

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on**  
**Wednesday, 5 February 2020**

Present:

Members: Councillor R Brown (Chair)  
Councillor N Akhtar  
Councillor A Andrews  
Councillor J Clifford  
Councillor J McNicholas  
Councillor G Ridley  
Councillor K Sandhu  
Councillor R Singh

Other Member: Councillor P Akhtar

Employees:

D Ashmore, People Directorate  
N Hart, People Directorate  
G Holmes, Place Directorate  
C Knight, Place Directorate  
L Knight, Place Directorate  
M McGinty, People Directorate  
G Quinton, Deputy Chief Executive (People)  
P Shingadia, Place Directorate

Other representatives: Pete Bond, Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)  
Chris Gibbens, National Express (NX)  
Martin Hancock, NX  
Nikki Houghton, NX  
Andy Thrupp, TfWM

Apologies: Councillors L Kelly, J O'Boyle and D Welsh, Cabinet Member  
and Deputy Cabinet Member

## **Public Business**

### **48. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

In relation to Minute 50 below, headed 'Bus Provision in Coventry', Councillor Andrew referred to his employment at West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). He remained in the meeting for the consideration of this item.

### **49. Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2019 and 8<sup>th</sup> January 2020 were agreed and signed as true records.

Further to Minute 43 concerning the 'Coventry Community Safety Plan' the Chair, Councillor Brown, had sent a letter to Cllr AS Khan requesting that the Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee (or their nominee) be included in the membership of the Coventry Police and Crime Board. Councillor Khan had since responded informing that the membership of the Board was adequate.

## 50. **Bus Provision in Coventry**

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Director of Transportation and Highways which provided a summary of existing bus service provision in Coventry with a specific focus on the city's current bus network; how services were managed; commerciality; contract services and core statistics in relation to bus service reliability, patronage and quality. Councillor P Akhtar, one of the Council's two representatives on the West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Committee attended the meeting for the consideration of this item. Chris Gibbens, Martin Hancock and Nikki Houghton, National Express, and Pete Bond and Andy Thrupp, Transport for West Midlands, were also in attendance.

The briefing note indicated that the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) was the statutory Local Transport Authority for the West Midlands, including Coventry. The WMCA discharged their responsibilities through Transport for the West Midlands (TfWM). TfWM was responsible for management of bus stops and shelters, passenger information, and other bus related infrastructure such as the Pool Meadow Bus Station, as well as the management of contracted (non-commercial) bus services.

Overall bus usage within Coventry was around 28 million passenger journeys a year, which has remained fairly constant over the last few years. In Coventry, bus punctuality (the percentage of services operating no more than 1 minute early and 5 minutes late) was 82% in 2017/18 and 80% in 2018/19, which was slightly above the West Midlands average. The nationally average was 83%.

There were currently 8 bus operators with regular services within Coventry. However, over 90% of the mileage was operated by National Express Coventry who, excluding school routes, operated 19 distinct services within the area. Stagecoach operated seven services, De Courcey operated four, Diamond, Johnsons and Community Transport each operated two, whilst Arriva and A&M Travel each operated one service.

Across the city, there were a total of 1,400 bus stops, 62 of which provided real-time service information to passengers. The briefing note included a map of the National Express network and detailed the latest significant changes to be introduced on the network.

The briefing note highlighted how the City Council worked closely with TfWM and local bus companies to ensure that services reflected local needs as closely as possible and identified and pursued potential investment and funding opportunities for improvements to the bus network and associated facilities. Recent examples of successful funding bids included the Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme, with a funding bid led by the City Council with support from TfWM and National Express. The Committee was informed that TfWM was preparing a series of Network Development Plans (NDPs) across the West Midlands setting out initial thoughts

on how the bus network in each area needed to develop to support growth in the region.

Reference was made to subsidised bus routes. Where commercial operators did not provide a bus service link that was deemed to be socially necessary then it could be subsidised. The decision on which services were eligible for subsidy was taken by TfWM.

The briefing note indicated that figures taken from the city's most recent household survey showed that the car remained the dominant mode of travel. Detailed information was provided on the different modes of transport used on journeys in and out of the city centre. Regionally and nationally bus use had been declining at a much faster rate than in Coventry. In relation to bus service reliability, data comparing scheduled timetable and actual journey times on the routes 20 and 9 was highlighted.

Information was provided on private operator investment. National Express had invested heavily in renewing its bus fleet over the last few years, with the introduction of the Platinum branded buses on some core routes. Successful joint funding bids between the City Council, TfWM and National Express had also provided the funding to allow all the current fleet to have the necessary modifications to improve bus engines to EuroVI, which is the best environmental standard for current diesel engines. The other bus operators in Coventry have also invested in recent years with brand new buses being introduced onto some bus routes. The bus engine retrofit programme had now been extended to these other operators, meaning that by 2021 all buses operating public services within the city will be Euro VI or better in standard.

Punctuality and frequency of services remained a key focus for Coventry City Council, TfWM and the bus operators. New links are being considered to the University Hospital and Westwood Business Park as well as faith centres and health services.

The Committee were informed about the subsidised bus contracts and the funding levy which formed part of the West Midlands Devolution deal.

The briefing note referred to recent funding bids. In particular, in September 2019 Government announced further plans to invest up to £50 million in establishing at least one electric bus town or city. This would see a town or city's entire bus fleet changed over to zero emission vehicles, with Government money supporting the purchase of new vehicles and the development of supporting infrastructure. The Government had said that they would shortly be seeking expressions of interest from local authorities, but further details of the scheme had yet to be published. Such publication was expected imminently.

The Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 was forecast to generate around 2.5 million visits to the city and would see a significant increase in travel demand to and from the city, especially around the major events expected to attract larger audiences. A transport strategy was under development in partnership with the City of Culture Trust, and it was anticipated that the bus would play an important role in getting people to and from events within the city. Bus based Park and Ride was being considered as part of the transport strategy alongside potential enhancement of

existing public bus services and the role that longer-distance coach travel could also play in getting people to and from the city. Investment in the improvement of Pool Meadow Bus Station has already been identified as an important issue.

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

- Although bus usage had flatlined in Coventry over recent years, there had also been a considerable population increase during this time so was the service meeting expectations
- A concern about customer service in relation to dealing with a twitter complaint from a resident about bus stops being continually missed out
- Clarification about the impact of the Council's decision relating to the removal of bus lanes
- The impact of climate change and the need to introduce improvements to the service to encourage more people to use public transport
- The requirement for additional measures/ services in relation to the expected 2.5m visitors coming to Coventry during City of Culture 2021
- Information about the role of the West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Group
- Whether there were any penalties incurred if buses did not run on time
- Details about cross boundary travel ie from Coventry to Leicestershire or Warwickshire and the impacts for passengers
- Further information about how service changes were managed including consultations and timescales
- A suggestion that it should be cheaper to use public transport rather than making a car journey
- An update on what was happening with the Ring and Ride Service
- Information about the number of subsidised bus routes in the city
- Details about the funding levy
- The suggestion that reregulation would allow for improved services and how could the Council contribute to the current review
- Details about public/ private investment and how this related to journey times and improvements in carbon emissions
- Information about the successes of the Platinum buses
- A suggestion that bus travel needed to be more convenient than making a car journey.

A further item on bus innovation was to be considered by the Committee at their next meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> February. It was decided that in addition to the original information requested, the following information be provided for this meeting:

- i) Framework of options under the Bus Services Act 2017 and how Coventry could input into the current review
- ii) Breakdown of the levy, ie the specific costs for Coventry
- iii) Detailed statistics for the recently introduced platinum bus service (12/ 12x)
- iv) Infrastructure solutions to assist bus travel to be more convenient than the car.

**RESOLVED that the contents of the briefing note and the arrangements for the follow up meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> February to discuss 'Bus Innovation in Coventry' be noted.**

**51. Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge - Progress Report**

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which outlined the progress made against the recommendations from the Council's Corporate Peer Challenge that took place between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> October 2018. At the time of the Peer Challenge it was agreed that the delivery of actions in response to the recommendations would be monitored by Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, as well as being monitored through the One Coventry Change Board and the Strategic Management Board. Appendices to the briefing note set out the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report and the Council's Self-Assessment Document

The briefing note indicated that the focus of the visit had been to look at how the Council understood its place and set priorities; the leadership and governance; financial planning; and the capacity to deliver on what it set out to achieve. The Peer Team were also asked to look at the approach to housing and homelessness; readiness for UK City of Culture 2021; how the Council made the most of social value in its capital projects; and the One Coventry approach.

During the Peer Challenge week, the Peer Team found that there were some areas where further work was needed. These were set out in the Feedback Report. The Council developed an action plan in response with progress being monitored by the Peer Challenge Delivery Group, which involved a range of officers across the Council. An updated position statement was produced in January 2020 as a self-assessment of the progress made since October 2018. The document also provided an overview of the next steps including future challenges.

The briefing note provided a summary of progress against the following 10 recommendations:

a) Prioritising action to tackle homelessness by:

Replacing expensive bed and breakfast with cheaper temporary accommodation options

Increasing the supply of social rented and affordable private rented accommodation so it exceeds projected temporary accommodation demand

Making greater use of peer or external challenge to continue to develop our response

b) Ensuring the work to deliver against the projected balanced budget position for 2019/20 is successfully concluded

c) Learning from other public sector best practice on industrial relations, pay and reward models and HR policy and practice

d) Taking the opportunity to enhance the way the Council communicates with residents and delivers customer service

e) Driving the digital agenda harder and faster

f) Being mindful of those staff who have not yet benefitted from changes to ways of working and accommodation and responding to the thirst amongst staff for knowledge and input

- g) Hard-wiring the legacy and inclusive growth potential of the City of Culture and the cultural strategy
- h) Determining what 'One Coventry' is and the role it can play helping the city and the Council respond to the challenges being faced
- i) Taking forward the recognised need for a shared vision for working in partnership across the Council and the city
- j) Strengthening delivery of the change programme to support the transformation agenda.

The Committee noted that although good progress had been made in some areas, it was important that the completion of the action plan continued, to enable as much progress to be made as possible before the Peer Team follow-up visit. This visit was currently expected to take place in autumn 2020, within 2 years of the original Corporate Peer Challenge. The timing of the visit would be determined by the Council. The Council would also need to decide where the Peer Team would focus their efforts. The focus would be agreed by the Senior Management Board.

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

- The need for more focus to be given to issues which cut across Scrutiny Boards with particular reference to the One Coventry approach
- A concern about the lack of communication with Councillors and residents with respect to City of Culture and the need for local involvement with the development of events
- A concern that under the issue of homelessness, there was no mention of the housing first approach
- The importance of local firms being able to benefit from any regeneration works
- Details about other peer reviews, the recent scrutiny review and the forthcoming review of Communications

**RESOLVED that the progress made and areas still to be addressed in response to the recommendations included in the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback report be noted.**

## **52. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2019/2020 and Outstanding Issues**

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

**RESOLVED that:**

**1) The work programme be noted.**

**2) Consideration of City Centre South Progress (including an update on Ikea) and Climate Change Emergency at the meeting on 4th March be supported.**

## **53. Any Other Items of Public Business**

There were no additional items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.10 pm)