

Nottingham City Council

Communities and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 24 January 2024 from 10:02am to 12:34pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Imran Jalil (Chair)
Councillor Neghat Khan (Vice Chair)
Councillor Andrew Rule

Absent

Councillor Liaqat Ali
Councillor Faith Gakanje-Ajala
Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Nayab Patel

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Samuel Balch	- Interim Head of Carbon Reduction
Nancy Barnard	- Head of Governance
Councillor Corall Jenkins	- Portfolio Holder for Energy, Environment and Waste Services and Parks
Councillor Angela Kandola	- Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Planning
Mary Lester	- Director of Resident Services
Adrian Mann	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Councillor David Mellen	- Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Regeneration and Communications
Councillor Sajid Mohammed	- Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods, Safety and Inclusion
Kate Morris	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Colin Parr	- Corporate Director for Communities, Environment and Resident Services
Colin Wilderspin	- Director of Communities

20 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Liaqat Ali	-	on leave
Councillor AJ Matsiko	-	unwell
Councillor Nayab Patel	-	work commitments

21 Declarations of Interests

In the interests of transparency in relation to item 4 (Service Impact of Budget Proposals), Councillor Neghat Khan declared that she is a trustee of Epic Partners, which receives Area-Based Grant funding from the Council.

22 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2023 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

23 Service Impact of Budget Proposals

Councillor David Mellen, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Regeneration and Communications; Councillor Corall Jenkins, Portfolio Holder for Energy, Environment and Waste Services and Parks; Councillor Angela Kandola, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Planning; Councillor Sajid Mohammed, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods, Safety and Inclusion; Colin Parr, Corporate Director for Communities, Environment and Resident Services; Mary Lester, Director of Resident Services; Colin Wilderspin, Director of Communities; and Samuel Balch, Interim Head of Carbon Reduction, presented a report on the development context of the Council's 2024/25 budget proposals and their anticipated impacts on the services delivered by the Communities, Environment and Resident Services directorate. The following points were raised:

