



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
CULTURE AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: WEDNESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Dawood – Chair
Councillor Mohammed – Vice Chair

Councillor Aldred
Councillor Halford
Councillor Singh Johal

Councillor Chauhan
Councillor Haq

In Attendance:

Deputy City Mayor Councillor Cutkelvin
Assistant City Mayor Councillor Dempster

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100. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Joshi and Cllr Mohammed.

101. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have had in the business to be discussed.

No declarations were made.

102. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission held on 4 November 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

103. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

104. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

105. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

106. DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 AND DRAFT GENERAL REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26

As the reports on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme were related, they were taken as one item.

The Director of Finance submitted reports detailing the proposed Capital Programme for 2025/26 and the proposed Revenue Budget for 2025/26.

Key points included:

- The medium-term outlook was the most severe ever experienced. The Local Authority, along with many other authorities, would face increasing difficulties with budget balancing. Some local authorities had already issued a Section 114 notice and,
- The aim of the strategy was to balance budgets up to and including 2027/28; if successful, the budget strategy would avoid the same outcome for the next three years.
- The decade of austerity up to 2020 was an influencing factor, during this period services other than Social Care had to be reduced by 53% in real terms. This had substantially reduced the scope to make further cuts.
- There were also cost pressures which were not matched by an increase in income. These included Social Care, support for homeless households, and increased inflation.
- The Council were fortunate to have one-off monies available, however, following the Chancellor's national budget in October, more constraints were anticipated.
- The Government understood the situation that councils were in, however, it was thought that new funding would be modest and a cut in 'unprotected services' which usually include local authorities would be expected in the period to 2028/29.
- There were five strands to the strategy:
 - Strand 1 - To release one off monies of £110m to buy time. This included £20m from earmarked reserves and £90m previously set aside to fund the current Capital Programme. This left a gap in

funding for already approved schemes. Borrowing of £90m would be required which would cost the local authority £5m pounds in interest and debt repayments. This would not usually be contemplated.

- Strand 2 – Involves reductions of £13m from the approved Capital Programme to reduce the amount of borrowing required.
- Strand 3 – The sale of property to secure an additional £60m. To use this for the budgets, permission is required from The Secretary of State.
- Strand 4 - To constrain growth in statutory services that are under demand-led pressure. Much work on this had already been done, cost growth had been reduced by estimates of £99m per year.
- Strand 5 – To make ongoing savings to revenue budget of £20m per year.
- Savings required that were relevant to this Commission included £7.2m needed from Neighbourhoods and Environmental Services and £2.3m needed from Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment.
- The strategy was heavily reliant on one-off money to reach 2027/28, in which year a gap of £90m was expected.
- The strategy included risk as it was difficult to predict new pressures in social care or the housing crisis. Lots of one-off monies were being used, as such, an unexpected cost of £5m would result in the use of £15m of reserves being needed unless more cuts could be found. This was another reason why annual savings were important.
- Elements of the Capital Programme relevant to the Commission included:
 - £1m for Neighbourhood Services Transformation.
 - £140k for Staff Welfare Facilities at Evington Park Depot.
 - £150k for Grounds maintenance Equipment.
 - £80k as match funding for the Historic Building Grant Programme.
 - £50k for festival decorations.
 - Invest to Save Schemes, including £550k for the relocation of the King Richard III café, £445k for street cleaning equipment, £180k for the automatic locking of public toilets and £55k for the Trees and Woodlands Stump Grinder.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- In response to a question raised regarding savings for homelessness services, it was explained that investments had been approved by the Council to invest in properties to alleviate pressures. This included work done in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and grant funded schemes through which houses had been built and properties acquired. Projections were based on what would happen once the work was undertaken.

- Points made about the recommendation to delegate powers to the City Mayor to add/amend capital schemes by up to £10m, and the suggestion it be decreased so as to give the Council more of a say over how money was used would be fed back.
- Points made regarding flood drainage were better raised in a different forum.
- It was clarified that the Policy Provisions were pots of money set aside that required further decisions to be released. These were set aside with the anticipation that they may be required, but with further detail needed for their release. As such there are no specific schemes which have been cancelled by removing these provisions. A large sum was set aside for New Ways of Working; now that more settled accommodation arrangements are in place this is no longer required. Some money had also been set aside for strategic acquisitions that was no longer required.
- With regard to a question raised about Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) it was clarified that these included some internal combustion engines such as diesel and hybrid and electric vehicles and were considered for use where appropriate, sustainable and affordable.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.
- 3) That points made on about the City Mayor's Delegated powers, and the suggestion that the amounts the City Mayor has authority over be reduce so as to give the Council more of a say over how money was used be fed back.
- 4) That the report be brought to Overview Select Committee prior to Full Council.

