

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Wednesday, 12 April 2017

Present:

Councillor J Blundell
Councillor D Gannon
Councillor L Kelly
Councillor J McNicholas
Councillor M Mutton
Councillor R Singh (Chair)
Councillor D Skinner

Other Members: Councillors J Mutton and P Seaman

Other Representatives: Mary Dunleavy, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
Janet Gurney, Coventry Law Centre
Claire Hindson, DWP
Ed Hodson, Citizens Advice Bureau
Alan Markey, Coventry Independent Advice Service
Iona Old, DWP
Glen Smailes, Job Shop

Employees (by Directorate):

V Castree, Place Directorate
L Knight, Place Directorate
A West, Place Directorate

Apologies: Councillor N Akhtar, L Bigham (Cabinet Member), G Crookes,
R Lancaster and C Thomas (Deputy Cabinet Member)

Public Business

70. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

71. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd March, 2017 were signed as a true record.

With reference to Minute 63 headed 'Creation of a City Centre Public Spaces Protection Order', the Committee were informed that their recommendations had been considered by Cabinet on 7th March. Cabinet felt that the issues raised in recommendations i – iv were already being pursued, they accepted an amended version of recommendation v to 'support the consideration of a city centre skatepark' and accepted an amended version of recommendation vi which supported the 'further consideration of a clear cycle plan for the city centre'. In addition, the Committee noted that in respect of Minute 64 headed 'Connecting

Communities Phase 2', their recommendations had been accepted by Cabinet on 7th March without alteration.

72. **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) - Priorities for 2017/18**

The Committee received a presentation from Mary Dunleavy, Claire Hindson and Iona Old, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) which outlined their priorities, challenges and opportunities for 2017/18 and informed how partnership work was supporting their aims. Janet Gurney, Coventry Law Centre, Ed Hodson, Citizens Advice, Alan Markey, Independent Advice Service and Glen Smailes, Coventry Job Shop also attended the meeting for the consideration of this item. A paper from Janet Gurney and Alan Markey setting out potential partnership issues for consideration was tabled at the meeting.

The presentation highlighted that the unemployment rate had fallen to 4.7% which was the lowest since 2005. Coventry had 4,430 claiming work intensive benefits, 855 being 18-24 which was a significant positive change since 2010.

Information was provided on the Jobcentre Plus Offer. Support for claimants included a universal job match; a named Jobcentre Plus contact with experience of recruitment in the local area; attraction campaigns and opportunities to get involved in local events; opportunities to recruit via a sector specific route-way; and offers of work experience or work trials. Examples of recent individual cases where claimants had been supported were highlighted.

The Committee were provided with an understanding of universal credit and given details on the benefit cap. The full roll out for Universal Credit in Coventry was due to take place in April, 2018.

The presentation referred to the new Disability Confident scheme, which involved working with employers to increase their understanding of disability; challenging attitudes towards disability; removing barriers for disabled people; and ensuring disabled people had the opportunities to fulfil their potential.

The Committee were informed about the support provided by Jobcentre Plus which included disability employment advisers, work choice and Access to Work, a national programme which helped to overcome barriers that disabled people come across when moving onto or retaining employment. Detailed information was provided on the benefits of Access to Work, the eligibility criteria and the types of help available. Information was also provided on the Mental Health Support Service and the help available from the Access to Work programme. Examples of several success stories were provided where individuals had been assisted with Access to Work grants.

The presentation set out current partnership working which included support for schools and troubled families. The presentation concluded with a summary of departmental objectives.

Members questioned the representatives on a number of issues arising from the presentation and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- Information on sanctions placed on claimants and how long the appeals process took
- The support provided by DWP for troubled families including attendance at children centre partnership board meetings
- The involvement of the DWP with the new family hub models
- The relationship between DWP and the local Law Centre and Citizens Advice Bureau
- The opening hours for Job Centre Plus and the position of the Tile Hill office
- Clarification about the working age population and the classification of university students
- Further details about the budgeting support available for claimants
- Clarification that there was not a duplication of services amongst the partner organisations
- A suggestion that a representative from DWP be asked to sit on the Health and Wellbeing Board
- A request for a briefing session for all Members of the Council on Universal Credit
- Further information on how the work of Job Shop compliments the work of DWP
- Details about the 18-24 year olds entitled to benefits but not claiming and the reasons for this
- The financial support that would be available to help people manage when they are moved on to Universal Credit.

Representatives from the DWP agreed to provide the Committee with additional information about the Disability Confident scheme and a definition of the working age population.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The presentation be noted.

(2) Councillor Caan, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, be asked to consider the appointment of a representative from the Department of Work and Pensions as a member of the Board.

(3) Arrangements be put in place for a Members Briefing to understand how Scrutiny can support effective engagement in the run up to the introduction of universal credit.

(4) Information be circulated to Members to enable them to signpost residents with issues to the appropriate agency and also inform them about the various options for support.

(5) A copy of the letter sent by an MP to his local schools informing about the support offered by Job Centre Plus to help potential NEETS students be circulated to members.

73. **Public Transport Select Committee - Outcomes and Learning**

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) which had previously been considered by the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) at their meeting on 22nd March, 2017 (their minute 48/17 refers) which detailed the outcomes of the Scrutiny Board's Public Transport Select Committee held on 15th February, 2017.

