



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 11 APRIL 2024 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cassidy (Chair)

Councillor Dave
Councillor Joel

Councillor Waddington

Councillor Osman
Councillor Porter

Also present:

Sir Peter Soulsby

City Mayor

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25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Dawood.

26. 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.

27. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced that this was the last meeting of the municipal year and as such the next meeting may have different members on the Committee.

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Reference was made to the Council spend in 2024/25 being more than that of past budgets, during which time, costs associated with Adult Social Care (ASC) had increased. The Director of Finance would follow up on this outside the meeting.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

29. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Treasury Management training session for members had been well attended. All members of the Committee had been invited and there had been no requests for it to be rearranged. The Chief Finance Officer was asked to consider whether further sessions could be arranged, perhaps online.

30. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations and statements of case had been submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

31. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

32. 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.

It was noted that none were marked as 'red'.

AGREED:

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

33. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The Chair reminded members that he would prefer for all questions to be provided in advance, which would help to provide more detailed responses at meetings.

The Chair accepted the following questions to be asked to the City Mayor:

1. Mario Duda, a youth representative asked:

At a previous meeting of OSC, a presentation was given, and a proposal was raised in relation to the use of unused school meal food. Please can you tell us if there is any update in relation to this?"

In responding to this question, the City Mayor made the following points:

- Much research had been conducted into the possibility and this had been followed up. This was a very important issue as food waste cost money and used resources as well as not being good for the environment and was a particular issue as many did not have access to sufficient food.
- However, unfortunately the idea of re-distributing unused school meal food to families for free had many constraints on it, most notably the food safety regulations that needed to be followed. These regulations stipulated that hot food was only safe for 90 minutes and cold food was deemed unsafe after four hours at room temperature.
- Boxing up unused food and distributing it would most likely take more than 90 minutes and therefore it was concluded that hot food, which made up much of the food that went to waste, could not be passed on. Cold food could potentially be used for another dinner sitting.
- Allergen information also needed to be managed.
- As leftover food could not be packed up and sent safely, the focus should perhaps be on preventing food waste. Schools needed to look to reduce waste and the Council had been encouraging this through the e-bulletin, the 'keeping-in-touch' meetings and the Eco Schools Team. The Council's own provider, City Catering, was working on new ways of reducing waste, such as encouraging the pre-ordering of meals a day in advance so that the right number of meals were provided, although this could be challenging for young people. Portion sizes, menus to meet children's preferences and tasting sessions for positive food choices were also being looked at.
- Above all, it was important to record and monitor food waste to enable City Catering to make decisions on future production.
- The Council continued to support families in need through local food banks and food initiatives and a range of projects including holiday activities and food programmes for children who receive holiday meals.

In response to a question around parents being asked to make meal

choices in advance and choose meals based on the preferences of the child and whether this could be explored to see if it resulted in a reduction in food waste before it was rolled out across the city. The City Mayor noted that the system may not always result in a reduction in food waste, particularly due to changing preferences of children, but took the point on board.

In response to a question regarding the sign-off of the accounts for year-end 31 March 2023 by external auditors Grant Thornton. The Director of Finance confirmed the papers would be going to Governance and Audit the following week, when it was anticipated they would be approved.

In response to further questions regarding challenges on the valuation of buildings and land, the Director of Finance noted that there were national issues surrounding valuation and the rules were complex to follow.

With particular regard to the value of a building recently sold on Vaughan Way, the Director of Finance would look into this and make contact with Cllr Porter outside the meeting.

The Chair noted the importance of submitting questions to the City Mayor in advance of the meeting as it allows a chance to prepare responses.

AGREED:

- (1) That the responses to the questions raised be noted; and
- (2) Further detail regarding the value of the building recently sold on Vaughan Way would be provided directly to Cllr Porter.

34. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING - APRIL-DECEMBER 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted the third report in the monitoring cycle for 2023/24 and provided an update on the financial pressures faced by the Council.

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

As part of the introduction to the item, the Director of Finance noted that:

- This was the third report of the financial year 2023/24.
- The Council was facing particular pressures in education and children's social care, which was showing an overspend of £12.2m.
- Further to this there were continued pressures in homelessness and

waste management.

- The pay award was £2.5m above what was budgeted for.
- The pressures were offset by some areas such as improvements around Adult Social Care (ASC), in which there had been an underspend of £5.8m.
- Additionally, with regard to capital financing there had been higher interest rates than forecast and cash balances have remained high.
- Growth in sports memberships had been higher than expected, leading to income of £0.7m, meaning that the budget could be reduced accordingly.
- Two recommendations, one related to additional grant that it is proposed to move to the managed reserve and the second identifies savings that can reduce budgets.

The Chair reminded the Committee that the recommendations in the report were for the Executive, and it was for the Committee to note and comment on the report.

