



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: TUESDAY, 16 MARCH 2021 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)

Councillor Dawood
Councillor Gee
Councillor Joshi

Councillor Waddington
Councillor Westley

Councillor Kitterick
Councillor Porter
Councillor Thalukdar

In Attendance:

Sir Peter Soulsby
Councillor Clarke

Councillor Cutkelvin

Councillor Dempster
Councillor Master

Councillor Myers

Councillor Patel

Councillor Russell

Councillor Singh Clair

City Mayor

Deputy City Mayor, Environment and
Transportation

Assistant City Mayor, Education and
Housing

Assistant City Mayor, Health

Assistant City Mayor, Neighbourhood
Services

Assistant City Mayor, Jobs, Skills, Policy
Delivery and Communications

Assistant City Mayor, Communities,
Equalities and Special Projects

Deputy City Mayor, Social Care and
Anti-Poverty

Deputy City Mayor, Culture, Leisure,
Sport and Regulatory Services

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157. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Halford and Joel. Councillor Gee was present as the appointed substitute for Councillor Halford.

The Committee noted that Councillor Thalukdar was present as a substitute Member.

158. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

159. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair conveyed the continued support and thanks of the Overview Select Committee to all the workers who were supporting the Covid-19 relief effort, to those working in the front line, and also to all residents in the lockdown. The Chair added that thoughts also remained with those that had fallen ill and to those who had lost loved ones during the difficult time.

The Chair also raised the issue of women's safety following the death of Sarah Everard and offered condolences to Sarah's family and friends. The Chair noted the many issues highlighted following Sarah's death and how women did not feel safe walking through streets of their neighbourhoods or anywhere, which was clearly unacceptable. The Chair acknowledged the whilst there was a pandemic, there was a right to peaceful protest, and that there needed to be a better way of policing planned vigils rather than some of the scenes witnessed on screens over the weekend. The Chair asked that a report on the Council's local position and how it was reacting to ensure women's safety go to either the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission or brought to Overview Select Committee.

Councillor Rita Patel, Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Equalities and Special Projects, offered condolences to Sarah Everard's family and friends and said the tragic event highlighted an ongoing issue. She added the objectification of women and girls needed to be tackled, with a report of two women every week murdered in their homes.

Councillor Patel said she and the City Council sent out the message that the incessant humiliation of women would not be tolerated. It was noted that recommendations in the report Women Talking, City Listening previously brought to Committee on 3rd December 2020 were being worked upon and would be included in the Equality Action Plan to be reported to the Committee in due course.

160. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minute Item 137 – Apologies for Absence

Councillor Dawood asked that his apologies as sent prior to the meeting on 4th February 2021 be recorded.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the Overview Select Committee held on 4th February 2021 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the amendment above.

161. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Committee noted responses to questions were provided by the Chief Accountant to Members of the Overview Select Committee following the meeting as follows:

Minute Item 147 – Draft Housing Revenue Account Budget (Including Capital Programme) 2021/22

Councillors asked how many housing tenants are currently in arrears.

At the end of December there was 5,470 tenants in arrears, with total rent arrears of £1.7m. This figure only includes housing tenants and does not include debt relating to hostels or non-dwellings.

Councillors asked about Border House and whether it was made clear in February 2020 that Border House may close, an extract from the February 2020 minutes is provided below.

“Councillor Porter noted that Border House was owned by the Council, but the staff, who were employed by the Council, had been told that it would close, as it was not fit for purpose and funding was not available to improve it. However, asylum seekers were being housed there, which was a concern if the building was not fit for purpose.”

At the invitation of the Chair of the Committee and the City Mayor, the Director of Housing addressed the points made, explaining that Border House remained a hostel for families, as there had been no change in its use. There were no asylum seekers there. There had been a proposal that Border House would close eventually, as the Council moved to a “Homes for the Homeless” approach, as this would remove the need for a hostel. The policy also would mean that there was more likelihood that homeless people could stay in their preferred area.”

Minute Item 151 – Investment Strategy 2021/22

Councillors asked what the estimated opening date and when the lease payments would start for the Travelodge.

The lease payments will start from May 2021.

The website for the hotel is showing as taking bookings from 3rd March 2021.

162. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

163. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

164. TRACKING OF PETITIONS -MONITORING REPORT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report updating members on the monitoring of outstanding petitions.

