



Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Time and Date

11.00 am on Monday, 10 June, 2024

Place

Diamond Rooms 1 and 2 - Council House

Public Business

1. **Apologies and Substitutions**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **Minutes**
 - (a) To agree the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 April, 2024 (Pages 5 - 12)
 - (b) Matters Arising
4. **Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge 2024 - Outcome of Peer Challenge** (Pages 13 - 58)

Report of the Chief Executive
5. **Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25** (Pages 59 - 72)

Report of Director of Law and Governance
6. **Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme and Outstanding Issues 2024/2025** (Pages 73 - 78)

Report of the Director of Law and Governance

7. **Scrutiny Management**

Councillor N Akhtar, Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, attended the meeting of Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change on 13 May, 2024 for consideration of an item relating to “Progress House, Westwood Way Westwood Business Park Coventry - Lease Re- gear ”

Councillor Akhtar agreed that the decision was urgent and that call in should not apply. In accordance with the Constitution, this matter is reported to inform the Committee of the reason for urgency which is:-

“In order to meet the construction programme and complete the new development for the occupation by students before commencement of the academic year in September 2026, the legal agreement and commitment was required to be completed by the 20th May 2024. If this timescale is not achieved, then a delay of a further 12 months would be incurred, which would mean that the improved income for the Council is also delayed by a year. “

8. **Any Other Items of Public Business**

Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

Private Business

Nil

Julie Newman, Director of Law and Governance, Council House, Coventry

Friday, 31 May, 2024

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Suzanne Bennett, Governance Services - Telephone: 024 7697 2299 E-mail: suzanne.bennett@coventry.gov.uk

Membership: Councillors N Akhtar (Chair), M Ali, A Jobbar, L Kelly (Deputy Chair), J Lepoidevin, C Miks, G Ridley, R Singh and CE Thomas

By invitation: Councillor G Duggins

Public Access

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Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Thursday, 11 April 2024

Present:

Members: Councillor N Akhtar (Chair)
Councillor J Gardiner (Substitute for Councillor G Ridley)
Councillor A Hopkins (Substitute for Councillor A Ali)
Councillor C Miks
Councillor E Ruane
Councillor R Singh
Councillor R Thay

Other Members: Councillor K Caan Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing
Councillor G Hayre Deputy Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing
Councillor P Hetherton, Cabinet Member for City Services

Others present: Inspector J Moran, West Midlands Police (for item contained in Minute 56 below)

Employees (by Service Area):

City Services: P Bowman, D Keaney

Law and Governance: S Bennett, G Holmes

Public Health and Wellbeing: A Duggal (Director), A Allen, R Chapman, P Hargrave, M Pouton

Apologies: Councillors M Ali, G Duggins, P Male, G Ridley, CE Thomas

Public Business

53. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

54. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March, 2024 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

55. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the Committee agrees to exclude the press and public under Sections 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 relating to the private item

in Minute 61 below headed 'Rebuilding Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Services' on the grounds that that item involves the likely disclosure of information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as it contains information relating to the financial affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information) and in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

56. **Parking Enforcement and Road Safety**

The Committee considered a Briefing Note of the Director of City Services which outlined the Council's Civil Parking Enforcement function and informed the Committee of current activities and arrangements relating to parking enforcement by providing an overview of key priorities and performance.

The Briefing Note covered the following areas:-

- The background to Parking Enforcement, which has been the responsibility of the Council since 2005 when the function was decriminalised and transferred from West Midlands Police
- The main aims of parking enforcement:-
 - To Improve road safety
 - To Improve access for public transport, public service vehicles and emergency services vehicle
 - To act as a deterrent to inconsiderate and dangerous parking
 - To improve traffic flows
 - To reduce traffic congestion which in turn will improve air quality
- The following functions and activities undertaken by the Council's Parking Service:-
 - Civil parking enforcement
 - Bus lane and enforcement
 - Moving traffic enforcement
 - Parking appeals service
 - Resident parking scheme management
 - Car park management
- Civil parking enforcement and the work undertaken by Civil Enforcement Officers including:-
 - Operational arrangements
 - Deployment
 - Staff resources
 - Performance levels
 - Penalty charge notice levels
 - Enforcement challenges and plans to deal with them
 - City Centre Restricted Parking Zones (RPZ)

- Issues regarding Burges and Trinity Street
- Pavement parking
- Parking hotspots
- Moving Traffic Enforcement

The Committee asked questions, made comments and sought assurances on a number of issues including:-

