
Leicester City Council Scrutiny Annual Report 2015-16

Message from the Chair of the Overview Select Committee, 2015-16

It has been a pleasure to chair the Overview Scrutiny Committee and a great privilege to have been able to facilitate discussion and debate on some very critical and crucial issues of future policy and programmes implemented by the Executive.

The annual report details work undertaken by the Scrutiny Commissions and Task Groups. Throughout the year, a most important facet of Commissions work has been that members have had the confidence and skills to use information to drive the scrutiny process and this has been in evidence in the outcomes of work of all the Commissions.

Overview Select Committee (OSC) instituted the review of the Fire Service restructure proposals which eventually led to the Central fire station retaining its present status and preserving fire service provision in the City. The OSC role in leading the Council's response to the much debated Ofsted report highlighted its crucial collaborative role with the CYPS Commission to achieve strategic development and change.

I would mention that the exceptionally efficient management of Commissions' workload, appropriately supported by Council officers, has indicated that restructured timetables and reformed resourcing of scrutiny meetings has worked well.

Finally, I have enormous respect and gratitude to the 'due diligence' conducted by Commission constituent members and Chairs in their deliberations on policy issues within their remit and the discharge of their scrutiny role and functions. On a personal note, I would add that OSC has achieved a closer working relationship with the City Mayor and the Executive without compromising accountability and the scrutiny task at the strategic level of decision making in the City Council.

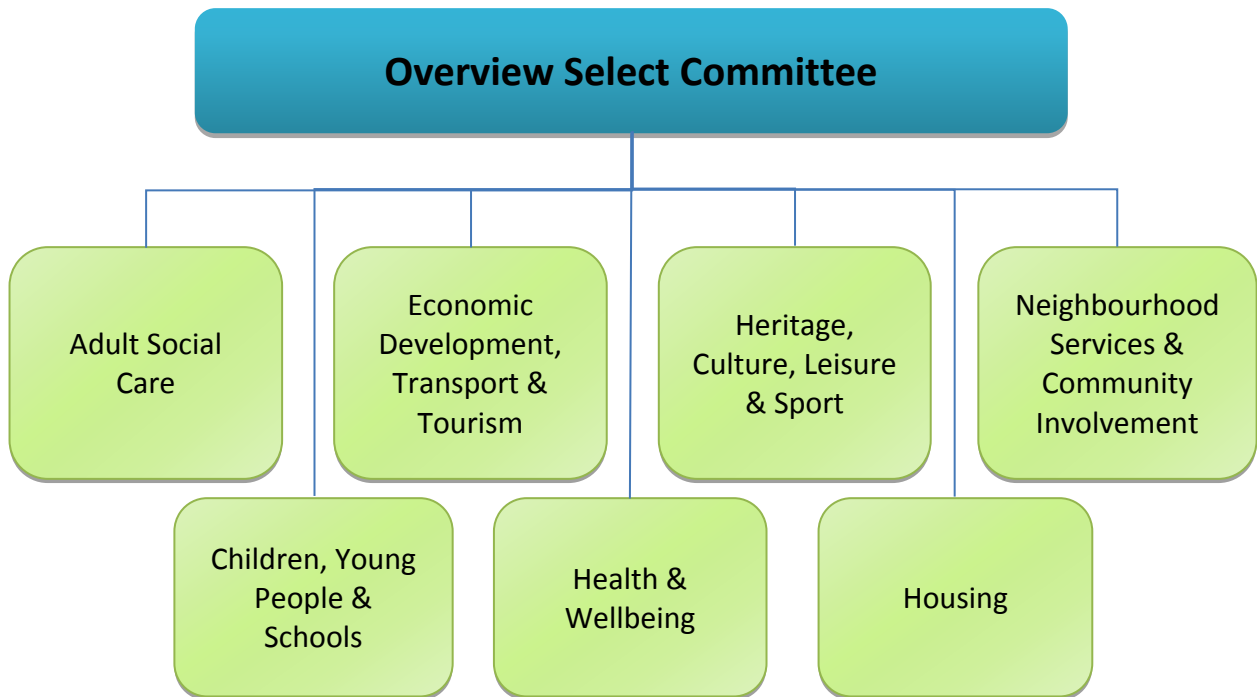


Councillor Baljit Singh
Chair, Overview Select Committee and Chair, Finance Task Group

CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE NUMBER
Membership of Scrutiny Commissions in 2014-15	4
Introduction	6
A place to do business	7
Getting about in Leicester	9
A low carbon city	10
The built and natural environment	11
A healthy and active city	12
Providing care and support	16
Our children and young people	17
Our neighbourhoods and communities	19
A strong and democratic council	23
Contacting scrutiny	25

Leicester City Council's Scrutiny Structure



Membership of Scrutiny Commissions in 2015-16

The following is a list of the commissions for 2015-16 and the members who sat on them:

Overview Select Committee

Chair: Councillor Baljit Singh

Vice Chair: Councillor Vi Dempster

MEMBERS

Councillors: Susan Barton, Lucy Chaplin, Virginia Cleaver, Mohammed Dawood, Ross Grant, Lynn Moore, Paul Newcombe, Rita Patel, Nigel Porter, Lynn Senior, Bill Shelton, Baljit Singh, John Thomas and Ross Willmott.