Deputy City Mayor Councillor Cutkelvin joined the meeting during the discussion of this item.

107. FLY-TIPPING UPDATE

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report to provide an update on fly-tipping issues across the city. A slide presentation was given (as included in the agenda pack).

Key points other than those in the slides included:

- Initiatives included Ward Action Plans. These were mini-projects within an area coordinated between City Wardens, Cleansing Services and Housing. Private Sector Housing and Waste Management were also involved. These could involve identifying issues at a particular time, also conducting cleanup days and door-knocking schemes.

- With regard to investigations and fines, the opportunities to investigate were limited by a lack of identifiable marks. Unidentifiable tips were still cleaned away for the public good.
- Serious or repeat cases could be referred on to the EnviroCrime team.
- When evidence was found by City Wardens, the person identified was asked for an interview.
- Other authorities were increasing their fixed penalty notices. This was discretionary to the local authority.
- Match spending was done where necessary.
- A positive effect was starting to be seen.
- AI was being used along with CCTV to assist with enforcement as there is a need to prove tipping was done by a certain person. Cars could be traced by DVLA records.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- In response to a question about how fines and prosecutions were counted, it was explained that a City Warden would investigate an incidence. If there was no evidence as to who was responsible, it would be removed by Cleansing Services. If there was evidence, the person involved would be called in and if there was a prosecution then there may be a fine. The figure on the slide was for both prosecutions and fines.
- Data on the number of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) to businesses in comparison to households could be obtained.
- It was clarified that a fine was the final stage of the process.
- People in St Matthews had been approached and it appeared as though many were unaware that leaving rubbish bags outside a bin was fly tipping.
- People could be persuaded not to fly tip both through education and through fines in a 'carrot and stick' approach.
- With regard to points raised about fly tipping around recycling areas, it was explained that a balance was needed as people needed the opportunity to recycle correctly, but people also needed to be discouraged from tipping at these sites. It was necessary to see if recycling sites needed to be there or if they invited fly tipping.
- Bring Banks were beneficial to some communities but detrimental for others. It was intended to encourage people to use them for household waste recycling. It was accepted that they did not always work, and some had been removed.
- There were a number of CCTV cameras across the city, including at the Brite Centre and Cossington Rec. Cameras were deployed in problem areas to capture fly tipping.
- Councillors challenged whether more city wardens would help combat fly tipping.
- Leafleting could be effective but was resource-heavy. A balanced

approach was necessary. If it was identified as a good strategy, then it could be used. A nuanced approach was needed.

- Not every fly-tip led to an investigation. People could deny responsibility if there was no proof and the tips still needed to be removed. A person would need to be identified for an investigation to take place.
- Eco-Schools teams had been worked with to educate children from a young age about recycling. Information was also available through libraries and community groups aimed at different levels of society. However, not every level of society could be reached.
- Where plans were in place and successful, the Council teams along with local people could make a difference.
- Communities could be empowered to help a culture shift through the spread of information about what constituted fly tipping and how it could be avoided.
- When comparing Leicester to other authorities, it was important to consider the differences between them particularly in terms of demographics. For example, in areas with high numbers of students and renters with a high turnover of residents, the issue would be exacerbated.
- More money and resources to tackle the issue would be welcome, but the money was not available to invest to heavily in the service. However, it was thought that the service was getting things right on balance.
- This was a societal issue, and the issue was harder to tackle if information was not passed on.
- City Wardens were praised for their work considering the pressure they were under.
- The use of the Love Leicester app was advocated as a helpful start to the process of dealing with fly tipping.
- The city had good provision of regular household waste recycling, the provision in Leicester was higher than in other Councils. This helped to keep fly tipping numbers where they were.
- Westcotes, Stoneygate and Fosse were all selective licenced areas. This in combination with being densely populated areas with lots of businesses meant that fly tipping would be compounded in these areas.
- It was requested that information be shared on which wards made the most use of the Love Leicester app.
- It was noted that Narborough Road had a large number of students and rented properties.
- It was suggested that some people fly tipped knowingly and others unknowingly. It was important that the Council did what it could in each situation with the communities involved. Different approaches were needed in different areas, going heavily on those tipping deliberately and educating those doing it unknowingly.
- Comparisons had been made with other unitary cities, some of these had bigger populations than Leicester.

- Action plans had been created for Westcotes and Belgrave.
- Legislation had prevented the use of big skips.

AGREED:

- 1) That the elements of the report pertaining to Culture and Neighbourhoods be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.
- 3) That the appreciation of officers and City Wardens be noted.
- 4) That the findings of the review come back to the Commission, including ward-by-ward correlations.

108. MUSEUM ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment submitted a report providing an overview of Leicester Museums & Galleries' Museum Engagement programme, which is funded by Arts Council England (ACE).

