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# Leicester City Council Scrutiny Report 2019-21

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## **Message from the Chair of the Overview Select Committee, 2019-21**

I have been delighted to serve as chair of the Overview Select Committee since May 2019 and I am very pleased to present a bi-annual report that reflects a wealth of work undertaken by chairs across our set of scrutiny commissions

It goes without saying that this period compares to no other. The pandemic has presented enormous challenges to individuals, families, communities, businesses and more generally, to the overall service delivery of local authorities. Here in Leicester, the pressures have been even more severe as a result of the periods of extended lockdown that we have all faced. The City and its people must reflect with great pride how it has coped during the most challenging of times and how we are now recovering from everything that we've endured.

Scrutiny during this period has focussed much of its energies on the impact and consequences of the pandemic. In doing so, we have sought to influence the response and recovery of our City for the good of the citizens that all elected members serve. The implications that the pandemic will have across society will not quickly disappear and scrutiny has and must continue to serve as a key vehicle for examining and evaluating the continued response to the pandemic.

As scrutiny chairs, along with our scrutiny commission members, my colleagues and I have been determined to continue to focus on and influence the every-day service delivery performed by the City Council. Both before and after the most critical times during the pandemic, scrutiny has completed a particularly impressive amount of work, not only in examining and influencing policy, but by engaging with partners, organisations and the public in considering the needs of the City. I offer my sincere thanks to all of those who have tirelessly contributed to the invaluable work that our scrutiny function performs.

As I look forward towards the end of 2021 and beyond, I'm fully aware of the challenges that our local authority and City, like so many others, will continue to face. Growing financial pressures and further uncertainty of the broader landscape as we recover from the pandemic are amongst the most significant of challenges. However, I am heartened by the great sense of passion and enthusiasm displayed towards scrutiny. I am also excited by our intentions to continue to examine critical local policy and to initiate work that will no doubt seek to offer improvements to the quality of lives of those in Leicester for many generations to come.

**Councillor Ted Cassidy MBE, Chair of the Overview Select Committee**

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## Glossary

The following abbreviations are used throughout this report:

**ASC:** Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission

**CYPS:** Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission

**EDTT:** Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission

**HCLS:** Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sport Scrutiny Commission

**HSC:** Housing Scrutiny Commission

**HWB:** Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission

**NSCI:** Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission

**OSC:** Overview Select Committee

# Introduction

## What is Scrutiny?

The Centre for Public Scrutiny defines scrutiny as “the activity by one elected or appointed organisation or office examining and monitoring all or part of the activity of a public sector body with the aim of improving the quality of public services. A public sector body is one that carries out public functions or spends public money. Scrutiny ensures that executives are held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public and that there are opportunities for the public and their representatives to influence and improve public policy.” As such, it is important that scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that the council and its partners remain effective and accountable.

## Leicester City Council’s Scrutiny Structure



As highlighted here, the council continued with the model of an Overview Select Committee supported by seven scrutiny commissions covering all facets of the council’s business. Since May 2021, the City Council has also acquired responsibility for leading the support to the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Scrutiny Committee; an arrangement that rotates on a bi-annual basis between Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council. A review of scrutiny functions also took place around this time and as a result, certain areas of responsibility were transferred between particular commissions, resulting in some minor title and terms of reference changes to several commissions.

## Report Structure

This annual report differs from previously published versions given that it covers a two-year period. It also spans a time like no other, given that it covers the period that was, to date, most significantly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. From a practical sense and in respect of content, scrutiny has been very different. However, throughout this period, a significant amount of work has been undertaken through the form of reports to meetings, reviews, lodging call-ins, carrying out task and finish work as well as making recommendations from the various commissions to the Council's Executive and partner organisations. Such work naturally relates to the implications of the pandemic but has also been in connection with a vast range of many other significant matters.

In 2019, local and mayoral elections took place and as a result, City Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby was elected for a third term of office. He and his executive team have been working to a new set of priority commitments across a number of themes that replaced those to which previous versions of this report have had a focus on. This report again summarises scrutiny activity in respect of each of these themed areas, drawing on how scrutiny across the whole portfolio of commissions has issued challenge, support and influence. Scrutiny has however had a broader focus beyond those pledges of the City Mayor and Executive and the report draws upon this range of activity. Given the strength of work regarding the pandemic, this report begins with a section that sets out how scrutiny has examined and influenced the ongoing implications and response.

Scrutiny throughout 2019-21 has covered an enormous amount of ground and has widely influenced and offered recommendations in terms of future service delivery to improve the lives of the citizens of Leicester. The subsequent sections of the report summarise some of the highlights but do not serve as a definitive list of activity and achievements. Further comprehensive details of the work of all scrutiny commissions, including reports and full minutes can be found on the Council's website via the following link: <https://bit.ly/3o5cylL>

## Scrutiny During the Pandemic

Although much of scrutiny is focussed on examining the operation and priorities of the City Council, it is fundamental that scrutiny is seen as responsive and that it examines key emerging issues that are often unforeseen and impact severely on service delivery and the wider landscape of the city. There is no greater example of this than responding to the circumstances faced as a result of the unprecedented coronavirus pandemic.

Scrutiny of the pandemic has been a feature of each scrutiny committee and commission since Spring 2020, and although this section sets out scrutiny's overall approach and impact, it also naturally relates to the thematic sections that follow and dovetails with much of the other work performed throughout this period.