- a) The overall 2024/25 budget proposals have been developed in the context of very challenging circumstances both locally and nationally. There are significant pressures in a number of service areas, with a £16.2 million net budget gap identified as at July 2023. However, by December 2023, growing inflationary and demand pressures indicated a requirement to make savings of £53.7 million to achieve a balanced budget for 2024/25. As a result, a strict 'Duties and Powers' approach has had to be taken to the development of the new budget, identifying potential savings of £20.5 million.
- b) The 'Duties and Powers' methodology assesses where the Council has a legal obligation to deliver a function and where it can exercise functions on a discretionary basis. It is a recognised approach in the Local Authority sector and is used to create a focus on the Council's core statutory activity and identify work areas where savings can be made. As a result, the current budget proposals have been developed on the basis of establishing all service options in the context of delivering the legal minimum as the base position. Although the current proposals have been discussed between senior officers and Executive councillors, and been subject to a formal public consultation process where required, a number have not been agreed by the Council's Executive.
- c) It is proposed that around £12 million in savings will be made from within the Communities, Environment and Resident Services directorate over the next two years, with the majority to be delivered within 2024/25. The identification of these savings has been an extremely challenging piece of work, and will have a significant impact on certain services. In making the proposals, full regard has been given to the written guidance on the required standards of statutory services. The statutory minimum service is clear in a number of areas, such as for Environmental Health, but careful consideration and balance has had to be applied to some other service areas where the required statutory threshold is less clear. Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) have been produced for all relevant proposals and work is taking place to mitigate service impacts wherever possible.
- d) The directorate's current senior management posts are also under review, to ensure that the correct management structure is in place to deliver services and transformation going forward in the most efficient way possible.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- e) The Committee queried how the current 'Duties and Powers' methodology connected to the 'One Council' best value process, how making the proposed substantial savings in a short time period would be achieved, how any new in-year overspend would be mitigated against, and what measures would be put in place to record the delivery of savings on an ongoing basis. It was reported that the 'Duties and Powers' approach is a recognised tool for identifying vital savings when significant reductions are required to achieve a balanced budget. A full risk analysis and profile have been completed, and the ongoing risk position will be monitored actively. The values set out in the proposals have been subject to robust challenge and some savings have been delivered already to help mitigate against the current budget overspend for 2023/24. A number of proposals build upon previous 'Best Value' transformation work and can be implemented relatively quickly, so it is not anticipated that a further overspend position will arise within the directorate during 2024/25. However, the delivery of some of the proposals, particularly those affecting community centres and public libraries, could be extremely complex and a great deal of mitigation work will be required.
- f) The Committee asked how the feedback gathered from the public consultation would be used to inform the final budget proposals, and whether there was enough time left in the budget development process for this input to be used effectively. It was explained that a high-level summary of the responses received is available to the directorate, currently. The data collected through the consultation process will be reviewed and used to establish the final proposals. It will be vital to consider the comments relating to potential service impacts very carefully, to help to develop any possible mitigations.
- g) The Committee asked what processes were in place to help reduce the impact of the proposals on service users, and how 'Best Value' would be achieved. It was set out that a high level of savings was needed within the directorate, but that these would be delivered in as proportionate a way as possible – while continuing with the Council's wider transformation programme to ensure greater efficiency within services. It is important that all directorates are aware of the work being carried out to achieve savings across the Council, as proposals made in one directorate could have a significant impact on another. There is a relatively high demand for statutory services currently and this could continue to increase so, although there is ongoing work to achieve transformation to improve the value for money of services, the overall national context continues to be very challenging.
- h) The Committee queried whether some of the current proposals could not be implemented, and what the long-term knock-on effects of service reductions could be. It was explained that the Council was required to deliver a balanced budget, but the finalised Local Government Finance Settlement has not been sufficient to cover all of the anticipated shortfall – thus requiring significant savings to be made. Some discretion has been used in the development of the current proposals, as they do not represent the stopping of all discretionary services provided by the Council – hence the continuing discussions between officers and the Executive to determine the final 2024/25 budget position.
- i) The Committee asked what the impact of the proposals on the Council's carbon neutrality ambitions might be. It was reported that, potentially, the Council's

ambitions for carbon neutrality by 2028 may need to be scaled back in the current context. However, the programme is still moving forward in the long-term with a strong 'green partnership' across the city, and the Council has frequently been successful in securing external grant funding to support its activity. The Council's vehicle fleet has been developed to be very clean in carbon emissions terms and, although this makes it relatively more expensive to run, the costs should reduce as national 'green' policies progress. A full 'best value' review of the Council's carbon neutral activity is underway, and this will make recommendations on how this can be better focused to achieve efficiencies and continue to ensure that the Council is a leader in this area.

- j) The Committee noted that the proposed fees and changes uplift within Bereavement Services could represent a significant concern to residents, particularly for the most disadvantaged communities and in the context of the current high cost of living. It was explained that the Council's current fees and charges had been benchmarked against the national Bereavement sector, with the increase bringing them in line with those elsewhere. However, the fees and charges levied by the Council are applied to commercial funeral directors, rather than directly to residents. The current arrangements for Public Health Funerals remain in place.
- k) The Committee queried what the likely impact of reducing mechanical road sweeping would be on neighbourhoods, particularly where there are existing problems with rubbish dumping and fly-tipping. It was set out that the primary purpose of mechanical road sweeping is to keep road gullies clear. As part of the transformation process to ensure an affordable and deliverable service, a baseline level road sweeping will be guaranteed for all neighbourhoods in the city, with additional resources deployed in areas of greater need when required – such as places that are more prone to flooding. Residents will be kept informed as to when road sweeping will take place, so that they can help to keep the roads clear. Regular monitoring will be carried out to check whether any areas need more regular road sweeping.
- l) The Council has a statutory duty to keep streets clean as a means of preventing environmental health problems, so work to address fly-tipping and rubbish dumping will continue as before. This will be supported by further education with residents on the importance of closing the lids of bins when putting them out for collection, as this reduces the levels of street litter. A new transformation approach to waste management has been agreed (including the integration and combination of services to be more efficient), which represents a significant change in approach to frontline environmental services. A consistent, baseline standard for street cleaning will be established across the city, while additional resources will then be deployed to priority and hotspot areas as required.
- m) The Committee asked what impact proposed reductions within Community Protection would have on the Council's ability to manage fly-tipping and littering effectively. It was explained that Community Protection Officer (CPO) posts have reduced in number over the last five years. A balance between prevention and enforcement activity will need to be struck for the CPOs, who will be focused on strategic areas such as carrying out the Council's statutory duties in relation to environmental health.

