

Nottingham City Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held remotely via Zoom on 7 April 2021 from 2.00 pm - 4.33 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Anne Peach (Chair)
Councillor Georgia Power (Vice Chair)
Councillor Steve Battlemuch
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Pavlos Kotsonis
Councillor Jane Lakey
Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Ethan Radford
Councillor Angharad Roberts
Councillor Andrew Rule

Absent

Councillor Carole McCulloch (Vice Chair)

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Beth Brown	- Head of Legal and Governance
Councillor David Mellen	- Leader of the Council
Councillor Sally Longford	- Deputy Leader of the Council
James Rhodes	- Head of Analysis and Insight
Councillor Dave Trimble	- Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Heritage
Hugh White	- Corporate Director for Covid Response and Recovery
Marylou Hemsley	- Governance Officer
Kim Pocock	- Scrutiny Officer

61 Committee Membership

The Committee noted the resignation of Councillor Cate Woodward.

62 Apologies for absence

None.

63 Declarations of interests

None.

64 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2021 as an accurate record and they were signed by the Chair.

65 Update on the Action Plan in response to the Report in the Public Interest on Nottingham City Council's governance arrangements for Robin Hood Energy

The Chair agreed to take this item and the next on the agenda (item 6 Non-Statutory Review Recovery and Improvement Plan) at the same time.

Councillor David Mellen, Leader of the Council, attended the meeting to provide a progress report on the recommendations of the Report in the Public Interest Robin Hood Energy and on the Recovery and Improvement Plan in place to respond to the Non-Statutory Review of the Council. He highlighted the following information:

Public Interest Report (PIR)

- (a) The findings and thirteen recommendations of the PIR were fully accepted by the Council and are currently being addressed through an action plan.
- (b) Key actions which have been delivered to date include a full review of Robin Hood Energy, which has now been dissolved; establishing a Governance Improvement Board; updating the role of councillors as company directors; updating the shareholder representative role and pursuing recommendations in relation to audit and scrutiny.
- (c) Outstanding actions were summarised as follows:
 - (i) further training for councillors on director duties and responsibilities – this is due to be delivered in late May by an external provider, Institute of Directors;
 - (ii) an informal working group has been established and redrafting of the Constitution is under way;
 - (iii) PwC is due to undertake a review of the Council's Financial Regulations;
 - (iv) the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny is carrying out a review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function; and
 - (v) the terms of reference for the Companies Governance Sub-Committee are being reviewed.

Non-Statutory Review (NSR) Recovery and Improvement

- (d) The Council's improvement journey had already started prior to the NSR. As a result of the NSR recommendations, the Council has put together a three-year Recovery and Improvement Plan and an Improvement and Assurance Board has been created to oversee its implementation.
- (e) The Improvement and Assurance Board has delivered its first report to the Secretary of State and the next report is due in May 2021.
- (f) A robust process has been put in place, using a programme management approach supported by a Programme Management Office (PMO), with clear lines

of accountability. Performance is regularly monitored and reported on a monthly basis to the Improvement Board. Risk identification and management processes and change control process are in place.

- (g) Recovery and improvement actions are delivered across eight themes: Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS); Assets; Companies; Capital Programme; Constitution; Organisation and Culture; Delivery Options; and Revised Council Plan.
- (h) Activity to deliver over the coming months includes:
 - (i) progressing the three-year MTFS and the associated programme of transforming services, including the start of delivery against 21/22 asset receipt targets;
 - (ii) reviewing the Council's companies and implementing the decisions arising from this;
 - (iii) achieving formal approval for the revised Council Plan and Constitution; and
 - (iv) building on cultural mapping work to consider and agree a new organisational culture.
- (i) The process is not without risk and these have been identified, with mitigations being considered, as follows:
 - (i) the complexity of shaping the MTFS and the desired changes to service delivery in a timely and effective manner;
 - (ii) the challenge of reaching asset disposal targets;
 - (iii) the potential scale and speed of decisions proposed around the review of companies; and
 - (iv) making sure that the Council achieves and embeds change where it needs to.

