



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: WEDNESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2017 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Malik (Chair)
Councillor Gugnani (Vice Chair)

Councillor Bajaj Councillor Fonseca
Councillor Cutkelvin Councillor Khote

In Attendance

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

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16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cank.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and
Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 12 July 2017
be confirmed as a correct record.

19. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

In relation to minute 11, "Portfolio Overview", the Director of Neighbourhood

and Environmental Services confirmed that the frequently asked questions referred to in the eighth bullet point had been prepared and, if not already available on the Council's website, would be published there soon.

20. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair made no announcements.

21. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

22. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Chair reported that he had received a letter from the Unison trades union, which raised a legal point regarding the re-procurement of social welfare advice. He had therefore asked for an opinion on the letter and had been reassured by the City Barrister that consulting on a single preferred delivery model / proposal was lawful.

Mr A Ross was present at the meeting to make a representation regarding the re-procurement of social welfare advice. The Chair invited Mr Ross to address the Committee for five minutes to make his representation and explained that the points he raised would be included in the Commission's consideration of social welfare advice re-procurement (minute 23, "Social Welfare Advice Re-Procurement", referred).

Mr Ross explained that he represented unwaged members of Unite and made the following representation:

"Over 34,000 people in the City and County rely on Employment Support Allowance as their source of income. They are by definition ill or disabled in some way, including members of Unite's Community Branch. The City Council proposes to cut the Welfare Advice budget by £500,000 and reduce access to the service to just 8 council offices in Leicester.

Unite Community want to know what are the commission's views on this proposal? We believe that at a time of increasing need for welfare advice in Leicester the current budget should be maintained, not cut, making use of the additional £7 million for adult social care the council has received since setting this year's budget. Access to welfare advice should not be restricted. Instead it should be extended to include health centres and food banks, where those in most need of benefit support already go."

23. SOCIAL WELFARE ADVICE RE-PROCUREMENT

The Director of Finance submitted a report giving an update on the re-procurement of Council-funded Social Welfare Advice contracts and providing details of the current public consultation on the proposed model of advice provision in the city.

Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor for Jobs and Skills, introduced the report, stressing that no decisions had been taken to date on how the contracts would be re-procured. She explained that the current social welfare advice contracts with external organisations were ending, so the opportunity was being taken to consider what should be provided in the future.

Councillor Waddington explained that external advice providers funded by the Council currently were managed by different service areas. This had resulted in some inconsistency in the performance and monitoring of the contracts. It therefore was important that the new service provided good quality social welfare advice for residents that was consistent, accessible and appropriate to people's needs. The re-procurement exercise also was an opportunity to facilitate closer working relationships between advice providers.

Councillor Waddington offered to present the findings of the consultation and information on the proposed new delivery model to the Commission.

It was stressed that, although savings were being sought, as in all service areas, this should not be to the detriment of the advice services provided. The Project Manager for the re-procurement exercise confirmed that the cost of the re-procured services, and therefore whether any savings could be achieved, was not known yet, as no decisions had been taken on what service model would be adopted.

The Project Manager further advised that:

- It had been difficult to bring together robust statistics by which to assess the current contracts. Different contracts contained different requirements regarding the methods and extent of data recording;
- This also meant it was difficult to know exactly how many clients were being seen, as one person could be being helped by more than one organisation. This also highlighted the need for centrally co-ordinated record keeping;
- Demand for social welfare advice was increasing, so the service could not remain in its current format. The Council therefore wanted to find a service model that ensured the continued delivery of free, quality advice across the city;
- Clients in crisis would continue to be "fast-tracked";
- Individual meetings were being held with the agencies currently funded by the Council to provide welfare advice;
- It was suggested that some agencies would need to consider changes to the way in which they delivered services, as they had been using the same delivery methods for a considerable length of time;

- The consultation on the re-procurement of these contracts had included a city-wide call for evidence, but there had been a limited response to this;
- It was anticipated that the welfare advice services would be delivered from a dedicated area in the Council's Customer Service Centre in Granby Street. This would help facilitate the provision of standardised, quality advice across the city, as well as according with the Council's Using Buildings Better programme. There was insufficient room for telephony services to be provided from there, so the lead provider / partnership could be expected to find a location from which telephone services would be offered;
- It was anticipated that advice providers would be required to introduce the channel shift aspects of the contract on a phased basis over three years from the start of the contract; and
- Advice agencies had stated that they felt they could work together more. The contract specification therefore would set out the need for formal inter-agency working relationships, as well as formal relationships with the Council. These would not be prescribed in the contract specification, (for example, whether there should be a lead provider, whether a consortium should be formed, or whether it would be a looser form of collaboration), as the voluntary sector should decide how it could best establish these relationships. However, the contract specification could state that the Council was seeking agencies with local knowledge.

