



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2023 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor Surti (Vice Chair)

Councillor Bajaj
Councillor Dave

Councillor Dawood
Councillor Joel

Councillor Porter
Councillor Waddington

Also present:

Sir Peter Soulsby

City Mayor

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48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

There were no declarations of interest.

50. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chair's announcements.

51. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

52. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

No matters were raised as part of this item.

53. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

There were no questions, representations or statements of case.

54. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

55. TRACKING OF PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which provided an update on the status of outstanding petitions against the Council's target of providing a formal response within three months of being referred to the Divisional Director.

AGREED:

That the status of the outstanding petitions be noted, and to remove those petitions marked 'Petition Complete' Ref: from the report.

56. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

There were no questions for the City Mayor.

57. CALL-IN OF BUDGET SAVINGS DECISION

A report was submitted informing the Committee that the Executive decision taken by the City Mayor on 24 November 2023 relating to in-year budget savings had been the subject of a six-member call-in under the procedures at Rule 12 of Part 4D, City Mayor and Executive Procedure Rules, of the Council's Constitution.

The Chair clearly outlined the process that he would follow in determining how to resolve the call-in. The Commission was recommended to either:

- a) Note the report without further comment or recommendation. (If the report is noted the process continues and the call in would be considered at Full Council); or
- b) Comment on the specific issues raised by the call-in. (If comments are made the process continues and the comments and call in would be considered at Full Council) or
- c) Resolve that the call-in be withdrawn.

The Chair invited the proposer and seconder of the call-in, Councillor Kitterick and Councillor Bajaj to address the committee. The following points were raised:

- Although many of the decisions reflected in the report were uncontentious and were being undertaken for operational reasons, it was felt that more detailed scrutiny of these was required.
- Detail was sought regarding the impact of the restructuring the provision of waste services.
- Detail behind the anticipated additional income within Bereavement Services was also sought.
- The level of saving within Enablement Services was seen as particularly significant.

The Chair invited the Director of Finance to respond to the call-in. The following points were put forward:

- In respect of waste management, complaints were now handled internally, and the City Council had charged a small increase for trade waste.
- With regard to Cleansing Services, the City Council had purchased more street cleaning machinery and required fewer staff as a result.
- A number of long-term vacancies had been held within the Regulatory Services division.
- In respect of savings made for CAMHS support, it was noted that external funding had now been secured in order to meet provision.
- Domestic Abuser provision was now primarily delivered in-house rather than sourcing external providers.
- With regard to enablement services, the provision of a 12-week intervention programme resulted in fewer required staff. This led to the formulation of a service review. It was reported that this would not impact service delivery.

Members of the Commission discussed the report which highlighted the following points:

- During the last decade, the Council's level of spend had reduced by over 50% as a result of government cuts. These cuts were very challenging for the City Council and it was reported that further savings would be required in the future.
- It was made clear that services that were not filling all vacant posts would comprise a staffing structure that was able to successfully deliver the required service.
- Further information would be provided in respect of fee increases within Bereavement Services.
- Further information would be provided in respect of the total number of deleted posts as a result of all of the savings proposed in the report.

- It was noted that individual scrutiny commissions should be responsible for examining the impact of changes to services within their portfolios.

Councillor Cassidy moved that, following the points raised during the meeting, the call-in be withdrawn. This was seconded by Cllr Surti. Upon being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the call-in be withdrawn and that the Committee supports the implementation of the Executive decision.
- 2) That further information be provided to members in respect of the total number of deleted posts as a result of all of the savings proposed in the report; and
- 3) That further information be provided to members in respect of fee increases within Bereavement Services.

58. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING - APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted the second report of the monitoring cycle for 2023/24 which provided an update on the financial pressures faced by the Council and the worsening picture on this and next years' budgets.

