



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HERITAGE, CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORT SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 25 JANUARY 2021 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Halford (Chair)
Councillor Gee (Vice Chair)

Councillor Dr Barton
Councillor Nangreave
Councillor Dr Moore

In attendance

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor, Culture Leisure and Sport

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111. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Cole and Councillor Shelton.

112. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Moore declared that her son was employed by the Library Service.

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

113. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sport Scrutiny Commission held on 1 December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

114. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

It was noted that any items or topics pending to come back to a future meeting

would be added to the work programme for 2021.

115. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair thanked Council Officers for their work creating online alternatives to in person services during the Covid 19 pandemic.

116. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

117. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS, STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

118. COVID 19 SPORTS SERVICES UPDATE

The Director of Public Health submitted a report updating the Commission on the further impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on Sports Services in the city. Andrew Beddow, Director of Sports, presented the update. It was noted that:

- All sports and leisure facilities were closed due to the national lockdown.
- The Aylestone and Cossington transformation projects had been completed, the Evington project was on track and it was hoped that transformation would be finished by the summer.
- £3.3m of income had been lost through Period 7.
- The lost income would cause transformation to slow down.
- Council Sports facilities were not eligible for Government grant relief funding due to being publicly owned.
- My Active Leicester was a free online service, it had 290 customers with a significant number of them being over 65.
- Sports staff had been reallocated to support testing.

Members of the Commission noted the update and Officers responded to the queries as below:

- Concerns about ineligibility for Government relief funding for Sports Services had been made clear to Sport England, other Local Authorities had also made their concerns clear.
- Testing was being widely advertised through marketing material and the Council website. Advertising on community radio was another option. Testing Centres might have been more or less busy depending on time of day and other factors.
- The My Active Leicester newsletter was distributed to members of the service and also on social media.

AGREED:

1. The Commission was concerned and disappointed to learn that Council Sport facilities were not eligible for Government relief funding when facilities which had been outsourced were eligible.

119. TOURISM, CULTURE, AND INVESTMENT SERVICES COVID 19 UPDATE

The Director of Tourism, Culture, and Inward Investment submitted a report updating the Commission on the further impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on Tourism, Culture, and Investment Services in the city. Joanna Jones, Head of Arts and Museums, presented the first section of the report. It was noted that:

- All Arts and Museums venues had been closed since December 2020.
- 40 Front of House staff across the Arts and Museums service had been redeployed.
- A number of the Festivals and Events team were helping with the Virtual Humanitarian Assistance Centre.
- A virtual tour had gone online in place of the Blitz exhibition.
- Although there had been a loss of income, money had been saved in certain areas including marketing.
- It was uncertain what the confidence levels of the public would be once they were able to return to Museums and Arts venues.

Anthony Flint, Venue Director for De Montfort Hall, presented the next part of the report. It was noted that:

- Most De Montfort Hall staff had been redeployed for testing, with some remaining for building maintenance and rescheduling.
- The Hall was available for any programs that needed to use it.
- Maintenance work in the Hall was hoped to be finished by April.

Members of the Commission noted the update and Officers responded to the queries as below:

- It was hoped that planned exhibitions that had to be cancelled would be able to be rescheduled for an appropriate time.
- The King Richard III Centre and Visit Leicester were now operating as a combined facility, with staff being redeployed to other Council areas.
- The Hospitality and Tourism industry in the city had been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, with certain facilities ineligible for Government funding at risk of falling through the net.

AGREED:

1. The Commission requested further updates on the progress of the Service be brought to the Commission.

120. UPDATE ON PARKS AND OPEN SPACES COVID 19 IMPACT

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report updating the Commission on the further impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on Parks, Open Spaces and Bereavement Services.

Victoria Hudson, Parks and Open Spaces Operational Manager, presented the first part of the update. It was noted that:

- City parks remained open as they had throughout the pandemic.
- Work was ongoing to encourage compliance with Covid rules in parks.
- Parks staff had been redeployed to wardening roles to provide as much of a front-line presence as possible to tackle Covid rule breaking.
- Police would be contacted if Wardens instructions were not being obeyed.
- Parks usage was at an all time high for the time of year, meaning that litter was greater than normal for the time of year.
- External security staff had been deployed to further enforce Covid rules.