Adult Social Care

Chair: Councillor Virginia Cleaver
Vice Chair: Councillor Deepak Bajaj

MEMBERS

Councillors: Elly Cutkelvin,
Mohammed Dawood, Elaine Halford,
Rashmikant Joshi, and Jean Khote.
Standing Invitee: Healthwatch
Leicester (Philip Parkinson).

Children, Young People & Schools

Chair: Councillor Lynn Moore
Vice Chair: Councillor George Cole

MEMBERS

Councillors: Teresa Aldred,
Manshukhlal Chohan, Ross Grant,
Inderjit Gugnani, Mustafa Malik and
Lynn Senior.

Co-opted Members: Bernard
Monaghan (Roman Catholic Diocese),
Carolyn Lewis (Church of England
Diocese), Mohammed Alauddin Al-
Azad: Parent Governor (Primary /
Special Needs).

Standing Invitees: Arshad Daud,
Brahmpreet Kaur Gulati, Yash
Sharma, Ryanvir Singh (Youth Reps),
Rabiha Hannan (Muslim Faith Rep),
Anu Kapur (Leicester Secular Society),
Peter Flack (Teaching Unions), Gary
Garner (Unison, Union Rep)

Economic Development, Transport and Tourism

Chair: Councillor Ross Willmott
Vice Chair: Councillor Rashmikant
Joshi

MEMBERS

Councillors: Hemant Rae Bhatia,
Patrick Kitterick, Lynn Moore, Nigel
Porter, Vijay Singh Riyait and Gurinder
Sandhu.

Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission

Chair: Councillor Lucy Chaplin
Vice Chair: Councillor Luis Fonseca

MEMBERS

Councillors: Dawn Alfonso, Harshad
Bhavsar, Dr Shofiquil Chowdhury,
Deborah Sangster and Kulwinder
Singh Johal.

Standing Invitee: Healthwatch
Leicester (Surinder Sharma)

Housing

Chair: Councillor Paul Newcombe
Vice Chair: Councillor Dawn Alfonso

MEMBERS

Councillors: Teresa Aldred, Hanif
Aqbany, Annette Byrne, Diane Cank
and Rashmi Joshi

Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sport

Chair: Councillor Susan Barton
Vice Chair: Councillor Malcolm
Unsworth

MEMBERS

Councillors: Deepak Bajaj, Ratilal
Govind, Elaine Halford, Bill Shelton
and Aminur Thalukdar.

Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement

Chair: Councillor Mohammed Dawood
Vice Chair: Councillor Inderjit Gugnani

MEMBERS

Councillors: Stephen Corral, Elly
Cutkelvin, Elaine Halford, Sue Hunter
and Jean Khote.

Introduction

Scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that the council and its partners remain effective and accountable. 'The definition of scrutiny provided by the Centre for Public Scrutiny explains it as "the activity by one elected or appointed organisation or office examining and monitoring all or part of the activity of a public sector body with the aim of improving the quality of public services. A public sector body is one that carries out public functions or spends public money. Scrutiny ensures that executives are held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public and that there are opportunities for the public and their representatives to influence and improve public policy."

For 2015-16 the council continued to have an Overview Select Committee and seven scrutiny commissions covering all parts of the council's business. Scrutiny is often cross-cutting and this report has retained the model of last year and looks at scrutiny work within key themes of the Council's work.

As in previous years, scrutiny has continued to do a considerable amount of work via reports to meetings, reviews, call-ins and task groups and making recommendations from the various commissions to the Council's Executive.

This report looks at some of the highlights but further details, including reports, can be found on the Council's website via the following link:

<http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/ieDocHome.aspx?Categories>

Contact

For more information please contact the Scrutiny Team on **0116 4546340** or email **scrutiny@leicester.gov.uk**

Glossary

The following abbreviations are used during the course of this report.

ASC: Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission

CYPS: Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission

EDTT: Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission

HCLS: Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sport Scrutiny Commission

HSC: Housing Scrutiny Commission

HWB: Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission

NSCI: Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission

OSC: Overview Select Committee

A place to do business

This theme focuses on how the council works with business, public, voluntary and community sectors to respond to the economic challenges the city faces.

Procurement strategy

The Economic Development Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission's examination of the council's **Procurement Strategy & Plan** focussed on the social value of Council procurement activities and how social value could be incorporated into future procurement and commissioning. EDTT asked the department:

- To report regularly to the Commission at appropriate intervals on the impact of Social Value on the Council's procurement activity; and
- To provide monitoring information to this Commission on training provision (such as apprenticeships), arising from the Social Value elements of procurement.