AGREED:

That the petition marked 'petition complete', namely 20/12/01 be removed from the Monitoring Report.

165. COVID-19 UPDATE

Julie OBoyle (Consultant in Public Health) and Alison Greenhill (Chief Operating Officer (COO)) provided an update on the Covid-19 data in Leicester.

The Consultant in Public Health reported:

- Positive progress was being made in the fight against the virus, but the rate in the city remained double the national average, at currently 135.5 per 100k people.
- A fall had been seen in the rate in the over 60s at 94.9 per 100k people.
- Patient numbers in hospital were falling, as was the number of people dying within 28 days of a Covid-19 diagnosis.
- Vaccination rates were increasing across the city, with 28% of the total population having had their first dose.
- The rates of vaccinations were positive in the older population and care homes.
- As well as symptomatic testing across the city, six testing centres were delivering the lateral flow test with good uptake.
- Schools had reopened. Secondary school pupils were required to take three lateral flow tests in schools supervised and then test kits at home twice a week for pupils and people in their bubble.
- The R-rate was at its lowest since the end September 2020, a much-improved picture.

The COO reported:

- With the contact tracing programme, there had been 97.5% successful contact. People were being contacted early and the right advice being given to people to protect themselves and their families.
- DHSC were calling it the 'Leicester model' and it was being used as an exemplar model.
- Business grants were complex, difficult and time consuming. The authority was running various business grant schemes. The Council's website provided information on the additional restrictions grant which had some flexibility as to who it could be given to.
- There were a range of targeted schemes looking at small and micro non-essential businesses, such as those in the city affected by footfall, for

example, dry cleaners, market traders, garages, charity offices, places of worship, driving instructors.

- Officers were keeping business' eligibility under review and would look at any convincing argument as to why people should have the grant.

In response to questions from Members, the following points were made:

- There had been an issue about vaccination take-up a few weeks previous in St Peters and St Matthews. There had been an increase in figures of take-up based on registered GP population.
ACTION: Figures for people eligible in the city to be provided to Members.
- In terms of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, there had been widespread reports on an increased risk of blood clots. It was reported that over 11 million doses had been given in the UK and with no blood clot cases reported. It was noted that blood clots became more common as people got older, overweight, smoked and were associated with a sedentary lifestyle. There was no evidence currently the vaccine caused blood clots but might be a compounding factor between people being vaccinated and risk factors. Information had been sent out to cancel the myths in circulation and included information from GPs encouraging people to take up the vaccine.
- There were some areas of the city and communities where vaccination take-up was lower than others, though none that were disastrously low. Across all communities and areas there was a general enthusiasm to have the vaccine, and there was uptake increases as time passed.
- With regards to business grants over 17,000 payments had been made. Regular reporting back to Government on who had received grants and the amount paid was made. There was intention to publish the data being mindful of data protection. Once the business grant scheme came to an end, a comprehensive report would be brought back to the Committee.
- All cases who were positive for the virus were being contacted by the tracing team, individuals including the household of the positive contact, were asked questions on support requirements, such as the self-isolation support payment of which there were two types; one for people on work related benefits, or if people were not on work-related benefits they would have to demonstrate hardship if they were to self-isolate for 10 days, for example, if they were self-employed, but they might not be eligible if a partner in the household was working. There was other assistance that could be offered, for example, with utility bills, or the winter support grant scheme.
- A benefit of the contact tracing team was being able have a rounded view, to be able to talk to the household to give them financial and safety advice.
- The Council had no means of making someone stay at home, and someone could be eligible for support and still leave the house.
- The Peepul Centre had been reported as operating at 10% capacity. It was noted that the local authority had no control over the vaccination centres. Understanding was a lot of communication by health colleagues had been done to encourage people to take up the vaccine, and to ensure people it was safe. There were now different ways the vaccine was being delivered to communities at a local level, for example, GP surgeries, pharmacies.

- Figures in Leicester were reducing but were still high compared with the national figure. It was not yet known if the figure was low enough or what level the city needed to be at to be lifted from restrictions in line with the rest of the country so work would continue to bring rates down as low as possible. If there was to be a reintroduction of the tier system it could look at different data, for example case numbers, the over 60s rate, positivity rate, and how the local NHS was coping. Not yet been given any guidance, so assuming have to bring rates down as low as possible to get back to normality.
- Data was not received for schools, but information received on individual cases which would not be classed as an outbreak.

