

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 7 February 2024 from 2:02pm to 3:49pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Imran Jalil (Chair)
Councillor Neghat Khan (Vice Chair)
Councillor Faith Gakanje-Ajala
Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Andrew Rule

Absent

Councillor Liaqat Ali
Councillor Nayab Patel

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Nancy Barnard - Head of Governance
Sarah Hartshorne - Heritage Site Manager - Nottingham Castle
Nigel Hawkins - Head of Culture and Libraries
Rachel James - Chief Operating Officer - Museums
Councillor Pavlos Kotsonis - Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture
Adrian Mann - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Ian McLellan - Interim Strategic Finance Business Partner
Kate Morris - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Colin Parr - Corporate Director for Communities, Environment and Resident Services

25 Apologies

Councillor Nayab Patel – work commitments

26 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 the Sneinton Hermitage Community Association, which could be affected by the savings proposals.

27 Service Impact of Budget Proposals

Councillor Pavlos Kotsonis, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture; Colin Parr, Corporate Director for Communities, Environment and Resident Services; and Ian McLellan, Interim Strategic Finance Business Partner, 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 potential impacts of these savings on the Portfolios of Strategic Regeneration and Communications; Energy, Environment and Waste Services and Parks; Highways, Transport and Planning; and Neighbourhoods, Safety and Inclusion were discussed at the Committee's meeting on 24 January 2024. Due to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture being unable to attend the meeting, the discussion of the impacts in that area were deferred to the current meeting.
- d) Ultimately, much of the Council's spending on services relating to leisure and culture is discretionary. However, investment in this area can provide substantial benefit to a wide range of communities – especially for the most disadvantaged. The delivery of the current budget proposals is likely to be a complex process, particularly as there is the potential for legal challenges to be raised in some areas. Implementation plans are being developed and further consultations will be carried out as part of this process, including in the context of proposals affecting libraries and community centres. The collective impact of the savings proposals is likely to be significant, so mitigating measures are being developed wherever possible.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- e) The Committee asked what would be done to mitigate the impact of the proposed savings on leisure and cultural services. It was explained that the potential for mitigations has been scoped and plans drawn up in consultation with officers and councillors. However, the financial context both locally and nationally makes it difficult to protect discretionary services, as demand for and the cost of statutory functions is increasing. The Council supports a number of leisure and cultural organisations by making grants, so the impact on individual organisations will vary depending on how reliant they are on these grants to operate. Financial input from

the Council may not necessarily be needed to cover an organisation's running costs on a day-to-day basis, but it is often used to support bids for larger sums from other external funding providers. As a result, engagement has been carried out both with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the larger grant-giving bodies to ensure that an effective pipeline of financial support remains in place.

- f) The Committee queried what savings outcomes were anticipated from the reviews of the current library and museum provision. It was set out that a review of museums is underway, but that this is a complex process because each museum is funded under different arrangements, including with support from Arts Council England. Libraries, on the other hand, are generally funded directly by the Council, so it is more straightforward to assess what the value of savings might be over the next two years. However, there is a statutory duty to provide a level of library coverage in the city, so any savings will need to be made in this context. Full Equality Impact Assessments are being produced to inform this decision-making process.
- g) The Committee asked what work was being carried out with community centres to mitigate the currently high levels of uncertainty that they were experiencing. It was reported that community centres have an extremely broad and complex range of arrangements in place so each will need to be considered individually, which will take time. Work is being carried out to establish the social outcomes delivered locally by each community centre, to develop a framework for community provision so that it can be sustained locally in an affordable, regularised and consistent way. It is vital for there to be good communication, so continual engagement with individual community centres is taking place. Careful consideration is being given to how all groups of people within the city can be treated fairly in the context of equality of access to community buildings – with a particular focus on helping community centres to deliver the vital local support work that helps mitigate the requirement for statutory services. Going forward, this activity is likely to be supported on the basis of a commissioned service model, rather than in the form of grants.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that the final Equality Impact Assessments relating to the review of library and museum provision are shared with the Committee, once completed.**

28 The Castle

Councillor Pavlos Kotsonis, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture; Nigel Hawkins, Head of Culture and Libraries; Rachel James, Chief Operating Officer for Museums; and Sarah Hartshorne, Heritage Site Manager for Nottingham Castle, presented a report on the performance of the Castle following its reopening in June 2023. The following points were raised:

- a) When Nottingham Castle was gifted to the city by the Duke of Newcastle, it was originally used as an exhibition centre and museum. The recent restoration, redevelopment and operation of the castle under an independent charitable trust was not successful, so the Council resumed its direct management as part of the Museum and Galleries service from November 2022. A sustainable business plan has been developed and a very simple 'pay once, visit all year round' ticket structure has been put in place. The castle reopened in June 2023 – with the annual visitor numbers now nearly reaching the target number of 200,000.
- b) A great deal of work has been carried out to learn from the castle's first six months of operation. In addition, the feedback received when the castle was open under the previous trust has been reviewed to inform how the site can be best used and developed. A great deal of engagement has been carried out with partners, including schools, to ensure that the castle provides a strong local offer. A great deal of activity has been carried out to emphasise to Nottingham communities that the castle is open to all and represents good value, with a wide range of accessible events taking place.
- c) Since June 2023, over 70% of all visitors have come from the East Midlands, with 50% coming from Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. An annual adult ticket is £12, also enabling three children aged 15 or under to enter for free. Schools and groups can enter at £5 per person. Low-cost community days are run at £1 per person, and these have seen a strong overall attendance of above 30,000. A medium-term financial plan is in place and is on target, while the re-opening of the castle and the return of visitors has brought a wider economic benefit to the city as a whole. Work is also underway to ensure the delivery of a best value service in the long term.
- d) A great deal of engagement has taken place to encourage repeat visiting, with a current return rate of 12%. A new website and social media presence has been launched and there is a strong focus on seeking to reach families. Consideration is also underway as to how the visitor base reached can be effectively expanded beyond the East Midlands, including internationally. Visitor feedback, including from local residents, is collected across a wide range of channels and has been very positive, and is used to inform improvements and planning the future offer. Engagement from schools has been extremely positive, and consideration is being given to expanding the castle's offer further – including potential theatre or cinema programmes.
- e) A volunteer programme has been established with various different engagement opportunities in place, and there are a number of people from across a range of city communities who are willing to give their time to support the castle.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- f) The Committee queried how pricing, booking and discount structures could be used to ensure that visiting the castle represents best value for city residents. It was reported that all possible avenues of engagement are being used to attract visitors, both locally and more widely. The £12 annual ticket is available to everyone, but will see more return usage by city residents. This offer is simple and straightforward, and the cost to administering this ticketing system is

relatively low. Photographic identification may be requested when an adult returns on a previously bought ticket, but every effort is made to ensure that the entry process is as flexible and welcoming as possible. Schools tend to visit on an annual basis, but the per head price of the group ticket enables the provision of tailored on-site services that are of added value to school trips.

- g) The Committee asked how engagement about the castle was being carried out with Nottingham's disadvantaged and emerging communities. It was explained that the Museum and Galleries service has strong links with partners, stakeholders and community groups across the city, and uses these to reach out to as many groups of people as possible to explore how they can access and enjoy a welcoming site easily. A 'land train' is used when the site is less busy to support wider accessibility, and there is a potential that this could be used at other sites operated by the Council.
- h) The Committee queried how the castle's business model would be developed further, going forward. It was set out that positive channels have been reestablished with the various major funders for the heritage and cultural sector, including the local D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England. Commercial opportunities are being explored with the local business community and Nottingham universities – particularly with the adjoining Business School campus. The ticket pricing approach and the potential for local discounts or coupons will be kept under review to ensure that there is a strong offer for local people that represents good value for money, while also seeking to ensure that administration costs for the site are kept to a minimum. A plan for growth has been factored into the medium-term financial plan, while financial resilience is also being built up.
- i) The Committee asked how regularly special or community events would be held at the castle. It was explained that the event offer is tailored to the season, with most taking place during the summer, and then in potential off-peak times to encourage visitors. It is likely that around eight special events will take place each year, and new opportunities will always be sought and developed. Regular heritage events take place, particularly as part of engagement with schools, and the castle works continually to support Nottingham's aim to be a Child-Friendly City.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that officers circulate a summary of how they have engaged with new and emerging communities to Committee members.**
- 2) To recommend that consideration is given to how pricing and special offers could achieve additional benefits to Nottingham residents.**
- 3) To recommend that consideration is given to how to engage local businesses effectively and how they can offer support through Social Corporate Responsibility.**

29 Work Programme

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

- a) It is intended to consider the Community Safety Partnership and the Council's Commercial and Environmental Regulation services at the Committee's next meeting on 6 March 2024, with the 3 April 2024 meeting to focus on the District Heating network and the delivery of the Council's carbon neutral ambitions.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

30 Recommendation Tracker

The Chair presented the latest responses received to the Committee's recommendations from the relevant Portfolio Holders.

The Committee noted the Recommendation Tracker.