

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Wednesday, 17 November 2021

Present:

Members: Councillor N Akhtar (Chair)
(Deputy Chair)
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor J Clifford
Councillor A Hopkins
Councillor J Innes
Councillor J Lepoidevin
Councillor C Miks
Councillor G Ridley
Councillor R Singh

Co-Opted Members:

Other Members: Councillors K Caan, G Hayre and M Mutton

Employees (by Directorate):

V Castree, Place Directorate
L Gaulton, People Directorate
D Hope
L Knight, Resources Directorate
R Nawaz, Chief Executive's Directorate
S Weir, Place Directorate

Apologies: Councillor M Ali, G Duggins and J O'Boyle

Public Business

32. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

33. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th October, 2021 were agreed as a true record.

Further to Minute 29 headed 'Coventry as a Marmot City – Update Report', the Committee noted that:

- Health Inequalities and guidance had been added to the briefing note template
- The One Coventry Plan refresh had been included in the Committee's work programme

- Open Spaces Supplementary Planning Guidance was to be considered by the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) at their meeting on 15th December 2021
- School readiness will be considered at the next meeting of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) on 9th December 2021
- The Committee's thanks were passed onto the parks staff, including via an intranet article.

34. **Health and Wellbeing Strategy Refresh**

The Committee considered a briefing note and presentation of Liz Gaulton, Director of Public Health and Wellbeing which informed about the Coventry Health and Wellbeing Strategy Refresh and provided an opportunity for Members to make any recommendations or comments as part of the engagement process. Councillors Caan and Hayre, Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member for Public Health and Sport and Councillor M Mutton, Cabinet Member for Adult Services attended the meeting for the consideration of this item.

The report indicated that the current Health and Wellbeing Strategy was approved in 2019, following consultation and engagement with key stakeholders and members of the public. As part of the development of the Strategy, it was agreed that the short-term priorities would be reviewed and refreshed every 12 to 18 months to ensure that these still reflected the key issues and challenges facing Coventry residents. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the city and residents and the proposed changes within the health and social care system had further strengthened the need to refresh the Health and Well-being Strategy to ensure that the priorities contained within it remained relevant. The current short term priorities were:

- Loneliness and social isolation
- Young people's mental health and well-being
- Working differently with our communities.

A stocktake of key outcomes and learning from the current Strategy had been undertaken, the details of which were set out in an Appendix to the report. The report summarised progress and key outcomes with the three short term priorities. In relation to loneliness and social isolation, partners had set up a number of initiatives over the last 18 months to tackle this issue. Health and care partners had worked together during this time to make significant changes in order to adapt the emotional well-being and mental health offer to ensure children and young people's needs were met during the Covid-19 pandemic including improved access to support and increasing the digital offer available.

Partners had also worked closely with communities to minimise the impact of Covid-19 and co-ordinate the response to the pandemic, with the aim of protecting and supporting vulnerable residents.

There were a number of lessons learnt from these three priorities:

- Profile and commitment - Board partners had raised their profile and galvanised commitment to work in partnership specifically to address children and young people's mental health and well-being, work differently with communities and reduce social isolation and loneliness.

- Population Health model - the King's Fund population health model had been helpful in mobilising partners around each of the four pillars and highlighted the roles that different organisations could play in delivering the strategy priorities.
- Stronger partnership working - Across the three priorities, clear benefits had been realised through new collaborations both with organisations that may not historically have recognised their role in contributing to health and wellbeing outcomes, but also directly with communities themselves, with communities playing an equal and trusted part in the city's response to the pandemic.
- Demonstrating impact – due to the pandemic, work on developing a performance framework to monitor outcomes and impact had been delayed.

The briefing note highlighted that, following a review of evidence from a range of sources, including needs assessments that had been conducted as well as survey data, workshops with stakeholders and senior partners and the learning from the current Strategy priorities, the Health and Well-being Board agreed that the existing Strategy priorities were the right areas of focus for the Strategy and needed to continue, albeit with a stronger emphasis in the following key areas:

- focus on employment and homelessness as a prevention opportunity: recognising the impact of poverty on the well-being of residents and on children especially following changes such as the end of furlough, universal credit and the end of 'no evictions'
- Mental health for adults also needed to be included in the strategy due to the increasing levels of need
- Strengthen working with communities and the voluntary community sector, building on the work undertaken during the last 18 months and continuing to unlock the power of local assets by improving the connectivity between the Health and Wellbeing Board and communities and the Board and place based working
- Need to ensure work in the overlap between priorities e.g. communities and isolation may have a new slant with different communities coming to Coventry i.e. Afghan refugees

The revised strategy would be shared with the Health and Well-being Board in the New Year for consideration and endorsement, with the development of action plans for implementation during Spring 2022. The Committee were informed that any comments and recommendations made at this meeting would inform the final draft Strategy and would be reported to Health and Wellbeing Board in the New Year.