This has since lead to EDTT commencing a scrutiny review into the Council's procurement strategy and this will be concluded next year.

Jobs creation and recruitment

EDTT also looked at the work being done with former employees of **The Mark Group and SPS Technologies**. Almost 1,200 jobs were at risk, mainly due to the ending of Government support for solar energy technology. The Commission was briefed on a jobs fair organised in the wake of the job losses. Members supported the initiative and **recommended** that the council considered the feasibility of holding regular jobs fairs, possibly focussing on certain parts of the city. The commission will expect a report back within a few months on work being done to assist former staff at the Mark Group and the success of this.

King Richard III Economic impact assessment



A report to HCLS set out the economic impact of the Richard III discovery on tourism and the visitor economy in the city and further afield. The commission noted the rise in visitor numbers and that more than 1,000 jobs had been created among a range of economic benefits.

'The discovery of Richard III has singularly put a pin in the map for Leicester, a place where no one was even looking for a pin in the past. As stewards of the county we now have a responsibility to make the most of this legacy...'

Stakeholder reported in an Economic Impact Assessment

Commission members praised the strategy adopted by the council and wider business community, and called for measures to encourage day tourists to stay longer. Members stressed they felt development needed to be sustainable over a long period. Members felt one challenge would involve making sure hotel capacity was built to meet the increase in visitor numbers.

The economic impact of Leicester's heritage and culture:

HCLS also conducted a review into the performance indicators relating to the contribution and economic impact of culture and heritage in the city in the context of using culture as a means to secure inward investment.



The review also considered the capacity to build the city's artistic and cultural reputation and create a sense of place and identity. It also explored the prospect of future research regarding social impact of the arts, heritage and culture on the city.

[Draft recommendations from the review reported to HCLS in March included:](#)

- Establishing of clearer methodologies for how economic data could be gathered,
- Social impact of the city's heritage and culture be investigated and greater publicity given to what was achieved through investment in heritage and culture.

The report was due to be finalised later in 2016-2017.

Getting about in Leicester

This section prioritises the need for an effective traffic management network, including road maintenance programmes and an efficient public transport network which is technologically advanced, up to date and helps improve air quality. Safe provision for cyclists and pedestrians is also important.

Connecting Leicester

Economic Development Transport and Tourism commission members scrutinised proposals in their early stages of development. Projects on the agenda during the year included Guildhall Lane; Mill Lane; Jubilee Square; Harvey Walk Footbridge; Oxford Rd; Grey Friars Townscape; Belgrave Rd; Belvoir St and Welford Rd. EDTT scrutiny invited external witnesses to give evidence on the impacts to access, road layout, transport and traffic issues, including Leicester Disabled Persons Access Group and Belgrave Residents Association. EDTT sought assurances that work was on schedule and what residents in the area desired, and this will continue as the programme of work continues.

Review of Bus Lanes Policy and Operation

EDTT led a task group review into how well bus lanes were operating in the city. The bus lanes network has received major investment in recent years. The task group concluded the network delivered benefits for bus and other road users. They had increased numbers of passengers, reduced journey times and improved the cycling environment.

The bus operators praised the council for installing enforcement cameras in the city centre. This was done after surveys found contraventions were affecting the operation and efficiency of bus services. In evidence, the Bus Users Panel said: *“if there are regulations of any sort, then they should be enforced, and penalties applied for infringements. The proper enforcement of Charles Street and Causeway Lane has made a huge difference to the number of infringements, markedly improving bus journey times along Causeway Lane and does not appear to have caused any problems”*.

The task group's recommendations include urging the city council to:

- continue to operate its "24/7" bus lane policy
- improve enforcement with the help of additional cameras; and
- install extra signs to warn motorists from using the bus lanes.

The Executive have taken many of the recommendations on board.. [A link to the task group report is here.](#)

A low carbon city

A key ongoing priority area of work for the city council is reducing the city's carbon footprint by focusing on reductions of greenhouse gas emissions from the council's own operations, as well as promoting sustainable travel, and reducing emissions from homes and businesses.

Air Quality Action Plan – Joint scrutiny


Members of the Health and Wellbeing Commission were invited to EDTT to review the council's draft Air Quality Action Plan. Poor air quality in the city has been associated with a number of deaths and nationally has the greatest impact on the most deprived communities.



Healthier Air for Leicester

Leicester's Air Quality Action Plan (2015-2025)

Consultation Draft

City Mayor 

Members endorsed the Action Plan but had a number of observations and suggestions. [A link to the minute of this report can be found here](#). Members felt evaluation of health data needed to be enhanced because it was not possible to definitely relate individuals' deaths to poor air quality. It was suggested 2013 data showing ward health profiles, and particularly winter care deaths, could be used to assess if a geographical correlation with air quality existed. Working with health partners was encouraged, as was the introduction of a low-emission zone. Further progress on this will be brought back to both commissions.