- n) The work carried out by CPOs, both statutory and discretionary, is wide-ranging and brings a substantial benefit to communities. The EIA carried out in relation to the proposals affecting Community Protection has identified CPOs not carrying out as much wider activity as a significant impact, so a great deal of work will be required to ensure that the effects do not fall disproportionately on certain communities. It is difficult to value the full range of activity carried out by CPOs – particularly in the terms of how prevention and education work carried out results in savings in other service areas across the Council, so it is difficult to predict whether direct savings in this area will result in costs arising elsewhere.
- o) As much work will be done in mitigation as possible, including the seeking of funding from other partners (such as Nottingham's universities), due to the benefits that CPO work brings to everyone in the city. Engagement is also underway with the Police and other partners on the development of an integrated enforcement model. The transformation programme will also be vital in releasing CPO time from certain activity so that they can focus more effectively on statutory areas and enforcement, including through developing integration with Resident Development Officers and seeking to help empower communities for the delivery of prevention activity.
- p) The Committee queried how effective education on recycling would be implemented, and how the recycling provider could be engaged with, to reduce the number of loads being rejected due to contamination. It was noted that achieving improvements in this area does rely on bringing about effective behaviour change amongst residents, so an ongoing focus on education is vital. Work is being carried out at a national level to make recycling processes simpler and more straightforward across the country.
- q) The Committee queried how the new charging system for garden waste collection would be managed, and whether this could result in a reduction in uptake and increase in dumping. It was explained that the uptake for paid-for garden waste disposal will be monitored closely. Given that garden waste collection is a paid-for service under many other Local Authorities, there is a great deal of available learning that can be used to inform appropriate management.
- r) The Committee asked for assurance that any cost increases to residents on the District Heating system were fair and proportionate, given that they are unable to move to another provider. Assurance was provided that the District Heating, metering and billing services implemented from the start of 2024 have been properly benchmarked to be consistent with other similar suppliers. Residents on the system have the same protection against unfair price increases as customers of any other domestic energy supplier.
- s) The Committee asked how vital community work would be supported following the proposed ceasing of Ward Budgets and a reduction in the funding for Area-Based Grants. It was noted that local investment has been very effective in developing public cohesion and safety, even when the amounts are relatively small. As much work as possible will be done to ensure that community providers are sustainable on a commissioned basis, rather than being reliant on grants, and

close engagement is required with the voluntary and community sector to properly plan and establish the services needed for Nottingham, going forward.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holders, Corporate Director and other officers for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To add the following items to the Committee's Work Programme:**
 - a) to consider the findings of the 'best value' review of the Council's current carbon neutral activity;**
 - b) to review the Council's current Bereavement service offer; and**
 - c) to consider the development of the future model for the deployment of Community Protection Officers.**

24 Work Programme

The Chair presented the Committee's current Work Programme. The following points were discussed:

- a) As the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture was currently on leave, the service impacts of the proposed 2024/25 budget in this area will be discussed at the Committee's next meeting on 7 February 2024, in addition to an item on Nottingham Castle.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.