



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SCRUTINY
COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2015 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Dawood (Chair)
Councillor Gugnani (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Cutkelvin
Councillor Halford
Councillor Khote

In Attendance:

Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor - Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor - Communities & Equalities

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27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Corrall and Hunter.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Gugnani declared an Other Disclosable Interest in agenda item, 7, "Working with the City's Voluntary and Community Sector to Support Engagement with Communities", in that he was Secretary of the Leicester Council of Faiths.

Although not a member of the Commission, Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor (Communities and Equalities), declared an Other Disclosable Interest in agenda item, 7, "Working with the City's Voluntary and Community Sector to Support Engagement with Communities", in that she was Chair of the Leicester Council of Faiths.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors'

judgement of the public interest. They were not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

29. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Commission noted that, further to minute 18, "Progress on Actions Agreed at the Previous Meeting: Call-In of City Mayor Decisions – Highfields Community Association", three of the staff affected by the loss of preschool provision had requested voluntary redundancy. This had been accepted. The fourth member of staff had chosen to stay with the service and had been transferred to a vacancy in another setting.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 1 October 2015 be confirmed as a correct record.

30. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

31. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

32. USING BUILDINGS BETTER PROGRAMME AND UPDATE ON NEXT PHASE OF CUSTOMER FACING BUILDINGS TRANSFORMATION IN NORTH WEST LEICESTER

The Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance presented information on the Using Buildings Better programme and an update on the next phase of customer-facing buildings transformation in north-west Leicester.

The Commission noted that:-

- The vision of the Using Buildings Better programme was to rationalise Council-owned premises, so that there were fewer buildings, but of a higher quality than at present;
- That the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme was now part of the wider Using Buildings Better programme;
- Ward Members and residents were being consulted to identify factors such as the most important services to them and where they travelled to. Service need would then be considered to determine what access to buildings people needed before assessments were made of whether better use could be made of individual buildings;

- Opportunities would be taken where possible to co-locate with partner agencies, such as the Police;
- The same team as had undertaken phase 1 of the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme in 2014 would be undertaking this next phase, except that consultation with young people would be undertaken by Children's Services;
- Additional focus group sessions had been arranged in the North West of the city for the latest consultation on youth centre provision, due to the high level of interest in the proposals for these programmes;
- Monthly meetings would be held with trades unions representing staff to discuss progress with the programmes;
- A list of depots, stores and workshops could be circulated, giving the addresses of these buildings, so that the buildings could be identified accurately;
- Some wards did not have many buildings that could be used for customer-facing services. This needed to be taken in to account when considering how services could be accommodated;
- Use of a service could be mapped across the city. For example, people often moved across the city to access libraries or other large facilities;
- The accessibility of buildings for users of public transport was very important;
- The Council was still learning the best approach to be taken when a community group took over the management of a building. However, time would be given for officers to engage with such organisations, to help them understand what they were taking on;
- The Locality organisation would provide advice to community groups considering taking over the management of buildings. For example, workshops had been run explaining others' experience of asset transfers to community groups, including the advantages and disadvantages. Locality also could provide one-to-one support;
- As some parts of the city did not have many Council buildings that could be used by customers, if groups representing communities could be identified and worked with to get engagement in the consultation, it could be possible to identify other buildings that could be used. However, this was not a core focus of the review;
- These reviews did not include examining the commissioning of community services, (for example, youth services), but focussed on the best way to enable people to access those services;

- It was anticipated that some buildings being reviewed would have land associated with them. The best use to be made of each would be considered on a building by building basis. It was too early in the process to be able to give an indication of timescales for this;
- Any capital receipts from the sale of assets would be used towards the Council's capital programme;
- The costs of undertaking the review were still being identified. It would be possible to have a better idea of what these were when more information was available on what work needed to be done; and
- It was possible that some people could be recruited to fixed-term roles, such as project manager, but the use of consultants would be limited to areas of work where skills needed could not be found through existing staff.

