



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: THURSDAY, 12 MAY 2016 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Dawood (Chair)
Councillor Gugnani (Vice Chair)

Councillor Corrall
Councillor Cutkelvin
Councillor Halford
Councillor Hunter
Councillor Khote

In Attendance

Sir Peter Soulsby, City Mayor
Councillor Clair, Assistant City Mayor - Culture, Leisure and Sport
Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor - Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor - Communities & Equalities

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62. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

64. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

that the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and
Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held 4 April 2016 be
confirmed as a correct record.

65. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

66. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

67. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Chair reported that actions since the previous meeting had generally related to the Gambling Impact Scrutiny Review, and this was subject to a short report under item 9 on the agenda.

68. CHANNEL SHIFT DELIVERY PROGRAMME

The Director of Finance submitted a report that outlined the Channel Shift transformation programme. This highlighted the importance of the programme and the achievements made since November 2014.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support presented the report and explained that Channel Shift for Leicester would:

- Move as much customer contact away from expensive face to face and telephony channels as possible;
- In doing so, improve service standards and the user experience; and
- Protect a core delivery service for those people who really needed it.

As a result of this there was an expectation that Channel Shift would make financial savings. The main provision for customer service would be on Granby Street, but there would also be work to build on the digital home offer so that people could transact business on-line.

Members heard that there was a new Customer Record Management (CRM) System, which would provide a more robust procedure for data collection as the old system was out of date.

Various initiatives were being introduced to facilitate Channel Shift. These included 'My Leicester' which, it was hoped, would be operational and on-line by September 2016. With this, people would be able to log in and transact with the council on nearly 40 different types of transactions.

In the Customer Service Centre there were a number of PCs which people could use to pay bills or transact on-line. Customers would be met and invited to use the PCs; staff would be there to show them what to do. Where customers were able to transact their payments or enquiries on line, staff would be freed up to help customers who needed face to face contact. Part of the focus of the new system was to ensure that officers were available to help the vulnerable as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Members raised comments and queries, which included the following:

- As the front desk at New Parks Housing Office would now be closed, what provision would there be for people who could not get into town?
- Would the libraries be able to cope with an increased demand if more people used the PCs there to transact on line?
- Would Channel Shift result in staff redundancies?

Members heard that due to budget pressures, savings were necessary but the Council were conscious of the need to protect the most vulnerable. There would be six hubs (or locations), including the Pork Pie Library, where there would be a digital offer to support the Channel Shift programme. There would be a need for extra PCs and some PCs would be set aside purely for people to transact on line. Training was already offered in libraries for people to use I.T. and this would continue. A Member suggested that if community groups could be offered this training, they in turn could train others.

In respect of staffing, it was difficult to know the exact impact on staffing numbers, however there was a requirement to make savings as the Customer Service budget needed to be cut by £200k. The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance said that she was currently looking at what this would mean for individuals.

- What help would be available for people with language difficulties?

Members heard that staff already dealt with a number of people with language difficulties and the Council would continue as part of its Customer Service offer, to provide help to those people.

- Concerns were expressed that if people were dealing with their transactions from home, they would miss out on personal and social interaction.

Members heard that the average face to face transaction time only took about eight minutes but the Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) programme would be instrumental in providing real opportunities for social engagement.

- It had been mentioned that there were six hubs where there would be a digital offer to support Channel Shift, but there appeared to be nothing in the East side of the City.

Members heard that the East side of the City was still to be considered under the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme. The initial consultation in that area would seek people's views on the community facilities they liked to use, and in response to a request from Councillor Hunter, assurances were given that the relevant Ward Councillors would be included in the consultation.

- Is there recent customer satisfaction data available?

Members heard that customer satisfaction surveys were carried out on a monthly basis and up to date information could be provided for Members. Recently there had been 'Mystery Shoppers' at the Pork Pie Library and

Granby Street, and positive feedback was received from both locations. This feedback could also be shared with the Commission.

- A concern was raised that analysis showed that between April 2015 and March 2016, 12% of the phone calls made to the Granby Street Customer Services had been abandoned.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support explained that when people telephoned Customer Services, an automated message gave other options for contacting the Council, such as by transacting on-line. Some people may have preferred to use a different method. The Council were aware that there had been occasions when people had to wait a long time for their call to be answered and were working to reduce this. Phone calls were charged at a local rate and last month the average call time was six minutes.

- What was known about the end user experience and how could this be measured?

Members heard that the customer experience was and would continue to be measured and as part of this, feedback from Mystery Shoppers and data collection would be important. In addition the new CRM system had a customer satisfaction module which would capture satisfaction levels at the conclusion of the user's transaction.

It was noted that the report stated there were barriers in implementing the Channel Shift programme, though Members heard that these barriers could be overcome. Appendix B of the report detailed the structure across the authority to support the programme. Members were informed that careful thought had been given about the investment needed to support the programme because much of Channel Shift depended on the Council's I.T. investment and services.

The Chair drew the discussion to a conclusion and stated that the most important outcome was for the customer to benefit from the changes. The challenges in implementing the programme were noted however.