In response to questions from the Committee and in the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- (j) Transformation will be key to the success of the Recovery and Improvement Plan. The Council is looking at doing things in a different way, learning from other councils and reflecting how Nottingham needs to change to keep spending within budgets in a refreshed Council Plan. Max Caller, who led the NSR, asked that the Council look at culture alongside all of the other recommendations.
- (k) Capacity is being strengthened by returning to a management structure of four corporate directors. The Director of People is already in permanent post and the Council has an interim Director of Finance and Resources. The other two roles (Director of Resident Services and Director of Growth and City Development) are currently being advertised. This will support the development of a strengthened leadership team which can be supported by bringing in specific expertise and experience when needed. Extra resource is being found to support transformation.

- (l) Asset disposal will take account of the market, to achieve the best capital receipts possible. The current experience is that a number of assets are marketing for more than was anticipated.
- (m) Citizen and community engagement will continue. When the current leading group came to power, it based the Council Plan on its Manifesto, which was the result of wide consultation. There will need to be some changes to the Council Plan to support the transformation programme. The refresh of the Council Plan is at an early stage, but Councillor Mellen noted that he would welcome the involvement and input of scrutiny in its development.
- (n) Concern was expressed regarding the reduction in community facilities which is likely to accompany the need to make savings. Councillor Mellen agreed that it was important to look at the impact across the city and to take a balanced approach so that no one area of the city suffered more than another.
- (o) Risks in relation to Council owned companies are included in the Council's Risk Strategy and Register and are reported to Audit Committee as a matter of course and to the Executive Panel every three months. Most of the criticism of the Council's culture in the reviews related to the Council's attitude towards risk and the need to be fully aware of risk in the light of limited budgets. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the Chairs of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee to meet to discuss the separate roles of each Committee in looking at risk.
- (p) In response to a question about the Council's Fraud Strategy, Councillor Mellen agreed to provide a detailed note for circulation to Committee members.
- (q) In response to concerns about the impact on those currently using space in Council properties to be sold, Councillor Mellen noted that both the music service and the drama company who formerly used the centre on College Street had found new locations. The support for older asylum seeker children will be moved from College Street at the end of the academic year. The remaining users were more limited in their use and talks are ongoing with the Playhouse to see what could possibly be housed there. Properties which are well used and sustained will not be in line to be sold.
- (r) Councillor Mellen acknowledged that the composition of the current Improvement Board (four middle-aged white men) does not in any way reflect the diverse demographic of the city it is seeking to improve. He noted that this has been mentioned to both the chair of the Board and to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- (s) In terms of the Council's companies, there are some areas for specific focus at the moment. EnviroEnergy cannot continue to meet current high network charges. The contract for steam benefits 4,500 homes and it needs to be a contract which can continue to meet this need. Without district heating the Council would have to install boilers which would not contribute towards carbon neutral targets. The contract for Revenues and Benefits is being revisited following Max Caller's recommendation that it be brought back in-house. Clarification is needed on the arrangements with Thomas Bow, as these were not clearly recorded at the

start of working with them and the lack of income to the Ice Stadium, which has necessitated a loan to support it during lockdown, will need to be considered in the short-term.

- (t) The Council's aim is to reach financial stability and there are some areas which need more intensive work to achieve savings, for example the need to bring down the number of out of area placements for children in care, which are very costly. Savings have been achieved in adult services by doing things in a different way, learning from other authorities. Different ways of working are being considered across many areas and Councillor Mellen accepted that it would be useful to involve scrutiny in early stages of discussions about these. There are difficult decisions to be made.
- (u) In response to a question, Councillor Mellen responded that the profile of scrutiny in the Council could be raised by inviting councillors and colleagues to scrutiny meetings to hold decision makers to account. Scrutiny councillors need to press for answers.