Alan Brown, Bereavement Services Manager, presented the next part of the update. It was noted that:

- The Muslim Funeral Hall had been reopened.
- There had been 435 funerals for Covid deaths since the start of the pandemic.
- Covid deaths were not expected to peak until February.
- A new multi-media system had been procured, meaning that funerals would be able to be viewed online.

Members of the Commission noted the update and Officers responded to the queries as below:

- There had been a mass gathering at Spinney Hill Park on Sunday 24 January, Police did respond swiftly to disperse the gathering. An investigation into the incident was ongoing. The Council did not have any Enforcement powers in relation to this issue.
- On the ground staff was limited so not all rule breakers could be caught immediately.
- Fencing in parks had been increased to curb rule breaches.
- A Parks helpline was available for residents to report their concerns anonymously. The Love Leicester app was also available for residents to report concerns.
- Signs had been placed throughout the parks and open spaces in the city, reminding people of the Covid rules. Advice had also been distributed to residents in various languages and on various

platforms.

- Enforcing the rules around funerals would have to be done in a tactful manner due to the sensitive nature of the circumstances. The Public Safety team were carrying out assessments on external venues being used for funerals. Any Premise that was in breach of guidelines could be reported to the Council.
- Outdoor gyms were closed, they would only be taped off where there were breaches.

AGREED:

1. The Commission noted the report.

121. DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2021/22 AND DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out the City Mayor's proposed Draft General Fund Budget for 2021/22 and Draft Capital Programme 2021/22.

The Deputy Director of Finance presented the report on the Draft General Fund Budget and outlined the following:

- The budget presented was a one-year stop-gap budget due to the uncertainty created by the Covid 19 pandemic. A more thorough financial assessment would take place when there was more clarity.
- Significant additional funding would be required for Social Care. The Government expected the Council to raise Council Tax by an additional 3% to contribute to the extra costs.
- The budget was balanced, with £20m in reserves. However substantial savings would be required to balance future years budgets.
- The Local Government Finance Settlement would create some minor changes.

The Deputy Director of Finance also presented the report on the Draft Capital Programme and outlined the following:

- Like the General Fund Budget, a one-year skeleton Programme was proposed.
- Many of the current schemes delayed by the pandemic would have to continue into the next financial year.
- Schemes covered in existing Capital Programmes were not covered by the new Programme,
- Proposed new schemes which were of note to the Commission included:
 - a. Conservation of Buildings Grants
 - b. Festive Decorations
 - c. Improvements and maintenance of De Montfort Hall
 - d. A further round of Heritage Interpretation Panels

Members of the Commission discussed the reports which included the following points:

- There were concerns that the public might not understand why Council Tax was being raised, and the reasons for that needed to be made clear.
- It was suggested that the budget impacts of the pandemic could be added to the Tourism Action Plan.
- It was hoped that a more long-range budget could be presented to the Commission early in 2022.
- There would clearly be a continuing loss of income for Sports Services in the next financial year due to the pandemic. The income shortfall would be managed corporately and some of the losses would be claimed back from the Government's Fees and Charges Income Support Scheme, which was set to continue through the first quarter of the new financial year.
- A corporate contingency budget of £10m was in place for one-off costs and income losses associated with the pandemic.
- A decision would need to be taken about whether certain facilities should re-open once Covid 19 measures were eased.
- A plan was being looked at in terms of tourism for the summer months, with particular focus on encouraging staycations.
- The Council's contribution to the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Record Office had increased, following a review of costs and cost-sharing.

AGREED:

1. The Overview and Select Committee be advised that the commission:
 - a. Regretted the necessary rise in Council Tax and wanted the reasons for it to be made clear to the public.
 - b. Requested that the Executive recognise the particularly severe impact of the pandemic on Sports Services, and that the negative impact of that upon the health and wellbeing of the people of Leicester.
 - c. Requested that the Executive set out details of corporate support available in the budget for Sports Services.
 - d. Requested a commitment of financial support for recovery for Sports Services.
2. That the Draft Capital Programme 2021/22 be noted.

122. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2021

The Chair asked that Members send any ideas for agenda items for future meetings of the Commission to herself or the Scrutiny Policy Officer.

123. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other urgent business, the meeting closed at 5.49pm.