From the outset of the pandemic, scrutiny has engaged directly with those who have led Leicester's response and been tasked to deal first-hand with the countless complex issues that have arisen. The City Mayor and Ivan Browne, Director of Public Health, have been called to attend each OSC meeting to outline the approaches to dealing with such issues. As the pandemic progressed, scrutiny has been quick to identify other key senior officers and partners, who have in turn contributed greatly in informing and responding to many associated issues.

Throughout the first year of the pandemic in particular, a large proportion of OSC's time was geared around this and members lodged a host of queries, comments and suggestions in response to the local position and the impact on local people and service delivery. In the early stages of the pandemic, OSC was quick to resolve that each scrutiny commission be tasked to scrutinise the response at a more focussed level in alignment with their respective portfolios. The main aim during this period was to monitor the progress of work in mitigating against the risks of the virus on the residents of the city. OSC and other commissions received regular updates on the latest data and the methods used across all our services to gain assurances that services were still able to be provided and could support the most vulnerable.

Some particular areas of scrutiny focus and challenge throughout this period are as follows:

- A condemnation by OSC and ASC in respect of the actions taken by Leicestershire County Care Ltd towards its staff during the early stages of the pandemic.
- Recommendations by ASC in terms of Public Health England's approach to those who were shielding.
- An exploration by ASC of the impact of the pandemic upon those who access day-care services.

- Ongoing monitoring by ASC of the vaccination roll-out within care homes and amongst care sector staff, and similarly, CYPS continually scrutinised the vaccination programme in respect of school staff.
- Further scrutiny by HWB in respect of the low-level of vaccination take-up amongst certain cohorts and geographical areas and recommendations to undertake a more targeted communication strategy.
- Monitoring by HCLS of fines issued to those in breach of pandemic guidelines.
- A call by HCLS to ensure that risk assessments be carried out prior to council facilities re-opening to ensure the safety of staff and the public.
- Recommendations by HCLS to ensure that additional safety measures were taken in the city's parks and open spaces.
- A request by HCLS to ask the Executive to recognise and remedy the particularly severe impact of the extended lockdown upon Sports Services, and the general impact of it upon the overall health and wellbeing of people.
- An involvement by HCLS in the marketing, communication and rebranding of activities relating to the culture, leisure and tourism sectors in the city in support of post pandemic recovery.
- A stance taken by NSCI for increased enforcement of those businesses not operating within covid guidelines.
- Close scrutiny by NSCI of the Council's approach in supporting communities in the absence of access to key community-based services such as libraries and community centres.
- Strong support by OSC in respect of the Council's approach in providing support to local businesses.
- Continual scrutiny by CYPS of the impact of the pandemic upon children's services and particularly upon schools.
- Extensive probing by CYPS regarding the approach and the handling of risk assessments, safeguarding issues and other incidents within schools.
- CYPS also undertook an analysis of the gap in learning as a result of the pandemic.
- A recommendation by CYPS for ward funding to assist with additional learning support.
- A strong view from CYPS to seek assurances that adequate support was being provided to school staff.
- A focus by EDTT on the economic and transport recovery plans.
- Consideration by EDTT of the temporary measures taken in respect of pavement widening and other highway-focussed initiatives.
- Scrutiny by HWB regarding the testing centre regime in the city
- Views expressed by HWB regarding the need for improved localised covid case data – in respect of ethnicity, workplaces and particularly with regard to care home cases.
- Probing by HWB regarding hospital admissions for those with long covid and a request for data regarding hospital re-admissions.

- An interest by HWB in terms of how Clinical Commissioning Groups were reaching those with immigration status issues as part of the vaccination programme.
- Strong support by HWB towards more work to identify the impact of the pandemic upon health inequalities amongst the local population.
- Regular reviewing and influence of the major recovery planning work by all scrutiny commissions.

It should also be pointed out that within its work, scrutiny has regularly paid thanks and appreciation for the considerable efforts of those who have led the local response to the pandemic.

The pandemic, and the issues that arise from it, will without doubt continue to be a prominent feature of scrutiny throughout 2021-22 and beyond. As pandemic implications will feature within the majority of mainstream council policy, it is anticipated that the format of its scrutiny may change. It is also anticipated that scrutiny work will become more focussed and may involve a number of service-based reviews and task and finish exercises to examine ongoing implications.

## A Fair City

*This first main theme focusses on work that relates to developing a local growing economy and ensuring that the economic needs of communities, families and individuals are adequately assessed and met.*

During 2019-21, scrutiny closely examined several pieces of work around the provision of a fair economy in Leicester. Scrutiny commissions, led by OSC, have continued to monitor the financial situation the authority was facing and the uncertainty that the Council had around its future level of finance. OSC have maintained an interest in understanding the impact of council tax increases, particularly on vulnerable families. Such interest was also shared by NSCI and EDTT who sought more comprehensive datasets to better understand the overall extent of the impact.

OSC have remained committed to ensure that benefit payments are made available to those who qualify for them, both during and either side of the pandemic. The committee has championed the promotion of information relating to hardship funding and has particularly encouraged the use of this information by all elected members as part of their day-to-day work with constituents. OSC also sought a review of information on the Council's website regarding opportunities to apply for hardship support. Furthermore, OSC recommended the Executive consider deferring a decision on the proposal to repurpose the welfare reserve until a broad post-covid anti-poverty strategy was produced. OSC will be further examining the position of the Council's anti-poverty strategy later in 2021.