- Implementation of disabled parking bays and the fact that disabled bays are an advisory service and not enforceable
- Bus lane enforcement and the impact that they may have on footfall in the city centre
- Traffic management in the Burges and Trinity Street, and steps taken to address the issue of delivery drivers, such as allocated parking bays in White Street car park
- School parking issues and measures in place to try and improve, including the use of volunteers.
- The impact of physical and verbal abuse on the wellbeing of parking staff and the issues around recruitment
- Issues at specific car parks in the city
- Problem parking on pavements on main arterial routes into the city such as the Foleshill Road, Longford Road, Stoney Stanton Road and Clay Lane.
- Street furniture, signage and whether the changes proposed in the city centre would be clear to drivers.
- The issues of enforcement of white zig zag lines, which only the police are able to do.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee:-

- 1) Notes and welcomes the actions and initiatives in place to tackle the key parking enforcement priorities.**
- 2) Recommends that the Cabinet Member for City Services:-**
 - a) Considers the introduction of red routes on the parking hotspots of Foleshill Road, Stoney Stanton Road, Clay Lane and Longford Road.**
 - b) Reviews the parking restrictions in the City Centre, including the Restricted Parking Zone, to ensure they are clear and consistent.**
- 3) Recommends that the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities request that West Midlands Police take enforcement action in relation to parking on white zig zag lines.**
- 4) Requests that officers:-**
 - a) Continue to work with schools regarding parking and enforcement issues.**

b) Continue to review road signage and reduce this wherever possible.

c) Ensure that the parking bays in White Street car park are marked for delivery drivers.

57. Complaints Policy and Procedure Task and Finish Group

The Committee considered a Briefing Note which detailed recommendations from the Complaints Policy and Procedure Task and Finish Group, which was established to review the existing Policy and Procedure to ensure that the process is easy to access and understandable for everyone involved, particularly members of the public.

The Briefing Note detailed the membership of the Task and Finish Group, which was chaired by Councillor N Akhtar. The scoping document for the Group was appended to the Briefing Note.

The Briefing Note indicated that the Task and Finish Group had discussed the following issues:-

- There are unlikely to be savings but better service provision.
- The need to have the right processes before a system can be built.
- Links with Members Casework Management tool to be explored.
- Training for staff to deal with complaints and soft skills to manage engagement with residents.
- Where complaints come in from Members – the need to be kept involved in the process and updated to be built into the process design.
- The possibility of including surveys of complainants to be shared with Members at some point in the future.

The Task and Finish Group had agreed that a renewed Policy and Procedure should include the following:

- Differentiation between contacting the Council, service requests and complaints.
- Some case studies or flow charts as to how a complaint will be handled.

An Appendix to the report detailed annotated comments and amendments made by the Task and Finish Group to the current Policy and Procedure. The Task and Finish Group had also considered a presentation on progress and had discussed the following:-

- The benefits and challenges of the informal resolution stage for complaints and how it has reduced the number of formal complaints by 68%.
- The structure and capacity of the complaints service and the introduction of the new service manager who will start on the 1st of May.

- The areas that still need to be worked on, such as checking the Ombudsman code, creating training and response standards, reporting, and learning from complaints, and reviewing the templates and systems.
- The issues around a single point of contact and potentially violent persons processes and how they can be improved and aligned with data protection and customer service principles.
- The opportunities and implications of exploring Customer Relationship Management systems and how they can support the complaints process and the resident experience.
- The feedback and suggestions from the Task and Finish Group on the draft Policy and Process and how they will be incorporated into the final document.

RESOLVED:-

- 1) **That the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee approves the submission of the following recommendations of the Complaints Policy and Procedure Task and Finish Group to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources:-**
 - a) **That the Complaints Policy and Procedure be amended as proposed by the Task and Finish Group and as detailed in the Appendix to the report.**
 - b) **That timescales for implementation of the electronic complaints system to deal with complaints be identified.**
 - c) **That consideration be given to future strategic planning opportunities, including the budgetary implications for savings from an alternative Customer Relations Manager system.**
- 2) **That a report on progress on the recommendations made to the Cabinet Member as detailed above be added to the Committee's Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2024-25.**

58. Rebuilding Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Services

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Public Health and Wellbeing, which would be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 16 April, and which indicated that the Council is responsible for commissioning drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services. The current contract for this service is due to expire in March 2025.