The Commission noted the proposals, but felt that there was confusion in renaming Transforming Neighbourhood Services as Customer Facing Buildings and requested that consideration be given to the terminology used.

Members observed that non-schools based staff would be impacted by the programme through possible changes to the way in which they worked. For example, offices could become open-plan; work stations could be established, rather than staff having personal desks; or increased use made of flexible working arrangements. However, as the programme was just starting, it was not possible to say exactly how, or how many, staff would be affected. The Commission would be advised of this when the information was available.

It was suggested that school should be included in the review, as some could have space that community groups could use. In reply, the Director of Culture and Neighbourhood Services advised Members that schools were not included. However, the possibility of seeking to use space in them could be considered during the review.

Members also questioned whether the focus on strategic operational buildings meant that the Overview Select Committee should be responsible for the scrutiny of this review.

AGREED:

- 1) That the need to undertake the Using Buildings Better programme be noted and the broad objectives of the programme supported;
- 2) That the Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance be asked to:-
 - a) circulate a list of a list of depots, stores and workshops, giving the addresses of these buildings and the service they were used by;

- b) engage head teachers in the consultation on the Using Buildings Better programme, in order to identify the potential for use of school buildings by the community;
- c) ensure that the Overview Select Committee is updated and clarify which aspects of the Using Buildings Better programme are to be scrutinised by this Commission and which should be scrutinised by the Overview Select Committee;
- d) submit a six-month progress report on the Using Buildings Better programme to this Commission;
- e) ensure that Ward Members, local communities and local community groups are kept informed of progress with the Using Buildings Better programme and the Transforming Neighbourhood Services project in North West Leicester;
- f) ensure that the needs of vulnerable service users are taken in to account during these reviews; and
- g) submit a report on the outcome of the Transforming Neighbourhood Services project in North West Leicester as soon as it is ready.

33. WORKING WITH THE CITY'S VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR TO SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES

The Commission was reminded that the City Mayor had taken a decision on 4 November 2015 on working with the city's Voluntary and Community Sector to support engagement with communities.

It was noted that this decision was based on the results of consultation carried out across the city with stakeholders representing those with protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. Details of this were set out in the report.

Many community and voluntary organisations had been supported by the Council in their work with specific groups or communities for many years. However, it had become apparent that a lot of groups representing newer communities were doing good work, but with no Council support.

Of the people responding to the consultation, many had indicated that they preferred not to work through representative organisations and wanted a different approach to be taken. The decision therefore had been taken to establish a new fund to support activities and projects, which it was hoped would be of benefit to a wider range of communities. In addition, some funding for contracted provision of advice and guidance services still would be provided, through The Race Equality Council and the Somali Development Service.

Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor (Communities and Equalities), addressed the Commission at the invitation of the Chair, reminding Members of her declaration of interest in this item. She noted that community organisations had established a lot of respect from the community due to their hard work and this should not be lost. The organisations had engaged with a lot of partners, often with no funding from the Council, leading to Leicester being recognised as an excellent example of a city with multi-cultural and diverse communities.

Councillor Sood noted that many organisations were upset by the Council's decision. Change was always a challenge, so care should be taken to ensure that the work and experience of these organisations was not lost. Not all organisations were good at completing tender documents, so officer support was needed, (for example, there was still a large proportion of the city's population that did not access technology and this needed to be taken in to account).

The following points were then made by Members:-

- Although many communities were mentioned, there was no mention of women;
- An indication was needed of what services were delivered by the organisations that would no longer receive funding;
- Would this jeopardise people in need?;
- A lot of people arriving in the city did not speak English, particularly women. How would they be helped?; and
- When community groups supported financially by the council had surpluses at the end of a financial year, was this surplus "clawed back"?

In reply, the Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance stressed that this review was an assessment of what needed to be provided in the future, not a judgement on past performance. It was recognised that it was very important that what was put in place was very accessible, so the consultation undertaken had included an examination of barriers to accessing services.

Consideration also had been given to what sort of support it was reasonable to provide in the future. Under the previous contracts, organisations had had a representative role, the impact of which was hard to measure. It was important that outcomes could be measured, particularly now that the Council was not in a position to maintain previous levels of funding.

