

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 29 January 2024.

PRESENT

Mr. M. T. Mullaney CC (in the Chair)

Mr. T. Barkley CC
Mr. M. Frisby CC
Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC
Mr. T. Gillard CC

Mrs. A. J. Hack CC
Mrs. R. Page CC
Mr J. Poland CC
Mr. T. J. Richardson CC

In Attendance

Mr N. J. Rushton CC – Leader
Mrs D. Taylor CC – Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Regulatory Services
Mr L. Breckon CC – Lead Member for Resources
Mrs P. Posnett CC – Lead Member for Communities and Staff Relations

42. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2024 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

43. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

44. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

45. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

46. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

All Members of the Commission who were also members of district councils declared an 'Other Registerable Interest' in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (minutes 49 to 52 refer).

Later in the meeting (minute 51 refers) Mrs A. Hack CC declared an Other Registerable Interest as she was a GMB Union Member.

47. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

48. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 35.

49. Provisional Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2027/28

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided information on the proposed 2024/25 – 2027/28 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as it related to Corporate and Central items. The report also provided an update on changes to funding and other issues arising since the publication of the draft MTFS and provided details of a number of strategies and policies related to the MTFS. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed the Leader of the Council, Mr N. J. Rushton CC, and Cabinet Lead Member for Resources, Mr L. Breckon CC, to the meeting for this item.

In presenting the report the Director commented that this was the hardest budget he had ever had to present so far and that unfortunately the forecast was that the pressures on the County Council and local government generally would likely continue for the foreseeable future. In the last three years, the Council had been able to balance at least two years of the MTFS when this had been presented for approval. Unfortunately, this had not been possible this year and for the first time, the budget next year could only be balanced with the use of reserves. Members noted that for 2025/26 the Council had a £33m funding gap and urgent action was therefore needed to address this.

The Director reported that since the report had been circulated, the Government had announced an additional £600m for local government, £500m of which would be to support social care services. It was not yet clear how much would be specifically allocated to Leicestershire, but this would be confirmed following the final local government finance settlement which was expected in early February. Members noted that whilst the additional money was welcomed, this would simply be used to reduce the Council's current shortfall.

Arising from discussion, the following points arose:

Corporate and Central Items

- (i) The Council budget for income from ESPO was approximately £800,000 for the current year, with a stretch target of £900,000 for 2024/25. It was on track to meet these targets.
- (ii) The contingency for inflation and national living wage was expected to be used each year. This was currently an estimate and so was held centrally until the pay award, and other factors had been confirmed. It would then be allocated to departments as appropriate. Members noted that the contingency was reviewed

and reset each year. Any amount not spent would be released to departments in year.

Earmarked Reserves

- (iii) Concern was raised regarding the cumulative deficit of £112m, forecast for the final year of the MTFs, in the dedicated schools grant (DSG) High Needs budget. It was noted that the Government had implemented a statutory override but that this was temporary until 2026. It was not yet clear whether this would be extended. Members noted that this was a national issue and that there was some uncertainty as to how the Government intended to deal with this. At present the deficit was held off the Council's balance sheet but without the statutory override in place, it would be a liability that would need to be paid by the Council.
- (iv) The Director reported that much was being done within the Children and Family Services Department to address the rise in demand and costs associated with SEN Services. Good progress was being made and a targeted reduction in annual spend of £10m had been set. However, the DSG would still not meet the level of spend in this area which was entirely demand led.
- (v) Some members commented that this issue had been considered by the Council's Corporate Governance Committee the previous week as part of its consideration of the external audit of the Council's accounts. The external auditors had highlighted this as the biggest risk facing the Council but had recognised that this was not an issue unique to Leicestershire and had assessed the County Council as being in a much stronger financial position than most others in managing this. A member commented that councils simply didn't have the resources to address this deficit which nationally was in the region of £4.6 billion given its limited ability to raise additional income through council tax and suggested that this was therefore a matter for the Government.