National policy in relation to drug and alcohol treatment has changed significantly with the launch of the new Drug Strategy "From Harm to Hope" which reinforces the Government's ambition to rebuild treatment services following a decade of disinvestment. The report included a summary of the health needs in Coventry related to drug and alcohol misuse, a summary of the engagement and consultation work carried out and the planned process for re-procurement of drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services. The report indicated that people

misusing drugs and alcohol are among the most vulnerable and socially excluded populations and the contract will directly lead efforts to reduce health inequalities and prioritise engagement with communities affected by addiction.

The report proposed re-procurement of services via an open tendering process and summarised some of the funding stream relevant to the procurement.

The Committee also received a presentation in private relating to the commercially sensitive aspects of the current contract (Minute 61 below refers)

The Committee asked questions, raised concerns and received assurances in relation to a number of issues including:-

- Details of the procurement process and length of contract
- Value of the new contract compared to the current contract
- Whether the resources in the new contract were sufficient to meet current demand
- Whether the new contract would bring an improvement in performance, what would be done differently to what has been done before
- The consultation process and steps taken to engage service users, as well as the on-going dialogue with service users, which forms part of the contract requirements
- Performance data, how Coventry was performing compared to national data, including drug related deaths
- How performance was managed as part of the contract including regular formal and informal meetings, the monitoring of data, KPI's and powers to manage poor performance.
- The wider causes of addiction and prevention and a request for scrutiny to be updated on progress on the Drug and Alcohol Strategy
- The links with mental health services and how different services were working in partnership, including joint training and joint service meetings

RESOLVED that Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee:-

1) Supports the recommendations to Cabinet as detailed in the report with the following additional recommendation:-

2) That Cabinet's attention is drawn to the following recommendations made to officers:-

- i. That officers consider ways of assuring the consultation process and continue to consult throughout the term of the contract.**
- ii. That officers provide information detailing how the new contract will improve performance, specifically in terms of opiate users >6 years opiate treatment.**
- iii. That the new contract ensures that there is capacity to undertake new and innovative approaches.**

- iv. That officers investigate how best to get feedback from GP's on the effectiveness of treatment.
- v. That officers ensure that data is collected on repeat attendances on treatment programmes.

59. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme and Outstanding Issues 2023/20246

The Committee considered their Work Programme and outstanding issues for 2023/24.

RESOLVED:-

- 1) That consideration be given to ensuring maximum Member involvement and engagement in Scrutiny during 2024/25
- 2) That the following items be added to the appropriate Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for 2024/25

**Local Development Plan
Review of external partners**

60. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

Private Business

61. Rebuilding Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Services

Further to Minute 58 above, the Committee considered and noted commercially sensitive information regarding the current contract for Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Services.

62. Any other item of private business

There were no other items of urgent private business.

(Meeting closed at 1.40pm)

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Public report Cabinet

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee
Cabinet
Council

10 June 2024
11 June 2024
9 July 2024

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership – Councillor G Duggins

Director approving submission of the report:

Chief Executive

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge 2024 – Outcome of Peer Challenge

Is this a key decision?

No – although the proposals affect more than two electoral wards, the impact is not expected to be significant.

Executive summary:

The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government, working with Councils to support, promote, and improve local government. The LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge offer is effective and well regarded by the sector and provides robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to Councils.

It is expected that all Councils receive a Corporate Peer Challenge at least every five years covering core areas and any specific areas requested by the Council. Coventry City Council's first Corporate Peer Challenge took place in October 2018. In 2023, it was agreed that Coventry City Council would again host a Corporate Peer Challenge as this was now timely.

The Peer Challenge took place from 15th to 18th January 2024. The visit focused on five core themes (local priorities and outcomes, organisational and place leadership,

governance and culture, financial planning and management, and capacity for improvement). These areas are critical to Councils' performance and improvement.

We also asked the Peer Team to provide feedback on transformation: the organisation's corporate capacity and plans for service transformation. Transformation was specifically chosen on the basis that it would benefit from some external challenge and feedback on future delivery plans.

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report is provided as an appendix to this report (Appendix A). This report provides a detailed response on findings, including a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report.

In summary, during the course of the Peer Challenge week, the Peer Team found that:

- Coventry is an ambitious place that is on the up, with examples of innovation and a willingness to embrace change, whilst not forgetting its heritage
- Coventry is a well-run Council, with strong officer and political leadership
- Employees and elected members are passionate and proud about what they do
- The Council should take further steps to improve diversity across the organisation at all levels
- There is recognition that tough times are still ahead, but people are up for the challenge
- There is a need to ensure that the transformation programme is adequately resourced to enable delivery at pace
- The Council should use the established performance framework to drive improvement and bring greater prioritisation and visibility to areas that require improvement
- Partners and residents are eager to step up and become more involved at an earlier and more strategic level
- There is a need to review our external and internal communications and engagement strategy

There are some areas where further work is suggested by the Peer Team. These areas are described in the 'Key recommendations' section of the LGA's feedback report.