AGREED:

that the Commission:

- 1) notes the report and the progress set out within it;
- 2) expresses concerns at the staff reductions that may result from the Channel Shift programme; and
- 3) requests that a review be brought back to the commission in six months' time to include progress and any learning points that have arisen so far.

69. TRANSFORMING NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES - NORTH WEST AREA

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report that provided an overview of the progress of the Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) Programme. The report also set out the results of the

engagement work and consultations that had been carried out and the intended proposals for the North West area of the City.

The Chair reported that a representation had been received from Councillor Byrne expressing concerns from constituents in the Abbey Ward, and in particular from the Thursday night Bingo Club, which related to the possible closure of the Stocking Farm Community Hall building on the Community Centre site. Councillor Corral added that he used to be a Councillor for New Parks and had been lobbied by residents there in relation to the possible closure of the Braunstone Frith community facility.

Members heard that the consultation, which had commenced in 2014, had been extensive and a very good response had been received. The Commission considered the report and the ensuing discussion included the following comments:

- Would it be possible for the New Parks Youth Centre to be adapted to provide toilets for people using sporting facilities at New College? Concerns had previously been expressed that the new cycle track, which had recently received planning permission, would be sited too far away from the College's nearest toilet facilities.

Members heard that this could potentially be a possibility.

- Did the Braunstone Frith Community Centre have the capacity to accommodate some of the community groups that had nowhere else to go?

Members heard that if Braunstone Frith was leased under the Community Asset Transfer scheme, there would be a condition that access to the centre must be offered to other community groups.

- Did the Council now own the old New Parks Police Station? There was no mention of this in the report.

The City Mayor responded that the Council had submitted a bid for the Police Station but he was not aware that the bid had been successful. He added that this would be checked.

- In cases of Asset Transfer, would buildings be in good condition before they were handed over?

The Commission heard that the condition of the building would be a part of the negotiations and the Council would make every effort to ensure this was carried out correctly.

The Chair then invited Councillor Unsworth to the table to contribute to the discussion. Councillor Unsworth explained that he represented the Western Ward; which was one of the Wards affected by the TNS programme.

Points made by Councillor Unsworth included the following:

- Concerns were expressed regarding the proposed community asset transfer of the Braunstone Frith Community Centre. The area was not wealthy and there were concerns that there would be insufficient people willing to be involved in such a scheme.
- There were health and unemployment issues in the area.
- There was a perception that residents in the area were being neglected. The Police Station had closed down, there were reductions in the bus service to Kirby Frith and there had been little investment in properties in the area.

The Head of Libraries and Information Services responded that everyone involved in the project understood the importance of the Braunstone Frith Community Centre and had been seeking a long term solution. The first option was for asset transfer, and any parties that came forward would be given advice and guidance on the process. There was a fall back plan however if asset transfer was not feasible.

The Chair referred to previous community asset transfers and queried how well they had worked elsewhere in the City. The Commission heard that lessons had been learned from previous asset transfers. The checks and balances had been tightened up considerably to try to overcome any risks - inappropriate groups or activities. The Council tried to ensure that people applying for a community asset transfer fully understood their responsibilities. In response to a question, Members heard that interested parties could receive help from an independent organisation, which would check their business case and offer guidance and support.

The Chair referred to the report which stated that there were four Council run pre-schools operating in Neighbourhood Services buildings in the north-west area of the City. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that if any of those pre-schools were located in a building that might be an asset transfer, the Council would ensure that provision was made in agreements where required.

The City Mayor stated that they were very keen to continue to engage with Ward Councillors and to listen and talk prior to making any final decisions.

AGREED:

that the Commission:

- 1) Welcomes the wide-ranging consultation in respect of the Transforming Neighbourhood Services Programme;
- 2) Considers it vital that community groups are made fully aware of the implications and responsibilities involved in Community Asset Transfers; and
- 3) Considers that the re-shaping of services should ensure that the most vulnerable and deprived communities retain ready access to a wide range of services.

70. IMPACT OF GAMBLING ON VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY REPORT UPDATE.

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a briefing report that provided an update on the Impact of Gambling on Vulnerable Communities Scrutiny Report.

Councillor Gugnani, Chair of the Task Group, reported that the Executive were very pleased and supportive of the recommendations that had arisen from the review. Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services, added that all the Members of the Executive had supported the recommendations; the review was commended as a very good piece of work.

Concerns were expressed relating to a betting office that had recently been given planning permission, as a number of residents had objected to the application. In response to queries raised, the Commission heard that if a 'Change of Use' was necessary, the applicant would need to apply for planning permission. Ward Councillors were routinely notified about forthcoming planning applications. As well as planning permission, the applicant would also need to apply for a licence whereby conditions may be attached to any licence granted.

AGREED:

that the update on the Impact of Gambling on Vulnerable Communities Scrutiny Report be noted.

71. WORK PROGRAMME

There were no comments on the work programme.

72. VOTE OF THANKS

The Chair expressed his thanks to Members for their contribution to the work of the Scrutiny Commission during the year. The Chair also thanked Officers, and in particular the Scrutiny Policy Officer, for the advice and support given to the Commission during this time.

73. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm.