Capital Programme

- (vi) The Council would be receiving additional funding following cancellation of Phase 2b of HS2. This would largely be for additional highway maintenance works. The amounts would be relatively small in the first two years (approximately £2m and £2.5m) but this was expected to increase thereafter. The actual allocations to be received in future years had not yet been confirmed by the Government.
- (vii) A Member commented that the Leicester City Mayor's unwillingness to support a level 3 devolution deal for Leicester and Leicestershire meant that the people of Leicestershire were losing out on significant infrastructure funding. The combined county authority involving Nottingham City, Nottingham County, Derby City and Derbyshire County Councils (D2N2) would receive £1.1 billion in funding over the next 10 years [*subsequently confirmed to be 30 years*]. Not participating meant that Leicestershire would not have access to that funding or have the ability to bid for other funding made available by Government for combined authorities in year although it would be difficult to assess the actual level of lost funding
- (viii) The Leader agreed that the Council had been disadvantaged by not securing a level 3 devolution deal. The legislation required Leicester City and Leicestershire County to be considered as a functional economic area and so the County Council could not secure such a deal without the support of the City Council Mayor. The

possibility of joining the D2N2 deal at a later date was mentioned. The Leader pointed out that, even if that were to be agreed, it would come with risk as the County Council would hold a minority vote. Therefore, all that was currently available was to secure a level 2 deal which still subject to the agreement of the City Council and Rutland Council.

- (ix) A Member questioned how the Council strategically planned for local infrastructure, particularly schools and SEND provision which were sometimes located some considerable distance from where people lived. The Director confirmed that a corporate group had been established some time ago to plan for all types of infrastructure across the County which was needed to meet identified growth. This included early discussions with district councils as they developed their local plans to ensure these were mindful of the costs of delivering such infrastructure. Members noted that SEND provision was subject to some specific considerations including whether there were adequate numbers of children with similar needs living in a particular area that would mean building provision in that area would be viable.
- (x) Officers through the Children's Social Care Investment Programme were looking to increase inhouse provision of residential homes. This would not meet all demand and some outsourcing would always be necessary to meet the varied and complex needs of some children. The commissioning approach within the Children and Family Services department was also therefore being improved and strengthened.
- (xi) The Council developed area strategies to collect contributions from multiple developers for specific areas for the range of infrastructure requirements required. The Director confirmed that this was being developed in coordination with district councils and was considered a key factor in ensuring appropriate section 106 funding was secured to meet the costs of delivery.
- (xii) It was recognised that a significant issue for the County Council was the viability of housing and the push by developers to seek to reduce section 106 developer contributions. The Leader commented that the Council no longer had sufficient capital resources to build infrastructure and so it would in future be reliant on section 106 funding coming in before works could start. This would unfortunately mean that the use of existing assets would be stretched as forward funding and the early delivery of schemes was no longer financially possible. A Member suggested that a briefing on the development of area strategies would be of benefit for all members.

Budget Consultation

- (xiii) Members noted that 450 responses to the consultation had been received and challenged whether this could be considered representative of the residents of Leicestershire. It was noted that a light touch consultation had been undertaken and a more detailed exercise was held every four years which provided more detailed feedback. The responses received, although few, were in line with comments previously received.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 9th February 2024;
- (b) That an all member briefing be arranged regarding the development of area strategies to support future infrastructure planning.

50. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2027/28 - Chief Executive's Department

The Commission considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources which provided information on the proposed 2024/25 – 2027/28 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as it related to the Chief Executive's Department. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

In addition to the Leader and Lead Member for Resources, the Chairman welcomed the Lead Member for Regulatory Services, Mrs D. Taylor CC and the Lead Member Community and Staff Relations, Mrs P. Posnett CC, to the meeting.