The interest in welfare support has not been limited to work by OSC. HSC and NSCI both examined the impact of the introduction of universal credit and raised a number of concerns and issued several recommendations.

OSC have received a number of reports in relation to income collection and showed particular interest in the procedures used to write-off parking and bus lane enforcement fines. OSC also probed the issue of companies using insolvency to avoid debt and sought detail on how this could be addressed.

The provision of social value in service delivery has become an emerging theme when scrutinising many of the most significant policy developments. In examining social value in procurement practices, both OSC and EDTT raised a number of points regarding contractual obligations and have continued to maintain their position on the imposition of a real living wage. A further example of scrutiny's interest in influencing this agenda is HSC's recommendation to include social value clauses in housing contracts which support training and employment at a local level.

EDTT have inspected issues of modern slavery and exploitation in the textile sector and have recommended several strands of support for staff, particularly in smaller workspaces.

Scrutiny has continued to exercise the use of service-based reviews and task and finish work when examining policy more closely or considering alternative means of provision. A scrutiny review on local level development was conducted prior to the start of the pandemic. The work yielded a number of recommendations that also fed into the proposals for the COVID Economic Recovery Plan, particularly in relation to greater investment into opportunities for young people. The review also strongly favoured the notion of inclusive growth as a means of reaching the most vulnerable members of society.

Secondly, over 2019/20 a scrutiny review into the viability of a community lottery for Leicester was carried out by NCSI with the findings resulting in a recommendation not to consider it. Both NCSI and OSC were of the view that a lottery would have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable individuals, households and communities in Leicester and would not be consistent with the aims and objectives of the anti-poverty strategy. The report was fully supported by the Executive.

Scrutiny has also continued to exercise an ability to question the executive and particularly the City Mayor, with both EDTT and OSC including dedicated items to enable members to do so. Scrutiny commissions have examined the strategic commitments made by the City Mayor and Executive both in broad, overview terms and by also seeking to examine some pledges more closely. Further detail of some of this work can be found in subsequent sections of this document. In addition, OSC have maintained an interest in examining any revisions to guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Authorities and continues to serve as the body for ensuring that scrutiny is serving in a meaningful and appropriate way.

## Homes for All

*This theme covers building and purchasing plans to increase the level of council housing in Leicester. It also captures the Council's work in preventing homelessness and for providing services for those that do lose their homes.*

From the outset of 2019-20, HSC focussed on the significant number of housing-related strategic pledges. During this period, HSC also comprehensively examined policy in relation to the statutory services provided by the City Council's Housing division. In considering the Housing Revenue Account for 2021/22, HSC supported the suggested increase in rents of 1.5%. When examining budgets more corporately, OSC recommended to ensure that updates be provided in respect of anticipated pressures on the Housing General Fund, particularly in relation to temporary accommodation.

As a result of reviewing progress reports regarding outstanding rent arrears, HSC carried out a visit to the income collection team to establish a greater understanding of the work of the team. When reviewing the corporate capital programme for 2021-22, OSC also questioned the level of outstanding arrears and recommended that HSC continue to monitor the position.

HSC have been particularly effective in considering alternative methods of scrutiny when examining policy in greater depth and suggested the establishment of working parties to consider more closely both the overcrowding reduction strategy and voids performance. In addition, HSC recommended a number of all-member ward-based briefings relating to key housing initiatives. And similar to that described in other sections, HSC frequently advised that enhanced publicity of key housing services be communicated through the use of local libraries and neighbourhood centres.

When reviewing a proposal to transfer the responsibility of dealing with anti-social behaviour to the Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (CrASBU) service, HSC raised a number of concerns, and as a result, the proposal was amended to maintain a lead role with the Housing division. This work continues to be at the heart of HSC's agenda, with a task and finish exercise in conjunction with NCSI on the role of the new ASB team and its relationship with the Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (CrASBU) taking place throughout 2021-22.

HSC have held particular interest in reviewing who is entitled to social housing and have continued to receive regular updates in relation to housing allocation matters. An overwhelming ask of HSC has been for more to be done to increase the supply of affordable housing, which remains a key executive pledge. In particular, HSC recommended that work be undertaken to encourage more support in this field from

the private sector, and as a result, policy proposals are being drawn up for consideration by scrutiny in 2021-22.

When reviewing the Homelessness Strategy, members of the commission agreed to attend a street-count. HSC have and will continue to maintain an interest in the development of the MyHome app. Scrutiny of the pandemic has of course remained at the core of HSC's interests, and in particular, HSC examined the 'Everyone In' scheme, which proved to be extremely successful in assisting the homeless throughout the pandemic. HSC continue to monitor work to assist those that are still accessing the homelessness service. Moreover, in respect of homelessness, HSC have made several service improvement related recommendations, including increasing support measures for those staff who work with service users.

Since the Grenfell Tower tragedy of 2017, HSC have stringently examined accommodation safety standards, and in 2019, asked officers to review guidance around fire sprinkler systems in light of concerns voiced at a national level.