66 Update on the Non-Statutory Review Recovery and Improvement Plan

This item was considered at the same time as item 5 on the agenda and the minutes are included above (minute 65).

67 Nottingham City Council's Response to Covid-19: Service Closures and Reinstatements

Councillor Sally Longford, Deputy Leader, Hugh White, Corporate Director for Covid Response and Recovery and James Rhodes, Head of Analysis and Insight attended to provide the Committee with an overview of the City Council's current response to the pandemic, following their last presentation in September 2020. Their report focused on the Council's plans and processes for reinstatement of services as restrictions are lifted. They highlighted the following information:

- a) A summary of the response that was implemented last March and a timeline showing the change in case rates since September alongside the local and national lockdowns that were implemented have been provided in the report. The rate of Covid infections in Nottingham is still well below 100 cases per 100,000 people and the situation is monitored daily by public health colleagues.
- b) Since the last presentation to the Committee, a number of key activities have continued or are being introduced in response to the pandemic. In summary these include:
 - (i) support to vulnerable citizens;
 - (ii) working with the universities, particularly around the September/October 2020 spike;
 - (iii) negotiations with Government on Tier levels;
 - (iv) contract tracing;
 - (v) business grant support;
 - (vi) enforcement in relation to business and within communities;

- (vii) setting up a comprehensive network for community testing;
 - (viii) vaccinations and supporting uptake amongst vulnerable groups;
 - (ix) communications, for example on tiers/ restrictions, testing and vaccinations;
 - (x) reopening of education and schools; and
 - (xi) Preparing for Operation Eagle (surge testing).
- c) A wide range of communications and media have been used to communicate the Covid rules as they have changed and the restrictions Nottingham is subject to. In addition, there have been communications on reducing vaccine hesitancy within the city with specific and tailored messages to those communities with low uptake, for example by using case studies of people from within those communities who have had the vaccine.
- d) Many adjustments have been made to services to ensure that they have been able to continue, including the following:
 - (i) developing a responsive IT strategy and support to home working;
 - (ii) designing and creating the Customer Hub and training staff to support Test and Trace, shielding and vaccination take-up amongst vulnerable groups;
 - (iii) continuing to deliver a safe Street Scene service through social distancing, for example two people per cab in waste management;
 - (iv) provision of parks catering through mobile concessions and self-serve options;
 - (v) keeping libraries open with a click and collect offer;
 - (vi) moving Council meetings on-line and meeting governance requirements by live streaming formal committee meetings on You Tube;
 - (vii) conducting remote court hearings;
 - (viii) Covid secure delivery in care homes, schools and other settings;
 - (ix) social care work carried out through digital and multimedia channels, for example, assessments, training and case management and client contact;
 - (x) reshaping services and redeploying staff to lead on triangulating information and escalation issues between schools, social workers and the Council's education teams to maintain oversight of vulnerable children and young people not in school; and
 - (xi) managing a range of grant schemes through the re-deployment of over 40 colleagues from across the council.
- e) The planning and process for bringing back services was established in October 2020 and learning from this has informed the current process of bringing more services back safely. Initially 56 services were approved to reopen, but some were forced to cease or did not reopen due to wave 2 of the virus.

- f) The Government's four-step roadmap is informing planning for more services to reopen, ie

- (i) Step 1: 29 March: Outdoor Sport
- (ii) Step 2: 12 April: All Retail, Outdoor Hospitality
- (iii) Step 3: 17 May: Indoor Hospitality
- (iv) Step 4: 21 June: Larger Events

Nothing will be reinstated earlier than the target date and, in some cases, reinstatement may be deferred to ensure that it is done safely.

