

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)**  
**held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 26 September 2018**

Present:

Members: Councillor J McNicholas (Chair)  
Councillor J Birdi  
Councillor Clifford  
Councillor G Crookes  
Councillor R Lancaster  
Councillor C Miks  
Councillor B Singh  
Councillor T Skipper

Employees (by Directorate):

People C Bainbridge, N Inglis

Place J Bowker, G Holmes, G McKelvie, M Salmon, D Shiner

Others Present: H Turner (Managing Director, The Wheelhouse)

Apologies: Councillor K Taylor

## **Public Business**

### **8. Declarations of Interest**

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

### **9. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

### **10. Affordable Warmth Support for Vulnerable and Low Income Householders**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a briefing note and presentation from the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that provided the Board with further information on affordable warmth support, following consideration of the work of the Energy and Low Carbon Team at the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018 (minute 3/18).

Fuel poor households cannot afford to heat their home to an adequate temperature. The majority of households in fuel poverty are owner occupiers and people living in private rented accommodation, and single parents and houses with multiple occupants are also the most at risk.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy annual fuel poverty statistics for England were released in June 2018, the latest statistics relating to June 2016 showed:

## Coventry

- 15.3% of all households in Coventry (20,479) are now fuel poor, compared to 11.1% in England. In the previous year, 14.4% of all Coventry households (18,878) were fuel poor, and 11.0% were fuel poor in England.
- Out of all 326 billing local authorities in England, Coventry has the 10<sup>th</sup> highest level of fuel poverty along with 3 other local authorities (Sunderland, Barrow-in-Furness, Newham).

## Coventry Neighbourhoods

- Of the 195 Lower Super Output Areas in Coventry, there are 40 where at least 1 in every 5 households are fuel poor. This is 21% of all LSOAs. In the previous year 29 LSOAs had at least 1 in every 5 households in fuel poverty.
- The LSOA with the highest level of fuel poverty is Gosford and Gulson Roads. 38.3% of households in this LSOA are fuel poor. It has the 9<sup>th</sup> highest level of fuel poverty out of all 32,844 LSOAs in England.

Studies indicated that households that could not afford to heat their home to an adequate temperature could suffer ill health as a consequence. Older persons, children and those with existing health conditions were particularly vulnerable.

The Council's Affordable Warmth Team and Public Health collaborated closely to develop and deliver projects that provided maximum support within the resources available. The two elements to the Team's work were: i) providing insulation and heating measures to improve energy efficiency, and ii) offering affordable warmth advice and information. Most projects focused on helping low income and vulnerable householders who had health conditions that were affected by their cold homes, these were:

Warmer Homes in Coventry

Affordable Warmth on Prescription

Keeping Coventry Warm

Switch and Save

Warm and Healthy Homes for Disabled Householders

Heating Assistance Preventing Hospital Admissions

The Affordable Warmth Team provided wide-ranging affordable advice and information to help households reduce energy bills and stay warm in their homes. This was available to all Coventry households but focussed on those that were vulnerable or on a low income. Help was available by telephone, e-mail, the Council's website, and by home visit, as well as through weekly surgeries held at Age UK, and included advice on energy tariffs, negotiations with energy suppliers regarding fuel debt, registering for the Priority Service Register and obtaining £140 annual Warm Home Discount payments and other financial support. In 2017/18, 469 households received advice and information, in the same year the team's webpages also received 7665 web page views. The Team also provided bespoke affordable warmth advice and information to tenants of Whitefriars housing association living in Manor Farm, Coventry that resulted in an average yearly saving for each household visited of £280 made principally through accessing grant funds and reductions in energy usage.

The presentation clarified:

- Who the fuel poor were - Households were deemed to be living in fuel poverty if they had above average (national median) fuel costs, and were they to pay that they would have a residual income below the official poverty line
- Fuel Poverty and Health: what we know - Young children, older people and those with pre-existing health problems are particularly susceptible to cold and it caused 10 to 30% of excess winter deaths
- Coventry Fuel Poverty by area of the City
- Fuel Poverty: Action in Coventry – There were a range of programmes to support the most vulnerable (based on income and health criteria) by providing heating and insulation measures, and advice and guidance; using internal and external funding for programmes; engagement with frontline health and care staff to generate referrals; and evaluating impact on health, financial gains to residents

The Board questioned officers and discussed the following issues:

- Fuel poverty arising from cash poor households
- Focus on heating and insulation measures, in addition to the provision of advice and guidance
- Concerns around the effects of Universal Credit
- Working with all nine care providers in the City and with the UHCW Discharge Team for referrals
- Improved standards of affordable homes/social rented housing
- How to involve Elected Members from the Wards with the highest fuel poverty
- The anticipated improvement to the condition of properties following the introduction of Selective Licensing in the St Michael's Ward, currently one of the highest for Fuel Poverty
- The difficulty Elected Members have identifying those in fuel poverty, in order to offer help and support
- The success of the Affordable Warmth on Prescription Pilot and aspirations to expand the project, subject to securing funding, in the future
- The importance of having a functioning boiler in the home, especially for the very young and the elderly and the issues that could arise from delaying boiler checks and repairs

The Board agreed that: officers be requested to work with Credit Unions regarding ethical borrowing and saving; Members of the Board be provided with an electronic copy of the Fuel Poverty in Coventry Map with a Ward Boundary overlay for ease of use; officers be requested to follow-up the recommendation in respect of the Serious Case Review – Child T. considered by the Education and Childrens Services Scrutiny Board (2) at their meeting on 18th June 2015 (Minute 3/15 referred); and all Elected Members be provided with flyers for use at Ward surgeries and a 'Quick Guide', for referring residents in fuel poverty to appropriate services.

**RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):**

- 1) Notes the contents of the report.**
- 2) Endorses the work carried out by the Affordable Warmth Team and Public Health to provide affordable warmth support for vulnerable and low income households.**
- 3) Requests that officers work with the credit unions regarding ethical borrowing and saving.**
- 4) Officers be requested to consider how they could involve Elected Members from the Wards of the City with the highest fuel poverty.**
- 5) Produce a guide for Members to support constituents to access information on fuel poverty**

**11. The Wheelhouse**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a briefing note and presentation from the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that informed the Board of current activity in relation to The Wheelhouse and their establishment of shared office space in the Council House, and sought the support and guidance of the Board in considering further options in relation to the St. Mary's Guildhall offer.

In May 2018 (minute 49/17 refers) the Board were informed that The Wheelhouse had opened at the Council House as a means of generating an income from otherwise underutilised space within the Council.

The Wheelhouse (Coventry) opened in April 2018, within the former Communications Team offices converted to offer:

- Dedicated desk spaces
- Co-working desk spaces
- Relaxed working spaces
- Meeting room spaces

The Wheelhouse reported that they were on course for achieving targets in business growth and tangible income now being received from The Wheelhouse, which was ahead of forecast.

Hot desk membership was underperforming, however the number of fixed desk membership was ahead of forecast, which over-compensated revenue-wise for the hot desks.

The membership base had further increased over the last 3 month period, following the usual summer lull, with additional hot desk enquiries and a significant fixed desk enquiry supporting growth for September.

A renewed marketing campaign was being launched through September and October to capitalise on the 'new term' opportunities; social media, local business

forums, press releases and event hosting, all support the marketing campaigns. A referral system was in place for all Coventry City Council Employees.

Following a visit to The Wheelhouse by the Board as part of their meeting, they questions officers and discussed in more detail the following:

- The original set up of the Wheelhouse concept in London in 2016
- The expansion of the concept to date – Oxford, Coventry
- The Wheelhouse at the Council House launch in March 2018
- Membership - the current usage of hot desks and fixed desks
- Plans for growth
- Opening hours and fees
- Security – provision of security pass for first floor Council House access.
- Income generation for the Local Authority through the concept
- The provisions included in the fee – network connection, office equipment, meeting/desk space
- The benefits to users of the co-working provision
- Types of business users – business start-ups, freelance, charities, entrepreneurs

The Board agreed that officers be requested to submit a further report in 6 months' time on the progress of The Wheelhouse business model and future plans.

**RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise (3) agrees:**

- 1) **To continue to support and promote the growth of The Wheelhouse and their shared office space within the Council House.**
- 2) **A progress report on The Wheelhouse business model and future plans be submitted to the Board in 6 months' time.**

12. **Work Programme 2018/2019**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) considered the Work Programme for 2018/2019 and discussed the scheduling of proposed issues for consideration at future meetings of the Board.

**RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) notes the Board's Work Programme for 2018/2019 and agrees that the following item be added, for consideration at a future meeting of the Board:**

**Coventry A Giga Bit City – Presentation and Briefing Note on Coventry's aspiration to become a Giga Byte City.**

13. **Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved**

There were no other items of public business.

14. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

**RESOLVED** that Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) agrees to exclude the press and public from the meeting under Sections 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 relating to the private report in Minute 15 below headed 'The Wheelhouse' on the grounds that the report involves the likely disclosure of information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as it contains information relating to the financial affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information) and in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

**Private Business**

15. **The Wheelhouse**

Further to Minute 11 above headed 'The Wheelhouse', the Scrutiny Board discussed confidential financial issues associated with The Wheelhouse.

(Meeting closed at 4.00 pm)