The built and natural environment

In recent years we have seen national and international focus on the city and its heritage. Initiatives such as Connecting Leicester have been important in promoting the heritage of the city and connecting shopping, leisure, heritage, housing and transport facilities.

Jewry Wall Museum

HCLS was briefed on proposals to make the Jewry Wall Museum more accessible and scrutinised plans to create a sustainable visitor attraction. External funding, including a bid for Heritage Lottery funding, was being sought for proposed works. Members looked at the proposed walkway from St Nicholas Circle to the Vaughan College podium and designs for a new staircase and lift for improved accessibility. They *recommended* discussions should take place on whether glass could be inserted into a proposed walkway.

Members scrutinised the designs and proposed improvements to the ground floor, reception and the first floor of the museum and *recommended* that if any film of the original excavation of the Jewry wall site was still available it should be part of the exhibits when the museum has been redeveloped. A further update on this will be received at a future meeting.

Market Redevelopment project

The Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Commission considered this issue at two meetings, the first during consultation on development proposals and a second which considered the results of the consultation. [Minutes of this meeting are accessible through this link.](#)

Options to attract younger shoppers to the market and suggestions to offer a wider range of products were proposed by Commission Members. The Commission broadly welcomed the redevelopment proposals but asked to be kept briefed on the project as it developed and this will continue on next year as plans develop.

Using Buildings Better

EDTT scrutinised the proposals for the **New Walk Centre / Welford Place Development Site**, with a focus on the change of use to mixed use, including residential, and impacts to the local area and residents. It was agreed comments raised by commission members would be passed onto the developer. Again, as this is a work in progress, scrutiny will continue to monitor the development.

A healthy and active city

Leicester has poorer health on average compared to the rest of the country - so it is important to provide excellent healthcare and promote healthier lifestyles to close the gap with the rest. Scrutiny calls to account all health partners in the city.

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) – Quality monitoring following the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspection

A review by the Health and Wellbeing Commission monitored progress of LPT's efforts following a report and 'requires improvement' judgement from the CQC. The Commission wished to be assured LPT was making the necessary improvements to ensure services were not putting vulnerable people at risk. Initial findings of the review are that:

- Progress was being made but that all ligature risks needed to be removed immediately whether they are high risk or not.
- Further resources were needed in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to reduce waiting lists.
- Greater strategic planning is required to deal with the staffing issues, particularly at the Bradgate Unit.

Primary Care Workforce

An HWB task group reviewed NHS workforce planning and in particular the ability of the city to attract and retain high quality medical staff. This is a national issue, with a third of GPs planning to retire in the next five years. But there were also important local issues, including why graduates from the universities' medical schools were not being retained.

The task group asked Leicester City Council's executive and the Health and Wellbeing Board to launch "a concerted effort to promote the prospects of the city, not only in the city but other cities and maybe even internationally." It called on the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to consider "better engagement and consultation with patients by GPs/Partners and the CCG with patients when surgeries are due to close";

"I remain to be convinced there is a sustainable workforce model for primary care in general in the UK.... This is particularly a problem for Leicester with a number of factors coming together (retirements from GP, rising demand and sometimes unrealistic expectation, low morale in the workforce, high levels of NHS red tape diverting dedicated workforce from front line patient care etc). All this is occurring in a tight financial environment."

*Evidence from Professor Kevin Harris,
University of Leicester*

and said: “Nursing courses should look at how doctors organise their trainees to help remove the barrier to GP placements for nurses in training”.

Public Health England and other national bodies were called on to consider the issue of notice periods, saying these should be “extended to ensure that there is enough time to ensure patients are adequately catered for.” The CQC is also asked to “reconsider their inspection regime and the impact that it has on patients by taking away the time of GPs, particularly on a single GP surgery.”

Investing more money into funding GPs is not the answer to solving the issues in the primary care workforce as there is a shortage of GPs. –

Dr Peter Miller

Since the review started the Deputy City Mayor has called on a summit to deal with the issue of Primary Care in the city. The commission will continue to review the position of primary care based on its recommendations.

Better communications when closing GP surgeries

This issue related in part to that of workforce planning and was prompted by a number of high-profile GP surgery closures and the public dismay and confusion caused by those closures. HWB considered this issue on a number of occasions. Members were told GP contracts allowed for three months’ notice of termination; they felt that a voluntary six month notice period would allow for better succession planning for the CCG and also to give more public notice of the closure and the possible need for patients to register with another GP practice. The CCG agreed to take on the Commission’s concerns.

