

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Wednesday, 20 December 2017

Present:

Members: Councillor R Brown (Chair)
(Deputy Chair)
Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor A Andrews
Councillor R Auluck
Councillor J Clifford
Councillor P Male
Councillor J McNicholas
Councillor P Seaman
Councillor R Singh

Co-Opted Members:

Other Members: Councillors G Duggins and R Lakha

Employees (by Directorate):

L Gaulton, People Directorate
G Holmes, Resources Directorate
L Knight, Resources Directorate
S Lam
D O'Shaughnessy, Chief Executive's Directorate
A Walster, Place Directorate

Apologies: Councillor D Gannon, M Mutton and G Ridley

Public Business

45. Declarations of Interest

Councillor N Akhtar declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in the matter referred to in Minute 47 below headed 'Taxi Licensing'. He withdrew from the meeting during the consideration of this matter.

46. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd November, 2017 were signed as a true record.

Further to Minute 37 headed 'Student Accommodation and University City Development' the Committee were informed that additional information requested from City Council officers had been circulated to Members. The further information requested from the two universities was still awaited and would be forwarded as soon as it was available.

47. Taxi-Licensing

The Committee received a presentation from the Director of Streetscene and Regulatory Services and considered a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator which provided a strategic overview of the current position in relation to taxi-licensing, including the context in which local authorities operate, the current legislative context and potential developments and recent market changes. Marcus Jimenez, General Manager from Central Taxis and Alan Lewis, Unite attended the meeting for the consideration of this item along with Councillor Lakha, Deputy Cabinet Member for City Services. Councillor Duggins, Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership was also in attendance. The city's three MPs had also been invited but were unable to attend due to prior commitments.

The presentation referred to the two types of taxis licensed in the city as follows: The Hackney Carriage (black cab) which was currently capped at 859 and operated from the taxi ranks, could be flagged down in the street, undertook pre-booked work and was required to use the metre to measure levy their charge within their licensed authority. There were currently approximately 200 private hire vehicles licensed in Coventry who could undertake pre-booked work only.

The presentation set out all the requirements to be able to be a taxi driver in the city including a comparison with the reduced requirements for other local authorities. The necessary vehicle checks were also highlighted.

The Committee were informed of the current challenges around taxi licensing which included:

Air Quality – the majority of the taxi fleet were older diesel vehicles, especially the black cabs which contributed to poor air quality. New technologies such as the LEVC TXC would help to improve air quality.

Cross Boarder Hire – an increasing number of vehicles were now trading in Coventry from local authorities with lower licensing standards and the council had no licensing power over these vehicles.

Current Legislation not Fit for Purpose – the current legislation did not deal with the rise of digital solutions and app based platforms, for example Uber; were two different types of taxi licences still needed in 2017?; should Hackney Carriages still have regulated metres?; what would happen to accessible vehicles if the market dictated a move to all private hire vehicles.

Members raised a number of questions in response to the presentation and responses were provided by the officer and the representatives present, matters raised included:

- Details about the European Court ruling that Uber was a transport company and not a digital service and the resulting implications
- Further details about the different requirements needed to be met to be a taxi driver in Coventry compared to the requirements for Wolverhampton and Birmingham
- An update about what was happening across the West Midlands region regarding taxi licensing from Councillor Duggins from his perspective as Leader of the Council
- Details of the Reading Court Case when two private hire drivers had been prosecuted for illegally plying for hire after trying the Uber Incentive Scheme

- The importance of ensuring the safety of Coventry residents who use local taxis
- A concern that Coventry drivers were being disadvantaged in light of all requirements being placed on them.
- A comparison of the numbers of taxi drivers licensed in Coventry compared to Wolverhampton
- The implications for the Hackney Carriage trade if Uber continued to operate in the city
- Details about the recent meeting between John Hayes, Transport Minister, Jim Cunningham MP and Alan Lewis including the discussions on potential legislative changes which were not anticipated in the next two Parliaments
- Concerns about the licensing of drivers by Wolverhampton Council and the implications for taxi drivers in Coventry along with details of meetings which included representatives from the two local authorities
- Further information about the Uber drivers licensed by Wolverhampton and Birmingham operating in Coventry
- If there were any options open to the City Council to help alleviate the current taxi issues in the city
- A request for a snap shot in time of taxis in the city
- An acknowledgement of the need for a change in regulation legislation to be able to deal with some of the issues raised
- Potential implications for the City of Culture 2021
- The need to support future development opportunities in the city i.e. the development of electric vehicles
- The opportunities for the West Midlands Mayor, Andy Street to become involved in lobbying for a change in legislation relating to taxi licensing and the requirement to keep lobbying
- Details about the potential for customers to pay for taxis by electronic payment
- The opportunity to be taken to review the requirements/ standards for taxi drivers in the city to ensure the City Council is carrying out its duties in the most expedient and efficient way.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The content of the presentation be noted.

(2) The issue of public safety to be kept at the forefront on any future discussions on taxi licensing and support be given to the opportunities for innovation in the city e.g. the development of electric vehicles.