The City Mayor said he was incredibly impressed with the way officers and teams had dealt with the challenges raised over the past year.

166. MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS UPDATE

The City Mayor introduced a presentation. He informed the meeting that despite the difficulties faced over the last year, the Executive were determined to deliver the manifesto commitments first brought forward two years previously, and it was hoped to be delivered successfully over the following two years. The Executive Team were also present to talk about the particular pledges they were taking forward.

Councillor Danny Myers, Assistant City Mayor, with responsibility for Jobs, Skills, Policy Delivery and Communications proceeded to deliver the presentation, and updated on the 96 pledges contained within the document, which covered economic development, transport, sustainability, housing, health and social care, equalities, lifelong learning, culture, tourism and community safety.

Progress to date was outlined with key points highlighted below:

- The meeting was informed there were seven pledges that were foregrounded, the headline of which was to continue to protect services which had been achieved, and those services had been valued more than ever over the past year, such as parks which had been vital to people's mental health during the pandemic.
- Significant progress had been made to build over 1,500 homes built for social and council housing, and significant progress had been made on tackling homelessness.
- Also noted was the improved green transport infrastructure that had been put in place during the past year.
- Council tax support had been maintained, and a huge range of financial support for people across the city over the past year provided
- It was further noted that though schools had been shut, work to generate more school spaces had continued and was on course to meet targets previously set.
- Covid-19 had amplified pre-existing inequalities which the council was determined to tackle.

- 34 of the 96 commitments have been impacted or delayed because of Covid-19 or the lockdown. Members were confident that 88 of the commitments would be delivered over the next two years. Seven had specific issues before Members could commit to deliver, and one would not be delivered. In relation to the consideration of a local lottery, the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission recently recommended the Council did not pursue a local lottery, which had been agreed by the City Mayor and Executive.

Each of the Executive Members proceeded to introduce the relevant commitments to their portfolio throughout the presentation.

Following the presentation, the City Mayor thanked the Executive Members and said there were still lots of challenges, but he hoped everyone could recognise that the team were absolutely determined to deliver pledges.

The Chair said there had been presented a thorough review on what the Council had promised and was half-way through and was the sign of a progressive council to be able to continue to deliver on the commitments throughout the Covid-19 crisis. He suggested the commitments be reviewed in 2022, and that individual sections of the manifesto be taken to the relevant Scrutiny Commissions so they could discuss in depth progress on the manifesto commitments and give feedback and advice to the Executive.

The City Mayor and Executive agreed to attend Scrutiny Commissions to discuss the Commitments as and when they were placed on the agendas of Commissions.

Members were asked if they had any general points to raise and the following comments were noted:

- Cllr Porter there were other areas that needed to be included as priorities, for example, slave labour in the city which had not been addressed.

The City Mayor said the manifesto had been to the people of Leicester and had been overwhelmingly supported by the people of Leicester.

Chairs of the Scrutiny Commissions welcomed the report and looked forward to receiving the document at the Commissions. Comments made included an invitation to people to visit Green Lane Road where the front walls were being built as an example of good work that had been undertaken in the city. They further welcomed the improvements that had been made with housing in the city.

The Chair added that when taken to Commissions, it was important to offer some challenge to the City Mayor and Executive to see whether they were going far enough, and was delighted at what had been achieved to date, and was incredible to see what had developed in the city despite a terrible year with the Covid-19 pandemic, and he looked forward to another review in 2022 and development of future objectives.

Councillor Westley asked if an item on Leicester's Markets be taken to Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission as they had also suffered through lack of footfall and required support due to the pandemic.

AGREED:

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. Individual sections of the manifesto be taken to the relevant Scrutiny Commissions to be discussed in depth and provide feedback and advice to the Executive as they saw fit.

167. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING PERIOD 9 2020-21

The Director of Finance submitted a report on performance against the revenue budget for the year. The Overview Select Committee was recommended to consider the overall position presented within the report and make and observations as it saw fit to the Director of Finance.

Alison Greenhill, Chief Operating Officer (COO) informed those present that the report was not dissimilar to the report at Period 6. The report included estimated additional cost arising from the pandemic. Section 1 of the report presented the overall position of a forecast overspend of £37million through a combination of reasons, such as, additional spending on testing and tracing programme, loss of income for services being closed, the cost of overtime because it was difficult to recruit to posts under current conditions.

