

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)
held at 10.00 am on Wednesday, 15 November 2017

Present:

Members: Councillor J McNicholas (Chair)
Councillor G Crooks
Councillor M Hammon
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor B Singh
Councillor K Taylor

Cabinet Members and Deputy Cabinet Members Present: Councillor L Bigham
Councillor R Lakha
Councillor J O'Boyle
Councillor C Thomas

Employees (by Directorate):

G Holmes, Resources Directorate
M Lynch, Place Directorate
M Rose, Resources Directorate
P Ward, Resources Directorate

Apologies: Councillor R Auluck, L Harvard, J Innes and H Sweet

Public Business

21. Declarations of Interest

There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

22. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th September, 2017 were approved.

Further to minute 17/17 'Coventry Canal Basin' Councillor McNicholas updated the Board on the discussions at the Task and Finish Group.

23. St. Mary's Guildhall - Strategic Development

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note and presentation of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which detailed current activity in relation to the strategic and commercial development of St. Mary's Guildhall and sought opinions and support of the Board in respect of future plans and proposals.

The briefing note recognised that St Mary's Guildhall was regarded as a valued cultural asset for the city of Coventry, yet for some time had not realised its full cultural or commercial potential. As a trading service, the Guildhall was facing

financial challenges, with corporate and operational costs exceeding the overall income generated. The Guildhall also lacked a clear strategic focus and identity in respect of its overall purpose, and how it should be best utilised as an important city asset in the long term. Action was required to address the immediate financial situation and generate increased, profitable income from the Guildhall that would initially make the asset self-sufficient, and in due course provide additional income contributions to offset other frontline service budget pressures.

Development works were in progress in two initial areas, the café and the muniment room. Work was underway to develop and relaunch the existing on-site café in the Undercroft, which had suffered from inadequate trading and under-investment. Refurbishment of the space, and comprehensive changes to the menus, identity and customer offer were planned, supported by a strong marketing campaign, which would increase footfall and trading performance. Until recent months, the impressive and historical muniment room had been used only for storage, with no regular public access. A partnership had now been established with a successful external operator to develop 'shared office accommodation'. This relatively risk-free venture would see the external partner invest in development of the space and ultimately bring new income to the Council through a commission on scheme memberships, while also providing a facility for the city's growing community of entrepreneurs, creative industries and flexible workers. With no capital investment required from the Council (as the scheme was to be funded by the external operator), by Year 2 there was a projected contribution of c.£21k back into the service.

It was intended that a Feasibility Study be commissioned to review the current situation, explore available options and establish a vision for the Guildhall that delivered a strong cultural asset and visitor experience, together with a business plan that captured capital and revenue investment and the likely income returns that may be achieved from this in the longer term.

The Scrutiny Board considered the presentation and information in the briefing note and the Chair requested an adjournment to allow the Board to visit the muniment room.

The Scrutiny Board discussed the following with the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration and the Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member for Community Development as the issues crossed portfolios:

- Improvements to the café including visual improvements, for example, the removal of waste bins visible through the entrance window at eye level and promotion to students
- Discovering the asset of the muniment room and other uses for generating income in this room rather than office space
- Using the Dame Ellen Terry Suite, Mercers Room and old Police Cells in the council house basement
- Holding events such as Ghost nights or Medieval theme nights

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board recommend to the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration and the Cabinet Member for Community Development:

- 1) To call for a feasibility study into positioning and developing the role of St. Mary's Guildhall. This should be as a visitor attraction and heritage venue of distinction, as well as reflecting the fact that the Council House is the democratic centre of the City.
- 2) That the feasibility study should cover the following areas:
 - a) A market test to ensure that proposals can be viable in a competitive market
 - b) Consideration of the management of the Guildhall, including by an external organisation
 - c) An assessment and audit of vacant and under-used space in the Council House
 - d) The internal catering service.
- 3) To include other cultural and heritage partner organisations within the scope to learn from and share good practice.
- 4) To ensure that changes to the café and Muniment Room are evaluated and lessons learned are included in the feasibility study.
- 5) Once the proposed lease arrangements are concluded, alternative, more appropriate uses for the Muniment Room are considered.
- 6) That a report be submitted to Scrutiny before the Cabinet Members with recommendations arising from the above, within an interim update to the Business, Economy and Enterprise Board in January 2018.

24. **The Destination and Tourism Strategy**

Councillor O'Boyle discussed with the Board how the destination and tourism strategy would be looked at in detail following the result of Coventry's City of Culture Bid.

The Board discussed how they would like to be involved in the draft strategy and that it would be interesting to speak to Andrew Dixon a Cultural Consultant and the Coventry City of Culture Bid Advisor about marketing Coventry.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board requested that the item be considered in more detail in January, 2018 and Andrew Dixon Cultural Consultant and Coventry City of Culture Bid Advisor be invited.

25. **Recommendations from the Digital Strategy Task and Finish Group**

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator to inform the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) of the recommendations arising from a select committee style meeting of the Digital Strategy Task and Finish Group with the three main suppliers in the city.

Following on from the Digital Strategy Task and Finish Group that reported during the municipal year 2016-17, the group was extended with the purpose of meeting with the main digital suppliers in the city. Members had the opportunity to question

them on their plans and priorities, what the main barriers to these plans and priorities were and what the Council could do to support them in delivering their plans and priorities. On the 18th October members of the task and finish group (Cllr Brown, Cllr McNicholas, and Cllr Ridley) met separately with CityFibre, Virgin Media and Openreach and BT. Their presentations were summarised in the briefing note and questions raised by members of the Task and Finish Group.

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board were recommended:

- 1) To fully endorse the progress made on the Digital Strategy and request the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Growth prioritise this work to enable Coventry to become the leading local authority in digital connectivity.
- 2) To encourage all Members to lobby local MP's to address the issues around delays to adoption of highways on large developments
- 3) That the appropriate Cabinet Member consider the possibility of a Members liaison group to look at the issues raised including Section 58 issues.
- 4) That the Cabinet Member for City Services identify ways to speed up the process for adoption of highways to enable access for connectivity.
- 5) That the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Growth ensure that connectivity is considered at the planning stage for large developments.

The Board discussed co-ordinating works on all roads more effectively and 5G developments.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board requested that the recommendations above be amended to include the following:

- 1) **to enable Coventry to become the leading local authority in digital connectivity including the forefront of piloting 5G**
- 2) **to ensure connectivity is considered at the planning stage for any development not just large ones**

26. **Work Programme**

The Board discussed the work programme.

RESOLVED that the Board request that the following be amendments be made:

- 1) **Destination and Tourism be added to January, 2018**
- 2) **Jobs and Economy Strategy be moved**
- 3) **An additional meeting be arranged for February, 2018**

27. **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 business.

(Meeting closed at 12.05 pm)