



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: TUESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)

Councillor Batool
Councillor Halford

Councillor Porter
Councillor Thalukdar

Councillor Westley

In Attendance:

City Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby
Deputy City Mayor, Councillor Clair

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31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joel, Joshi and Pantling.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to disclose any pecuniary or other interests they may have in the business on the agenda.

Councillor Westley declared an interest in Item 9, Housing Scrutiny Crisis report, in that family members were council tenants.

Councillor Thalukdar declared an interest in the agenda items to be discussed that family members were council tenants.

Councillor Halford declared an interest in the agenda items to be discussed that family members were council tenants.

Councillor Porter declared an interest in Item 4, Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036) that he had submitted objections on behalf of local residents, and also submitted his own objections during consultation on the plan.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors' judgement of the public interest. The Members were not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

33. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair invited the City Mayor to give a statement regarding recent incidents of unrest in Leicester East.

The City Mayor noted that he was deeply concerned about the recent events. He stated that these were particularly shocking in a city such as Leicester in that it was unique and proud of its diversity and proud of how communities lived together. He suggested that the incidents had been orchestrated by a comparatively small group of people, but nonetheless it was intensely distressing for people in the city, particularly in the locality affected.

The City Mayor said he intended to make a statement at the Special Council meeting on 29th September, and would ensure Members were briefed on the situation at the end of the coming week. He believed that the events needed and required the authority to examine further what lay behind them, and intended to review the events, and to most crucially, examine what were the motivations of those that took part, what lessons could be learnt, and to then seek to develop recommendations to be taken on board by public authorities, the council and community groups. Terms of Reference would be developed for the review group, which would be shared with Members before adoption. He also sought to ensure that Members would be briefed throughout the process.

In response to a question, the City Mayor responded that he hoped that he would be in a position to share the Terms of Reference shortly and would include opposition Members in relevant discussions, following which a discussion would be had in terms of who would lead the review. The City Mayor anticipated that a report would come out at or around start of the new year.

The Chair thanked the City Mayor for the update.

34. LEICESTER LOCAL PLAN (2020 - 2036) - PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON SUBMISSION PLAN (REGULATION 19)

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report which outlined the main strategies and proposals of the submission for the City of Leicester Local Plan for public consultation in November 2022.

Members were invited to consider the report and make any recommendations for Full Council.

The Chair stated that this was a key opportunity to examine the Local Plan proposals ahead of a Full Council decision. Members were asked to examine

the proposals and to offer comments and recommendations in respect of the final stages in adopting a new local plan. It was noted that scrutiny commissions had already looked at the plan and had provided comment on it during discussions.

The City Mayor introduced the plan. He stated it was important that the City had a Local Plan, which was a requirement, and needed to enable the Council to plot the future as a city, and particularly to have a framework for land use decisions, for employment, new developments that provided employment, and housing. It was noted there was an expectation from Government that the authority provide housing in and around Leicester, but he was keen to do it in a way that protected the vital open space, the green space and ecology within the city, which was a difficult balance. He added that in seeking to find the space for housing there was a very strong incentive, with those constraints in mind, and because it made good environmental sense in other respects for people to not to need to travel for work, leisure or other activity. He believed officers had sought to get the balance right, and they had put a tremendous amount of work and professional expertise into the plan. He also said he was very grateful for the fact they had worked very well with the district councils around Leicester, and that those districts had themselves engaged with Leicester City Council to try to get the balance to take an appropriate amount of development within their areas.

The City Mayor was mindful that a significant volume of papers lay behind the draft plan, and that it was appropriate to ensure that they were examined. He suggested to bring further detail of the strategies and policies that lay behind the local plan to the Overview Select Committee at its next ordinary meeting.

Grant Butterworth (Head of Planning) and Fabian DCosta (Team Leader, Generic Planning) were present to introduce the report. It was noted the Plan had been taken to three scrutiny meetings in recent weeks, and each Commission had been reminded of what had been said at the previous stage of consultation and how officers had addressed those comments. A summary of discussion and consideration from each of the scrutiny commissions had been published and circulated to the Overview Select Committee prior to the meeting. The extracts had reflected extensive questioning on the plan.

Members were informed the plan needed to be evidence based, and the intention was to make all documents with evidence available to all Members for review over the coming weeks, and to give opportunity for Members to seek clarity from officers.

The Chair then invited the Members that had chaired the Scrutiny Commission meetings to provide a few words on key issues raised.