HSC also maintained oversight of council house building schemes and continue to monitor progress of the strategic priority to increase the overall supply in Leicester. Furthermore, ASC examined schemes to provide additional supported living and extra care units and made a number of recommendations in relation to the standard of accommodation units.

## Connecting Leicester

*In recent years, Leicester has seen national and international focus on the city and its heritage. The Connecting Leicester initiative has been fundamental in promoting the heritage of the city and connecting shopping, business, leisure, heritage, housing and transport facilities. There continue to be plans for further transformation of the city, including some significant and widespread schemes and programmes to facilitate this.*

Such schemes include the plan to consult on a workplace parking levy as a measure to tackle problems associated with traffic congestion and air quality. EDTT have scrutinised these plans from concept phase and continue to be a central vehicle in examining the overall process behind the development of a potential levy. EDTT have shown particular interest in the potential economic impact of a levy scheme upon businesses and this remains at the core of their interests.

The plans for the further development of Connecting Leicester have been strengthened as a result of a successful bid to the government's Transforming Cities Fund (TCF). A £70million package of work is focusing on major sustainable transport improvements to provide attractive choices for people to get to work, support the city's growth and deliver on the council's climate emergency, air quality and healthy living commitments. EDTT have received several presentations on TCF proposals, both in terms of the overall position as well as individual schemes, such as the St Margaret's Bus Station development. The commission have made several recommendations to date, including voicing the need for increasing the overall level of investment in the east of the city. Throughout the period, EDTT regularly examined further elements of the Connecting Leicester programme ahead of their implementation and made several alternative suggestions to proposals.

A further aim of Connecting Leicester is to remove barriers that make it difficult for people to move from one area to another. As such, EDTT has closely examined issues around city centre accessibility. In doing so, the commission received evidence from local interest groups and arranged city centre site visits to identify potential issues for further discussion. EDTT remained committed throughout 2019-21 in striving to improve accessibility and have made a number of recommendations. These include a suggestion to use a proportion of future income generation from a workplace parking levy towards enhancing the overall level of accessibility, particularly in the city centre. More generally, EDTT sought an accessibility audit in respect of both City Hall and Town Hall, and this is another facet of work that will continue to be closely examined by the commission.

Scrutiny of Leicester's draft Local Plan has been a prominent feature amongst the majority of commissions. In examining the earlier phases of the production of the Local Plan and in contributing to its consultation, several key principles were identified by scrutiny and these include:

- A number of points were raised by EDTT in relation to the overall level of housing need, accessibility, Homes of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and public transport infrastructure.
- An interest by EDTT in references within the plan to the Evesham Road link.
- Concerns raised by EDTT in respect of the level of anticipated engagement in the consultation exercises as a result of the pandemic.
- A specification by HCLS that essential green and open spaces which were well used by residents for recreation, exercise and sports should be protected and improved, and not be considered for new developments and a change of use.
- A suggestion by HCLS for the creation of more 'green painted walls' as a means of offsetting and identifying areas where green space has been lost,
- Views from HCLS that existing heritage sites to be protected, and heritage forums in the city be consulted on the local plan
- Comments by HCLS in respect of the need to better reflect the culture, history and diversity of Leicester City.
- A request by HCLS for a further report in relation to sports and leisure facilities that are to be included within the final plan.
- General views from NCSI regarding the protection of existing green and open spaces to support well-being and wildlife, and the need to plan for additional amenities in the city to cater for population growth.
- Concerns by CYPS in respect of the effect that any loss of playing field space and learning centres could have upon the health and wellbeing of children.
- An examination by HSC of particular sites identified within the plan including Lanesborough Road and the Saffron Velodrome site.
- On a more general issue in respect of planning policy, OSC examined the impact upon City Council income of the imposition of charges for pre-planning applications.

In advance of its submission for approval to Full Council in 2022, scrutiny of the local plan will remain an imperative throughout 2021-22 and it is anticipated that commissions will focus on tailored elements of the final set of proposals and OSC will also examine the proposals and make recommendations to Full Council as they see fit.

## Sustainable Leicester

*A key ongoing priority area of work for the City Council is reducing the city's carbon footprint by focusing on reductions of greenhouse gas emissions from the council's own operations, as well as promoting sustainable travel and reducing emissions from homes and businesses.*

At the heart of work by the City Council in respect of this theme has been the production of a climate emergency action plan. This was examined by a number of scrutiny bodies including OSC, who made a several recommendations such as:

- An encouragement for all Members to help publicise and champion the Climate Emergency Conversation through their role as Ward Councillors.
- Further scrutiny of the impact of schools declaring their own climate emergency.
- Encouraging work to on-board other organisations in joining the Council in taking action, including developing their own action plans and strategies.
- That further reports relating to the development of the strategy be reported back for scrutiny in due course.
- That a particular feature of the future strategy involves the steps required to increase the overall level of 'green' jobs.

In examining the Climate Change Conversation consultation, NCSI recommended that the exercise should include all school-aged children. Like OSC, when reviewing the draft Climate Emergency action plan, the commission requested further consideration of how proposals for 'green' jobs could be drawn-up. HSC encouraged greater lobbying of MPs, who were seen as being in a particularly strong position to influence change.