Public Health Budget

The council’s public health programme was badly affected by an in-year government announcement of public health budget spending cuts. Additionally the public health budget is being reduced year on year nationally by 2.2% in 2016/17, 2.5% in 17/18, 2.6% in 18/19 and a further 2.6% in 2019/20. In-year budget cuts in 2015/16 of £1.6m will be followed by further cuts of £621k in 16/17 and £695k in 18/19. Ring-fencing of public health budgets would end from 2018-2019 onwards

HWB Commission members underlined the importance of highlighting where savings were identified as a result of duplication across the health economy and the importance of considering equality implications and impacts on specific communities. A letter was written to the Secretary of State about the concern in cutting Public Health Budgets, which negates against all the preventative work achieved by them which the Government believes should be promoted. The Commission will continue to monitor the situation.

Non-emergency patient transfers

Leicester City Clinical Commissioning Group reported that an option to extend the Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service by Arriva Transport Services was not being taken up. This followed criticism by the HWB and the wider public of Arriva's performance. Some of these had been apparent under the previous contract with Arriva. Despite this Arriva were awarded a further contract in 2012. However members recognised the health and care system was different to when the contract was originally awarded and more demands had been placed upon Arriva since then. The commission was pleased that concerns they had raised had been taken on board, and with the CCG's decision.

Patient transfers from EMAS to LRI

Waiting times for the transfer of patients from ambulances to Leicester Royal Infirmary (LRI) Accident and Emergency (A&E) unit continued to be a concern. East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) and University Hospitals Leicester (UHL) representatives made presentations to the October 2015 and January 2016 meetings of HWB.

Comparisons were made with the Queen's Medical Centre (QMC) A&E unit, which was 30-40% larger than that of LRI and was specifically designed to accommodate patient flows through the hospital. Whilst 1,650 hours had been lost at the LRI in October 2015 through waiting to transfer patients from ambulances only 570 hours had been lost at the QMC. There were also significantly more walk-in patients at LRI whose A&E unit was the busiest in the country.

"Ambulance crews experienced additional emotional pressures as communications to all ambulances were open channel broadcasts and they would be aware there were Red category calls that they could not respond to whilst waiting to hand patients over to hospital staff." –

Evidence to the Health and

Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission



The Commission heard delays in discharging patients had a significant impact on ambulance staff. Communications to all ambulances were open channel broadcasts

and crews were aware of Red category calls to which they could not respond while waiting to hand patients over to hospital staff. The Commission will continue to observe this but:

- Wanted to be informed of reductions in performance for the handover process as it occurs rather than being informed 2-3 months afterwards
- Welcomed the measures introduced to improve performance and said the efforts of staff to achieve this be recognised
- Recognised the need to treat patients in corridors at periods of high volumes of admissions but indicated it would not wish to see this practice continued when the new Emergency Floor was completed.

Sports participation

HCLS was briefed on the extent of sports participation in the city and on the legacy of the Olympic / Paralympic Games following London 2012. There had been little change in participation since the games and rates remain lower than the national average. Members welcomed changes to the government's sporting strategy and the need to recognise physical activity other than competitive sports.

Members looked at plans to tackle barriers to participation and concluded there needed to be further encouragement among people aged over 60, disabled people and members of the BME community.

Better Care Fund – Letter sent to Minister of State

Members of ASC were told Leicester City was seen both regionally and nationally as an exemplar in delivering the Better Care Fund (BCF). However members were told of concerns that the BCF was very bureaucratic and that the Department of Health needed to be made aware of the issues that arose. Planning and bureaucracy were felt to be “unhelpful” despite an awareness that other regions that were not as well placed in dealing with BCF as Leicester.

The Commission members were also concerned at BCF bureaucracy and the chairs of the Adult Social Care and Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commissions wrote jointly to ministers to express and underline their concerns about the BCF, and in particular the bureaucratic nature of its structure.

Providing care and support

Care for older people needs to be adequate for their needs and this is moving from traditional social support services towards promoting independent living. These services are also being increasingly aligned with healthcare to ensure easier transition between the two. There is also a need to ensure carers are well supported.

Greater consideration of Autism and publicity for families.

Guidance for councils and NHS organisations to support the Adult Autism Strategy was published in March 2015. The guidance refers to what “must” and “should” be done by councils and NHS bodies to implement the strategy. Members of ASC were told a multi-agency Autism Board had taken over from the previous Autism Planning Group to oversee the work in the delivery action plan. The Chair of ASC suggested more action was needed to raise awareness as autism was not promoted as well as, for example dementia. Council officers needed to be more aware of the issue. Libraries, community centres and other public buildings could perhaps do more to promote public awareness. Regular updates on the strategy would be requested by ASC with museums and libraries asked to take particular action.

Closure of Elderly People’s Homes (EPHs)

ASC continued to receive reports relating to the closure of EPHs within the city as well as monitoring issues surrounding those closures and the resulting transfer of residents to other homes. In November 2015 the commission requested a report on the sale of Arbor House and ThurnCourt as going concerns to Leicestershire County Care Ltd and the closure of Preston Lodge. Commission members asked about impacts on residents and staff and how these were managed and were reassured appropriate actions were being taken to manage this, including supporting residents and their families.