Councillor Westley reported back from the Housing Scrutiny Commission which had been joined by Members of the Economic Development, Transport and Climate Emergency Commission. He added he been pleased that Members had been able to make a series of comments and observations which they hoped the Executive would act upon. He expressed thanks on behalf of all

Members to Grant Butterworth and his team, in that they were able to set out what was a complex picture in an understandable way. Points made were:

- For Housing Scrutiny Commission Members, the key factor in the Plan was the need to provide enough development land to meet the social housing needs of the community over the coming decades.
- A more general point made related to the relationship between housing and employment. It was felt those provisions should be near each other to reduce travel time and costs and to curtail air pollution impacts.
- Members were also concerned that space standards for new buildings be clearly set out in the Local Plan.
- Another concern that had been raised was the planning for high-rise buildings. Members were concerned that isolated high-rise blocks were a worse option than high-rise development near existing similar schemes.
- Finally, there was discussion about brownfield sites. It was felt some could be developed, though members were warned that the Environment Agency had stopped the development of several sites because of the risk of flooding. Members had asked for a summary report on brownfield sites across the city and their status in terms of what obstacles there were in developing them.

Councillor Halford reported back from the Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Tourism Scrutiny Commission who had been joined by Members of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission for joint scrutiny of the Local Plan item. Some of the points covered were:

- Having a reassurance for space standards for new development housing areas.
- Priority be given to affordable social housing for future housing developments.
- The council to retain and control our open spaces, as much as possible.
- The council to retain a sense of place and sustainability with consideration to be given to the history of land areas and archaeological sites of interest in Leicester, for example the Western Park Golf course site.
- Consideration be given to the needs of the younger generation and the elderly generation within areas of development, with amenities planning for all age groups, for example Rancliffe Crescent.
- Green wedge land area should be retained where possible, for example the land adjacent to Grand Central Railway.

Councillor Halford then thanked Grant Butterworth and his team for preparing an excellent presentation to scrutiny, and for taking on board the views and comments of scrutiny members to feed into the Local Plan, as it was a massive and complex topic for the council and the city.

Councillor Thalukdar, Chair of Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Commission, added that housing was needed in the city, with social housing being particularly important for the next generation of people who were finding it very

difficult to buy a house. He also added retainment of green space was important and should not be protected as far as possible.

Councillor Batool (for Councillor Pantling) reported from the Adult Social Care, Children, Young People and Education, and Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commissions which had examined the Local Plan proposals at their joint meeting. It was reported the meeting had been well attended by Members across the three commissions. Points raised mainly related to:

- Concern around the loss of green space and the impact it had on health and wellbeing.
- A desire for the Council to build its own social housing.
- The impact of further house building on access to front-line health services, including GPs and dental practices.
- The need for young people, particularly through schools, to be engaged in the process.

The meeting had agreed two specific recommendations:

1. That where possible, the Council should look to prioritise the building of more purely social housing on Council owned sites; and
2. That where possible, the Council should act to minimise the impact of new developments on existing inequalities (including those relating to health and education) especially on sites owned by the Council

The request was that Overview Select Committee endorse those comments and recommendation ahead of Full Council consideration.

The City Mayor wished to comment on one particular point, noting that there was a desperate need in the city to deliver more social housing. He wanted it noting that, whilst it could not be specified what sort of housing should be provided when drawing up the Plan, the Council could commit itself to maximise the development of social housing. He was of the opinion the Council needed to set very challenging targets and make these clear to the public so they could judge that the Council was making its contribution to social housing to relieve the desperate housing crisis in the city.

Members were then given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions and responses were given:

- A Member stated the Local Plan consultation had been ongoing for several years and had gone through another round of scrutiny, and that as part of the process members should have had the opportunity to see those documents which would have addressed some of the issues raised.
- With Government directives, and the current Levelling Up Bill, the new Prime Minister was reported to have said she did not believe that housing targets works and wanted to abolish them. It was asked if the Local Plan could be obsolete within 18 months, and that sites allocated with a few thousand houses on could be kept as green spaces.