It was encouraging to experience a good level of public engagement at scrutiny in respect of a number of issues concerning sustainability; particularly at HSC. Public questions were raised in respect of passivhaus homes and in terms of carbon standards in housing developments. The latter led to the production of a detailed report on house-building standards, and HSC also reiterated the need for all corporate reports that were the subject of scrutiny to include detailed climate change implications. HSC also engaged with the relevant Assistant City Mayor to discuss the future of local housing development in the context of the climate emergency declaration. Furthermore, when reviewing energy efficiency of a particular new housing development, they recommended an upskilling of City Council staff for installations and requested the planning team to consider site layouts that would maximise solar power as an energy source. HSC have also sought to review the effectiveness of the district heating network including the network's contribution in addressing the city's declared Climate Emergency and opportunities that could be available to extend the scheme. In addition, when exploring a review of sport's

services in Leicester, HCLT urged the continuation of energy efficiency strategy work within all leisure centre facilities.

NCSI examined several strands of work with regard to waste management. When scrutinising recycling bring banks, the commission made suggestions in terms of greater promotion of the service. In addition, NCSI recommended greater engagement with schools in terms of raising awareness of waste management services in Leicester.

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## Health and Care

*Leicester has poorer health outcomes on average compared to the rest of the country, so it is important to provide excellent healthcare and promote healthier lifestyles to close the gap. In doing so, scrutiny calls to account all health partners in the city.*

*Care for older people needs to be adequate for their needs and this is moving from traditional social support services towards the greater promotion of independent living. These services are also being increasingly aligned with healthcare to ensure an easier transition between the two. There is also a need to ensure that carers are well supported.*

A significant amount of the work undertaken in relation to health and care services has not surprisingly centralised on the impacts arising from the pandemic and as such, scrutiny prioritised its discussion around key services to protect the most vulnerable. Scrutiny acknowledged that it was a particularly difficult time for the Leicester City area as the lockdown period had been prolonged. Regular updates were received on the overall position, the data, and the impacts on elderly and vulnerable residents requiring care. Scrutiny was reassured that a number of council divisions were working in collaboration to manage the crisis and to keep people and staff safe by providing extra support where required, and this covered matters including meals on wheels, access to food banks, PPE safety equipment and access to GP health services.

HWB closely examined the implementation of and issues surrounding the vaccination programme. The Commission reiterated the need for health partners to access hard-to-reach communities and encouraged vaccinations and regular testing regimes. This was also accompanied by an update on the yearly flu vaccination programme and the issues faced in conducting this alongside the covid19 vaccination programme. The latter part of the updates relating to covid19 in 20-21 began to focus on the impact on long covid, as well as the risks of health inequalities in Leicester being heightened by the pandemic. HWB intend to further examine these matters and others stemming from the pandemic into the 2021/22 municipal year.

Both either side and throughout the peak of the pandemic, there have been many other issues affecting health and care services that scrutiny has examined in detail.

In light of the well-documented increase in pressures on the care sector, ASC have continued to scrutinise and provide comments on the development of key strategies and plans essential to supporting and improving adult social care services and partnership working e.g. Mental Health, Dementia support services and Carers

support. In doing so, members valued hearing evidence and information directly from provider organisations such as Age UK Leicester, Leicester Carers Support Group and the Independent Chair of Leicester Safeguarding Adults Board. Some particular points highlighted when examining issues surrounding care provision and associated services were as follows:

- *Revision to ASC Charging Policy*– scrutiny recommendations influenced the council decision-making timeline. This resulted in no changes to charges during the pandemic, and that the council would then undertake another wider statutory consultation.
- *Carers Strategy* – engaged with partners including Age UK and Leicester Carers Support Service and recommended a simpler route for carers to access information and for increased awareness of voluntary sector services to be promoted. ASC also welcomed the City Council’s introduction of a Carer’s Passport.
- *VCS Review* – sought further detail on the impact and progress of the new Service User Participation Service.
- *Extra Care Housing* – voiced concern over development size and how the design would safeguard the mixed ages of vulnerable adults. ASC conducted site visits to Danbury Gardens and Abbey Mills which were seen as examples of good design practice.
- *Dementia Strategy Action Plan* - praised the recruitment of ‘Dementia Friends’ in light of the high rate of diagnosis in the city.
- *General Fund/Budgetary issues* – repeatedly raised concerns over the increasing cost of care packages. This has led to the initiation of a task group review during 2021-22.

In considering corporate budgetary matters, OSC made a number of observations and recommendations. These included seeking additional sets of information relating to revenue spending which covered detail of the number of children in care, and details surrounding reductions in the number of child protection plans as well as an explanation regarding the decline in the take up of sexual health services in Leicester. OSC also sought details of the nature of vacancies within the SCE department.

ASC also closely examined circumstances surrounding ‘Leicestershire County Care Limited’ which became subject to scrutiny over several meetings and included seeking evidence from the company director. Scrutiny recommended that concerns be raised relating to the company’s financial stability and changes to staff terms and conditions.

A scrutiny task group review into ‘Adult Social Care Workforce Planning: Looking to the Future’ was carried out. As part of this, evidence was gathered from Adult Social Care officers, unions and the Leicester Development and Skills group. The findings identified the urgent need to recruit many more care workers and provide better skills and training with accreditation. It also recommended the improvement of terms and conditions and pay grades. Scrutiny continued dialogue following completion of the review and in particular, sought more detail on how and by whom the responsibilities identified were going to be actioned.

