

Nottingham City Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at Loxley House, Nottingham on 3 August 2022
from 2.01 pm - 4.18 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Samuel Gardiner (Chair)
Councillor Georgia Power (Vice Chair)
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Corall Jenkins
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Sajid Mohammed
Councillor Anne Peach
Councillor Angharad Roberts
Councillor Andrew Rule

Absent

Councillor Carole McCulloch
Councillor Merlita Bryan
Councillor Jane Lakey

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Beth Brown	- Head of Legal and Governance
Nigel Hawkins	- Head of Culture and Libraries
Frank Jordan	- Corporate Director for Residents Services
Councillor Pavlos Kotsonis	- Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Planning
Councillor David Mellen	- Leader of the Council
Hugh White	- Director of Sports and Culture
Laura Wilson	- Senior Governance Officer
Phil Wye	- Governance Officer

15 Apologies for absence

Councillor Merlita Bryan – personal reasons
Councillor Jane Lakey – leave
Councillor Carol McCulloch - leave

16 Declarations of interests

None.

17 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

18 Together for Nottingham Plan - Progress update by the Leader

Councillor David Mellen, Leader of the Council, presented the report on progress made on the priorities in the Together for Nottingham Plan, and highlighted the following:

- (a) the Government has announced that they are minded to appoint commissioners to the Council. Letters of support for the Council have been sent to the Minister but there is uncertainty on when a final response will be given. If commissioners are appointed they will work with the Council for a period of 2 years;
- (b) the rising cost of living is affecting many Council services, particularly in terms of fuel costs. This has been incorporated into corporate risk planning;
- (c) recruitment is underway for a new Corporate Director of Finance and Resources;
- (d) a new reserves policy was recently agreed and the asset sales programme continues to provide a capital receipt for the Council;
- (e) Nottingham City Homes will be in-housed to the Council, and consultation has started with trade unions and staff, as all staff will be brought into the Council workforce;
- (f) a prioritisation exercise is being undertaken for the Capital Programme as funds for this can no longer be borrowed but must come from grants or sales receipts;
- (g) a staff opinion survey is being planned as it has not been conducted for some time;
- (h) the Transformation Programme is making progress in making savings from the areas required;
- (i) of the refreshed Council Plan targets, 110 of 142 are expected to be achieved, with 26 rated as amber and 6 rated as red in terms of achievability.

During the discussion which followed, and in response to questions from the Committee, the following points were made:

- (j) there has been no official Government response from the last two reports of the Improvement and Assurance Board. The Board's message has been for improvement work to continue despite uncertainties in the Government and commissioners;
- (k) in terms of the review of Council owned companies, it has been difficult to recruit to the team dealing with it. However, Thomas Bow has been sold and the National Ice Arena are in a much stronger position than previously;

Resolved to

- (1) request that at the next meeting the Council Plan commitments be split into statutory and non-statutory functions;**
- (2) schedule the staff survey response for a future meeting.**

19 Libraries Transformation

Councillor Pavlos Kotsonis, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Planning, delivered a presentation to the Committee on the findings from the Library Needs Assessment and Public Consultation, highlighting the following:

- (a) Nottingham City Council must continue to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service but continues to face a challenging financial situation and is required to make recurrent budget savings across all its services as part of its medium term financial plan. The closure of libraries remains a threat, however there are a range of options and the Council would like as many libraries to remain open as possible;
- (b) the consultation on the Library Service ran between 31 January until 24 April 2022 via surveys, and generated 2,979 responses. Five public engagement sessions also took place which were attended by 220 attendees. A number of letters were received from a number of national and regional organisations, a local Save Nottingham Libraries group was formed, and one petition was presented to Full Council with 2800 signatories;
- (c) the majority of respondents were female, over 65 and white. Work was done to try and reach under-represented groups but this was less successful than hoped. The majority of respondents disagreed with the closure of libraries for a variety of reasons;
- (d) the three libraries that have been identified for possible closure were chosen as they have lower numbers of visits, book issues, computer use and active users than other libraries, and because there are other libraries which can be reached by bus, tram or foot from the areas where these libraries are located;
- (e) suggested alternatives to closure include increasing co-ordination with other services as multi-use sites, reviewing opening hours, technology-enabled opening, and support from community or voluntary sector organisations to run the buildings. All of these options have associated risks;
- (f) a final decision has not been made as the Council would need commitment from local community groups or the voluntary sector were they to take over the running of buildings. There are also possible income streams that the Council is bidding for such as the Library Transformation Fund.

Following a suggested list of questions to consider put forward by the Portfolio Holder, the Chair reminded the Committee that their remit is not dictated by the Executive and that is their decision on which areas to scrutinise.