Arising from discussion and questions, the following points arose:

Proposed Revenue Budget

- (i) Members noted that Strategy and Business Intelligence covered a broad area of work including business intelligence, the Communities and Policy teams, the Resilience service (the County Council acting as host to the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Local Resilience Forum and Partnership), and the Growth Service. These helped to secure funding, supported the delivery of large scale projects, such as Broadband rollout, and worked with partners and the voluntary sector. A Member commented that these were not statutory services and this section generated the highest cost for the Department but was not expected in the current MTFS to deliver any savings. It was suggested that an update on this service area would be beneficial to better understand the breadth of work delivered.
- (ii) The Council's contribution to the Leicester and Leicestershire Place Marketing Team was included within the Strategy and Business Intelligence budget. This amounted to approximately £60,000 per year as well as two seconded officers. A Member commented that tangible examples of what this partnership delivered would be helpful. It was noted that these would be provided in the next annual report on the performance of the organisation as had been previously requested by the Commission.
- (iii) In response to questions raised, the Director confirmed that the Department currently employed approximately 250 FTE staff excluding registrars on zero hour contracts.
- (iv) Members welcomed the work of the Trading Standards service and noted that, in light of the Government's recent announcement to ban the sale of disposable vapes, the work of the service would increase further. Some additional funding had been allocated to enable the service, in conjunction with East Midlands Airport, to tackle the import of such products. However, members noted that the service was

already stretched and had limited staff to cover all areas of enforcement. A triage approach would therefore be adopted to prioritise those areas that gave rise to the most risk.

- (v) It was noted that Trading Standards was responsible for food standards whilst district councils were responsible for food hygiene. The service worked closely with district council environmental health officers given there was some cross over in this work, particularly when coordinating inspections. It also worked closely with other partners, such as the police, in tackling doorstep crime and rogue traders, and East Midlands Airport border force and HMRC to tackle issues such as illicit tobacco.
- (vi) It was noted that the recruitment of solicitors continued to be an issue, particularly in areas such as adult and children's social care, with some posts having to be readvertised a number of times. Case levels had also significantly increased. Members recognised the need to ensure legal cases were continuously being managed and therefore any gap in service had to be temporarily filled through the use of locums or by outsourcing work to the private sector, both of which were costly to the Council. The Director confirmed that the corporate incentive programme had been used to enhance salaries to make the positions advertised more competitive. This had resulted in some improvements.
- (vii) The new Biodiversity Net Gain Regulations would come into force in April 2024. The County Council would be the lead local authority and was therefore in the process of reviewing the limited guidance currently available and establishing an advisory service. This would be a chargeable service and no costs were therefore accounted for within the MTFS. Over time it was expected this service could generate an income for the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made by the Commission be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 9th February 2024.

51. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2027/28 - Corporate Resources Department

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided information on the proposed 2024/25 – 2027/28 MTFS as it related to the Corporate Resources Department. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed the Leader and the Lead Member for Resources who remained present for this item.

Arising from discussion and questions, the following points arose:

Savings

- (i) A Member raised challenged the scale of the savings required to be made by the Department given that some of the services it provided were discretionary, not statutory. The Director commented that the overall budget for the service was £30m, and an ongoing saving of £3m had been identified which was therefore significant given that this would be a year-on-year reduction in spend of 10%. The

identification of further savings was also being considered for future years.

- (ii) Ways of Working – A Member questioned if the planned capital investment of more than £5.5m on the Ways of Working programme was justifiable against a forecasted saving of £70,000 in 2024/25 rising to £780,000 from 2025/26 onwards. The Director commented that this was the additional saving from 2024/25 and that savings had also been made in previous years. The current MTFs showed what was a short term capital investment to support this saving. However, this would be balanced against the generation of an increasing, long term revenue income stream, as well as long term reduced costs to the Council. Members noted that most of the investment costs included within the MTFs related to improved IT infrastructure which would be necessary to support improved service delivery. Improvements in IT related to updating staff laptops, which had a natural life cycle, and improvements to the network infrastructure.
- (iii) Members noted that the Programme delivered a range of benefits in addition to the financial benefits outlined. These included increased productivity of staff, the improved recruitment and retention of staff, and a reduction in carbon and overall operating costs. It was noted that an update on the Ways of Working Programme would be provided to the Commission in April.
- (iv) The models of IT were changing and there was a gradual move from capital investment to a revenue cost as more was hosted off-site with third party providers. Members noted that a significant amount of spend was now targeted towards security. The Director undertook to address this as part of the Ways of Working update to be provided in April.
- (v) A Member questioned what options had been assessed as part of the business case for the Programme and whether there were any opportunity costs being lost in retaining the current office space. The Director commented that a balance had been struck between the capital value of the County Hall campus against the cost and disruption to services of relocating staff to a new site.
- (vi) Review of mobile phones – A tender exercise had been undertaken 3 to 4 years ago which had significantly reduced the cost of mobile phones used by staff. The use of handsets had increased during the covid pandemic (from approximately 2,300 to over 3,000). Efforts were now being made to reduce those numbers where possible. However, it had to be acknowledged that working arrangements had changed during that time, particularly in the field of social care, and staff were using devices more regularly to engage differently with service users including, for example, by using WhatsApp. This was proving beneficial and so the savings had to be balanced against a new service need.
- (vii) Union Representatives – Some Members challenged why the Council funded employee union representatives and provided them with facilities within County Hall, suggesting that this should be paid for out of union members subscriptions, not council funding. The Director reported that the Council currently funded 4 full time union representatives at a cost of approximately £160,000/£170,000 pa. They were also given use of reasonable facilities within the building. This was common for local authorities of this size and complexity.
- (viii) Given the degree of service transformation that had taken place across the Authority over the last decade, it was suggested that the input of union