ASC also examined the Joint Integrated Commissioning Strategy for Adult Mental Health and raised concerns surrounding a significant post-pandemic rise in people presenting with mental health issues and encouraged all to be done to address such issues and to serve need. Moreover, ASC recommended consideration of how the more granular detail in terms of a suicide response service could be built into the strategy. Members suggested that within the concept of building resilience, it would be helpful to share values around mental health across different communities. Officers agreed to take that suggestion to the relevant partnership board for further consideration.

Scrutiny of mental health issues and implications will feature prominently across a number of work programmes throughout 2021-22. In addition to the continued work by ASC, CYPS are set to continue some work scoped previously in terms of exploring interventions to help children and young people with mental health issues. HWB plan to hold meetings with a dedicated focus on mental health, and in doing so will work with several key stakeholders and witnesses. Much of the scrutiny around matters relating to mental health will relate to long-term implications following the pandemic.

Throughout 2019-21, HWB examined many of the key strategies and fundamental changes proposed by the leading health agencies in Leicester. Prior to the pandemic, HWB focused on the NHS Long Term Plan, the introduction of Primary Care Networks, as well as the urgent improvements required following inspections at local services such as the Bradgate Unit.

There was also a central focus on the £450m investment into Leicester's hospitals and the Building Better Hospitals consultation run by the CCGs to gauge support for 14 key proposals, and this led to heightened interest and engagement with scrutiny from the public. Over the course of 2020-21, HWB considered a pre-consultation business case and submitted separate comments in relation to the proposals and made several recommendations. This included initiating the transfer of control of the Hospital Close site from UHL to the City Council. Furthermore, the financial deficit in the UHL accounts was also scrutinised in detail, and in doing so, additional meetings with UHL board members were held. This work led to recommendations proposing a consideration of a cultural change at UHL and also identified the need to involve HWB into the selection process for new board members.

Other issues that HWB have examined in closer detail are as follows:

- *Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and the Introduction to the NHS Long-Term Plan* – concerns were raised in terms of the funding, operation and geographical spread of PCNs along with concerns around how they would address health inequalities and how the public could contribute to their development. A recommendation was proposed in respect of increasing nursing provision at GP surgeries. It was also voiced that the long-term plan did not adequately cover service provision in relation to dementia and frailty.

- *Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust – Steps taken on Regulatory Inspections* – recommended in-depth work in relation to equalities and sought a report that detailed progress with the redevelopment of the Bradgate Unit.
- *Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Primary Care Strategy 2019/21-2023/24* – sought further information on work to deflect away from the use of A&E services and requested Healthwatch to engage with the commission in terms of the development of the strategy.
- *LLR Urgent & Emergency Care Transformation Plan 2019/20* – focussed on issues in connection with an absence of GP surgery consultations, a decline in care home provision; digital exclusion to the vulnerable and elderly, detail around the ambulance handover process and expressed an urgent need for greater investment in mental health service provision.
- *0-19 Children’s Offer* – sought further detail in relation to health visits and the extent of improved outcomes and raised issues of concern around parents experiencing judgement regarding oral health and obesity issues.
- *Updates on Obesity (including childhood obesity)* – recommended improved communication of particular projects and programmes aimed at school-aged children and also recommended that practitioners should focus on the issue of poor diet as much as encouraging the need to exercise.
- *Primary Care Hub Access at Merlyn Vaz Health & Social Care Centre* – the commission agreed that any in-depth review of the walk-in facility should reflect the demography of the city.
- *General Fund and Revenue Budget issues* – sought an update on the impact of the pre-exposure to the HIV service and further details were requested in relation to the overall funding of the service.

As reported elsewhere in this report, HWB also initiated a review in relation to the experience of black people working in health services in Leicester and Leicestershire. This work engaged extensively with and sought evidence from a range of health partner agencies and the evidence gathering continues into the 2021/22 municipal year ahead of the preparation of a set of recommendations.

During 2019-21, the administration of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Joint Health Scrutiny Committee was performed by Leicestershire County Council. However, the City Council has now assumed responsibility for the administration of the committee from 2021-23 and it is currently chaired by Councillor Patrick Kitterick. The committee will continue to examine health issues and consultations which impact upon the whole of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. In doing so, the committee will engage with key strategic health partners as well as encouraging wider participation in scrutiny from youth representatives and members of the public. The committee will explore a range of work, which will undoubtedly include the continuation of scrutiny of the UHL reconfiguration as well as many issues that form part of the long-term recovery from the pandemic.

## Lifelong Learning

*Ensuring that the Council protects its proud track record of supporting nurseries, schools and colleges to provide a high level of education for all remains a top priority. As well as meeting the needs of all children, opportunities are also made available for adults to continue their learning.*

Prior to the pandemic, CYPS focused on the financial pressures faced by service areas, possible OFSTED inspections planned for the future, the position of academies in the city and the city-wide issue of knife crime and its impact on children and young people.

CYPS also continued to examine developments in respect of key statutory services which included adoption, fostering, edge of care interventions and SEND commissioning. The latter was scrutinised stringently, with requests for consultation outcomes and final key performance indicators to be shared with the commission. On a related matter, CYPS investigated the re-alignment of special school funding and expressed concerns regarding the documentation of parental feedback and the detrimental effect of setting a budget-cap.