Following the Peer Challenge in January, the Council has reflected on the Peer Team's findings in order to determine its response to the recommendations that have been made. The Council response is provided as an appendix to this report (Appendix B). We are embracing the opportunity to reflect on this feedback and are committed to making improvements where we can through organisational ownership.

Recommendations:

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Support the recommendations to Cabinet.
- (2) Identify any further recommendations to Cabinet in relation to the outcome of the Peer Challenge.
- (3) Request a further progress update after the LGA Peer Team's review and the subsequent LGA feedback report has been received.

Cabinet is requested to:

- (1) Support the work to deliver the actions outlined in Appendix B, in response to recommendations made by the Peer Team.
- (2) Consider any comments made by Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee in relation to the outcome of the Peer Challenge.

Council is requested to:

- (1) Note the content of the Peer Team's feedback report and the Council response document, and support the work to deliver the actions outlined in Appendix B, in response to recommendations made by the Peer Team.

List of Appendices included:

The following appendices are attached to the report:

Appendix A – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report

Appendix B – Council Response to Peer Team Recommendations

Background papers:

None

Other useful documents

None

Has it or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

Yes – 10th June 2024

Has it or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

Yes – 9 July 2024

Report title: LGA Corporate Peer Challenge 2024 – Outcome of Peer Challenge

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1. Peer Challenge is a core element of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer to local authorities. The activity is improvement focused, with the scope being agreed by the Council and tailored to reflect local needs and specific requirements.
- 1.2. In autumn 2023, the Council held an initial scoping meeting with the Local Government Association to determine the main focus (in addition to the core areas) of the Challenge. Discussion focused on when it would be best to undertake the onsite activities, the nature and composition of the Peer Team and the results the Council was seeking to achieve. It was subsequently agreed that a Corporate Peer Challenge would take place in January 2024.
- 1.3. The core components of each Corporate Peer Challenge relate to local priorities, organisational leadership, governance, financial resilience and capacity for improvement. These elements help Councils to check they have the capacity to continue to deliver their priorities.
- 1.4. The core components are described in further detail below:
 1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the Council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the Council delivering effectively on its priorities?
 2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the Council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
 3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
 4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the Council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the Council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
 5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the Council have the capacity to improve?
- 1.5. In addition, Coventry City Council asked the LGA to provide feedback on **transformation**: the organisation's corporate capacity and plans for service transformation. Transformation was specifically chosen on the basis that it would benefit from some external challenge and feedback on future delivery plans.
- 1.6. The Peer Team identified many strengths across these areas which are summarised below.
- 1.7. Core Component – 1) Local Priorities and Outcomes

- The One Coventry Plan has good brand recognition within the Council and good political and officer buy-in.
- Coventry's children's services were rated 'good' following an inspection by Ofsted in July 2022 and the Council is ambitious to achieve an "outstanding" rating. The Council continues to address inequality in the city as evidenced by the continuing decline in the numbers of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) – currently at 3.5% and the lowest bar one of the city's statistical near neighbours.
- The Local Job Shop is an example of an innovative approach to improving outcomes, helping around 14,000 residents find work in the last 10 years.
- The Council is developing innovative approaches to addressing climate change, including the partnership with E.ON. It is using the climate action to strengthen local supply chains and skills.
- Residents are starting to feel the benefits of some of the investments the Council is making in the city – especially the impact and legacy of the City of Culture.

1.8. Core Component – 2) Organisational and Place Leadership

- The Council has strong political leadership led by a Leader and Cabinet that work together well to address cross cutting issues.
- The visibility of the new Chief Executive has been valued by Council employees, elected members and partners and has been immediately impactful.
- There are pockets of good practice on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) – the apprenticeship scheme and legal services is a good example.
- The Council is seen as a strong and trusted partner both strategically and operationally.
- The Council and the work it does is really valued by the Combined Authority.

1.9. Core Component – 3) Governance and Culture

- Scrutiny is seen as a place for good cross-party working that addresses pre and post decision-making and there is a good relationship between scrutiny and Cabinet.
- A statutory officer group is in place and the constitution is regularly reviewed.
- Managers and employees feel empowered to deliver.
- Employee networks have attracted over 1000 members and the chairs and the networks are valued.
- There is an appropriate consideration of risk. The Council knows the issues and it will be important to maintain a strong approach as it faces a challenging national and local environment.
- The Council welcomes external challenge and should continue this approach to support its further development and transformation.