The following points also were made in discussion:

- Over the last few years there had been many surveys about people's welfare rights which showed a lack of awareness of those rights and how to access services.
- Monitoring of contracts was very important, as there had been occasions when it had been found that the services being provided under some contracts, (unrelated to the ones currently under consideration), were not those anticipated. This also was important if any of the services were sub-contracted.

Reply by the Project Manager:

It was anticipated that agencies would sub-contract elements of the service, but this would be vigorously monitored by the Council through the lead agency.

- What training would be provided for those providing the advice? Training also would be useful for Councillors, especially in relation to newer benefits, such as Universal Credit.

Reply by the Project Manager:

The contract specification would include the requirement that robust training and development for staff and volunteers be provided. The

opportunity to also provide training for Councillors would be welcomed.

- The high rate of success in appeals was welcomed, but it was questioned whether it was felt that demand for Tier 3 advice had been monitored sufficiently and whether anticipated demand could be met.

Reply by the Project Manager:

Demand for Tier 3 advice had been monitored carefully and, based on an assessment of data provided by agencies, currently was considered to be approximately 2% of reported footfall. Anticipation of an increase in this demand for the next few years would be built in to the contract.

- How would the Council protect its income in respect of potential rent arrears arising when people moved on to Universal Credit?

Reply by the Director of Finance:

When Universal Credit was fully introduced in March 2018, the Council would no longer be commissioned to provide the benefits, although it would remain be an option for the Council to provide support.

The Council was aware of issues this could create. For example, housing benefit would no longer be paid to the Council, as landlord, but would be given to the tenant. Councils in areas where this was happening already were finding that high levels of rent arrears were accumulating, as some tenants had never had to pay rent themselves before.

The Council did not have the resources to support all tenants, so it needed to focus on those most in need, while providing tools for others to help themselves. The provision of welfare advice services was part of this.

The Council also had a very limited amount of funding it could use to support people, but this would only enable small amounts to be awarded to successful applicants. The Department for Work and Pensions would be providing the Council with some financial support to facilitate this, but it would be very limited and the exact amount was not known yet.

- Some concern was expressed that the specialist services currently provided by some voluntary groups would be lost.

Reply by the Project Manager:

One of the aims of the re-procurement exercise was to encourage advice agencies in the city to work together, without losing the specialist knowledge and services they currently provided.

- What assistance could be provided to those experiencing language barriers?

Reply by the Project Manager:

Support was in place for those needing language assistance. However, those experiencing language barriers would be encouraged to bring someone with them to face to face meetings to help. If this was not possible, the Council's translation services would be used where possible. It also was hoped that people who spoke community languages would volunteer to work with agencies contracted to provide advice services.

The Project Manager thanked participating agencies for their co-operation and contribution to the preparation work for the re-procurement exercise and reminded Members that the consultation would close on 6 October 2017. All Members were invited to respond to the consultation if they had not already done so.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Chair be asked to respond to the consultation on the re-procurement of social welfare advice services on behalf of Commission, asking that the points raised above to be taken in to consideration and drawing particular attention to the following points:
 - a) Partnerships are very important to the future of these services, so it is essential that all organisations involved in delivering welfare advice services maintain productive and transparent relationships, (for example, with defined roles and how they will be managed). The Council needs to manage these partnerships effectively, so a robust monitoring framework needs to be included in the service contract;
 - b) Priority groups for inclusion in the contract specification should include those whose first language is not English and those who do not have information technology knowledge and/or experience; and
 - c) Care should be taken to ensure that advice commissioners and providers are aware of the different access needs of clients;
- 2) That the Director of Finance be asked to report back to Commission on responses received to the consultation and setting out proposals for the future delivery of the service; and
- 3) That the Director of Finance be asked to provide training for Councillors on the new welfare system.

24. TRANSFORMING NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES - EAST AND CENTRAL AREA

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report providing an overview of progress with the Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) Programme, summarising the results of engagement work and consultation carried out in the east and central areas of the city and setting out proposals intended to be implemented by the TNS programme in relation to those areas.

Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services, introduced the report. He drew attention to the engagement and consultation that had been undertaken on the proposals for how services in the east and central areas of the city could be reorganised to achieve the required reduction in service delivery costs. He noted that these savings should be achieved through the recommendations being made, but stressed that it was important to ensure that neighbourhood services were maintained in all parts of the city, so people did not have to come in to the centre of the city to access them.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that consultation on the proposals had been undertaken using the methods developed when considering the delivery of neighbourhood services in other parts of the city. For example, questionnaires had been available on-line and in printed format and also were produced in a community language.

The number of responses to the consultation had been lower than that received in other areas, but this could have been due to fewer changes to service delivery being proposed than had been made in other parts of the city.

Members asked whether it was proposed to revisit some of the changes made to the delivery of neighbourhood services throughout the city where it was known that issues remained unresolved. In addition, it was felt that there was some disparity between areas in which the delivery of neighbourhood services had been reviewed. For example, in some areas there had been a bigger impact on the provision of youth activities than in other areas, but unlike some other areas the proposals for the central and eastern areas impacted on housing services

In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that the Council's Using Buildings Better programme had started during the TNS programme and had expanded the range of buildings being considered. It was recognised that some boundaries between areas were "artificial", in that people living in one area visited buildings in other areas. The next phase of the programme would be a city-wide survey of how satisfied users were with the services delivered through neighbourhood buildings and an important part of closing down the project therefore would be to identify what remained to be resolved.

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services endorsed this, confirming that the lessons learned from the TNS programme were relevant across all Council service areas.

The following points were then made in discussion on the report:

- The merging of services were some of the biggest changes made by the Council to service delivery, but damage had been done by a lack of understanding by some officers of communities' perspectives of the changes.
- Services offered from multi-service hubs should include provision of a "triage" process, so an assessment could be made of which services people needed to access for their particular situations.
- Multi-service hubs would require a change in culture for staff, as they no longer would be working exclusively for one service area.

Reply by the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services:
Managers were very mindful of the need to ensure that staff were kept involved in the development of new service delivery systems.

- Would there be enough space in St Barnabas Library to accommodate services relocated from the Humberstone and Rowlatts Hill housing offices?

Reply from the Director of Housing:
"Back office" Housing services would not be located at the Library, so the only space requirement would be for a small number of front-line staff. It was anticipated that an existing room would be used and that this would not restrict other users' access to library facilities.

- There was concern that people would be unable to use the facilities at the Coleman Lodge Neighbourhood Centre.

Reply by the Head of Neighbourhood Services:
A range of options for the how the Centre could be used would be considered. Officers were aware that groups using the Centre were interested in participating in these discussions.

- The proposed improvements to facilities and access to services was welcomed.

AGREED:

- 1) That the results of the engagement work and consultation carried out in the east and central areas of the city under the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme, and the resulting proposals for future delivery of Neighbourhood Services in those areas, be noted;
- 2) That the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services be asked to share the lessons learned about consultation and engagement through the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme with other Council service areas;

- 3) That the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services be asked to present a report to this Commission on the lessons learned about consultation and engagement through the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme; and
- 4) That the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services be asked to present a report to this Commission on how the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme will be closed, this report to include information on work needed to complete issues remaining outstanding under the programme.

25. NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SPENDING REVIEW PROGRAMME - UPDATE

The Director of Finance reported verbally that the two key spending reviews affecting services within this Commission's remit were Social Welfare Advice Re-Procurement and the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme.

She further reported that the Chairs of Scrutiny Commissions soon would be meeting the City Mayor to discuss spending reviews. No changes to the reviews falling within this Commission's remit were anticipated.

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services advised the Commission that a decision following the DIY and Bulky Waste review had been deferred and it was not known at present when any decisions on these services would be taken. An indicative saving of £2.3million needed to be made from cleansing and waste services, so consideration was being given to how this could be achieved through various service areas.

AGREED:

That directors be asked to provide a written update on spending reviews falling within this Commission's remit for future meetings, this report to be circulated with each agenda.

26. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair advised Members that the suggestions for items to be included in the Work Programme received further to the invitation issued at the last meeting, (minute 14, "Scrutiny Commission Work Programme", referred), had been incorporated in to the Programme.

27. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.08 pm