In examining the 2021/22 draft revenue budget, CYPS requested a greater depth of scrutiny regarding the SEND transport budget. A further view expressed by the commission in respect of the draft budget concerned their support towards the retention of the connexions service.

CYPS also examined the Youth Justice Plan and raised concerns regarding the comparatively high level of entrants from Leicester into the system. The commission sought a more expansive explanation of work undertaken in respect of links between mental health and youth offending, as well as recommending closer scrutiny of the Knife Crime Strategy.

The commission continued work carried out previously in scrutinising the position of academisation in Leicester. In doing so, it raised concerns on the standards complaints process as well as governance structures and more specifically, the reduction in local governors. Furthermore, CYPS voiced concerns regarding the length of the initial inspection period for a school following academisation and requested closer examination of the role of the Regional Schools Commissioner.

In October 2019, CYPS commissioned an in-depth scrutiny review into 'The Underachievement of 'Black Caribbean' and 'White Working-Class' pupils of secondary school age in Leicester'. The work led to a number of detailed recommendations for schools as well as the City Council. An Executive response to the report was presented to the commission in June 2021 and further dialogue in terms of embedding some of the work that the commission supported will continue throughout the 2021-22 municipal year. In particular, the commission has requested

further insight into the interventions available for young people regarding mental health and plan to explore this via a task and finish group.

A number of other commissions also reviewed work that related to this area. When reviewing library services, NSCI raised concerns relating to the ability to engage with children from hard-to-reach communities. NCSI also queried library opening hours in general and the need for greater provision of digital skills courses, particularly for adults at risk of digital exclusion. Recommendations in respect of enhanced digital infrastructure and investment in further IT equipment within libraries and neighbourhood centres were also put forward. EDTT examined adult learning more generally and when looking at the LASALS service, queried the operation of clawback funding and recommended a more expansive offer in respect of re-skilling.

However, it goes without saying that a significant amount of the scrutiny in respect of learning outcomes and opportunities were in connection with the situation in schools throughout the pandemic. Particular areas of focus included scrutiny of the infection rate within schools where children of key workers were attending, as well as the quality of learning for children who were able to engage in home-schooling. Other identified issues included the confusing and often last-minute advice from the Department of Education, the quality of free school meals, appropriate access to laptops and study tools for children and the impact that the pandemic will have on the mental health of young people and children. CYPE were extremely supportive of the work of all council staff throughout the pandemic in supporting young people and children across the city.

It is envisaged that further work regarding the impact of lockdown on young people and children will be looked into by CYPS, as well as understanding how the upcoming OFSTED inspections will be conducted and finding out more about the impact of consulting on SEND funding for schools.

## A City to Enjoy

*This priority is focussed on enhancing the amenity of the city by developing the festivals offer, making improvements to the arts and museums services and providing capital investment for venues, new workspace and business support for creative businesses and organisations.*

The severity of the lockdown period in Leicester impacted heavily on access to many of Leicester's main amenities and attractions. Many of the regular and most popular festivals were cancelled and scrutiny agendas were dominated by the impacts to services, such as venue closures across the city and staff being redirected to support essential services, as well as the recovery plans for re-opening safely. However, scrutiny continued to play an important role in examining the existing service and its future proposals. The majority of scrutiny in relation to this pledge theme was undertaken by HCLS.

In respect of arts and museums, in summer 2019, HCLS closely examined the use of additional funding provided by the Arts Council. It also spent much of its time looking at the Council's museums service, and made several recommendations in terms of enhancing the service including the carrying-out of more outreach work (especially for hard to reach communities) and requesting that ward councillors be better engaged in terms of community engagement work in respect of the museums service.

In addition, it strongly supported plans to create a dedicated educational space at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery for access by local schools. When examining the museums capital plans, HCLS proposed a transformation of the service's digital offer, and on many occasions, have made suggestions to consider making an overall better use of museum space when undertaking redevelopment work. The commission examined closely the Leicester Museum and Art Gallery redevelopment plans, and whilst being generally supportive of the proposals, sought regular updates on the development programme and budget and sought to undertake a site visit upon the completion of the work.

HCLS also scrutinised the Jewry Wall Museum redevelopment plans on several occasions. A number of information requests were lodged and the dialogue on this issue spanned several meeting rounds. Particular areas of interest included targeted visitor numbers, admission pricing and work to deliver energy saving initiatives in light of the climate emergency. More generally, HCLT challenged the length of time taken in delivering the programme and referred this also to OSC for a more corporate level of examination. An executive decision in relation to the works was called-in by scrutiny, and following lengthy dialogue, the call-in was withdrawn prior to being submitted to Ful Council. HCLS have also monitored the progress of plans

to develop the former Haymarket theatre and the consultation exercise that was undertaken. The commission formed a number of views, principally stating a preference for a multi-purpose facility and seeking assurances that all accessibility requirements be responsibly fulfilled.

Along with EDTT, HCLS was briefed regularly on tourism-related activity and carefully reviewed the newly formed Leicester Tourism Strategy. Many of the comments and recommendations arising from the work focused on communication, including the request to consider a number of potential marketing and advertising campaigns, such as greater TV and radio coverage in relation to local tourism attractions. The continuation of the Council's heritage interpretation panel initiative was also scrutinised, and the commission raised a number of ideas for future panels and also expressed a desire for an improvement of local history education throughout the City's schools.

