



Leicester
City Council

MINUTE EXTRACT

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

Held: WEDNESDAY, 24 JANUARY 2018 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Gugnani (Chair)
Councillor Thalukdar (Vice Chair)

Councillor Bajaj Councillor Cutkelvin
Councillor Cank Councillor Khote

In Attendance

Councillor Clair, Deputy City Mayor with responsibility for Culture, Leisure, Sport and
Regulatory Services
Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor - Neighbourhood Services

Also Present:

Councillor Kitterick

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51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fonseca.

Members of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission had been invited to attend the meeting for agenda item 8, "Language and IT Training". Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Patel in relation to this.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

59. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2018/19 TO 2020/21

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out the City Mayor's proposed budget for 2018/19 to 2020/21, noting that a balanced budget was proposed for the next financial year. This had been achieved by drawing on the last of the Council's reserves.

The Director of Finance advised the Commission that:

- Unison trades union had rejected the employers' offer of a 2% increase on employees' pay for 2018/19. This could have a significant impact on the budget, as allowance for a 1% award had been built in to budget ceilings;
- A significant pressure on the budget was the continuing reduction in housing benefit administration grant, received from the Department for Work and Pensions. The number of housing benefit claimants had not fallen, but by 2019/20 the grant received would be less than half that received in 2010/11;
- Under the government's welfare reforms, if elderly people were already in receipt of Housing Benefit they would continue to receive it. However, non-payment of rent was recognised as a risk for the Council, as reduced income to the Housing Revenue Account would affect the Council's ability to pay for repairs to the housing stock;
- Government funding for discretionary housing payments continued to be ring-fenced and would reduce over the next few years. The Council would be advised in March what funding it would receive for these payments over the coming year, but indications were that it would be approximately the same level as the current year;
- The Supporting Tenants and Residents (STAR) service initially had been included in the recent review of welfare advice services. However, it was felt that including it in the new social welfare advice contract would not have made that contract attractive to the market, so it was removed. Instead, an internal review was being undertaken to determine the way forward for this service; and
- This Commission's remit included discretionary services and regulatory services for which there was discretion in how they were provided. Historically, financial savings had been made through cuts to such services and this was likely to continue.

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services drew Members' attention to the large number of actions undertaken through these service budgets. For example, annually there were approximately 9,000 licensing applications processed, 13 million waste collections, 8,500 fly tips dealt with and 27 community/library buildings operated and maintained. Despite budget reductions over recent years, good services continued to be provided. This was evidenced from feedback such as that from waste collection services,

which showed high levels of satisfaction with waste collection and waste management.

The Commission noted that a change in law relating to the content of waste processed through the anaerobic digester that the Council used at Wanlip had resulted in significant costs to the Council. These costs would be reduced by reducing the organic content of sand derivative from the waste processed there from the current level of approximately 15% to below 10%. Work was underway with Biffa, (the Council's contractor), to install clarifying equipment that it was intended would help achieve this.

The trade waste facility at Gypsum Close recycling centre also had an impact on the revenue budget, as an ambitious income target had been set when the current facility was opened in 2015. However, use of the facility was increasing and weighbridge revenue had increased by approximately 40% since the facility opened in 2015. These services were being promoted as much as possible, for example by including Information on trade waste services in the letters to be sent advising businesses of their rates for the coming year.

Loros currently operated the re-use shop at the Gypsum Close Recycling Centre. Under the contract, at or above a certain level of profit, some of that profit was passed to the Council. The amount being received was increasing, which would contribute towards the running costs for the site.

Members asked whether consideration had been given to recovering charges from Council tenants when their gardens had to be cleared by the Council. The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services confirmed that charges for clearing private locations were passed on to the owners and suggested that Housing services could be asked to consider doing this for Council tenants. Any costs recovered in this way would be paid in to the Housing Revenue Account.

Members asked whether consideration had been given to recovering charges from Council tenants when their gardens had to be cleared by the Council. The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services confirmed that charges for clearing private locations in, for example, filthy, verminous or fly-tipping situations, were passed on to the owners. The Director offered to feedback the Commission's view to Housing Services. This matter would relate back to the Housing Revenue Account.

It was questioned whether the current garden waste collection service had been successful. In reply, the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services noted that approximately 4,200 residents currently used this chargeable and optional service, which was considered to be a reasonable level of use, noting the city environment. However, there was an ambition to further grow the customer base.

Concern was expressed that the budget reductions being faced by the Council would lead to a reduction in staff numbers. The Director of Finance advised that the level of budget reductions meant that it was not possible to provide

guarantees about jobs, noting that the Council's employment costs currently were approximately £1million per day.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services be asked to:
 - a) ask Housing services to consider recharging Council tenants when the Council is required to clear poorly maintained gardens; and
 - b) provide this Commission with a full report on waste management costs, including information on how the city's waste is disposed of;
- 2) That the Director of Finance be asked to notify the Commission of the final level of funding to be available for discretionary housing payments in 2018/19, to enable a decision to be made on whether the impact of this on the city's residents requires further scrutiny; and
- 3) That the Chair of this Commission be asked to advise the Overview Select Committee that this Commission accepts that the Council cannot increase Council Tax for 2018/19 above the limit set by government and so supports the proposed increase of 4.99%.