



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 9 JULY 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Joel - Chair

Councillor Batool
Councillor Gregg
Councillor O'Neill
Councillor Porter
Councillor Waddington

Councillor Dave
Councillor March
Osman
Councillor Rae Bhatia
Councillor Zaman

Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor
Councillor Sood – Assistant City Mayor (online)
Rebecca Lunn – Youth Representative
Vivek Masania – Youth Representative

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129. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Kitterick – Cllr Gregg substituted.

130. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

With regards to the item on Revenues and Benefits, Cllr March mentioned that she worked for the Citizen's Advice Bureau and if it appeared as though there was an interest in the item, she would leave the meeting. She had taken advice from the Monitoring Officer and it did not appear that there would be a need to declare an interest.

131. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview Select Committee held on 1st May 2025 be confirmed as a correct record.

132. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE 2025/26

The Membership of the Commission was confirmed as follows:

Councillor Ashiedu Joel - Chair
Councillor Melissa March
Councillor Misbah Batool
Councillor Sue Waddington
Councillor Karen Pickering
Councillor Syed Zaman
Councillor Molly O'Neill
Councillor Hemant Rae Bhatia
Councillor Abdul Osman
Councillor Bhupen Dave
Councillor Patrick Kitterick
Councillor Nigel Porter

133. DATES OF MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE 2025/26

The dates of the meetings for the Commission were confirmed as follows:

9 July 2025
24 September 2025
3 December 2025
28 January 2026
18 March 2026
29 April 2026

134. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Commission noted the Scrutiny Terms of Reference.

135. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATION 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.

Dr Patel asked:

As a member of the public, I would want to engage with the democratic process as much as I possibly can. However, the current policy requires the public questions to be submitted five working days before a scrutiny

meeting. However, the agenda for the meeting is also only published five working days in advance. This means members of the public have no way of knowing whether their questions will be relevant to the agenda.

Will the Overview Scrutiny Commission consider reviewing this process to improve meaningful public engagement and allow questions to be submitted after the agenda is published?

Possible solutions –

1. Change deadline for questions to be submitted 4 working days prior to committee.

or

2. Publish a provisional agenda front sheet earlier. Provide a draft or indicative agenda 10 working days before the meeting. Mark it clearly as “subject to change”.

A further question was submitted by Dr Patel but was not published with the agenda. As it was submitted before the deadline, the Chair agreed for it to be asked:

I attend council meetings often. I park opposite the city hall on Carlton Street. With street parking now increasing by 25%, this now feels like a new tax on residents who are trying to participate in the democratic process.

Will the council consider providing support with travel costs, such as validating parking or reimbursing bus fares, for members of the public who attend scrutiny or full council meetings?

Removing this financial barrier could help increase public participation in local democracy, particularly for those on lower incomes.

The Chair informed those present that Dr Patel had received responses to these questions via email and these would be shared with members of the Committee following the meeting.

The Chair referred to the responses that were sent to Dr Patel via email and would be shared with members following the meeting (appended).

It was suggested that the issue on deadlines for questions could be discussed in a meeting of the Committee. It was further suggested that this could be fed back into a constitution review.

It was suggested that the issue on travel and parking costs for council meetings could be picked up at Economic Development, Transport and Climate Emergency Scrutiny Commission.

136. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chair's announcements.

137. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

138. 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 raised that petitions concerning libraries and community centres were not included in the report and it was noted that the Monitoring Officer had applied the rule for these petitions to be included as part of the consultation on the matter rather than being considered at Council. Questions were raised as to whether proper procedure was followed.

The Monitoring Officer would be approached for a response.

It was requested that Directors provide updates on the petitions on Peebles Way and Oakland Avenue.

AGREED:

That the status of the outstanding petitions be noted.

139. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

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

Young People's Council Representative Rebecca Lunn asked:

I have a question about public transport. I know that in Manchester they have the hour pass scheme which allows for free buses for youths aged 16 to 18 and 18 to 21 for those in care experience. I was just wondering how Leicester could possibly do something similar or look into how they've achieved this? I know that they did it through the Manchester Combined Authority and I wondered if we could come up with something similar.

The City Mayor responded:

- Government support had enabled a free Hop bus which linked the central city areas together.

- Concessions were limited due to cost considerations, but opportunities to extend the offer could be explored with government support.
- Benchmarking against other local authorities would be useful.
- The financial benefits of service delivery by combined authorities were acknowledged. The Chair of the Economic Development, Transport and Climate Scrutiny Commission requested that the question be referred there.