- Officers responded that there had been various comments made by prospective prime ministers, the Prime Minister, and ministers. The Government had set a target of 300,000 a year and it was believed the Government would set context on how they would be delivered nationally. It was reported that the latest announcement talked about investment zones as an answer to how houses would be delivered and where local authorities want to see the houses developed. Since the announcement, the indication was the investment zones would not be able to deliver the requirement for the level of housing need evidenced.
- Officers also stated it was highly unlikely that, with the government recently increasing the target by 35% which led to all of the work with the districts to take half of the housing need from the city, that the government would reduce the housing requirement to a level recommended in the plan. It was noted that the comments made at all the scrutiny meetings included the need to find deliverable sites for housing to tackle housing crisis. In the Plan the majority of the sites were on brownfield land but there was a need to open up other sites that were the most deliverable. It was concluded that the Plan would not be out of date until the government introduced new planning legislation, but even if they decided to amend targets through the Levelling Up Bill it would take several years for secondary legislation to come through to confirm targets, in which time the Plan would be due its five-year refresh.
- Members believed the radical plans the government had announced on planning could have an impact as well. The paper on the Housing Crisis to be discussed later in the meeting noted that additional land was needed, with Leicester running short on sites, therefore, it would be a long, up-hill struggle to reach any targets.
- Officers noted the Levelling Up bill was based upon the White Paper produced over two years ago, and that there was a danger that legislation took a long time to come to fruition, and the Levelling Up bill did not specify a new approach to housing targets so there was likely to be even more delay before the new government had chance to consult to confirm a new mechanism. In the meantime, the biggest imperative was to progress as quickly as possible the duty to cooperate which would be abolished under the Levelling Up bill, which would mean the Council would lose the ability to capitalise on the agreement with the districts, which sought to deliver just over half of the total of housing need.
- A Member was pleased that some of the pressure had been reduced on some of the green field sites within the city, but that shifting the problem of housing building to the other side on the boundary with a large amount of people moving to the surrounding areas of Leicester would still place pressures on existing services such as hospitals, GPs, etc which were already struggling to cope, and that unless there was an approach laid out in the Local Plan on how it would be addressed, it could be disastrous.
- Officers noted there was a very substantial document which was an infrastructure study which had been published at the last consultation stage, and had invited comment on health and a whole range of infrastructure topics to support the need for delivery of the Plan, and had since been updated and was included in the bundle of evidence which would be made available for viewing. The Government, and those in charge of development

and partners such as the police would find that infrastructure information very useful.

- A Member stated that the impact of all the development, new housing and industrial units on the fight against global warming and climate change, with the construction industry being a major contributor to carbon emissions, which should be addressed in the Local Plan through policy and construction materials and was something the Council should be pushing. As the first environment city in Europe, Leicester should look to have minimal impact on the environment.
- With regards to global warming and carbon efficiency, officers responded that the authority was restricted by national government policies on how far the Local Plan could go in terms of setting those standards.

The Chair asked why the process had taken so long to reach its current stage. The City Mayor responded that there had been many statutory processes to negotiate and it had been a complicated process which had required careful consideration of sites, with the procedures being changed by Government on a number of occasions throughout the process. It was also worth noting that the authority were significantly some way into the process compared with other authorities.

Officers also responded that the draft plan had been due to go out to consultation just when the first lockdown was announced, following which there had been reconsideration of sites, and reconsideration of capacity work. Officers had also been working with districts on the issue of unmet need and there had been a lot of evidence and work done on where unmet need could be accommodated, which had been a huge piece of work affecting timescales.

The Chair moved and was seconded by Councillor Westley, that the Commissions' comments and recommendations be supported, and also comments made at the Overview Select Committee meeting, and that they be taken to Full Council.

The Chair noted that the associated Local Plan policies and strategies would be brought to the next ordinary meeting of the Committee on 3rd November 2022, and in the meantime, these would be made available to all Members. He thanked Grant Butterworth and his team for all of their hard work.

AGREED:

That:

1. The key local plan strategies, policies, site allocation, and provisions for consultation be noted be made available to Members for review.
2. The Overview Select Committee endorse the comments and recommendations from the joint Scrutiny Commission meetings, along with the comments and recommendations from Overview Select Committee Members to Full Council on 29th September 2022.

3. The associated Local Plan policies and strategies be brought to the next ordinary meeting of Overview Select Committee on 3rd November 2022.

35. FINANCIAL REPORTS

36. REVENUE MONITORING APRIL - JUNE 2022

The Deputy Director of Finance submitted a report to the Overview Select Committee which was the first in the monitoring cycle for 2022/23 and which provided early indications of the financial pressures the Council was facing for the year.