- g) Assurance processes, agreed by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) are now in place. Decision making has been delegated to Corporate Directors following consideration of 4 key areas: Health and Safety (including a risk assessment of BAME and vulnerable staff and Trade Union consultation); HR (including staff welfare, furlough considerations etc); Property (including detail of Covid secure measures); and Finance, ie reopening costs.
- h) Planning is underway for the return of face to face formal meetings as, to date, the Government has concluded that it is not possible to bring forward emergency legislation to enable continuation of remote meetings at this time due to vaccine roll out and pressure on Government's legislative programme. This is being challenged legally, but planning for face to face meetings has to continue.
- i) In terms of staff home/ office working, people should continue to work from home where they can and minimise domestic travel where they can. This will continue until the Government has reviewed social distancing measures and other long-term measures to limit transmission. The outcomes of the review will inform future working arrangements.
- j) Plans are being worked on for the next steps to support recovery from the pandemic. These include:
- (i) usage of the city centre, including footfall, culture, offices, transport, retail etc;
 - (ii) the Council's role in the continuation of vaccine rollout and reducing vaccine hesitancy;
 - (iii) the impact on social care of delayed elective care or conditions going undiagnosed, less healthy lifestyles etc;
 - (iv) the impact on mental health, especially on vulnerable and elderly people due to isolation, bereavement, lack of social connection etc;
 - (v) building on positive outcomes of volunteering and neighbourhood/ community cohesion;
 - (vi) tackling the learning loss and number of children being electively home educated;
 - (vii) the impact on domestic violence/ abuse; and
 - (viii) the economic impact, eg worklessness and debt.

In response to questions from the Committee and in the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- k) After wave one and wave two of Covid, colleagues have learnt a great deal and plans will need to adapt to the ebb and flow of the virus, for example if there is a third wave. The vaccine programme will help with maintaining a level of open services which weren't experienced in the first two lockdowns. The Council is leaner and more efficient than it was and working in a more planned and managed way.
- l) Extra staff resource and vehicles have been put in to support waste collection while the number of people allowed in cabs is limited. If the country is able to follow the road map for lifting restrictions then it is expected that normal staffing levels would be resumed in waste services, so releasing staff to return to their usual Street Scene responsibilities.
- m) While community testing was slow to start in some centres, it has now picked up and there is growing awareness of the service and that citizens can pick up lateral flow test kits to take home, to follow the guideline of twice-weekly testing.
- n) There are five weeks between each step of the road map which allows time to plan and to be confident that appropriate arrangements are in place in good time. Now that some staff have been through the process they will be able to mentor those who need support. Engaging early and training will be key, but there may still be occasions where there is a decision to delay the opening of a service – there is no requirement to open until the service is ready and all arrangements are robust.
- o) In response to a question, colleagues anticipated that it would not be possible to use the data from the initial calls to the golden number (used to request support in the early stages of lockdown one) for further communications to potentially vulnerable citizens. As the information on the callers was recorded for a specific reason (ie provision of support, referral to other service etc), it can only be retained for a limited period and used for that purpose. However, James Rhodes agreed to find out more and circulate this to members of the Committee.

The Chair noted that it may be useful to invite colleagues back to the Committee to report on progress as more people return to buildings to work and that it may also be useful to hear about lessons learnt from emergency and ongoing planning in response to Covid 19 restrictions at a future meeting.

68 Scrutiny of the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Information Technology

Councillor Dave Trimble, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and IT, attended the meeting to report on progress against his key priorities. He highlighted the following information:

IT

a) Key achievements in IT in response to the pandemic include:

- (i) 442 laptops have been deployed to colleagues to enable agile working;
- (ii) 1,135 mobile devices have been deployed to ensure colleagues could stay in touch with each other and citizens;
- (iii) support has been provided to the increase in online meetings from 12 meetings per day in February 2020, to 23,747 in February 2021;
- (iv) increasing home and mobile working capabilities by 500% by February 2020, ensuring flexibility for NCC colleagues;
- (v) introducing and updating a range of new and updated tools, including Zoom, Jabber, Lifesize, Housing Rent, Revenue and Benefits changes, CCTV solutions and many others; and
- (vi) colleagues being there in person at Loxley to help those that needed face to face IT support throughout lockdown.

b) Delivery has been enabled by:

- (i) maintaining and improving the most reliable corporate network the Council has experienced since the improvements of 2015;
- (ii) continuing to meet or exceed service level agreements negotiated in 2018 for all key customer groups and Council companies;
- (iii) migrating the Council network from Virgin to Kingston communications;
- (iv) updating corporate storage, backup and cloud solutions during 2020 and 2021; and
- (v) exceeding commercial income from training, grant funding, schools IT and other services while covering overheads.