Expected outcomes in relation to the use of the new fund in the future would be monitored, to ensure that the funding provided was being spent on achieving these. This could lead to further funding being withheld if there was concern that resources were not being focussed on achieving expected outcomes.

The Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Manager further explained that many organisations previously had had multiple sources of financial support. It therefore had not been possible to assess what proportion of any surplus funds had been derived from the Council. For this reason, it had not been possible to “claw back” unspent funding.

In addition, the way that funding previously had been provided had meant that some organisations had been unable to access financial support. The way the new fund would operate would enable a wider range of organisations, such as women’s centres, to apply for assistance.

The Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance confirmed that the new fund was not live yet. A short consultation on how it would operate would be undertaken, starting shortly and probably concluding in early 2016, before the fund was launched.

Members expressed concern that a lot of knowledge and goodwill could be lost through the new funding arrangements and an unintentional outcome could be that communities were set in opposition to each other. The Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance reminded the Commission that previously funded organisations were not precluded from applying for funding under the new system. In addition, other funding mechanisms also were available to these organisations. The organisations had known for some time that this review was being undertaken and that they could not rely on receiving core funding from the Council indefinitely.

The Commission suggested that Voluntary Action LeicesterShire could become more engaged in community development work. This could include, for example, a requirement in its contract with the Council that representatives attended Ward Community Meetings.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance be asked to submit details of the consultation on the operation of the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Support Fund to the next meeting of this Commission, this report to include any outcomes from the consultation received before the Commission’s meeting;
- 2) That the Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance be asked to circulate the consultation documents on the operation of the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Support Fund to all members of this Commission in advance of the report referred to under 1) above; and
- 3) That the City Mayor be asked to note the Commission’s concerns about the potential loss of experience and skills as a result of the new Voluntary and Community Sector funding arrangements.

34. THE IMPACT OF BETTING SHOPS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES WITHIN LEICESTER

The Chair reported that it was proposed to establish a Task Group to consider the impact of betting shops on local communities within Leicester. He explained that this followed concern that betting shops were opening in areas where people were vulnerable, (for example, due to low incomes).

Members noted that Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor (Jobs and Skills), had welcomed this proposal and had suggested that outcomes from it could contribute to local area profiles. Outcomes also would be used to put recommendations forward to the Executive and possibly to the government.

It also was noted that the Deputy City Mayor had asked to be kept informed of progress with this review.

The Chair suggested that the review should be led by the Vice-Chair of this Commission. A Task Group would be established, which would hold meetings at City Hall and make visits within the community. These visits were likely to be made during the day. Witnesses would include the Police, betting shops and associated businesses.

Members were advised that Dr Heather Wardle, from Geofutures, had done some work on the impact of gambling on communities. She would be providing an informal briefing on this at City Hall on Friday 20 November 2015. Members of the Commission were invited to attend.

Comments on the Scoping Document that had been circulated with the agenda were welcome.

AGREED:

- 1) That a review of the impact of betting shops on local communities in Leicester be undertaken as set out in the Scoping Document circulated with the agenda, this review to be led by Councillor Gugnani;
- 2) That all members of the Commission advise the Scrutiny Policy Officer as soon as possible if they would like to take part in the Task Group referred to under 1) above;
- 3) That any comments on the Scoping Document for the review referred to under 1) above be passed to the Scrutiny Policy Officer as soon as possible; and
- 4) That the Scrutiny Policy Officer be asked to contact Members who express an interest in this Task Group to arrange meetings of the Task Group.

35. WORK PROGRAMME

AGREED:

That the Commission's Work Programme be received and noted.

36. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Industrial Action by City Taxi Drivers

A Member requested that a discussion be held on the proposed industrial action by the City's taxi drivers, but as this was not considered to be an urgent matter, in accordance with Procedure Rule 14 of Part 4E of the Council's Constitution the Chair declined this request.

37. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.23 pm