Councillor Caan reported on the successful partnership work of the Health and Wellbeing Board and Councillor Mutton informed of the need to include members from the voluntary and community sector in the Board's membership.

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

- How would the strategy be implemented
- With reference to social isolation, the importance of the built environment, for example putting in measures to enable elderly people to go out and about in their locality
- Details of successful measures introduced during lockdown to support lonely and isolated residents
- A suggestion that air quality should be included in the strategy, especially due to the impact that poor air quality had on people with health issues
- An acknowledgement of the importance of parks and green spaces
- A request for details about the consultation process including plans for engaging with the community
- Details about Section 106 funding from new planning developments with particular reference to the NHS funding contribution in light of concerns about the pressures being put on existing health provisions by an increasing city population.
- What were the lasting legacies from the partnership working had been taking place during the covid pandemic

Clarification/ assurances were sought on a number of issues in the briefing note concerning the consultation process since not all residents had access to social media – had contact been made with GP surgeries, mosques, local pubs etc. Further information was requested about what was happening to prevent mental health problems, especially in children along with details about the mental health support teams and the grass route community organisations referred to in the briefing note. Additional information was also asked for on managing partners' performance. Officers indicated that a response would be provided.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The process for the development of the refreshed Coventry Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy be noted

(2) Councillor Caan, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Sport be requested to include air quality and its links to the built environment in the Health and Well-being Strategy

(3) A report on Section 106 funding, with particular reference to the different contributions, be submitted to a future meeting of the Board and the Board's work programme be updated accordingly.

35. The Impact of Brexit on the Council and the Local Economy

The Board considered a briefing note of the Director of Business Investment and Culture concerning the impact that the UK's withdrawal ("Brexit") from the European Union (EU) has had on the local economy in Coventry. This included the impact on local businesses and important sectors of the local economy and the labour market, and also the Council's response in working with local business support partners to help businesses adapt to new trading regulations and conditions.

The report indicated that the UK EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement was agreed on 24 December 2020 and formally signed on 30 December. The main implications of this Agreement for businesses were that since 1 January 2021, the UK had not been a member of the Single Market and Customs Union, although there were zero tariffs or quotas on goods traded between the UK and EU that meet the “rules of origin” (material from the UK or EU or processing within the UK or EU). However, all goods exported or imported between the UK and EU now required customs declarations and an EORI (Economic Operator Registration Identification) number. Full border checks on customs declarations and controls for goods imported into the UK were to be introduced on 1 January 2022 and product checks on food and animal products imported into the UK were due to be introduced on 1 July 2022. The position for services remained more complex.

The briefing note highlighted the key challenge in attributing the impacts of the UK’s exit from the EU was the Covid-19 pandemic which brought significant restrictions and closures to many parts of the UK economy from March 2020, soon after the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. Many of the market trends, performance trends and challenges that had affected businesses and the economy since this date had been due to both the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic and the UK’s withdrawal from the EU.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) had forecast that the UK economy would return to Quarter 4 2019 levels by Quarter 1 2022, although no regional breakdowns of the recovery trajectory were provided. The OBR report for the 2021 Autumn Budget forecast that UK GDP would be 4% lower in the longer-term as a result of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, driven significantly by 15% falls in both export and import activity. The report also forecast that the Covid 19 pandemic would lead to a 2% longer-term drop in GDP. It was noted that these forecasts did not specify time periods nor variations by regions or sectors.

The briefing note referred to recent data from WM REDI (West Midlands - Region Economic and Development Institute) that had emphasised the impact of the drop in trading activity in the West Midlands. Recent surveys had shown that 1 in 4 West Midlands businesses were still exporting less than normal and 1 in 5 importing less than normal.

Local business support and economic development partners were reporting a range of common challenges that Coventry and Warwickshire businesses were facing. The additional administration requirements associated with customs documentation was placing additional costs and human resource requirements on businesses trading internationally, particularly on small businesses. Businesses across multiple sectors were also being impacted by increasing costs of materials and shipping and storage, and supply chains were experiencing further challenges presented by delays to the shipping of products and components.

Labour shortages were also impacting on multiple businesses in key sectors of the local economy, including tourism and hospitality, haulage and logistics, security, construction, manufacturing and health and social care. Many of these sectors had historically employed a high number of EU nationals, although there had been longstanding concerns over the supply of labour, with terms and conditions for workers in these sectors a contributing factor. Details about unfilled vacancies

across the UK were highlighted. The City Council's Employment and Skills Service had recently identified over 3,000 vacancies in Coventry itself, and 32,000 vacancies within a 25 mile radius of the city, with the most common types of vacancies in logistics (288 in Coventry), food & beverage (219) and construction (144). These labour shortages were despite a significant rise in unemployment in Coventry since early 2020, up to 14,250 (5.6%) in September 2021.