Members of the commission asked about government proposals for local reorganisation, particularly in relation to the role of the City Mayor.

The City Mayor responded with the following points:

- Members had been briefed that there would be opportunity to debate preferences for either a mayoral leadership, or leader and cabinet system.
- More recent government announcements included the following:
 - The nationwide introduction of combined authority mayors.
 - The creation of new mayoral systems of governance would be halted.
 - The return to a committee system was ruled out.
 - Authorities with existing mayoral systems could continue, however, any boundary extensions or other significant changes, legally required the establishment of a new authority. The new authority would then adopt a leader and cabinet form.
 - It was highly likely that boundary changes would arise for the city, in advance of the next election in 2027.

AGREED:

That the responses to the questions raised be noted

140. CUSTOMER SERVICES - PERFORMANCE REPORT 24/25

The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report providing an overview of the corporate customer service including arrangements in place, performance and improvements during 2024/25.

The Assistant City Mayor for Health, Culture, Libraries and Community Centres gave an introduction to the item noting this was a challenging area of work, and there were some good news stories.

It was noted that improvements had been made, through an adjustment to service operating hours leading to an improvement in call waiting times. Feedback from staff was positive, with lower staff absence levels and improved

staff retention, resulting in a more skilled and experienced workforce.

The Chair invited questions and comments from the commission, with the Customer Support Manager being present to answer. Key points were as follows:

- It was clarified that the cut off point for receiving calls was 16:30. Calls incoming toward the end of the day went into a queuing system answered by 17:00.
- Timelines to the customer experience strategy were currently unknown. The Committee requested to have oversight of the plan.
- It was confirmed that the Housing service managed feedback from council tenants.
- It was noted the technology was not yet in place to carry out ad-hoc satisfaction surveys, but this could be something to be considered for the future.
- It was confirmed there was an out of hours service for areas such as children's safeguarding.
- Webform contact information would be reviewed to improve the customer experience.
- Social Care and Housing lines were prioritised.
- Staffing numbers had reduced in line with council budgeting, but workforce retention had improved.
- The commission would be informed about the potential for creating a call-back system.
- AI implementation was subject to a review of current web page information.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission be taken into account by the lead officers.

Councillor O'Neil arrived during consideration of item.

141. OVERVIEW OF THE REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE

The Director of Finance presented a report providing the Overview Select Committee with an overview of the Revenues and Benefits Service. This was

presented by The Head of Revenues Key points to note were as follows:

- The Household Support Fund would be replaced by the Crisis and Resilience Fund, enabling longer term planning.
- A working group had been established as part of the review of the Council Tax Support Scheme.

The Chair invited the commission to raise questions and comments. Key points to note were as follows:

- Welfare advice was delivered both internally and externally via a triaged approach. More information would be distributed to the commission with details of how welfare services could be accessed.
- It was confirmed households could apply for the Household Support Fund repeatedly.
- Council Tax collections were ongoing, any amounts not collected within the financial year would be recovered or support efforts would be put in place.
- Equality Impact Assessments were conducted for decisions affecting service users.
- Questions on support for digital access were best placed with the Director of Corporate Services. Information would be sought and fed back to the commission.
- Leicester ranked 9th out of 13 neighbouring Local Authorities for Council Tax collection rates. More information could come back on rankings.
- Care experienced young people were exempt from paying Council Tax.
- Detail was awaited on the Crises and Resilience Grant.
- Members suggested engaging users in digital expansion considerations.

AGREED:

- 1) That comments made by members of this commission be taken into account by the lead officers.
- 2) That the report be noted.

142. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING OUTTURN 2024/25

The Director of Finance submitted the final Revenue Budget Outturn in the monitoring cycle for 2024/25 and reported performance against budget for the year.

The Strategic Director of City Development and Neighbourhood Services and the Director of Children's Social Work and Early Help attended the meeting to assist with the discussion.