representatives had been valuable, and they played an important part in ensuring good employee relations, especially during significant periods of change. It was noted that approximately 30% of staff were members of a recognised trade union. However, when reaching collective agreements with trade unions this benefited all staff and the reach of union representatives therefore went beyond the 30% who were registered members.

- (ix) The Leader commented that the amount spent to fund trade union representatives was good value. Relations with all trade unions had been good and they provided a useful channel through which to communicate, negotiate and engage with staff. Given the concerns now raised, however, the Leader understood to consider the matter.

[At this point in the meeting Mrs A. Hack CC declared an Other Registerable Interest as a GMB union member. Mr R. J. Richardson also declared he was a union member.]

- (x) Traded Services - A Member commented that the Council's commercial traded services were costing the Authority a significant amount but generating very little in revenue return. It was questioned whether the Council could efficiently run services of this nature. Members noted that the school meal service had generated a good income in the past for the Council but had been hard hit by the covid pandemic and subsequently affected by food inflation and increases in the national living wage. The Director highlighted that the services did have a dual purpose and were not entirely commercial. Whilst required to generate an income, they also provided wider benefits, school food and outdoor activities at Beaumanor being examples.
- (xi) A Member challenged the losses made by the school meal service and questioned what action had been taken to rectify contracts which had not accounted for the significant rise in food inflation costs. It was noted that an update on the performance of the service was the subject of a separate report elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.

Capital

- (xii) ICT – The investment allocated was largely to address end of life replacement, capacity growth and upgrades. This was not an investment to generate future savings, but necessary to improve efficient ways of working and ensure systems were robust and secure.
- (xiii) Property Services – A Member questioned what challenge took place when considering whether or not to carry out works to a property and if the sale of that property was also considered. It was noted that new windows at a cost of £85,000 were to be installed at the Basset Centre in Wigston. The Director provided assurance that robust reviews were undertaken of every property before works were carried out. In this instance, the property was not empty but used as a locality office by the registrar and social workers and also housed the Memphis Centre. The works had therefore been considered appropriate in respect of this property.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting on 9th February 2024 for consideration

52. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2027/28 - Consideration of responses from other Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Commission considered extracts from the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held to consider the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 – 2027/28 so far as this related to the County Council departments. A copy of the minutes extracts is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member for Resources reiterated the financial pressures faced but emphasised that the Council had taken prudent decisions year on year and it was therefore in a strong position compared to many. Scrutiny had played a key role in challenging these difficult decisions which provided a good level of assurance. The Lead Member emphasised that the Director of Corporate Resources as the Council's section 151 officer was able to give assurance that the budget estimates were robust and earmarked reserves adequate. The Lead Member further thanked officers and the Chairs of each scrutiny committee for their input into the process which had been in depth and valuable.

The Chairman and the Chairs of the scrutiny committees thanked officers that worked well under tremendous pressure and had continued to deliver change in the face of considerable financial constraints.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 9th February 2024.