There were a number of high-profile sporting-related initiatives that were inspected by HCLS. When examining council-operated golf facilities, the commission recommended the exploration of 'golfing pop-ups' within under-utilised open space. Increasing the uptake of sport and leisure was at the heart of the thinking of HCLS's work, particularly in relation to golf services but also when scrutinising the football investment strategy. The commission asked for more work to be undertaken with the aim of increasing participation in sport, particularly amongst 11 to 17 year-olds. When reviewing sports and leisure facilities more generally, it was felt that an enhanced programme of staff training should be undertaken to help consistently achieve a good standard of customer service ratings.

## A Safe and Inclusive City

*This pledge sets out a range of commitments to enhance community support and safety and strives to become even more of an inclusive city. It covers how the City Council engages with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VC) as well as work carried out by the police and other community safety partners.*

Scrutiny work in connection to this particular pledge spanned a range of commissions, with particular focus by NSCI.

NSCI and OSC in particular have been and will continue to be heavily engaged in work that stemmed from the Black Lives Matters movement. Work has become more focused over time with OSC having several opportunities to scrutinise the Council's corporate approach in tackling racism and inequality. In examining the corporate Equality Strategy and Action Plan, OSC encouraged more to be done to improve the level of black and minority ethnic representation at senior levels of the City Council.

Moreover, HWB initiated a review into experiences of black people working in health services in Leicester and Leicestershire and by working with a number of partners in the health sector, the evidence gathering in respect of this review continues into 2021/22.

HCLS also recommended an examination of how historical information was presented within the Council's Arts and Museums service, noting that similar exercises had been undertaken in other part of the country. In addition, CYPS pledged support for widening the scope of racial literacy training and embedding this into the corporate training regime for elected members.

A number of commissions engaged with the Women Talking City Listening Project, which from a scrutiny perspective, helped to place an importance on examining all matters concerning women's safety and led to a more focussed examination, particularly at OSC, around how improvements could be made by the council and its partners.

NSCI has been particularly active in examining community safety matters throughout the two-year period. In reviewing the Council's Community Safety Plan, concerns were raised in respect of cyber fraud as well as a potential spread of ASB and street lifestyle issues to areas of Leicester beyond the city centre and the commission remain committed to monitoring this. Stemming from this work, NCSI have also closely inspected the work of the Public Safety and Noise Control teams, and in respect of the latter, the commission strongly recommended work to help to reduce waiting times in responding to noise nuisance complaints.

NCSI have also maintained a close interest in the development of a knife crime strategy, and have recommended to enhance the level of resources targeted towards youth services and also recommended greater work on educating young people around potential dangers through schools and other agencies. Similarly, other key topics such as Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse support services have been explored, as well as community safety more generally, with members comments influencing the overall strategy development and a number of consultation exercises. A consistent point raised when examining such areas was the need to increase communication, particularly to elected members.

In looking beyond the remit of the City Council, the commission closely inspected the Safer Leicester Partnership Plan and recommended some joint scrutiny work between HWB and NCSI in respect of alcohol misuse and street drinking.

## What next for scrutiny in Leicester?

This report has covered much of the activity undertaken by scrutiny during the past two years. The period has certainly been unconventional, both in terms of the format and practical sense of scrutiny and also due to scrutiny content being dominated by a focus on the pandemic. Whilst scrutiny began to focus on more typical service-based work, it is already evident that the legacy and impact of the pandemic will typically feature within policy implication moving forward, and as documented elsewhere, scrutiny has already and will undoubtedly continue to examine implications and outcomes from the pandemic over years to come.

Scrutiny in 2021-22 will offer commissions the opportunity to continue to examine some of the most critical work being undertaken across the city and to explore the implications of key issues as they emerge. For instance, scrutiny will be taking a leading role on reviewing the resettlement programme for Afghan refugees welcomed into Leicester after fleeing the hostile situation in their homeland. Scrutiny will maintain its work on some of those major ongoing schemes and programmes as documented within this report including work in relation to women's safety, work stemming from the Black Lives Matter movement, the UHL reconfiguration and work being undertaken in connection with some of the core strategic pledges, including the anti-poverty strategy, the response to the climate emergency and the proposal to consult on the introduction of workplace parking levy in Leicester. Several scrutiny task group reviews have already commenced in the earlier part of 2021-22 with the aim of concluding and forming recommendations by the end of the municipal year.

Scrutiny commissions will continue to inspect policy and programmes as part of their ongoing work and will also convene reviews and task group work as appropriate, undertake visits and invite the participation of external partners and witnesses to assist in helping to draw recommendations for future service delivery. As part of this, it is envisaged to promote wider stakeholder engagement in Leicester's scrutiny activity and in particular, to increase the level of youth participation in scrutiny work and to identify clear roles for those that will engage.

The scrutiny team and lead directors will continue to support the scrutiny process and will ensure that members are equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver influence when examining scrutiny items. It is envisaged that a programme of scrutiny-based member training will again be delivered throughout 2021-22 and that scrutiny actions and recommendations will continue to be closely monitored in order to fully assess the impact of work undertaken by commissions.

## Contacting Scrutiny

For more information please contact the Scrutiny Team via **[scrutiny@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@leicester.gov.uk)**.

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