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

The Director of Children's Social Work and Early Help gave an update on placement costs and noted that:

- Placement costs formed a significant proportion of spend in Children's Services.
- There were currently 146 children in residential accommodation, 40 in Council-run accommodation and 106 in private accommodation.
- Quality in private care could be variable, it was aimed to place children in accommodation rated 'good' or outstanding', but this was not always possible due to availability.
- The cost differential of placing a child in private accommodation versus in-house accommodation was £700 per-week per-child, so by having 40 children in Council accommodation, there was an overall cost mitigation of £28k if a child was placed in Council accommodation.
- It was planned to expand internal resource. Holly House had been converted into a new five-bed unit which had received its first Ofsted inspection and had been rated 'good'.
- A new-build had been commissioned at Hillview, the original building had not been suitable for refurbishment, so it had been demolished. However, this had meant it was possible to build to design. The project was mid-build and should be in Council possession in 2-3 months with the aim to open in October or November. It contained an independence flat for those transitioning to independent living.
- There were two further capital bids in with the DfE. There was originally supposed to be a decision on these in May, however, this has been delayed by the government.
- One of these would be a smaller two-bed unit for people with complex needs, and the other would be a four-bed unit for those with complex emotional wellbeing issues. These would be people who needed more care but did not meet the criteria to be an inpatient in a mental health unit. These projects would be dependent on the capital bid.
- The Council were building internal fostering resources and there were now 226 children within Council foster care households and 132 external foster care organisations. There was around £640 per week difference between Council provision and external provision. Anything Councillors could do to champion in-house fostering would be welcomed.
- The majority of private care was profit-making.
- Around £5m per year was spent on supporting special guardians and family members and friends who had filed a residence order and were

taking children in. This was very cost-effective in supporting families to care for children and young people within a family network. This also delivered permanence for the child or young person. The costs to the Council for this process were considerably lower than fostering at £220 per week.

The Commission were invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers and the City Mayor to respond. Key points included:

- With regard to a query on the 32% variance in Departmental Overheads within City Developments and Neighbourhoods, it was clarified that this mainly related to a bad debt provision.
- Housing services were in a better position than anticipated, and the overspend had been reduced by £4m from the end of December.
- With regard to investment in children's homes, providing such facilities made sense, however, it would not be possible to eliminate the reliance on the private sector. However, the government recognised the need to support on this, therefore capital funding was made available to bid for, which could help a move towards not-for-profit care.
- It was noted the best way to promote fostering was to use people who have traction in their own communities, and there was potential to promote in community and faith groups.
- It was noted the variance at outturn compared to the original budget set was £40m. It was explained that the variance was mainly due to the significant work in social care to reduce costs and increase the funding from the NHS.
- It was confirmed the increase in the budget strategy reserve did not fundamentally change the budget the budget gap.
- Information requested on the Connexions service would be picked up outside the meeting.
- More information would be sought on intervention and care packages, and the issue of prevention would be taken up in Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission.
- It was noted the reduction in the forecast outturn was reflective of the work undertaken to increase our own temporary accommodation.

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.

143. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING OUTTURN 2024/25

The Director of Finance submitted a report showing the final position of the

capital programme for 2024/25.

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

The Commission were invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers to respond.

- It was noted that due to the nature of capital projects the budgets were not all expected to be spent in one year. In relation to work programmes it was confirmed a significant part of the slippage was mainly relating to fleet that had long lead times.
- It was confirmed Library Self Access roll-out was linked to the current review in libraries.
- It was noted that getting a contractor to work on the railway station development had been difficult, however, none of the money spent so far had been government grant funded.
- It was clarified that with regard to the St Paul's project, there had been attempts to engage with the owners to secure the building.

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.

144. INCOME COLLECTION OUTTURN 2024/25

The Director of Finance submitted a report detailing progress made in collecting debts raised by the Council during 2024-25, 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.

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.

145. REVIEW OF TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2024/25

The Director of Finance submits a report reviewing how the Council conducted its borrowing and investments during 2023/24.

The Committee were recommended to note the report and make comments to the Director of Finance and the Executive as they wish.

The Commission were invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers to respond. Key points included:

- The breakdown of the Lothbury Fund was welcomed, and this approach was encouraged.
- When questioned if there were any concerns about previous Treasury Advisors following the property fund, There were no concerns with treasury advisors past or present, and credit agencies were used to give the best advice possible at the time.

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.

146. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The City Barrister and Head of Standards submitted a report providing a summary of the Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-24.

The Chair presented the report:

- The outgoing Chair was thanked, as were colleagues who had previously been part of OSC.
- It was stressed that scrutiny was a fundamental part of governance, and it was aimed to continue to ensure that scrutiny members gave their all in the process to establish key lines of enquiry, and to deliver for the city's residents and challenge on where things could be done better.
- The Chair looked forward to a successful year of working and good scrutiny.

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 the report be considered at Full Council.

147. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

It was requested that the recommendations on Adventure Playgrounds come to the next meeting of the Committee.

It was requested that a report on Community Asset Transfer policy come to the next meeting of the Committee.

The work programme for the Committee was noted.

148. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 20:44pm.