The COO reported that budgets had not been adjusted mid-year as it was thought to be appropriate to show the true additional costs and loss of income. It was acknowledged that significant government funding had been received, but there was still an impact on services and costs. The authority had received £33million of additional grant funding and the authority would continue to put claims in for loss of income. It was noted there was continued uncertainty as government grant funding was one-off, and uncertainty over the longer-term economic recovery which would significantly impact on future budgets.

In response to questions from Members, the following points were made:

- The authority's debt tended to be fixed rate at the point the debt was taken out. Interests rates were low, and as a cash-rich authority, the large cash balances were not earning as much money as they would have done three to four years ago, but the mantra was that the safety of the money was most important. The situation was looked at on a daily and weekly basis to try to mitigate the amount of financing costs with the amount of interest the authority earned. It was noted that at a previous meeting of the Committee there had been a specific recommendation to include in future revenue budget monitoring reports the impact of treasury decisions on daily revenue budget.
- It was noted in the report at Appendix B, Para 11.4 that there was an increase in the number of voids with staff having had to work differently during the

pandemic to bring houses back into use. Members would be informed in writing of the financial impact of shortfall of rental income and council tax.

- It was asked if issues being faced now would affect how the authority managed three to four years in the future. It was reported the authority was in a good position and previous actions taken over a number of years to make sure it had good levels of reserves meant the authority had been able to be resilient during the pandemic.

The Chair added that it was been the careful management of finances over the years had helped the authority survive the current situation and would be the right foundation for moving forward.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.

168. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING PERIOD 9 2020-21

The Director of Finance submitted a report which showed the position of the capital programme for 2020/21 as at the end of period 9. The Overview Select Committee was recommended to consider the overall position presented within the report and make any observations it saw fit.

Amy Oliver, Chief Accountant, provided an update on the progress of capital projects and programmes. She reported there had been a significant slippage of the delivery of programmes due to Covid-19, which had been taken into account when considering the budget for 2021/22 previously reported to the Committee.

Members were asked if they had any questions on the report, and the following information was provided:

- £3million was spent on the Haymarket on DDA works on the lift to improve disabled access to people going into the theatre, some additional work to the lift area to improve DDA access into the main car park and some minor work to the ticket office.
- There had been some contractual issues with the Extra Care capital build which officers were addressing. The Council had been contractually committed to the schemes but the Government had then changed housing benefit rules, so issues were being unpicked arising from the schemes. Talks were progressing positively and were hoped to be rectified, following which the position would be firmed up. Ward Councillors were asked to be kept informed of Extra Care schemes.
- The last planning application for St Georges Church Yard had had an interesting suggestion to meander the path to improve sight lines. It was note that Cultural Quarter capital funding once associated with St Georges Church Yard was being looked at. Ward Councillors would be sent the design once known.
- Members were interested to see the filling in of the underpass in Beaumont Leys, particularly in reference to tragedy of Sarah Everard. It was asked of there were any plans to fill in the St Margaret's underpass. The City Mayor

agreed and was mindful of the fact the underpass was unpleasant and in most need of being filled in with a better crossing to take its place. It was hoped the scheme could be brought forward in the near future and was on the priority list of works.

The Chair thanked officers for the report.

AGREED:

That:

1. The report be noted.
2. Ward Councillors be kept informed of Extra Care Schemes.
3. Ward Councillors be provided with the design of St Georges Church Yard once known.

169. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

- a) Councillor Porter asked the City Mayor who would be his choice to replace him as Labour Party candidate at the next election.

The City Mayor responded it was his hope to be reselected and serve another term, but it would be the choice of the Labour Party and electorate. He added there were many months before a decision would be taken and he had many things to do as the city moved out of pandemic and to deliver the manifesto commitments.

- b) Councillor Thalukdar had a request to the City Mayor as Bangladesh celebrated its 50 years independence on 26th March 2021. Because of the pandemic in the city and around the world, people were not celebrating outdoors. He said it had been an achievement for the Bangladeshi people in 1971 when a lot of people had sacrificed their lives. Councillor Thalukdar asked if the City Mayor could send a message to the Bangladeshi people in the city of Leicester on the eve of 26th March 2021.

The City Mayor said he would be delighted to do send a message to the Bangladeshi community that had brought and given so much to the city, and that there would be some degree of celebration but some memories of pain.

170. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 7:39pm.