The report indicated that in preparation for the Select Committee:

- Members of the Board visited the House of Commons on 19th July 2016 sat in on the Parliamentary Select Committee on Transport to observe Members questioning witnesses, they also met with Clive Betts MP the Chair of Communities and Local Government and questioned him on the process of a Select Committee in the Houses of Parliament.
- An Advisory Panel of the Board, comprising Councillors Brown, Lancaster, Mayer, and McNicholas (chair), was established to clarify and finalise key lines of enquiry and scope for the meeting.
- Members attended a number of briefings and were provided with background documentation on: Effective Questioning for Scrutiny; Connecting Coventry – Strategic Transport Investment Programme; Coventry Station Masterplan; and Coventry Rail Story.
- Members agreed the key lines of enquiry and the witnesses to be invited to provide evidence and also invited representatives from Coventry Older Voices and Transport Focus (the independent transport user watchdog) to participate in the meeting. Twitter and Facebook would also to be used to encourage public participation.

The Select Committee was set out in 3 sessions at which Members received presentations and information from witnesses and raised questions in response:

- Session 1 - How can train connectivity support economic development and business growth in the city?
- Session 2 - How can we improve the bus service in the city?
- Session 3 - What are the key accessibility issues for public transport in the city, and how can they be addressed?

The Committee were informed that Scrutiny Board (3) had agreed the lessons learned and ways to improve the process as follows:

- i. Specific briefings for Cabinet Members by Select Committee Chair and Officers should be held, especially if the themes of the committee span more than one portfolio.
- ii. Members on the select committee attend briefing sessions, avoid substitutions and fully familiarise themselves with background briefing papers.
- iii. Presentations from witnesses should be to introduce their role only and not provide additional or new information.
- iv. The number of witnesses should be kept to a maximum of three per session.
- v. Questions to witnesses should be given one at a time to allow multiple witnesses to respond, and should be limited to 60-90 seconds.

- vi. Questions to witnesses should be prepared prior to the meeting by members of the committee, based on background briefing information and themed or grouped together.
- vii. Careful consideration of payment to expert witness should be made where there are gaps in knowledge by Council officers.
- viii. Council officers who attend as witnesses should be senior officers with responsibility for implementing and managing policy decisions.
- ix. The select committee should be consist of a half-day to question witnesses with additional time for a plenary session, so recommendations can be identified on the day.
- x. Social media and other traditional communications are used well in advance of the meeting to enable questions from the public to be considered as part of the process.

A briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator informed the Committee that at their meeting on 22nd March, Scrutiny Board 3 had also agreed that Cabinet Members be required to attend all future Scrutiny Select Committees and that advanced publicity for Select Committees be maximised to encourage public participation.

The Committee discussed a number of issues arising from the briefing notes including:

- For any future Scrutiny Select Committees, the importance of members being fully involved in the complete process
- Clarification about the attendance of witnesses on the day
- A suggestion that, in relation to the recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration that he commissions a bus user and non-user survey just for Coventry, that Transport for West Midlands be involved in the survey
- The benefits of having the option to choose either a Scrutiny Select Committee or a Task and Finish Group to investigate an issue
- The models for Scrutiny work used by other local authorities
- The selection of members to serve on the Select Committee

Members placed on record their appreciation for all the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Team to ensure the success of the Select Committee meeting.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The benefits of using a Select Committee approach for Scrutiny be noted.

(2) The lessons learned on the process, as detailed in paragraph 14 of the report, for future Select Committee arrangements be noted.

(3) Consideration of suitable subjects for potential Select Committees be discussed by the individual Scrutiny Boards when discussing their work programmes for the new municipal year.

(4) The following two additional Scrutiny Board (3) recommendations from the meeting on 22nd March be noted:

(i) Relevant Cabinet Members be required to attend all future Select Committees

(ii) Advanced publicity for future Select Committees be maximised to encourage public participation.

(5) With reference to recommendation 3) from the Scrutiny Board (3) meeting, the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration be recommended to involve Transport for West Midlands in any bus user and non-user survey undertaken in Coventry.

74. Annual Report of the Work of Outside Bodies - Whitefriars Housing Association

The Committee considered a report of Councillor Patricia Seaman, one of the Council's four representatives on the Whitefriars Housing Board, which detailed the work of Whitefriars Housing over the preceding twelve months; set out the benefits to the Council of the Council's appointments; and provided information on the attendance records and remuneration for the appointments. Councillor Seaman attended the meeting for the consideration of this item.

RESOLVED that the current arrangements for the governance of the Whitefriars Housing Board continue to be made and the Council continues to appoint four individuals to the organisation to:

- **Ensure compliance with the values and purpose of Whitefriars Housing**
- **Play a leading role in setting the direction for the organisation**
- **Establishment of policies and plans**
- **Ensure residents are central to plans and decisions**
- **Oversee a framework of delegation and control**
- **Take decisions on significant matters**
- **Approve annual accounts, budgets and business plans for agreement at West Mercia Group Board**
- **Monitor performance in relation to plan budgets and key performance indicators.**

75. Outstanding Issues

The Committee noted a report of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator which outlined the approach to be taken on progress, outcomes and responses to recommendations and actions made by the Committee.

76. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2016/2017

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

77. Any Other Items of Public Business - West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee noted an update from Councillor J Mutton, the Council's representative on the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee, regarding his attendance at the recent Committee meeting held on 21st March, 2017. The Committee had discussed the key principles to underpin the relationship between the CA and local authority scrutiny by individual authorities on the work of the CA. The Committee had agreed that all partners

would work together to exchange views, to minimise bureaucracy and ensure the best use of resources. The Committee agreed that their focus would be on regional issues and there was an acknowledgement that, for some issues, consideration at a local scrutiny level would be preferable. Local Scrutiny Committees would have the opportunity to make recommendations to the CA.

The Committee noted that they were due to discuss progress of the work of the WMCA at their meeting on 10th May, 2017.

(Meeting closed at 12.20 pm)