Adult Social Care Budget

The Adult Social Care budget is under increasing pressure because of government budget cuts and increased demand for services. The ASC and HWB commissions [held a joint meeting](#) to consider the adult social care budget. Members felt older citizens appeared to be increasingly disadvantaged as the government was not adequately supporting the continuing demands for adult social care and preventative services. They said investment in public health campaigns had proved effective in keeping people healthier for longer which reduced the burden on more expensive acute sector services. Members also underlined that sports, arts and cultural activities all contributed to health and wellbeing, combated isolation, helped to deliver good quality of life to people and helped people stay fit and well. The commission will continue to monitor the impacts of the pressures on the budget.

Our children and young people

This priority is based on every child to be safe, loved and live a happy and healthy childhood, free from harm and given every chance to pursue their aspirations and fulfil their potential.

Leicester Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB): 2014/15 annual report

The Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission considered the report in the context of an Ofsted review which had found Children's Services and the LSCB inadequate. The Board report to CYPS included reference to the publication of a two-year business plan for LSCB. This was the first time the Board had published such a plan and members were told the longer-term planning would help the work programme and would allow for the 2018 LSCB business plan to be aligned with the LCC Children's Trust Children and Young People's Plan.

Scrutiny members, concerned the report did not give a true reflection of what was happening on the ground, asked whether the action plans in the report had been implemented and what the improvement figures were. With numbers of children in need and caseloads increasing the Commission was told the government was reviewing the safeguarding framework in the light of serious pressures on families. The trend in Leicester echoed the national picture and the council had invested in early help and was working with families to get interventions in place as early as possible. However the Commission was warned these areas were under threat due to funding cuts because they were not statutory children's services.

Early Years Foundation Stage Outcomes

Results for Leicester continued to improve, with 2015 results being better than in 2014. However:

- Results also improved across the country and Leicester remained at or near the bottom on many measures
- Girls continue to achieve better outcomes than boys though the gaps in achievement between girls and boys are smaller than nationally
- Achievement for all children and the lowest performing 20% improved but the gap between them increased, contrary to regional and national trends.

CYPS members acknowledged that achieving the required improvements would not be simple and stressed the importance of ensuring the objective was embedded in schools' teaching without interfering with individual schools' classroom ethos. The commission will consider this again next year.

The strategy to improve educational outcomes in Leicester: 2015-2018

CYPS members received a report which set out the above strategy. Members were told the strategy, which had been developed with the Leicester Education Strategy Partnership (LESP), featured three main strands -

- Outstanding leadership
- Inspiring teaching and learning; and
- Early help and a good start in life.

Members asked how the strategy differed from previous strategies and were told it had been written in close co-operation with head teachers in the city - also that it was a working document and would be revised as appropriate. Concern was expressed at the falling numbers of teachers. Members were told that nationally there was a downward trend in numbers of teachers remaining in the profession. There was a concern there would not be enough teachers to meet future demand and the commission will keep a watching brief on this.

“We want to engage and harness the resources of all who care about children and young people and the future of a thriving Leicester City to work together to deliver our vision. The children of Leicester City deserve only the best. Our vision is one of partnership working, innovation and long term sustainability.”

Leicester Education Strategic Partnership

Ofsted inspection of services for children in need

In 2015 a task group reviewed ‘The historical context of the Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of care and protection, inspected by Ofsted and assessed as *‘inadequate.’*

The findings highlighted some weaknesses in management at the time of the Ofsted Inspection; however, the task group was satisfied the council has taken measures to make improvements.

It respected and acknowledged the efforts of frontline staff and welcomed assurances from the new Strategic Director and Councillor Russell, the Assistant City Mayor (Children Young People and Schools), that things were being turned around but that this was a considerable task against a national shortage of social workers. The task group praised social workers for their hard work and commitment.

The work of CYPS will continue to monitor that the improvement plan put in place following the Ofsted inspection is working well and meeting the required standards.

Our neighbourhoods and communities

Neighbourhood facilities allow people to access services locally and to run them themselves where possible, reducing costs and improving services through better use of buildings and joining up services locally where possible. It is also important to communicate the many welfare reforms taking place and to look at ways to potentially reduce the impact of those reforms.

Environmental and enforcement services help keep people safe, tackle anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and substance misuse and keep the city clean and green through waste collection and recycling, and tackling fly tipping. There is also an aim in this section to ensure council homes are good quality and energy-efficient.

Housing Voids Task Group

The Housing Scrutiny Commission has begun a review into void council homes. The time during which properties remain empty has been an on-going concern for members, tenants and tenant representatives. Each empty home meant a household or family, which should be in a decent home, cannot access that facility. There are also financial implications for the council through loss of rent and council tax. Members are seeking to understand why some homes remain unoccupied for months while work remains un-started or unfinished. The task group is due to report to the HSC in Autumn 2016.