Sport and Culture

- c) Due to the pandemic, the past year has been a very different and difficult year. Plans have had to been put on hold, refreshed and re-written to adjust to the challenges caused by the pandemic and there have been different priorities to focus on, eg adaptations to enable services to be delivered; major support given to the Council's front line efforts to keep citizens safe; and managing close-downs and re-openings throughout 2020/21. However, while delays have been inevitable, the Council is still moving forward with top priorities that are important to the city and its recovery. These include progressing the works to complete Nottingham Castle; developing plans for a new central library; and continuing to secure grants to help support services.
- d) Despite the pandemic, work has continued towards completing the transformation of Nottingham Castle. The handover of the Ducal Palace site to the Nottingham Castle Trust for operation is planned for the end of May 2021 and the re-opening of the Castle is planned for Summer 2021, pending Covid restrictions in place. This capital scheme has been managed within its agreed £31.3 million budget for the programmed works. The reopening of Nottingham Castle will mark a significant milestone for the city as a major part of the city's redevelopment and

will now play a major part in post-Covid recovery by welcoming visitors back to the city with a year of celebration events.

- e) The Libraries service has changed and adapted swiftly to enable it to provide essential services, resources and activities to help address social isolation, inequality and disadvantage during the pandemic. The scheme to develop the best children's library within Central Library continues and remains within the Council's agreed Capital Programme following its review in February 2021
- f) Specific libraries activity to support citizens through lockdown include:
 - (i) development of new online offers and content;
 - (ii) introducing virtual story-time sessions for children and families;
 - (iii) launch of a new click & collect service;
 - (iv) redeployment of staff to support Customer Services, Coroners, business grant administration and manage the asymptomatic testing centre at Djanogly Leisure Centre;
 - (v) a successful bid to the Arts Council Emergency Response Fund to develop a Virtual Library Service and new website;
 - (vi) a successful bid with the British Library to help support new business start-ups and advice through the city's libraries;
 - (vii) a new Sherwood Library is to be provided, at no capital cost to the Council, via Hockley Developments; and
 - (viii) refurbishment of Clifton Library during the first national lockdown.
- g) Covid has meant a halt to the Council's usual annual events programme and to international events this year, but it has brought about new opportunities which have exceeded expectations as consumers sought out entertainment options outside their homes. Examples include the Arboretum Garden Bar and Bandstand – ticketed events attracted a total of 10,195 people – and the Christmas lights at Wollaton Park which saw 121,000 ticket sales and an average of 4,030 visitors per night. The event will be repeated in 2021.
- h) Leisure venues have become key in the delivery of the front-line response to Covid, for example:
 - (i) Harvey Hadden transformed into a food and PPE distribution hub;
 - (ii) the Tennis Centre has been used as the customer contact centre for the shielding programme, including inbound and outbound Covid support calls for the city's vulnerable citizens;
 - (iii) redeployment of staff to critical frontline council services;
 - (iv) launching the first Nottinghamshire Asymptomatic Testing Centre at Djanogly Community Leisure Centre;
 - (v) hosting the first Nottingham city leisure centre local testing centre at Southglade Leisure;
 - (vi) operating a mobile testing site from Nottingham Tennis Centre;
 - (vii) operating Stay Safe, Stay Active and Keeping Nottingham Moving; and
 - (viii) providing continued support to partners, communities and citizens to be able to access physical activity provision in a safe way.

