

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Wednesday, 18 December 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor R Brown (Chair)
Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor A Andrews
Councillor R Bailey (substitute for Councillor G Ridley)
Councillor J McNicholas
Councillor C Miks (substitute for Councillor L Kelly)
Councillor K Sandhu
Councillor R Singh

Employees (by Directorate):

V Castree, Place Directorate
L Knight, Place Directorate
A Walster, Place Directorate
A Williams, Place Directorate

Apologies: Councillors J Clifford, L Kelly and G Ridley
Councillors G Duggins and A S Khan, Cabinet Members

Public Business

37. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

38. Report Back on the Work of Culture Coventry Trust

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) which informed of the activities and achievements of Culture Coventry Trust (CC), including the outcomes of grant funding, monitoring arrangements and future plans.

The briefing note indicated that CC was established in 2013 and was an independent limited company with charitable status, with a Board of five trustee-directors. The Trust managed the Coventry Transport Museum, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Old Grammar School and Lunt Fort, and had responsibility for the management of the city's collections of art and archives, and for the running of the Tourist Information Centre. The charitable objects of CC were detailed.

In relation to the financial position, the Council was the main funder of the Trust providing annual grant of £2m with the current grant funding agreement running until in March 2021. In addition, CC was currently repaying two loans from the Council, dating from 2017. The Trust's three-year business plan was approved by its Board in February 2018. This followed a major review of costs and staffing structures and the development of a series of business improvement measures including the introduction of charging at the Coventry Transport Museum which

was introduced in July 2019. Investment was being made by CC into facilities to address historic under-investment. The Committee noted that the Sport, Culture and Destination service was currently undertaking a review of all grants which included a focus on the agreement of outcomes that would be achieved by Culture Coventry through grant support from the Council.

Reference was made to governance and it was noted that CC's trustees were currently engaged in discussion with trustees of CV Life to consider the options for future organisational structure, including assessing the desirability of creating a single trust to manage both sport and culture, establishing a shared services company, or recruiting a dedicated and suitably qualified independent management team for CC. The trustees would share their analysis with the Council over the coming months and officers had requested to be involved in the modelling of any future operation, to ensure it met the Council's needs in relation to management of the city's cultural and heritage assets, and the legacy of City of Culture 2021.

Officers in the Culture Service monitored the delivery of the trust against the obligations set out in its grant agreement with the Council which included observing the bi-monthly meetings of trustees. The arrangements enabled officers to manage the risks associated with funding the trust, in the light of historic financial and operational under-performance. The current Council review of all cultural grants was likely to create more robust monitoring arrangements for financial and cultural aspects of the operation.

The briefing note provided details of visitor numbers at the Coventry Transport Museum, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum and the Lunt Roman Fort for the previous three years. There was a downward trend in visitor numbers which was a challenge for the trust. Reference was made to the introduction of admission charges at the Transport Museum in July 2019 which were set out, although they did not apply to GoCV card holders. Since this introduction, the number of visitors attending had fallen in comparison to the same period in the two preceding years. This reduction had been anticipated by CC and the current numbers were in line with the forecasts within the business plan.

Culture Coventry was one year into the current four-year business plan; the first year had been one of experimentation and learning across the various programmes. Key areas of research and development had been:

- i) Digital as a tool to engage, provide access and as art
- ii) Co-creation to better reflect the voices of Coventry and provide meaningful interaction with the people of Coventry
- iii) National and regional audience development through better PR management and high profile art shows; stronger learning programmes
- iv) Better programming of high quality contemporary art in partnership with the local arts ecology and wider national collections.

The briefing note highlighted recent developments at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry Transport Museum, the Lunt Fort and the Old Grammar School. In addition, Coventry Archives had now become embedded into the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum's creative programme.

The Committee were informed that in August 2019, the Council received a £8.51m capital grant allocation from Arts Council England to support projects which

created production space, expanded and improved cultural and heritage venues ready for UK City of Culture in 2021 and provided a lasting legacy of the title. CC's project included within the application was to improve the galleries within the HAGM, creating additional gallery space by re-purposing a paint store and improving three adjoining galleries. The investment would improve the flow of visitors around the building and create a "dialogue" between the four gallery spaces. The improvements would enable CC to attract and showcase nationally and internationally significant work and increase the number of national partners working in the gallery.

