

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)
held at 10.00 am on Wednesday, 11 January 2023

Present:

Members: Councillor R Singh (Chair)
Councillor A Hopkins
Councillor T Jandu
Councillor A Jobbar
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor B Singh (Deputy Chair)
Councillor A Tucker

Other Members: Councillor L Bigham (City Council Representative on West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Committee)
Councillor J Innes (Chair of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2))
Councillor J O'Boyle (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change)

Employees (by Service):

Business, Investment and Culture D Nuttall

Law and Governance G Holmes, L Knight

Transportation and Highways S Evans-Gadgil, D Pipe, J Seddon

Others Present: C Crane (Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce)
P Jones (Destination Coventry)

Apologies: Councillor P Akhtar
Councillor P Hetherington
Councillor G Lloyd
Councillor A Masih
Councillor K Sandhu
Councillor R Simpson

Public Business

17. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

18. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2022 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

19. **Tourism Strategy and Destination Coventry - Progress Report**

The Business, Economy, and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a briefing note and presentation setting out the progress on the Tourism Strategy and Destination Coventry.

The Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change introduced the item, highlighting that work on the Strategy and Destination Coventry had commenced prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, but that good progress had been made through difficult conditions. There had been a move away from the Local Authority being responsible for promoting the city to a collaborative approach between the Council and Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, to deliver a new, pilot Destination Management Organisation (DMO).

The Board noted that the DMO was formally established in August 2021 as a public / private collaboration, to deliver a proof-of-concept model to establish that Destination Coventry would:

- Lead in the management, development and promotion of Coventry's leisure and business tourism
- Continue to operate the Coventry and Warwickshire Convention Bureau
- Assume responsibility for the provision of visitor information in the city
- Provide opportunities for the private sector to engage in a regular tourism dialogue
- Co-ordinate the delivery of the 2019-2023 Tourism Strategy, with stakeholders contributing to Strategy reviews and future iterations
- Not rely solely on Council funding, but will enable the private sector to contribute financially to the DMO's destination marketing activities, with the aim of amplifying growth of the city's visitor economy, and
- Deliver activities to include the development of income streams to ensure sustained financial viability.

The management and operations of Destination Coventry were overseen by an Oversight Board, chaired by the Commercial Director of Coventry Building Society Arena. The Board further included representatives from the Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Coventry BID, Coventry City of Culture Trust, Coventry City Council, Visit Britain and representatives of several tourism, leisure and hospitality sector businesses.

In December 2021, Destination Coventry launched its membership scheme which included categories of Full Membership; Patron Membership; Food, Drink and Nightlife Membership; Supplier Membership; Joint Destination Coventry / Chamber of Commerce Membership; and Basic Membership. This had resulted in 105 memberships being established across these categories.

The Briefing Note outlined the work undertaken by Destination Coventry during the 17 operational months of the pilot period to date. There had been a number of campaigns supported through 2022 under themes of food and drink; nightlife; Halloween; and business Tourism, in addition to seasonal

campaigns Explore Coventry and Coventry's Winter Wonderland. These campaigns had achieved a significant reach across television, radio, YouTube, social media accounts, website views, plus others.

The Scrutiny Board noted that there were a number of next steps and key priorities for the DMO, which included:

- Sustainable DMO Model beyond 2023/24
- DMO Review (du Bois Report)
- 2024 Tourism Strategy / Destination Management Plan
- Collaborative sustainable tourism journey
- Further specialist sector support opportunities
- Addressing recruitment and skills challenges
- Thematic campaigns – culture and heritage / sport
- Business events grown, and
- Major events.

The delivery of the Coventry Tourism Strategy 2019-2023 continued to be a core principle and ongoing key priority for the Destination Coventry model. Progress was measured against planned priorities and actions outlined within the Coventry Tourism Strategy, across the four key themes of Partnership, Product, Place and Positioning. It was acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted significantly on the UK hospitality and tourism industry during 2020 and 2021. However, a recently published report using the STEAM tourism economic impact model, had identified accelerated levels of recovery across all metrics in Coventry, in comparison to the West Midlands Combined Authority area and the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region, including visitor numbers, economic impact and total employment.

It was noted that the STEAM report also identified a growth in accommodation had also been strong in Coventry across this period, which showed that Coventry has 72 serviced and no-serviced establishments offering 11,880 beds. This was 6 establishment and 1,722 beds up on the previous year. This did not include the Indigo Hotel at Friargate or 8 other developments at various stages of planning consent.