The Committee was recommended to consider the overall position presented within the report and make any observations it saw fit.

The Head of Finance presented the report and the following points were noted:

- The report highlighted a forecast of a £12.7million overspend for the year due to three main reasons: income shortfalls due to the on-going impact of the pandemic; inflation and energy costs which were much higher than anticipated including significant contracts such as the contract for waste collection and disposal; and the expected pay award which would exceed the budget by £7.4million.
- All councils were facing significant budget pressures, most of which would be ongoing to future financial years.

The Chair stated he felt that Finance officers were managing well both the present and future problems. The Head of Finance responded that the report showed current year problems, but inflation and the pay award meant there was now significant additional pressure on future years' budget forecasts. She added that for the current financial year the pressures would be managed under the Managed Reserves Strategy but that this meant there would be less funding available to support future years.

The Chair requested, if possible, for future reports to show how plans were being affected by the additional budget pressures, and to include more progress on how issues were being managed. The Head of Finance reported that these points would be picked up in the draft 2023/24 budget which would be available towards the end of the calendar year.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and responses were given at the meeting, as follows:

- The Housing Revenue Account had an overspend of £1.4m but was saving money on vacant posts of £1.2million. It was noted that voids did not generate rental income. It was asked that, if there was a shortage of people in the housing department that were able to refurbish properties to get them back out to rent, would it not be better to recruit to the vacant posts to speed up the process of getting the backlog of empty properties let. The

Head of Finance would ask the Director of Housing to provide a written response to the Member.

- It was reported that the Biffa waste management contract costs increased annually with inflation, and the expected impact was built into the budget each year. As inflation had turned out higher than predicted, contract costs now exceeded the current year's budget. The Deputy Director of Finance added that various councils had different contracts with Biffa. It was noted that Biffa would also have seen their costs increase through inflationary pressures. He added that with regards to the recent increase in share price for Biffa, there had been movement in recent months from parties wanting to take over Biffa Group.
- With regards to the increase in the running cost of swimming pools, officers were analysing total costs with the inflation rate rising, and that options for future funding would then be considered. It was acknowledged a wider area would be looked at, to include the festivals and events budget and the funding of lights etc. An energy report would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.
- Members asked if they would be told of problems with local community centres, for example, having problems with meeting the costs of heating. It was reported that for any Council building their energy costs would be met. The forecast for next year was being looked at and would be built into the budget.
- There were overspends in housing, including on homelessness, landlord services and district heating. It was acknowledged that the charges to tenants and leaseholders for district heating would need to increase. It was noted that households on the district scheme received heating and hot water, but electricity would come directly from their chosen commercial supplier. The Government were giving a £400 discount over six months to all households, which would be applied to a household's electricity bill from October 2022.
- The Government had recently announced support for businesses with their energy bills which would include schools. It was not known at this point if the support would be extended to the district heating scheme costs; this would likely depend on whether the supply tariff costs charged to the Council exceed the tariff support threshold.
- People's energy suppliers would receive the £400 assistance from Government, who would then pass on the reduction to residents. People should not have to do anything as it the reduction for each month would be applied automatically.
- It was asked if the Council should review the plan to light up empty buildings at night in light of rising energy costs.
- . Information on the additional waste contract and energy cost breakdown would be sent to the Members directly.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and noted the recommendation to consider the overall position presented, and the recommendations for Executive which were supported.

AGREED:

That:

1. The overall position as outlined in the report be noted.
2. The Director of Housing to be asked to provide information on the management of voids and that information regarding recruitment to vacant posts in Housing repairs should also be provided to Members.
3. Information on the additional waste contract to be provided to Members.
4. An energy costs report would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

37. CAPITAL MONITORING APRIL - JUNE 2022

The Deputy Director of Finance submitted a report to the Overview Select Committee which showed the position of the Capital Programme as at the end of June 2022 (Period 3).

The Committee was recommended to consider the overall position presented within the report and make any observations it saw fit.

The Head of Finance reported on the following:

- The report was the first Capital Monitoring report for 2022/23 financial year. As previously reported, there was slippage and cost pressures to the current capital programme due to the pandemic, inflation and volatility in the construction industry.
- The report highlighted three decisions the Executive would be asked to approve on the Capital Programme.