- i) Neighbourhood markets have been well placed to continue to provide access to low cost, essential shopping, close to home without the need to travel. Action has been taken to provide as much support as possible, including:
 - (i) support to independent local businesses with start-up initiatives on neighbourhood markets;
 - (ii) implementing a revised operational redesign of markets to ensure public health and safety, focusing on enabling existing traders to operate until social distancing restrictions are lifted;
 - (iii) support to outdoor markets so that they have continued to operate throughout the pandemic to sell essential goods;
 - (iv) providing regular updates keeping shoppers informed on the Nottingham Markets website; and
 - (v) supporting the restart of non-essential retail in neighbourhood markets and city centre street trading.
- j) The key focus for the next 12-18 months will be on the opening of Nottingham Castle and a year of celebration; progressing the development of the new Central Library and carrying out a Libraries' needs assessment; recovering leisure centres and managing the closure of the John Carroll Leisure Centre; and ensuring the recovery of markets and events, which are integral to the city's recovery.

Parks and Open Spaces

- k) Nottingham has lots of beautiful parks, nature reserves and open spaces - 25% of Nottingham city is green space, equating to 1,700 hectares and including 169 parks, over 100 play areas and 14 nature reserves. In 2007/08 the Council had 4 Green Flags – this has increased to 74 in 2020.
- l) Current priorities for the parks and open spaces portfolio are to work with communities to secure more Green Flags than any other local authority; to deliver the World War Roll of Honour project and the restoration of the memorial gardens; to plant 50,000 trees; to protect parks and open spaces from cuts; and to enhance the city's play areas.
- m) Major projects have been undertaken on the Forest Recreation Ground and Sports Zone, Highfields Park, the WW1 Memorial and the Victoria Embankment Memorial Gardens
- n) Improvements achieved and challenges overcome include
 - (i) blue/ green infrastructure projects, include renaturalising the watercourse, reducing risk of flooding to properties and biodiversity improvements to Day Brook at Valley Road Park; preventing silt deposits and creating a boardwalk and seating area at Tottle Brook at Highfields; and creating bee friendly habitats in all of the city's wards;
 - (ii) an extensive tree planning project, with 10,000 trees planted since April 2020 and the creation of the People's Forest, ie the pledge to provide every primary school with an English oak tree descended from the Major Oak;

- (iii) the launch of Storyparks – free interactive story dens using nature and the environment in partnership with Libraries, Nottingham Together and Nottingham Building Society – with 6944 children and 2076 adults attending sessions, while over 6,000 people used the story dens independently;
 - (iv) the refurbishment of over 91 playground sites in the last 10 years, including improvements in Gabrielle Close play area, Greenway Park, Ruddington Lane play area, Woodthorpe Park, Lenton Recreation Ground, King Edward Park and Wollaton Deer Park; and
 - (v) developments at Woodthorpe Park Plant Shop and Nursery, which now grows more product for other councils and retail than it does for the Council's own parks and gardens – 2020/21 saw a turnover of £330,000.
- o) The Council is one of eight authorities across the country which has secured Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) funding to develop commercial and visitor attractions, following a period of extensive public consultation and community engagement.
- p) Future plans include:
 - (i) the development of a 25-year green and blue infrastructure strategy as part of the FPA;
 - (ii) open space audits, a volunteer strategy and commercial business plans;
 - (iii) a £157,000 National Heritage Lottery Fund project to restore the memorial gardens includes the war memorial, paths, ponds, fountains, toilets, planting and visitor centre extension;
 - (iv) a £300,000 memorial gardens activity plan will include work experience placements for veterans to help them find new careers outside the Army and numerous events and activities to encourage visitors to get involved;
 - (v) funding has been secured to deliver the Storyparks project again in summer 2021, with new parks added; and
 - (vi) building on the importance of parks (which has become even more apparent during the pandemic) for health and wellbeing, biodiversity, and climate change.

The Committee thanked Councillor Trimble for his considerable contribution to the Council, especially during his time as the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and IT.

69 Work Programme 2021/22

The Committee discussed some of the suggested items for its work programme for 2021/22. The final work programme will be agreed at its next meeting.