During the discussion which followed, and in response to questions from the Committee, the following points were made:

- (g) the consultation did attempt to garner responses from under-represented groups, with engagement sessions organised in all libraries;
- (h) some wards may have no community facilities left in them if the library closes, such as Radford ward. All libraries were looked at independently of other facilities and the alternative for the Radford area would be Hyson Green library at

20 minutes walk from the area;

- (i) when looking at library usage, figures from before the pandemic in 2019-20 were used as a baseline;
- (j) all schools were contacted and a questionnaire was put to them for children to respond to the consultation. The Youth Parliament were also consulted along with other organisations that work with young people. It was suggested that children could be consulted through the Summer Reading Challenge;
- (k) a formal application to the Libraries Transformation Fund is being made in September, with the result to be known in February. Conversations with community and voluntary groups are ongoing;
- (l) no religious groups such as mosques were directly consulted as a part of the consultation;
- (m) libraries play an important role in reducing social isolation and improving mental health. Due to this, the Public Health and People Directorates have been involved with this process;
- (n) the Council is in the process of drawing up an Asset Transfer Policy which would allow the libraries to be transferred to ownership of community and voluntary sector organisations;
- (o) Nottingham North has the 8th highest literacy need in the country. This was taken into account when making proposals, and the wording of the survey was simplified. Library staff helped users to complete forms if required, but the number of times that this happened was not recorded;
- (p) risk of a successful judicial review should be low, as the Council have followed best practice and been robust in their consultation. This can be evidenced by the number of responses received, the establishment of the Save Nottingham Libraries group, and the petition;
- (q) the wider national context would be useful in order to know the situation in other local authorities, and what their responses have been. It would also be useful to know the demographics of respondents as to whether they are from the LGBT+ community or are disabled, and also how these levels compare to library users as a whole.

Having considered all of the information available, the Committee felt that the consultation could have been more thorough, and that further effort could have been made to engage under-represented groups.

Resolved to request that

- (1) a review of the consultation process is undertaken, and lessons learnt are reported back to the Committee;**

- (2) consideration is given to people who might be reluctant to share their details with authorities when considering technology accessed libraries;**
- (3) consideration is given to who would be an appropriate partner is when considering shared usage;**
- (4) a mapping exercise of other community facilities, such as leisure centres or community centres is carried out;**
- (5) engagement is undertaken with all schools;**
- (6) feedback from the Health and People directorates is shared in full;**
- (7) the draft Community Asset Transfer Policy be discussed at a future meeting of this Committee;**
- (8) more context setting be included in consultation responses, and include LGBT+ and disability data, including any themes that were identified particularly with different communities;**
- (9) a log of the impact on individual wards of all major decisions, taking demographics into account, is maintained;**
- (10) a mapping exercise of all voluntary and community sector organisations, in particular those serving citizens with protected characteristics, is carried out and relationships established so that they can be easily contacted as a part of any consultation;**
- (11) ward councillors are consulted before any final decision is made.**

20 Public Sculptures and Monuments Policy Development

Councillor Pavlos Kotsonis, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Planning, delivered a presentation to the Committee on a proposed policy setting out guidance for applicants and decision makers to consider when proposals are put forward for statues, monuments and public art to be installed on Council owned land, highlighting the following:

- (a) the principle of the policy is to encourage all statues and monuments on Council owned land to celebrate or explain the City's heritage and culture in a way that is compatible with life in a modern, diverse City;**
- (b) Nottingham City does not have a policy on statues and monuments, which are common in other cities. It will cover new statues and public art installations on land owned by the City Council which are intended to be in place for more than 6 months, but doesn't cover temporary installations, murals, small memorials or those on private land;**
- (c) applicants will be asked to complete a form in support of their proposal with details of the artwork, the person, group or event it represents and evidence of community support for the proposal.**

During the discussion which followed, and in response to questions from the Committee, the following points were made:

- (d) the policy is not specific on the size of statues and monuments covered as they will be based on their significance, base of public support and location;
- (e) the policy does not cover the removal of monuments and statues;
- (f) statues and monuments would also have to pass the planning process, but this does not cover culture, morals and appropriateness which this policy aims to address;
- (g) evidence will be required that all relevant community groups have been consulted and show their support;
- (h) the policy does not cover murals, but these would be covered in a separate planned street art policy.

Resolved to request that

- (1) the proposed policy on street art be brought to a future meeting of this Committee;**
- (2) ward councillor consultation be included in the policy;**
- (3) the policy be reviewed as appropriate.**

21 Work Programme

Councillor Sam Gardiner, Chair of the Committee, introduced the work programme, and proposed to add the following items to future meetings:

- a) the Crime and Drugs Partnership be invited to the November meeting of the Committee;
- b) the draft Street Art Policy;
- c) the draft Community Asset Transfer Policy;
- d) the staff survey outcome

The Committee noted the work programme for 2022-23, with the addition of the above items at appropriate times.