Members were given the opportunity to comment and ask questions, and the following responses were given:

- The Jewry Wall Museum improvements delay in completion date was referenced. Officers reported the project was previously showing as red due to the contractor going into administration, which had stopped the whole scheme. The project had since returned to amber and a procurement exercise had been undertaken for a new contractor to continue the works.
- The Chair recalled at the beginning of the pandemic it had been queried if work could continue in council houses. It was agreed that there were concerns initially with repair workers going into houses which had slowed down works. There were still some residents with concerns about having people in the house, but the workers were catching up on repairs.

The Chair noted the recommendations for the Executive, and the recommendation for the Committee to note the overall position in the report.

AGREED:

1. That the Committee note the overall position as outlined in the report.
2. That the Committee support the recommendations for the Executive.

38. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report which provided a summary of the Scrutiny Annual Report for the Municipal Year 2021-22.

The Committee was invited to review the report and provide any comments or recommendations before the report was taken for consideration at Full Council.

The Chair informed the meeting that Full Council was required to approve the Scrutiny Annual Report each year, and the report set out each of the nine Commissions' highlights and achievements over the year. He added there was so much work ongoing in scrutiny and that Chair and Vice-Chairs of commissions had done an excellent job over the year.

The Chair said he was very pleased to recommend the report to Full Council and looked forward to saying at Council how important scrutiny was. He thanked the City Mayor and the Executive for listening to scrutiny, and thanked all officers that had worked alongside Members on scrutiny.

The Chair noted the report.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted and be forwarded to Full Council for endorsement.

39. FINAL HOUSING SCRUTINY TASK GROUP REPORT - HOUSING CRISIS

The Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Task Group submitted the Scrutiny Review "Housing Crisis in Leicester" report.

On behalf of Councillor Gee who had chaired the task group, Councillor Westley stated the report followed one of the most important reviews that had been undertaken. He noted that officers in the Housing Division, Planning Team and Members had taken part in the task group meetings and were all thanked for their part. It had been opened up to all non-Executive Members, who had made significant and constructive contributions both during the review and in the framing of recommendations. Points made were:

- The review had started in April 2022, and the economic developments since that time had highlighted and amplified the complex range of issues which made up the full picture of the housing crisis, which affected both public and private housing, as well as those who were homeless.
- The Government had over time cut the support payments which directly helped people to meet housing costs and to support low-income households. With current inflation levels, it was putting more pressure on those who could least afford it.
- Members believed a lack of affordable social housing was a major cause of the developing housing crisis. Land to build new homes had been identified

as a critical issue in an already highly developed city, but the major drain on social housing for those in greatest need had been the Government's continuing Right-to-Buy policy.

- The Task Group had produced a range of recommendations, many of which were aimed at national Government, but also aimed at driving development and strategy at a local level. A framework for devising programmes and objectives had been identified in the recommendations which provided a guide for future work by the Housing Scrutiny Commission.

The Committee was asked to endorse the report prior to it being forwarded to the Executive. The Chair of the Housing Task Group also endorsed in particular the idea of further work on the Housing Crisis in Leicester by the Housing Scrutiny Commission to continue to develop the ideas of the task group, and that work should continue to set out programmes and define milestones and objectives for those programmes.

The City Mayor stated it was an excellent piece of work, and an example of good scrutiny and added to the good governance of the city by the Council. He added it was timely and he welcomed the reference to the problems caused by Right to Buy. He said he wanted people to be able to own their own homes if they so wished, but Right to Buy had significantly reduced the Council's housing stock which prevents people who wanted to rent a council property from being able to do so, and that they had to largely rely on the private sector at much higher rents. He added that the pattern of housing in Leicester over recent decades had been the decline in housing that the Council were able to provide for people and denied people needing to rent a home the right to a decent landlord.

The Chair stated that this was an excellent piece of work and thanked Councillor Gee, Councillor Westley and the task group, the Assistant City Mayor for Housing and Education, and also the officers who had provided evidence throughout the review.

The Chair supported the recommendations and asked that the Overview Select Committee be copied into the response from the Executive.

AGREED:

That:

1. The Overview Select Committee support the recommendations.
2. The Executive response to the report be provided to the Housing Scrutiny Commission and also copied to members of the Overview Select Committee.

40. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

- a) The Chair informed the Committee that Angie Smith, the Democratic Support Officer, was leaving the authority. He noted she had been with the authority for some time and wished her all the very best in her future role. The City Mayor joined the Chair in extending best wishes to her for the future.

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 6:57pm.

41. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for 3 November 2022, 5.30pm at City Hall.