In considering the briefing note and presentation, the Board asked questions and received responses on the matters summarised below:

- Whether the city's universities were involved in the DMO and its work.
- When the 2022 figures would be available and whether there would be any comparison between the figures for 2018 and 2019 to identify whether recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic is in line with where the city was prior to the outbreak.
- Given the success of tv advertising, had any consideration been given to advertising on an international market.
- How much funding is provided from public sources.
- Where the statistics from social media were being gathered from.
- Whether the minutes of the DMO were shared.
- The business case and governance structures for the DMO.
- The impact of fuel cost increases and recruitment on businesses.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. That the contents of the presentation and briefing note be noted.**
- 2. Additional information be provided to members of the Board on:**
 - (a) Key performance figures for 2022 as soon as they are available.**
 - (b) The business case and governance structures for the DMO.**
- 3. The following matters be included on the Work Programme for 2023/24:**
 - (a) Considering support to businesses with fuel costs and recruitment.**
 - (b) Scrutiny Board involvement in the process for renewing the Coventry Tourism Strategy and the review of the end of the DMO pilot.**

20. School Bus Services

The Business, Economy, and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) considered a briefing note which provided an update on the future of several dedicated school bus services following a discussion at its meeting on 12th October 2022.

The Board had noted during its meeting in October 2022 that there were a number of dedicated school bus services operating across the city, with 8 specific routes identified at risk of being withdrawn in the future. These routes were divided into two groups:

- (a) Routes 53, 54 and 55 serving West Coventry Academy – these routes being operated by National Express on a commercial basis. National Express had indicated that they were considering withdrawing these services as part of a wider review of the bus network.**
- (b) Routes S40, S46, S48, S49 and S50 serving Bishop Ullathorne School. These routes were being funded by the Council but, at the time of the October meeting, no funding had been allocated beyond the 2022/23 academic year for the continuation of these services.**

It was noted that, as part of the budget setting process for 2023/24, a request had been made to fund the S40, S46, S48, S49 and S50 services over the next financial year.

It was acknowledged that the majority of the bus network within Coventry, including most dedicated bus services, operated on a commercial basis. Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) has overall statutory responsibility for the city's bus network and works closely with bus operators. In addition, TfWM directly funded some services where these were socially important but would not be commercially viable.

Bus travel had fallen significantly following the Covid-19 pandemic, with passenger numbers at around 87% of pre-Covid levels. In addition to the lower passenger numbers, bus operators were also experiencing rising costs, particularly with fuel, and driver shortages. The driver shortage was an industry wide issue which had caused a significantly worse reliability of service. TfWM have been working with operators to carry out a review of the bus network.

As part of the bus network review, National Express had initially indicated that they intended to withdraw a total of 15 dedicated school bus services across the West Midlands. These were previously operated on a commercial basis, without any funding from either TfWM or any individual local authorities. This included the 3 routes identified in (a) above. Both TfWM and the Council expressed concern about the potential withdrawal of these services on the grounds set out in the briefing note. Following further discussions with TfWM and National Express, these routes are to be retained and therefore the network review would not now directly affect any dedicated school routes in Coventry.

The briefing note indicated that during the 2020/21 academic year, the Council had stepped in to support a number of services, including those identified in (b) above, when the previous operator, Travel De Courcey, entered administration. Initially, 14 routes, serving 6 schools were affected. In the first year, the Council was able to access a grant from the Department for Transport to fund the continuation of all 14 services. However, this funding was no longer available and over subsequent years, the Council was directly funding the highest priority routes, while providing advice on alternative travel options to students where services have had to be withdrawn.

During the current academic year, the Council has continued to fund a total of 5 dedicated school bus routes, all serving Bishop Ullathorne school. In addition, the Council also pays a small fee to National Express to extend service 14, which is in general use, to cover Blue Coat Church of England School. The total costs for these services during the full academic year is £327,375. However, this would be partly offset by the income received from parents who are required to buy a specific pass to use any of the dedicated services, forecast to be £101,196.

As part of the Council's budget setting process for 2023/24, £220,000 had been allocated for the support of school bus services. Subject to final approval of the budget, the risk to these 5 services would be mitigated. Council Officers were continuing to work with colleagues at TfWM and staff at Bishop Ullathorne school to make plans and to secure operators to continue to provide current or similar services for the 2023/24 academic year.

In considering the briefing note, the Board raised comments, asked questions and received responses on the matters summarised below:

- As a result of the adjustments made by National Express, the bus route to West Coventry Academy no longer served Mount Nod and Eastern Green.
- Whether the Council has any influence with National Express in relation to routes.
- Whether long term assessments were being made in order to keep the routes.