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

- With regard to a query on the comparative spending on ASC in this budget compared to ten years ago, the Director of Finance noted the distinction between gross (without income) and net (with income) figures. The Director of Finance would ascertain the exact figures for comparison outside the meeting.
- In response to a query on forecasting, the Director of Finance clarified that forecasting was a best estimate and on the information we have available. predicted.
- In terms of the ASC budget increasing in 2023/24 despite the downward trend, it was clarified that whilst there had been an underspend, it was not near the level of growth put in, and additionally, the extra income was not known when setting the budget. When the 2024/25 budget was put together, some of the forecast was built in which fed into the growth, so the growth going into the 2024/25 budget would be reduced. If the improvement work had not been ongoing, the growth figure would have been higher.
- With regard to the allocation of additional funding from the government, funding is not always ringfenced to a specific service for example the business rates national surplus.
- Regarding overspend on Children, Young People and Families, it was confirmed £2m was set aside to provide local provision for residential homes for children. It was confirmed options were being looked at for the executive to consider at a later point. In terms of ways to better control the overspend, this was being looked at and an update would be brought to the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission.
- Annual accounts could not be used for outturn reporting as it included

aspects that could not be charged to the Council Taxpayer. Additionally, direct comparisons could not be made between different budget reports due to changes between years.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report and the recommendations to the Executive be noted.
- 2) That further information in relation to the queries detailed above be provided to members.
- 3) That a report come to a future meeting of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission on Provision of Care Packages/Residential Accommodation on CLA – Council provision and the private sector.

35. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING -APRIL-DECEMBER 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted a report to show the position of the capital programme at the end of December 2023 (Period 9).

The Committee was recommended to consider the overall position presented within this report and make any observations it saw fit and note the quarterly prudential indicators presented in Appendix F.

The Director of Finance noted that:

- This was the third such report for 2023/24. As per previous reports it continued to flag pressures and slippages.
- Members were reminded that once pressures were reported the ratings were reset.
- This was the first time the report had contained the additional index on prudential indicators. The Council had approved the Treasury Strategy in February. This appendix confirmed that the Council had complied with the Treasury limits.

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

- In response to a query about progress on the re-opening of Jewry Wall Museum, the City Mayor reported that he had visited the site with the media to look at progress made, and it was hoped to open early in 2025. The listed building had been used well and was fit for purpose. The importance of the site as the biggest example of non-military Roman masonry in the UK was highlighted.
- In terms of investment in Leicester Museum and Art Gallery (LMAG), a long period of investment had been undertaken and galleries had been moved around, including the important collection of Picasso exhibits. A new café was being developed as customers at museums often

expected refreshments, the café would make the museum more fit for purpose and accessible. It was further added that visitors would not stay long at the museum if they could not get refreshments. The new café was replacing the previous one as the previous café had been at the back of the building and there was now a better space that it could occupy. This was only a small part of the remodelling that continued for many years on a regionally important gallery.

- With regard to the paintings in the gallery, the gallery had many important paintings that were rotated.
- Regarding works on St George's churchyard, the scheme had been scaled back and trees were not the major focus. The area was currently perceived as safe or friendly and as such work was needed. The planning applications, which included the plans had been submitted, and were available to view.
- With regard to city estate shops on Thurncourt Road, these had been looked at pre-Covid. An adequate scheme was yet to be seen. The shops were an important part of the area they served and could benefit from investment. The City Mayor would ask Ward Councillors to consider and discuss how improvements could be approached.
- Regarding the developments at Leicester Railway Station, it was noted it was a complex project with many parties involved and was dependent on the availability of contractors was being awaited.
- It was suggested that a site visit to LMAG and Jewry Wall Museum be arranged for members of the Committee and also members of the Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission.
- With regard to the Lothbury fund, an extension had been granted for the fund to see if an acquisition could happen. This was a 60-day process, and an update would be available shortly. This would be updated in the Annual Treasury Report. Treasury advice would be sought once the decision was known.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted
- 2) That the quarterly prudential indicators presented in Appendix F be noted.
- 3) That a site visit to LMAG and Jewry Wall Museum be arranged for members of the Committee and also members of the Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission.
- 4) That the City Mayor make contact with the Thurncourt Ward Councillors in respect of possible improvements to the Thurncourt Road shops; and
- 5) That an update on the Lothbury Fund be provided in the Annual Treasury Report.

36. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee was asked to consider the current work programme and to make comments and/or amendments as it considered necessary.

It was noted that the next meeting would be in the next municipal year and items would need to be carried over.

It was further noted that the informal scrutiny group on Workforce Representation had met, and another meeting was due to take place, although this had been postponed due to the cyber incident.

AGREED:

That the current work programme be noted.

37. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance and other officers.

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 18:38