53. Draft Revised Investing in Leicestershire Programme Portfolio Management Strategy 2024 - 28

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which sought members views on the revised Investing in Leicestershire Programme Portfolio Management Strategy 2024-28 which set out the proposed approach to future asset management and investment. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Phillip Pearson, of Hymans Robertson, to the meeting. Mr Pearson provided a presentation on the external review of the Council's property portfolio performance, and a copy of the slides is attached to these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points arose:

- (i) A member raised concern regarding the underperformance of the Council's rural estate which despite good capital appreciation, showed a net income of -1.7%. Mr Pearson commented that rural property had an important part to play in the Council's portfolio. Hymans Robertson had recommended maintaining the current allocation on the basis this was proportionate for Council's portfolio and it aligned with the non financial aims of the Strategy. However, it was important that every property in the portfolio contributed and where this was no longer the case, a plan

would be put in place to address this, which might result in a disposal.

- (ii) The Lead Member for Resources highlighted that a lot of the Council's rural estate fell within district council emerging local plans and had been allocated for projects such as the Melton Mowbray Distributor road.
- (iii) In response to a question, the Director advised that the Snibston Café did not fall within the ILLP Portfolio but formed part of the Council's Country Parks estate.
- (iv) Carrying out repairs or refurbishments to properties could be costly. Consideration would therefore be given to whether, once those works had been carried out, a property would likely generate an acceptable financial return or have an otherwise positive impact in line with the Strategy's aims. If this was not the case, the property might simply be sold.
- (v) Costs relating to the sale of a property or the costs to repair, maintain or refurbish, would be reflected in any business case put forward when considering whether to carry out works. This ensured all options were properly costed and assessed before a decision was taken on the appropriate way forward.
- (vi) Selling a property placed significant demand on officer time. The Council therefore operated a rolling programme of asset reviews to ensure the whole portfolio was reviewed and actions taken over a long term to spread the costs and resource demand.
- (vii) A Member challenged what social benefits were being delivered by the Programme given that most investments within it were of a commercial nature. It was noted that the Council would not seek to compete with the private sector but looked to maximise the use of its existing assets to help generate economic growth (its development at Leaders Farm being an example), particularly where external funding was available (for example, Airfield Farm had benefited from European Development Funding). In turn it was hoped that such economic investment would then bring about wider social benefits.
- (viii) The Programme was reaching its capital investment limit. Consideration was therefore being given to increasing the focus on the existing estate, including some invest to save projects. A key area of focus was, for example, the purchase of residential properties to support adult and children's social care accommodation needs, although this fell under the Social Care Improvement Programme (SCIP).
- (ix) In response to questions raised the Director confirmed that the Programme consisted of a mix of treasury management and directly owned property investments, and a significant amount of the property included had been owned by the Council for a number of years before the Programme had been established. These investments had been grouped together within the Programme to provide a balanced and diverse portfolio which helped to manage risk.
- (x) The Director confirmed that the Lutterworth East SDA would be a multiyear development and the Council had yet to decide how to move this forward given the delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent inflation and cost increases. Options were currently being looked at and a proposal would be put forward over the next few months for members consideration.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the presentation provided on behalf of Hymans Robertson regarding its external review of the Council's Investing in Leicestershire Programme be noted and welcomed;
- (b) That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 9th February 2024.

