard to those adults having language difficulties and/or difficulties accessing digital services.

Members of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission had been invited to attend the meeting to participate in the scrutiny of this item. Councillor Kitterick was in attendance in this capacity. The Chair welcomed him to the meeting.

The Head of Adult Skills and Learning Services introduced the report, explaining that there were long-term low levels of skills in the city, particularly in English and maths, with 62% of residents being qualified at less than Level 2.

One way in which this was being addressed was through LASALS' work as a key partner in the Leicester to Work theme of the Leicester: Great City Economic Plan (2016-202), its role within this being to address low skill areas.

It was noted that:

- To make it easier to enrol on courses, weekly drop-in enrolment sessions were held at the Leicester Adult Education College every Thursday. These had been very successful;
- Basic level IT skills and IT skills for job searches courses were free, but one barrier to participation in some other courses was recognised as being the cost of course fees and eligibility for assistance with fees. For example, an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course could cost approximately £800. Approximately 60% of ESOL learners received the course free of charge and payment instalment plans were available to those required to pay at least part of the fee;
- People with irregular working patterns could find it difficult to attend classes, so attendance requirements were as flexible as possible. For example, some people attended different classes each week;
- People started the courses with very different skill levels, so the flexibility and funding that could now be offered meant that people could take longer to learn if they needed to;
- Refugees and asylum seekers could encounter problems obtaining funding for courses, so when funding was not immediately available they attended classes that were already running but had spaces available;
- The core programme of digital inclusion courses included courses of general interest and those focussed on work-based skills and searching for work on-line;
- There had been a retention rate of 88% during the previous year on digital inclusion courses and a success rate of 80%. These figures were in line with national averages;
- People were required to apply for, and manage, Universal Credit on-line, but many did not have the IT or language skills to do this. An introduction to Universal Credit course therefore was being developed. It also was hoped that funding would be available for Universal Credit Champions, who would be based at locations where people could drop-in for advice;
- Over the last five years, LASALS had been working with all tutors to embed English, maths and IT in all courses. One pleasing result of this was that nearly 60% of people providing feedback on courses said that they had learnt how to stay safe on-line. (Not all learners completed feedback forms, but approximately 7,000 were received last year);

- The majority of LASALS' students were qualified to Level 1 or below;
- When students on ESOL courses reached a certain level they became entitled to access free English courses. Many took this option, reducing the number of students progressing to higher levels with ESOL courses;
- LASALS was not the only provider of ESOL courses in the city, so resources were directed at work that did not duplicate that being done elsewhere. This meant that LASALS focussed on learners that other providers could be unable to help and used different venues to those providers;
- LASALS also had long-term relationships with community organisations providing learning and worked with them to do outreach work, for example through festivals and events; and
- Approximately 1,800 students currently were enrolled, which was approximately the same as last year. Some of these had been referred, (for example, by health professionals), or had come via the Job Centre, (as improving English skills could be a condition of their job search), but the largest recruiter was word of mouth. A new role of Learning Recruitment and Welfare Officer was being created for specific subject areas and it was expected that these officers would play a significant role in recruiting course participants.

In discussing the report, Members suggested that a further barrier to people accessing courses could be lack of confidence. If they struggled to speak English they could stay away from situations they found challenging, which could impact on take-up of the courses being offered.

Some concern as expressed that people could be deterred from visiting certain places if no specialist support or advice was available there, such as language support. It was noted that dedicated telephone lines were available in the Council's Customer Services area, which connected people to the Community Languages service. It also was hoped that the new Universal Credit Champions also could help overcome this problem, although it was recognised that government funding for this role was directed at getting people in to work. Members were asked to report incidents of people being told that language support was not available at Council offices to the Director of Finance for investigation.

Members questioned why there had been a drop in 2014 in the percentage of the city's population with no qualifications. The Head of Adult Skills and Learning Services explained that there was no clear reason for this, although there was concern that it could be associated with a reduction in funding for adult education in the city, as this had reduced nationally by approximately 40% since 2010. The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy provided opportunities to upskill the adult working population which needed to be maximised.