(3) Opportunities be taken to develop and streamline requirements/ standards for taxi drivers and vehicles in Coventry to ensure Council processes are undertaken in the most expedient and efficient way, while maintaining the highest level of standards.

(4) The Chair, Councillor Brown, to write to the city's three MPs and Andy Street, West Midlands Mayor, requesting that every opportunity be taken to lobby for a change in legislation for taxi licensing which is no longer fit for purpose.

(5) The Board to be informed of the legal implications relating to Uber operating in the city and the subsequent challenges this brings, for further consideration.

(6) Consideration be given to undertaking a study of taxi licensing in the city, providing a snap shot in time and the potential position in future years, with the results informing any review of taxi licensing requirements.

48. Council Plan 2017-18 Half Year Performance Report

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive, which set out the Council's progress against the Council Plan for the first half of 2017/18. A copy of the performance report was attached as an appendix to the report. The report was due to be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 9th January 2018. Councillor Duggins, Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership, attended the meeting for the consideration of this item and indicated that this was the last time that the Council would be considering a half year performance report. The Committee also received a presentation providing a summary of the performance report including the significant performance issues relating to globally connected and locally committed.

The Council Plan set out the Council's strategic direction and priorities for the ten year period 2014-2024. The current plan was last revised in July 2017. The report indicated that the Council sought to promote the growth of a sustainable economy and was committed to reform so that everybody, including the city's most vulnerable residents, could share in the benefits of growth.

The performance report detailed the progress made towards the Council Plan from April to September 2017. It set out the Council's performance across all areas and used indicators, along with contextual and comparative information to describe and explain how the Council and the city's performance compared to previous years and to other places. Where possible, the report compared progress with previous years and it was noted that where previous data was unavailable, the data would form a baseline against which to measure future progress. This year the report also included data for groups with protected characteristics as set out in the Council's equality objectives and the Council's Marmot (health inequalities) agenda.

The Council Plan performance report was currently measured using 67 indicators. At half year progress was made or maintained in 31 indicators; 13 indicators had got worse; officers couldn't say for 7 indicators; and progress was not available for the remaining 16 indicators either because they were updated less frequently or because data wasn't available. The Committee noted that the progress had been made in the context of continued and sustained reduction in the overall resources available to the Council, £107m less core government grant in 2017/18 than the equivalent figure for 2010/11.

The Committee noted that the performance report also set out how the Council was addressing inequalities. Detailed progress was discussed at relevant Cabinet Member meetings.

The Council's performance management framework, which set out how the Council planned and organised its resources to achieve its vision and priorities, was set out at a second appendix. Responding to the Council's digital strategy, officers had introduced new methods to improve transparency and good governance with online digital performance dashboards and publishing more datasets on-line as open data.

The Committee were pleased to note that the additional indicators, trend data and information requested for inclusion in future reports at their meeting on 12th July, 2017 had now been included in this Council Plan half year performance report.

The Committee questioned the Cabinet Member and officers present on a number issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- The option to standardise a 'start' date to demonstrate progress made from a baseline
- Further information on how many Council services could now be accessed on-line by Coventry residents
- Future Council Plan performance reports to include an information about the impact of Coventry being the City of Culture 2021
- The likely tourism benefits to winning the City of Culture bid and the importance of ensuring a lasting legacy for the city
- The implications for the City Council of the increasing numbers of homeless people in the city, noting that the issue was due to be discussed at the Committee's next meeting on 24th January, 2018
- Information about community safety and whether data was gathered from partner organisations.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The Council's performance this half year as set out in the performance report be noted.

(2) Details about the number of on-line services now offered by the Council be circulated to members.

(3) Consideration to be given to including the impact of Coventry being the City of Culture 2021 in future Council performance reports.

(4) A copy of the presentation be circulated to members.

49. Civic Visit to Belgrade, Serbia - 1st to 6th October, 2017 - Report Back

The Committee considered a report of the Lord Mayor, Councillor Tony Skipper concerning his civic visit to Belgrade, Serbia from 1st to 6th October, 2017 which involved leading a delegation from the Belgrade Theatre to meet representatives of the Children's Cultural Centre Belgrade and organisers of the annual Joy of Europe Festival with a view to young people from Coventry participating in future years. The Committee noted that Coventry had been twinned with Belgrade since 1957 so 2017 marked the 60th anniversary of the twinning arrangement.

RESOLVED that the report of the Lord Mayor's civic visit to Belgrade, accompanied by three representatives from the Belgrade Theatre and the principal private secretary to the Lord Mayoralty, and the positive way the relationship with Coventry was reflected, be endorsed.

50. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2017/2018 Including a Suggestion for Scrutiny

The Committee noted their work programme for the current municipal year. Attention was drawn to a suggested topic for Scrutiny that had been submitted by a member of the public as follows 'I would like the process of adults being assessed and diagnosed for autism to be clearer and more promoted. It is quite clear for children but a minefield for adults'. The Committee were informed that the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5) would be considering Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) at their next meeting on 31st January, 2018 and the issue could be raised under this item.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The work programme be noted.

(2) The suggestion relating to the process for adults being assessed and diagnosed with autism to be raised at the meeting of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5) on 31st January when the Board consider Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

51. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no additional items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.20 pm)