The Assistant City Mayor for Culture, Libraries and Community Centres introduced the report and noted that the programme aimed to go out to residents rather than residents coming to the museums. There were a number of buildings across the city where museum services were getting out and engaging with local residents, including Hamilton Library, the Brite Centre and Highfields Library. This had generated interest amongst people which had in turn brought them in to engage with museums. Leicester Museum and Art Gallery (LMAG) had been doing well in attracting investment, however, there was more to be done in terms of Councillors helping to get the message out, including through social media. This programme was a cornerstone of the cultural strategy.

The Head of Arts and Museums and the Audience Development & Engagement Manager presented the report.

Key points included:

- The Museum Service had been successful in obtaining funding from Arts Council England (ACE). £1.2m had been awarded for 2023-26 and was currently being used for inclusive activities aimed at making museums more relevant, involving more local people. It had also funded fixed term posts to deliver activities to communities.
- An additional year of funding had been applied for. If this was successful it would run from April 2026 to March 2027. Feedback from ACE had been positive.
- The report gave a snapshot of the range of work undertaken.
- Engagement with communities and audiences had been deepened across the city. The aim was to increase participation, taking objects out to be enjoyed and for people to be inspired to take part in other activities. An example of this was 'Peppy the Polar Bear' going to the

Brite Centre and St Matthews Library. The team were focussed on engagement with objects that would otherwise be in storage.

- Choice was important in so much as people having the opportunity to speak for themselves. The 'Popping to the Shops' exhibitions and co-produced exhibitions were examples of this. People could talk about their own histories and have their own voices.
- Exhibitions on Narborough Road and Saffron Lane were in progress and would open in March.
- Digital Engagement was breaking new ground, moving away from posters to new technology. The social media and interaction had a large reach. The service was a leading proponent of interactive labels. This was a long-term investment; however, it was recognised internationally for pioneering.
- People were encouraged to share their culture with people in communities.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- Museum staff were praised, and it was recognised that bringing culture to the community was important.
- It was particularly recognised that museums provided free, warm, safe environments for people to learn and have a free day out.
- Museums were seen as the jewel in the crown of Leicester.
- It was good to see young people in museums taking in the atmosphere. It was inclusive and felt like home for many people.
- The visiting Renoir painting and exhibition had generated many positive comments and put Leicester on the map.
- In response to requests for an expansion on the work done with schools on combatting exclusion, it was explained that a programme was developed in each funding cycle on combatting exclusion. This could be looked at for expansion if the funding was available.
- In response to a query about the possibility of bringing things to schools as well as libraries, it was explained that libraries already had infrastructure such as display cases for collections to be displayed, however, there was more work to do with Young People to bring them to museums. Work had been funded by ACE and the Learning team was working with 94% of schools across the city.
- It was looked to sustain better work experiences for people across the sector. A pilot scheme would take place in May which would be developed over the next 13 years.
- Engagement of schools on site had risen significantly from 6,000 before the Covid-19 pandemic to 21,000 now. This would increase as new sessions came online.
- When galleries were refreshed numbers would increase as strategic paths were followed.
- It was felt to be important not to have exclusive buildings as buildings were about addressing both emotional and physical needs. There was

appetite to use spaces in sports centres for museum displays. This could encourage people to visit museums, showing that the cost was low. This built on what was already available.

- The museums were praised for their front-line work with families in the cost-of-living crisis, providing holiday activities and somewhere for children to go. As such it was good that museums were now coming to the people.
- In response to a query about whether podcases or similar media could be made use of, it was explained that short films were being produced and digital versions of exhibitions were being created. Further funding for broadcast-style events was being discussed.
- Technology would change and expand opportunities to engage. Digital technology had been built into the revitalisation of LMAG. A Stage 1 National Lottery Heritage Fund grant has just been awarded to create an environment gallery and a 'Story of Leicester gallery'. At Leicester Museum & Art Gallery.
- New Galleries which are being developed will have a strong digital element, such as the animation at the Renoir exhibition.
- In response to a suggestion of the possibility of a weekend history festival or a free open day for students at paid-for exhibitions such as Richard III, it was clarified that there was a county-wide history festival and there had been a conversation about a specific Leicester-based festival.
- There have been successes with Heritage Open Days, and Councillors' help in getting organisations involved would be welcomed.

AGREED:

- 1) That the elements of the report pertaining to Culture and Neighbourhoods be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.
- 3) That Museum staff be congratulated.
- 4) That a further report come to the Commission on the outcomes and findings and conclusion.

109. WORK PROGRAMME

Members of the Commission were invited to consider content of the work programme and were invited to make suggestions for additions as appropriate to be brought to future meetings.

The work programme was noted.

110. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no further items of urgent business, the meeting finished at 19.09.