The Committee were informed that there was currently limited data on the impacts of the UK's withdrawal from the EU on individual sectors of the economy, with evidence and trends expected to materialise only in the longer-term. However, some analysis from WM REDI forecasted losses in the longer-term competitiveness of the region's automotive (4.1%) and other transport equipment (4.6%) sectors, as well as computers and electronics (2.4%). Details of the impacts on the local universities were also highlighted.

The UK's exit from the EU would also impact on how many of the Council's business, skills and employment support activities would be funded in the future. In recent years, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) had funded large amounts of Coventry and Warwickshire's business, employment and skills support ecosystem. The briefing note detailed programmes that had been supported by these funding streams in recent years.

The Committee were informed about the Council's Economic and Social Development response which included adopting a pro-active approach to understand the main threats and opportunities facing local businesses and the economy, and to put in place responsible business, employment and skills support services. In January 2019, the Economic Development Service became a member of Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce's Brexit Club. The Service also became a member of CWLEP's Smart Region, which was fronted by CWLEP Growth Hub and involved the co-ordinated gathering of local business and economic intelligence to inform lobbying of Government on responsive actions.

Through strong partnership working, business support schemes led by the Economic Development Service had been active in referring Coventry and Warwickshire businesses to specialist international trade support providers. The Brexit preparation workshops and 1:1 clinics that have been hosted by WM Chambers Export Academy and CWLEP Growth Hub had been promoted through the Business Newsletter (over 1,000 circulation) and due to high levels of take up, these had been extended beyond the originally intended end date of March 2021.

The EU-funded SME support programmes had also continued to support Coventry and Warwickshire firms to increase their international competitiveness in a range of aspects. In total, between 2019 and 2023, it was anticipated that these programmes would have supported over 1,500 SMEs to grow, create over 1,200 new jobs, and deliver £10.3m of business grants that would lead to a further £29m in business investment.

Employment support programmes had also been active in tackling labour shortages and skills gaps. Since March 2020, the Coventry Job Shop alone had registered over 3,900 new customers and supported 1,980 people into work and had held events including "Coventry Moves Into Work" in September 2021 which linked jobseekers with employers from sectors facing labour shortages.

The Service had continued to deliver major projects to create the conditions to grow the local economy and ensure businesses could thrive in evolving global markets. These included securing over £130m of public funding and overseeing the successful development of UK Battery Industrialisation Centre, and developing a strong regional partnership to pursue the development of a potential new £2bn Gigafactory in Coventry to safeguard and enhance the future international competitiveness of the West Midlands automotive and smart mobility sector and associated supply chains.

The Committee noted that the Service would continue to work with local business support and economic development partners, to continue collating information regarding the key challenges and opportunities facing Coventry and Warwickshire businesses. They would also continue to monitor how the UK's withdrawal from the EU, and evolving international trading conditions and new regulations were affecting them. Work would also continue to design and implement appropriate business support measures in response as changes emerged.

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

- Concerns about the loss of funding for the two universities who were key to the local economy
- An acknowledgement that it was very difficult to determine if the impacts on the economy were due to Brexit or a result of the Covid-19 pandemic
- Would the recent reduction in universal credit combined with the current inflation rate impact local businesses, in light of claimants tending to shop locally
- Was the financial support provided by the Council to stop people becoming homeless affected by the loss of European funding
- Was anything being done to collect and log feedback from the different business sectors in the city regarding the impact of Brexit
- The availability of Government information about the impact of Brexit
- A request for a twelve month update report on the impact of Brexit on the Council and the local economy, to include feedback from the different business sectors
- What could be done to help businesses get better at exporting and what support was being offered
- What was being done to support local manufacturing when problems were being experienced due to labour shortages, including financial support
- Concerns about the potential loss of City Council staff in areas where there were staff shortages and larger salaries were available in the private sector.

RESOLVED that:

1) The content of the briefing note be noted.

2) The difficulties in determining if impacts are due to Brexit or a result of the Covid-19 pandemic be noted.

3) An update report on the impact of Brexit on the local economy, including information on sector by sector feedback, be submitted to a future meeting of the Board in twelve months and the Board's work programme be updated accordingly.

36. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2021/2022 and Outstanding Issues

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

37. Any Other Items of Public Business - Liz Gaulton, Director of Public Health and Wellbeing

The Board placed on record their thanks to Liz Gaulton for all her work during her time as Director of Public Health and Wellbeing for the City and wished her all the best for the future.

(Meeting closed at 11.55 am)