Licensing Policies

In Autumn 2015 the city council reviewed its policies on licensing functions relating to alcohol outlets, gambling premises and hackney cabs and taxi drivers and these policy proposals were reported to the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Commission.

On the council's alcohol licensing policy the Commission considered that "the policy of banning some stores from selling high alcohol content drinks while others are allowed to sell such drinks is anti-competitive and may lead to smaller local businesses losing trade".

The gambling licensing proposals attracted comment and recommendations from NCSI members. They were concerned that a number of gambling establishments were too close to places of worship. Concern also was raised about the number of betting shops that could be located in one street.

The commission asked for updates to these policies following implementation.

The impact of gambling on vulnerable communities

Members of the NSCI returned to the issue of gambling, and looked more closely at the impact of gambling on vulnerable communities as a review. The Task Group devoted a hearing to taking evidence from the Association of British Bookmakers at senior level, and the ABB's overall response was that Leicester City Council's engagement with the industry was a model for others to follow.

Evidence from STAR (Supporting Tenants And Residents) showed that, against expectations and experience, people were prepared to answer difficult questions about gambling problems. This included one client in a city centre betting shop who said he had lost more than £100,000 in two years on betting; it had cost him his family and his home. The losses had been made on Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) and this was experienced by clients of gambling support groups, one of which provided evidence to the investigation.

"I shoplift and sell goods to fund my gambling habit. I have lost money and an inheritance..."

"£250 per week. This was the entire household income, leaving us without food and the ability to pay bills..."

"Spends £100 per week leaves no money for food..."

"£10 a week on gambling which affect my financial situation..."

The wider picture appeared to be that while gambling is legal and regulated it can have damaging impacts on individuals and communities. But support and other agencies did not ask clients about gambling and if so what the impact was. Part of the wide range of recommendations from the Commission sought to raise the issue of gambling as a problem for individuals and communities, particularly vulnerable communities.

The Commission proved helpful in offering advice and guidance to the review at a number of points. Heather Wardle, consultant with Geofutures and who had worked with Westminster and Manchester councils and the Local Government Association, was extremely helpful to the review, offering information and guidance, particularly about the development of a risk assessment framework.

A total of 26 report [recommendations](#) to the Executive were accepted in full. Four further actions recommended to the Executive from the chair of the task group in the light of the Times story and other developments, including the formation of an all-party Parliamentary group on gambling issues, were also accepted by the executive.

Highfields Community Association

The decision to end funding for Highfields Community Association (HCA) and to make no retrospective payments was called in and referred to the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission. Scrutiny looked at the underlying financial case for the decision and sought reassurances that disruption to services caused by the closure was minimised.

Discussions focussed on whether users of HCA buildings and services would have continued access to the services they required, and that where HCA staff were affected, assurances were in place about their futures. The Commission was assured appropriate alternative arrangements were in place for service users, in particular for those wishing to access adult education services, and that HCA staff had been supported in relation to seeking alternative employment.

Fire Service Review

The Overview Select Committee led on member responses to proposals from the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) to cut the LFRS budget, which included proposals to close Leicester's central fire station. Richard Chandler, the LFRS Chief Fire Officer, and representatives of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) were invited to give evidence to the OSC.

(OSC) "urges the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority and the City Mayor to look at a managed reserve strategy for the next two to three years, during which time a referendum is considered and planned for the most suitable time, with a county-wide campaign to support an increase in the fire precept for future years to address any budget shortfall.":-

Cllr Baljit Singh, OSC Chair

OSC was particularly concerned about the proposal to close Leicester's central fire station in the context of serious concerns that the most vulnerable communities in the city and county, particularly those in high-rise accommodation, as well as hospitals, two sports grounds and two universities, would be put at greater risk by the closure of the station. Members were critical that none of the proposals for savings included back-office reductions or proposals for joint working with other blue-light and public agencies.

OSC chair Cllr Singh wrote setting out the committee's views which were in a series of recommendations: that the Committee rejected the budget proposals on the basis that:

- 1) They would leave the city unsafe;
- 2) They did not include consideration of other savings, such as those outlined at by the Fire Brigades Union and Councillors, including savings at the Fire Authority's headquarters premises; and

- 3) The budget assumptions exaggerated the savings needed over the next three years, particularly because of the planning assumptions that are included;
- 4) OSC called on the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority and City Mayor to fully explore other savings to be made, including at the Combined Fire Authority's headquarters and other savings referenced by the Fire Brigades Union; and
- 5) That the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority and the City Mayor look at a managed reserve strategy for the next two to three years, during which time a referendum is considered and planned for the most suitable time, with a county-wide campaign to support an increase in the fire precept for future years to address any budget shortfall.

A major outcome from OSC and other representations was that the proposal to close the Central Fire Station was withdrawn.

Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS)

TNS continued to be a topic of interest for NSCI throughout the year. This city-wide programme of reviewing service delivery in relation to potential for disposal of buildings became part of the wider Using Buildings Better programme which also includes related work on Channel Shift that also forms part of this Commission's portfolio.

