

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Wednesday, 21 October 2015

Present:

Members: Councillor G Duggins (Chair)
(Deputy Chair)
Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor R Lakha
Councillor J Mutton
Councillor M Mutton
Councillor K Taylor
Councillor D Welsh

Co-Opted Members:

Other Members: Councillors A Lucas and J McNicholas

Employees (by Directorate):

V Castree, Resources Directorate
D Cockroft, Place Directorate
C Knight, Place Directorate
L Knight, Resources Directorate
D Nuttall, Place Directorate
D O'Shaughnessy, Chief Executive's Directorate
J Venn, Chief Executive's Directorate

Apologies: Councillor

Public Business

36. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest declared.

37. Cultural Trust Review

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Director of Place which provided a summary of the performance and the operating context for the Belgrade Theatre Trust and Culture Coventry in 2014/15. Hamish Glenn, Chief Executive of the Belgrade Trust and Gary Hall, Chief Executive and Roger Medway, Culture Coventry attended the meeting for the consideration of this item and the Chief Executives provided further details on the performance of their Trusts.

The briefing note referred to 2012 Cultural Review undertaken in response to the need to generate savings arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review to ensure a viable future for the cultural attractions managed by three trusts. The review recommended the merger of the Coventry Heritage Arts Trust and the

Coventry Transport Museum which led to the launch on Culture Coventry in August 2013, with the Belgrade Theatre continuing as a separate trust. These measures aimed to save £665,000 per annum for the Council. Reference was made to the Council's mid-term financial strategy and the further saving now required, which were the subject of a consultation exercise at the current time.

Belgrade Theatre

The Belgrade Theatre was an Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation and was a producing theatre with specific objectives relating to its ACE grant. The Belgrade had seen a phased reduction in its grant from the Council of £272,000 per annum from 2014/15. In response the theatre had worked towards a greater emphasis on earned income to secure sustainability with a 62% turnover from earned income in 2014/15, up from 30% then 46% in previous years. In 2014/15 151,000 people experienced a live performance across 113 productions with an average ticket price of £13.28. The theatre had successfully widened its audience base whilst maintaining levels at over 40% of tickets being sold at concessionary prices. In 2015 the theatre celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Theatre in Education, a movement started at the Belgrade.

Hamish Glen referred to the £6.6m contribution to the local economy generated by the Belgrade, highlighting that for every £1 of Council funding £4.98 was generated. He also raised concerns regarding the Council's mid-term financial strategy which required further saving by the cultural trusts from 2017 and outlined the implications which could include the loss of ACE funding if objectives couldn't be met.

Members raised a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- If there was capacity to increase the level of earned income
- Further information about the £6.6m contribution to the local economy
- If there were potential saving to be had from joint working between the two trusts
- Further details about the interaction with other theatres in the city
- The potential change from a producing theatre to a presenting theatre as a consequence of future financial cuts
- The likelihood that Arts Council grants would be reduced in any case due to the current public spending cuts
- Further details about the £5m turnover of business and future plans.

Culture Coventry

The Culture Coventry Trust supported the Coventry Transport Museum, the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, the Priory Visitor Centre, the Lunt Roman Fort and the Old Grammar School. The development of this new Trust had progressed concurrently with the £9.5m development and refurbishment programme at the Coventry Transport Museum and the 12th Century Old Grammar School, which was completed in June 2015. Reference was made to the complexities of the scheme which resulted in the closure of the museum for four weeks in total and the closure of the conference space which impacted on income generation in 2014/15.

Since 2013 the Culture Coventry Board had focused on securing an attractive visitor offer and a balanced budget to ensure the successful delivery of the required savings of £393,000 per annum. As both the Transport Museum and the Herbert remained free to visitors, improvements had been made to the shops and product lines at both locations. Also, in 2014/15 Culture Coventry had secured an additional £50,000 funding from ACE to create a new interactive exhibition space at the Lunt Roman Fort. The Committee were informed that over 24,000 students had visited the museum sites between 2012 and 2015. Following some previous fluctuations, visitor numbers at the Herbert were up by 11% in 2014/15. Visitor numbers had consistently increased at the Transport Museum since 2007 but fell by 30% in 2014/15 due to the development works.

Gary Hall referred to the recent reductions in staffing numbers and to the aim to attract half a million visitors to both the Transport Museum and the Herbert. He also raised concerns about the Council's future savings targets which could result in the closure of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum.

Members raised a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- The plans to close the Priory Visitor Centre which had been earmarked for closure to save £100,000 per annum
- Had consideration been given to charging visitors to the Transport Museum and the Herbert
- Whether there were proposals for income generation for the Lunt Fort
- The potential benefits for joint working so reducing back office costs
- The marketing of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum

Councillor Lucas drew attention to the 50% cut in Council funding, emphasised that savings had to be made and future decisions would be taken based on what was best for Coventry residents.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The performance and current operating contexts of the Belgrade Theatre Trust and Culture Coventry be noted.

(2) A briefing note be circulated to the Committee and to the members of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) providing a detailed explanation of the £6.6m contribution to the local economy generated by the Belgrade Theatre.