Following a brief overview of the report by the Director of Finance, the following points were made in response to questions and comments from members:

- The City Catering service had delivered £200,000 in staffing savings.
- The suggestion raised previously at the committee in respect of unused school meals was being taken up with the Schools Forum.
- It was acknowledged that solutions to the increasing number of LAC placements were required. Personal budgets were available for families and it was hoped that the take-up of this option would increase further.
- There was provision in the current capital programme for the building of two new children's residential homes, and consideration was also being given to how the number of foster placements in Leicester could be enhanced.
- The City Council was considering the delivery of a multi-million pound development to enable and easing of the pressures of dealing with an increase in the level of homelessness. Further detail would be forthcoming in due course.
- A number of incentives were outlined which attracted more service users into City Council leisure centres. It was noted that there had recently been a significant level of capital investment into the centres across the city and a growth in membership subscriptions had been experienced. Officers also stated that the pricing stricture had been reviewed, which had led to the provision of a greater number of different concessions for customers.
- Further detail would be provided to members in relation to:

- (i) The overall level of bus subsidy which was being paid.
- (ii) The number of Looked After Care (LAC) placements which were delivered out of the city. This matter was also being examined in more detail by the Children, Young people and Education Scrutiny Commission.
- (iii) The steps being taken to fill current vacant posts within the Housing department.
- (iv) Existing usage figures for the district heating scheme
- (v) Detailed information of the existing workforce and detail of the shortages of skills which were currently influencing the market.

AGREED:

That the overall position presented in the report be noted and that further information on a number of matters raised be provided to members, as outlined above.

59. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING - APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted a report that showed the position of the capital programme at the end of September 2023. She confirmed that this was the second such report submitted to scrutiny during the current financial year.

As part of the introduction to the item, the Director of Finance explained that delays around construction and inflationary pressures would result in a small proportion of capital schemes being completed later than anticipated. Progress in relation to these schemes would be detailed in future capital monitoring reports.

It was also stated that a number of additions, transfers and policy provision releases were recommended and each of these were outlined in paragraph 2.1.

In response to comments and questions from members, the following was reported:

- Projects highlighted in purple within the report were on hold for various reasons, which had nothing to do with the management of the capital programme.
- No further delays were anticipated to the Leicester Railway Station – Levelling Up project.
- The money allocated towards the Ashton Green Access Road project represented the next phase of work. This was anticipated to be complete by December 2024.
- The Green Homes grant allocation was transferred to private sector partners who would be delivering the required work.

AGREED:

That the overall position in the report including the recommendations for the Executive be noted.

60. INCOME COLLECTION APRIL 2023 - SEPTEMBER 2023

The Director of Finance submitted a report which detailed progress made in collecting debts raised by the Council during the first six months of 2023-24, together with debts outstanding and brought forward from the previous year. It also set out details of debts written off under delegated authority that it had not been possible to collect after reasonable effort and expense.

The Director of Finance noted that this was the first income collection report presented to the committee during the financial year. The overall level of debt outstanding to the local authority had not significantly dropped-off and the Director of Finance acknowledged that the cost-of-living crisis had presented escalating problems for many residents and businesses. A dedicated web page (BetterOff) had been set-up to assist those who were struggling to manage debt.

In response to comments and questions from members, the following was reported:

- Performance data against other local authorities was not always accessible. In terms of business rate collection, the City Council was ranked 9th out of 14 comparator authorities, though this often fluctuated.
- For the period under review, a figure of £0.7m had been raised from bus lane enforcement fines.

AGREED:

That the committee noted the overall position presented within the report.

61. MID-YEAR REVIEW OF TREASURY - MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted a report which reviewed how the Council conducted its borrowing and investments during the first six months of 2023/24.

The Director of Finance stated that this was first report of the financial year presented to the committee with regard to treasury management activity.

The report provided an overview of treasury management and included a summary of loans, investment and borrowing activity. It was noted that the base rate had increased from 0.1% to 5.25% since December 2021.

It was further noted that the City Council had recently repaid a £25m loan to Barclays originally due for repayment in 2077.

In response to questions in relation investments into the Lothbury Trust property fund, it was reported that this was initially envisaged as a long-term

investment. However, the Trust had suffered a number of significant redemptions and it was likely to be terminated on 31 December 2023. Should this occur, it was likely that all funds would be returned to the City Council. The Director of Finance agreed to provide an update in due course.

It was noted that some of the average rate information was incomplete within the loans and investments table included in the report. It was agreed that further information be provided to members.

AGREED:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That further detail with regard to the status of the Lothbury Trust investment be provided to members in due course; and
- (3) That a revised version of the loans and investments table included in the report be provided to members.

62. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme for the Committee was noted.

63. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of other urgent business.