Members were concerned that where buildings are offered to the community or community groups, those groups had the training and support to sustain them as a community resource. They were also keen to ensure that where services were being concentrated within fewer buildings service levels were maintained and that as far as possible services continued to be accessible to the most vulnerable members of the community.

Communal Cleaning Review

The Housing department reported back on progress made since a wide-ranging report on problems of cleaning communal areas of mainly council-owned and managed homes – often on stairwells and balcony areas of flats across the city, notably within the St Matthews and New Parks areas. [A link to the report, in December 2015, is contained here.](#)

The report set out details of £137.5k of investment in improved floor surfaces, and in some cases, cleaning and redecoration, for 2016-2017, as well as £33.6k of similar work in 2015-2016. A £32k programme of deep-cleaning of surfaces was also re-introduced, at least partly in response to the Housing Scrutiny Commission report calling for this to be done. The Commission was keen that staff, often temporary and part-time, should be recruited from local housing estates so that they would have better knowledge of the local environment and a greater buy-in to the work. Access to better training for all staff was also being encouraged.

A strong and democratic council

It is important for the public to have confidence and value the work of the council and also for them to be able to participate in decisions affecting them. As such ensuring the way the council's work supports openness and accountability, communicating effectively, and encouraging the people of Leicester to participate in the democratic process and in the shaping of services is an important priority.

Channel Shift

The council is transforming the way in which it interacts with communities. The objective is to ensure as many contacts are made electronically – through emails, social media and other formats – as possible. There would be a consequent reduction in face-to-face contacts. Members of NSCI received a progress report and were concerned that the most vulnerable and possibly in most need would have least access to computer-based facilities. They were also concerned that channel shift might reinforce isolation within some communities. Members asked for a further report on progress on implementing the strategy and expressed concern about staff reductions associated with the programme. [A link to the minutes of this issue can be found here.](#)

Ward Community Meetings

NSCI received a progress report on the re-shaping of the way in which ward community meetings were organised and how funding applications might be made and monitored. This included a shift towards on-line applications for project funding. The Commission:

- Encouraged the potential further use of Voluntary Action Leicestershire
- Supported production of a ward meetings annual report
- Was concerned about the reduction in the number of community engagement officers and the need to manage community expectations about what could be subsequently achieved by ward meetings; and
- Requested a report on the new operating model during the 2016-2017 year.

[A link to the report on this issue can be found here.](#)

Tracking petitions

Each meeting of the Overview Select Committee received reports about progress made on petitions which had been made to the council. It was recognised that some petitions could not be resolved and closed in the timescales set out by the council because they involved decision-taking and programming which might take months to resolve. This was particularly apparent in transport-related petitions where proposed changes, responding to petitions, would themselves be subject to consultation, and where projects might be required to be programmed in future financial years

City Mayor's Questions

This standing item on the Overview Select Committee's agenda covered a wide range of topics. It provided an opportunity for members of the committee to raise issues of concern to them, and for the Mayor (and other executive members) to respond or act on. Issues included:

- Empty city centre shops
- Western Park Golf Club
- Partnership working with county and district counties in Leicestershire
- Parking fines
- Investment in the outer estates (and the relationship with Connecting Leicester)
- The impact of welfare cuts
- Bringing empty homes back into use
- The purchase of Vaughan College
- The refugee crisis
- Ward community meeting funding
- The Anchor centre (and its replacement)
- Schools admissions and school place planning
- Franklyn Fields
- Tuition fees and academies
- Adult Social Care budget provision
- Trees in Knighton
- Schools and associated traffic parking problems

Finance Task Group/Budgets

The Finance Task Group made a series of reports to the Overview Select Committee and OSC members highlighted a number of issues from these reports. These ranged from the effectiveness of revenue collection to over-spends in areas such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The OSC Chair stressed budgets for Children Services and Adult Social Care needed to remain a priority for the relevant commissions and suggested they request updates and examine these accordingly.

Members also highlighted the increasing numbers of looked-after children. A lack of fostering places and increasing costs were identified as issues but the rise in numbers of looked-after children was likely to be part of a national picture. The Committee [asked for more in-depth information](#) about numbers of children from the city sent out of the area for their care and for a breakdown of the funding involved. OSC also asked for further information on the numbers of agency staff, particularly social workers, who were taken on to address issues with Looked After Children.

The chair of OSC also expressed concern about the overpayment of housing benefits. However the committee was told the headline figure of £15m was mitigated by the fact that a third had been collected and another £10m had been invoiced or was scheduled to be invoiced.

Contacting Scrutiny

Contact

For more information please contact the Scrutiny Team on **0116 4546340** or email **scrutiny@leicester.gov.uk**

Leicester City Council
City Hall
115 Charles Street
Leicester
LE1 1FZ

<http://www.leicester.gov.uk/>