38. NUCKLE - Arena Railway Station

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Executive Director of Place which explained the reasons for the delays in opening the Arena Railway Station; the issues in respect of event trains; and how it was proposed to move forward. Richard Brookes, Commercial Director and Steve Fisher, Head of Regional Services, London Midland, Richard Howarth, Network Rail and Ian Walters, the Council's consultant on NUCKLE attended the meeting for the consideration of this

item along with Councillor McNicholas, Deputy Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Employment with special responsibility for Transportation.

The briefing note indicated that NUCKLE (Nuneaton, Coventry, Kenilworth and Leamington) was the name given to a package of rail projects to radically upgrade north-south services through Coventry. The ultimate aim was to create a rail corridor with high quality services connecting the East Midlands/North East through Coventry to the Thames Valley and South. The project had been split into a number of phases with the first phase being the building of new stations at Coventry Arena and Bermuda Park, improvements at Bedworth and a new bay platform at Coventry with associated track and signal changes to enable more frequent services. The intention was to deliver phase 1 as a whole but due to an overheated signalling market meaning significantly increased signal costs, phase 1 became unaffordable. In light of the potential loss of significant European Regional Development funding and the Department of Transport funding, Cabinet, at their meeting on 4th March, 2014 gave approval to split phase 1 as follows:

- 1.1 the construction of two new stations and improvements at Bedworth
- 1.2 the building of the bay platform at Coventry and the associated works and the crossover at the Arena.

These issues delayed the start of the project by a year.

The Committee were informed that the new stations were completed by the end of July but the opening date had been delayed due to Network Rail requiring a cabinet to be climate controlled; staffing issues at London Midland; Network rail's requirement for signalling and commissioning plans; and the submission of the entry into service documentation.

The main purpose of the Arena Station was to serve the day to day needs of Ricoh Arena, the Arena Retail Park and local residents rather than the demand for major sporting events. The aim of phase 1 was two trains per hour between Coventry and Nuneaton with a minimum of two coach trains. Currently services could run once per hour until the bay platform was complete, expected to be Autumn 2017. Reference was also made to the lack of availability of diesel rolling stock which was unlikely to be available until December 2017.

The Committee were informed that the Arena Station was capable of supporting sufficient services to move over 3,000 people to and from events. A six coach platform had been provided along with queuing facilities. The current lack of train capacity had been the reason for the Safety Advisory Group's decision to close the station for an hour after major events. It was possible for event organisers to charter trains to enhance normal services.

Three further actions were currently being pursued to ensure that the Arena Station could support the ambitions of ACL/Wasps: (i) encouraging the provision of events trains, (ii) the delivery of the bay platform and associated infrastructure as soon as possible and (iii) engaging with partners to investigate alternative diesel rolling stock options.

Members raised a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- When was the station likely to be open

- Further information about the availability of diesel rolling stock
- Could event trains be scheduled into Coventry station without the bay platform
- Further details about the delays in electrification projects that would have released diesel rolling stock
- Concerns about how the situation looked to members of the public
- Further details about the proposals for the crossover at the Arena
- Was there potential for using the quieter platforms 2 and 4 at Coventry Station
- Concerns about the length of time it would take before phase 1.2 was complete
- Whether there was capacity for chartered trains to operate at Coventry Station on event days
- When would the Entry into Service documentation be submitted
- A concern that the public had not been fully informed about the decision and implications to deliver phase 1 of the project in two parts
- The financial costs of using chartered trains and the costs of train fares compared to the costs of using the bus or car parks
- Once the bay platform is operational at Coventry Station, what will happen to the existing capacity that has been released
- In light of the significant time it has taken to reach this stage of the project, the need to have a date for when phase 1.2 will be completed
- The challenges still to be faced.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The issues set out in the briefing note and raised at the meeting be noted.

(2) The Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Employment and the Deputy Cabinet Member with special responsibility for Transportation be requested to ensure that both Council Members and the public be kept fully informed of all developments during the different stages of the NUCKLE project, making particular use of the local media.

(3) The Cabinet Member for Business Enterprise and Employment and the Deputy Cabinet Member with special responsibility for Transportation be requested to ensure that the Entry into Service document is complied with, completed and submitted as a matter of urgency.

39. Update on Combined Authorities

The Committee received an oral update at the meeting from both the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Lucas and the Assistant Director, Policy, Jenni Venn on the latest progress on the Combined Authority.

The Committee were informed that Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, the last of the 7 metropolitan authorities, had confirmed their commitment as a member and approved the scheme for the West Midlands Combined Authority, at their Council meeting the previous day. The scheme was to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government today. A launch event had taken place the previous day at the House of Commons. The next stage in the

process was a formal consultation by the Secretary of State on his proposals leading to Parliamentary approval, with the West Midlands Combined Authority being set up from April 2016.

Discussions were still on-going regarding the devolution deal with Government which was a separate issue. Councillor Lucas emphasised that she was not prepared to sign anything that wasn't in Coventry's best interests. Any devolution deal would require a unanimous decision by all the constituent members. She clarified that Government had determined that the devolution discussions would be progressed in a confidential manner.

RESOLVED that progress on this issue be noted.

40. **Outstanding Issues**

The Committee noted that all outstanding issues had been included in the work programme.

41. **Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2015/2016**

The Committee considered their work programme for the current municipal year.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted and consideration be given to scheduling meeting dates for the City Centre Leisure Centre Development and the Coventry, A Top 10 City items.

42. **Any Other Items of Public Business**

There were no additional items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.40 pm)