- Recommendation that when issues relating to buses are considered by the Board, that representatives of National Express be invited to attend the meeting.
- Concern of the impact of year-on-year budget proposals and the need for a longer-term budget setting.
- Whether there are opportunities for funding assistance and / or alternative options through partnership working with schools, faith organisations, transport providers and other key partners.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. The content of the briefing note and the expected continuation of the 8 services previously considered at risk of withdrawal be noted.**
- 2. A briefing note to be submitted to the relevant Cabinet Member recommending a longer-term sustainable solution to continuing the school bus service in partnership with schools, faith organisations, transport providers and other key partners to deliver school bus provision.**

21. Electric Vehicle Charging Network

The Business, Economy, and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) considered a briefing note which provided an update on the electric vehicle charging network in Coventry.

The Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change introduced the item, highlighting that Coventry has the highest number of charge points in any city outside of London. It was recognised that this feeds into the battery facility, the electric bus fleets, and a number of other projects. It was acknowledged that electric vehicles are still expensive when compared to alternatives, but once the second-hand market picks up, they would become cheaper. It was further recognised that whilst the roll-out of charge point installations would be important, that it was necessary for careful assessments to be undertaken before decisions are made whether parking in charging bays should be restricted to electric cars only, particularly in communities where there were existing parking difficulties.

The briefing note indicated that, since 2017, the Council had secured £4.6m in grant funding from the Office for Zero Emissions Vehicles (OZEV) under the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure (EVCI) programme. This has resulted in a city-wide network of 603 electric vehicle charge points (EVCPs) being installed, with a further 157 becoming operational by January 2023. This would take the total to 760 WVCPs capable of charging 1,030 vehicles at any one time as some EVCPs are capable of charging two vehicles at the same time. The Board were advised that currently there were 528 on street residential charge points for public use, aimed at residents without off-street parking, and a further 39 on street rapid charge points for public use within city centre and district centre locations, aimed at commercial users, notably taxis and delivery vans. In addition, there were 36 off street charge points for public use, sited at Salt Lane and the Railway Station car parks. 44 workplace charging points were available for private use by Council staff and visitors, funded through the Plug-in Coventry initiative. 10 charge points had been installed through the Ultra-Low Emissions Bus Scheme, for private use

by the bus operator at the Bus Depot. This was to be increased as part of the All-Electric Bus City programme.

It is anticipated that, as the number of electrical vehicles registered in the city increases, there will be a demand to restrict the on-street parking bays with charge points available for electric vehicle use only. Currently, such restrictions apply to a small number of charge points across the city, with a number of time limitations for their use, dependent upon their location and the type of charge point installed. The restrictions are managed via sensors installed in the majority of the electric vehicle parking and charging bays. The remaining bays are predominantly in residential streets and the restrictions are advisory only, to avoid too much pressure being placed upon on-street parking. This means that non-electric vehicles can use the bays without penalty. This approach would be kept under review.

In addition to the expansion of the on-street EVCP network, further projects were underway to support the future development of the electric vehicle charging infrastructure within the city. Funding had been secured for a feasibility study into the potential development of a multi-fuel charging hub, called the CLEAN hub, which could meet both strategic and local fuelling needs. The outcome of the study is expected during late 2023. A feasibility study has also been completed into a wireless charging project, whereby equipment installed within the road surface charges electric vehicles as they pass over it. This charging on the move concept is being trialled in other countries and funding opportunities are being sought that would enable Coventry to undertake a similar trial.

It was noted that the recently adopted Coventry Transport Strategy fully supports the further expansion of the charge point network as a critical element of the decarbonisation of the transport system in the city.

In considering the briefing note, the Board raised comments, asked questions and received responses on the matters summarised below:

- Whether petrol stations would be installing charging banks.
- How Traffic Regulation Orders would work for charging points.
- How the areas where charge points are installed are identified
- The need to consider the demographic of local areas and being realistic about using sites that would be beneficial.

RESOLVED that, the briefing note on the update of the electric vehicle charging network be noted. There were no recommendations to the Cabinet Member.

22. **Work Programme 2022/23**

The Business, Economy, and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) noted the Work Programme for 2022/23 and also noted that the Local Cycling and Walking Plan would include information on the usage of the cycle hire scheme, as well as actions to encourage cycling, as requested at a previous meeting.

Other items raised during the course of the meeting would be added to the Work Programme.

23. **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 public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.30pm)