54. Interim Report on the Traded Services Strategy

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an overview of the themes explored in the Leicestershire Traded Services (LTS) Scrutiny Commission workshop held in October 2023 and an interim update on the performance of Services during 2023/24. The report also set out some suggested criteria for how the Council's traded services might be evaluated, beyond financial performance alone. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member commented that the report set out an honest assessment of where LTS was currently. The Commission's concerns raised at the workshop last year had been taken on board, and the Lead Member now welcomed its views on the criteria for evaluating each service and the prioritisation to be awarded to these. Plans were in place to address those Services that were not currently performing and over the next 12 months if circumstances did not improve, alternative options would be considered. The criteria to be applied would be key in considering those options.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) A Member criticised LTS, suggesting that despite the Commission receiving several reports suggesting that services would be improved, most continued to make a loss.
- (ii) A Member commented that the financial contributions made by the cafes was minimal and questioned whether outsourcing these had been considered, similar to the café at Snibston Country Park. The Director reported that an assessment had been undertaken but this had shown that the return likely to be generated by outsourcing would be comparable with current income levels.
- (iii) In response to questions raised, the Director advised that if the country parks cafes were to be operated by the private sector, this would be on an internal repairing only lease. The external parts of the property would therefore continue to be a liability to the Council. Given their location, the sale of the cafes would not be an option.
- (iv) A Member argued that the capital repair costs for Beaumanor Hall would be high, particularly as the long access road would soon require work which they suggested could cost in excess of £1m. This would outweigh the financial returns likely to be generated even if performance improved, noting that the service currently made a loss and had done for some years. The Director reported that the scale of repairs needed to the access road to Beaumanor Hall had been estimated to be significantly less than £1m, more likely patching works would be in the region of £100,000. Members were reminded that whilst the Hall was required to generate an income, it also generated wider benefits, such as the outdoor

activities for school children, which needed to be considered when assessing the future of the service.

- (v) The School Food service had resulted in significant financial losses and forecasted income was still expected to be below target. The Director reported that good progress was being made, the service having gone through an extensive review which had significantly reduced costs. A return to the service generating a profit, as it had done before the Covid- 19 Pandemic had hit, was looking more likely. In terms of timing, the Director confirmed that this year a loss had been forecast due to contract renewal cycles. However, the service was expected to make a contribution the following year.
- (vi) A Member expressed serious concern regarding the Council's contracts for the School Food Service, as he felt these should have been drafted to ensure that all increased could be passed onto the user. The Commission was assured that legacy contracts had been reviewed and updated following legal and specialist external advice, to better manage these types of cost in the future. Members noted that some of the contracts had been in place for many years, long before LTS had been established, when it could not have been forecast that, for example, food inflation costs would rise by more 20%. The Director commented that the review of contracts had taken time as these had to be assessed on a school by school basis.
- (vii) Some Members raised concerns regarding the tone of the discussion being held and commented that whilst generating a financial return was important, more recognition needed to be given to the wider benefits delivered by LTS, in particular relating to School Food. The Council had provided meals to all schools before the academisation programme began and had continued to do so on a traded basis for a number of years. Until relatively recently this had been a success and generated a good rate of return. Whilst it was taking time to recover, it was suggested that this service should be looked at as a longer term project.
- (viii) A Member commented that whilst the private sector provided alternative school food options that might be cheaper, the Council's service, despite the financial pressures faced, had deliberately not sought to be the cheapest, instead prioritising good quality, wholesome foods that provided good nutrition for children. A Member suggested that this was to be applauded given that for some children this would be the only hot meal they received all day.
- (ix) It was noted that the Century Theatre was a small, 200 seat capacity venue. Ticketing numbers and pricing could not therefore meet costs as it was too small an operation. Such theatres tended to operate for the benefit of the community and large organisations were not interested in taking these over. Whilst the wider benefits of the Theatre were noted, a member questioned whether the Council should continue to subsidise this.
- (x) Regarding the criteria for evaluating each LTS, it was suggested that focus should be given to those areas in which the Council held some expertise and/or where there was a gap in the market. For example, professional services provided by the County Council could offer customers a greater level of assurance over and above private sector providers. It should also seek to prioritise those that delivered benefits in Leicestershire. Members agreed that this should be the second highest

priority after financial return.

- (xi) A Member commented that given the breadth of services provided through LTS it was difficult to have a single conversation that fairly encompassed them all. It was suggested that in future, they should be considered individually taking account of their wider benefits against the level of financial return or loss expected.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the interim update on the performance of Leicestershire Traded Services be noted;
- (b) That the 6 criteria to evaluate each traded service detailed within the report be supported but that criteria (d) 'benefits to Leicestershire residents' be given the highest priority after financial return.

55. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 13th March 2024 at 10.00 am.

10.00 am - 1.52 pm
29 January 2024

CHAIRMAN