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

- Information about the marketing strategy for advertising the facilities managed by the Culture Coventry Trust, both inside and outside of the city and the potential to advertise in City Vision
- Further information about the implications of the introduction of admission charges at the Transport Museum
- Whether schools from outside of Coventry undertook educational visits to the Lunt Fort
- The potential to place leaflets advertising the attractions in local hotels
- The suggestion that the Old Grammar School should be opened up to allow members of the public to visit the facility and the opportunities to improve the Lunt Fort as a visitor attraction
- A request for further details about visitor numbers at these attractions
- A request for representatives from the Trust to attend a future meeting to inform of their work and future plans.
- An update on progress with the uptake of the GoCV card
- Would there be the opportunity to review the admission charges at the Transport Museum.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The contents of the briefing note be noted.

(2) Representatives from Culture Coventry Trust be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to provide a further update on the work of the Trust and their future plans, including details about any funding applications and governance arrangements.

(3) A briefing note be sent to Committee members providing a detailed analysis of the visitor numbers, including a breakdown by type, of the facilities managed by the Trust and information on the numbers of schools from Coventry and outside who undertake educational visits.

(4) The Trust be requested to consider arrangements to open the Old Grammar School to members of the public.

(5) Communications be requested to give further consideration to the promotion of Coventry visitor attractions.

39. **Commercial Activities Supporting Parks Infrastructure**

The Committee considered a briefing note and received a presentation on the current commercial activities supporting the parks infrastructure. A copy of the report 'Coombe Abbey Park – Commercialisation and Sustainable Development of Children's Play Facilities and Car Park Remodelling' considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 19th November 2018 was attached as an appendix to the briefing note.

The presentation indicated that in October 2018 the City Council agreed to fund a tree top, high wire experience at Coombe Abbey Park in partnership with Coombe Abbey Hotel and Go Ape. The Go Ape facility had been operational since April 2019 and had exceeded expectations in both visitor numbers and financial performance, providing an enhancement to the visitor experience at the park.

It had also been decided to improve the food and beverage offer at the park and improvements to the café had been undertaken and other potential options were highlighted.

The presentation referred to the proposals to further improve the visitor experience at Coombe Abbey Park by replacing and updating the two existing play areas, one adjacent to the park's visitors centre and the second in the wooded area near Top Pool Lodge, replacing the current outdated, free to use play area. It was intended that the play area near Top Pool Lodge would be a pay and play facility with a proposed charge of £2 per session or £5 per family. An example of the type of play facility proposed for the charged area was provided. The proposed new facilities would be of a distinct bespoke themed and unique design offering a real step change in children's play provision. The design and construction would fit naturally in the park environment. Market research for the entire scheme indicated an increase in park visitor numbers of between 15 and 20%.

In addition, it was also planned to remodel the existing car park to create an additional 300 parking spaces to handle the expected increase in numbers.

The Committee were informed that expenditure of £800,000 had been approved by Cabinet to finance the improvements to the park.

Members questioned the officer on a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- Support for Go Ape
- A concern about the £2/£5 charge for the new play area for low income families, especially in light of the car park charges
- The options for local residents to use public transport to access the park as oppose to private vehicles, particularly in light of climate change
- How to encourage the bus operators to improve the public transport offer to and from the park and also consideration to be given to the option of using very light rail
- Further details about the plans for the additional car park spaces
- What was being done to encourage members of the public to walk or cycle to the park

- Support for the potential option to open up the circular footpath around the lake
- Support to have electric charging points included in the car park along with a bus hub
- Further details about the catering opportunities associated with events at the park
- A request to see the results of the market research recently undertaken which supported the decision to carry out the improvements at the park
- Further details about how the charging policy would be applied when using the new play area facilities
- Had consideration been given to the use of the GoCV card at the park
- A reminder that Coombe Abbey park was a facility to be enjoyed by all Coventry residents, for example dog walkers, cyclists and walkers should all be encouraged to use the park.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The contents of the briefing note and presentation be noted.

(2) An update report be submitted to the Committee in six months, with a full update report being provided in 12 months.

(3) A briefing note be circulated to members on the market research that has been undertaken.

(4) Support be given to the opening up of the circular walk way around the lake.

(5) The issue of improving the bus offer to transport local residents to and from the park to be raised at the Committee's meeting in February when the bus companies will be in attendance. The option of very light rail also to be explored.

(6) Future consideration be given to the inclusion of a bus hub in the car park along with electric charging points.

(7) Officers be requested to liaise with Rugby Borough Council about the potential of providing a cycle route to and from the park.

(8) Officers to investigate the potential opportunities that could be provided for local residents through use of the GoCV cards at Coombe Abbey Park.

40. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2019/2020 and Outstanding Issues

The Committee considered their work programme for the current municipal year. Discussion centred on the expectations for the meetings on 5th and 19th February concerning bus provision and bus innovation in Coventry.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The work programme be noted.

(2) Climate change to be considered at a meeting prior to the end of the municipal year.

41. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no additional items of business.

(Meeting closed at 11.55 am)