It was noted that people could arrive in the city with qualifications that were not recognised in this country, so although they were qualified it could appear in the statistics that they were not.

Some courses were run on a full-cost recovery basis, particularly when providing them for other employers. It was difficult to identify opportunities to obtain a profit from such courses, as they were being offered in a market in which there were a lot of commercial providers. The government provided funding for qualification courses and non-accredited courses in different ways and the funding for one sort could not be used to offset the costs of the other.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director of Learning Services be asked to provide the following information to Commission members:
 - a) data on who the courses discussed above are targeted at, including which countries they are from;
 - b) the number of enrolments to date on IT and Digital Inclusion courses provided by Leicester Adult Education and Learning Services; and
 - c) the actual numbers of the city's population with no qualifications;
- 2) That the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission be asked to consider a more detailed report on language and IT training, the Chair of that Commission to agree the content of that report with the Chair of this Commission, subject to 3) below; and
- 3) That the Chair of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission and the Chair of this Commission be asked to include information on help available at all levels for people with limited English language skills in the report referred to under 2) above.

59. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2018/19 TO 2020/21

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out the City Mayor's proposed budget for 2018/19 to 2020/21, noting that a balanced budget was proposed for the next financial year. This had been achieved by drawing on the last of the Council's reserves.

The Director of Finance advised the Commission that:

- Unison trades union had rejected the employers' offer of a 2% increase on employees' pay for 2018/19. This could have a significant impact on the budget, as allowance for a 1% award had been built in to budget ceilings;

- A significant pressure on the budget was the continuing reduction in housing benefit administration grant, received from the Department for Work and Pensions. The number of housing benefit claimants had not fallen, but by 2019/20 the grant received would be less than half that received in 2010/11;
- Under the government's welfare reforms, if elderly people were already in receipt of Housing Benefit they would continue to receive it. However, non-payment of rent was recognised as a risk for the Council, as reduced income to the Housing Revenue Account would affect the Council's ability to pay for repairs to the housing stock;
- Government funding for discretionary housing payments continued to be ring-fenced and would reduce over the next few years. The Council would be advised in March what funding it would receive for these payments over the coming year, but indications were that it would be approximately the same level as the current year;
- The Supporting Tenants and Residents (STAR) service initially had been included in the recent review of welfare advice services. However, it was felt that including it in the new social welfare advice contract would not have made that contract attractive to the market, so it was removed. Instead, an internal review was being undertaken to determine the way forward for this service; and
- This Commission's remit included discretionary services and regulatory services for which there was discretion in how they were provided. Historically, financial savings had been made through cuts to such services and this was likely to continue.

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services drew Members' attention to the large number of actions undertaken through these service budgets. For example, annually there were approximately 9,000 licensing applications processed, 13 million waste collections, 8,500 fly tips dealt with and 27 community/library buildings operated and maintained. Despite budget reductions over recent years, good services continued to be provided. This was evidenced from feedback such as that from waste collection services, which showed high levels of satisfaction with waste collection and waste management.

The Commission noted that a change in law relating to the content of waste processed through the anaerobic digester that the Council used at Wanlip had resulted in significant costs to the Council. These costs would be reduced by reducing the organic content of sand derivative from the waste processed there from the current level of approximately 15% to below 10%. Work was underway with Biffa, (the Council's contractor), to install clarifying equipment that it was intended would help achieve this.

The trade waste facility at Gypsum Close recycling centre also had an impact on the revenue budget, as an ambitious income target had been set when the

current facility was opened in 2015. However, use of the facility was increasing and weighbridge revenue had increased by approximately 40% since the facility opened in 2015. These services were being promoted as much as possible, for example by including Information on trade waste services in the letters to be sent advising businesses of their rates for the coming year.

Loros currently operated the re-use shop at the Gypsum Close Recycling Centre. Under the contract, at or above a certain level of profit, some of that profit was passed to the Council. The amount being received was increasing, which would contribute towards the running costs for the site.

Members asked whether consideration had been given to recovering charges from Council tenants when their gardens had to be cleared by the Council. The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services confirmed that charges for clearing private locations were passed on to the owners and suggested that Housing services could be asked to consider doing this for Council tenants. Any costs recovered in this way would be paid in to the Housing Revenue Account.

Members asked whether consideration had been given to recovering charges from Council tenants when their gardens had to be cleared by the Council. The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services confirmed that charges for clearing private locations in, for example, filthy, verminous or fly-tipping situations, were passed on to the owners. The Director offered to feedback the Commission's view to Housing Services. This matter would relate back to the Housing Revenue Account.

It was questioned whether the current garden waste collection service had been successful. In reply, the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services noted that approximately 4,200 residents currently used this chargeable and optional service, which was considered to be a reasonable level of use, noting the city environment. However, there was an ambition to further grow the customer base.

Concern was expressed that the budget reductions being faced by the Council would lead to a reduction in staff numbers. The Director of Finance advised that the level of budget reductions meant that it was not possible to provide guarantees about jobs, noting that the Council's employment costs currently were approximately £1million per day.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services be asked to:
 - a) ask Housing services to consider recharging Council tenants when the Council is required to clear poorly maintained gardens; and
 - b) provide this Commission with a full report on waste management costs, including information on how the city's

waste is disposed of;

- 2) That the Director of Finance be asked to notify the Commission of the final level of funding to be available for discretionary housing payments in 2018/19, to enable a decision to be made on whether the impact of this on the city's residents requires further scrutiny; and
- 3) That the Chair of this Commission be asked to advise the Overview Select Committee that this Commission accepts that the Council cannot increase Council Tax for 2018/19 above the limit set by government and so supports the proposed increase of 4.99%.

60. SPENDING REVIEWS

Members noted that information on the spending review programme was included at Appendix 8 of the report on the "General Fund Revenue Budget 2018/19 to 2020/21", (see agenda item 9).

61. WORK PROGRAMME

AGREED:

- 1) That a briefing on knife crime for members of this Commission be given at 5.00 pm on the day of the next meeting of the Commission, (28 March 2018), and that the start time of that meeting be put back to 6.15 pm to accommodate the briefing;
- 2) That members of the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission be invited to attend the briefing referred to under 1) above; and
- 3) That the Scrutiny Policy Officer liaise with the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services to determine which partners, (for example the Police), should lead the briefing referred to under 1) above.

62. URGENT ITEM - STAKE LIMITS FOR FIXED ODDS BETTING TERMINALS

With the agreement of the Chair, this report was submitted as an urgent item, as the information on the consultation referred to was not available when the agenda was prepared and the deadline for comments was before the next meeting of the Commission. In view of the Commission's previous support of the proposals contained in the consultation, it was considered appropriate that the Commission be given the opportunity to respond to it.

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report advising the Commission of government consultations in respect of changing limits on Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs).

The Commission thanked Members and officers for the previous work that had been done on this, (minute 85, "Executive Response to Scrutiny Report on the Impact of Gambling on Vulnerable Communities", 22 March 2017 referred), noting that the national conversation on this had only started after that work had been done.

The Commission welcomed the suggested limit to stakes on FOBTs, but expressed some concern that once someone reached a limit on one machine they were free to move to a different venue and continue to gamble. This was particularly concerning as betting shops often located near each other.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Chair be asked to respond on behalf of this Commission to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport consultation on proposals for limiting the maximum stake on all Fixed Odds Betting Terminals reiterating this Council's support for restricting the maximum stake on all B2 machines to £2;
- 2) That the Executive be asked to support the response agreed under 1) above, thereby reiterating its previous support for this position;
- 3) That the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services be asked to inform the Local Government Association and local Members of Parliament of this position; and
- 4) That Department for Culture, Media and Sport actions relating to gambling and social responsibility be kept under review and a further report made to this Commission if appropriate.

63. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.09 pm