1.10. Core Component – 4) Financial Planning and Management

- The approach to financial management has been prudent as evidenced by a healthy balance sheet underpinned by robust financial management processes, but there is recognition that this is going to get tougher.
- The Council's financial situation is well understood by the leadership team and members.
- There has been regular engagement through the year on the financial position and proposals to address challenges, in which scrutiny plays an active role.

1.11. Core Component – 5) Capacity for Improvement

- The Council has a clear performance framework on which to build its improvement approach.
- Members and officers are ambitious for further improvement. This should be continued and will drive continuous improvement across the organisation.
- The Council has a clear ambition to pursue excellence in key areas e.g. ambition for achieving 'outstanding' in future OFSTED inspections.
- Recent leadership appointments are rapidly diagnosing and identifying further opportunities to drive through improvement.
- The Council has a track record of delivering on wicked issues (e.g. for those not in education, employment or training – NEETs). There is already-established best-practice in the organisation which can be shared and deployed to support continued improvement in other areas.

1.12. Additional Area of Focus – Transformation

- There is a genuine recognition for the need for transformation and a real ambition to 'save, do more, do better'. It is positive that the Council has made this a priority.
- There is real innovation emerging for example Coventry Connects, with residents at the heart of the programme. The agile and iterative approach is enabling some early examples of what the overall programme could achieve.
- The corporate programme of transformation builds on and will contribute to work that is underway in service areas. The approach being taken is owned by senior leadership and this will be invaluable to its success.

1.13. The LGA and the Council worked together to agree the timetable of activities and ensure the input of partners. The Corporate Peer Challenge took place from 15th to 18th January 2024. Peers reviewed a range of information to ensure they were familiar with the Council, the challenges facing the Council and plans for the future. The Peer Team spoke to more than 100 people during their time in Coventry, including a range of Council employees, Elected Members, external partners and residents, across more than 35 interviews and focus groups.

1.14. A 'Position Statement' was required to be submitted to the LGA, in advance of the onsite activities. This document provided a narrative on the Council's ambitions, progress and challenges.

- 1.15. The Peer Challenge concluded on 18th January 2024 with a high-level feedback discussion where the Peer Team shared their findings with senior officers and Elected Members.
- 1.16. The LGA's feedback report was received following the Peer Team's visit (Appendix A). This report provides a detailed response regarding these findings and includes recommendations for the Council to consider. The LGA will also publish the feedback report on their website.
- 1.17. The Peer Challenge did not provide an overall performance rating but it did highlight what is working well and where there are opportunities for improving. It is a matter for the Council, with the support of its partners, to decide how the areas for improvement identified during the Peer Challenge are taken forward.
- 1.18. In summary, the Peer Team found that Coventry is an ambitious place that is on the up, with examples of innovation and a willingness to embrace change, whilst not forgetting our heritage. They also acknowledged that Coventry is a well-run Council, with strong officer and political leadership and found that employees and Elected Members are passionate and proud about what they do. In addition, the Peer Team said that there is recognition that tough times are still ahead, but people are up for the challenge. Positively, partners and residents are eager to step up and become more involved at an earlier and more strategic level.
- 1.19. The Peer Team also found that there are elements for the Council to work on, for example the Council should take further steps to improve diversity across the organisation at all levels. The Peer Team found that there is a need to ensure that the transformation programme is adequately resourced to enable delivery at pace and that the Council should use the established performance framework to drive improvement and bring greater prioritisation and visibility to areas that require improvement. The Peer Team reflected that there is a need to review our external and internal communications and engagement strategy.
- 1.20. The Council has now reflected on these findings and suggestions in order to determine its response to the recommendations identified by the Peer Team during their time in Coventry. There is an expectation that the outcomes and resulting action plan, will be owned and delivered by the City Council, whilst recognising that the Council neither can, nor should, seek to do everything itself.
- 1.21. The LGA feedback report highlights 10 main recommendations, specifying areas for improvement, arising from the Peer Challenge. The recommendations are as follows:

1. City Centre masterplan

The Council should continue to work at pace to develop a city centre masterplan with the support and involvement of partners.

2. One Coventry Plan

The next iteration of the One Coventry Plan needs to include a corporate delivery plan supported by consistently developed service plans and should include a review

of the corporate strategy framework to ensure strategies are linked and gaps are identified.

3. Employees

The Council has rich data from the recent workforce survey and should develop actions to address the issues it highlights. A key element of this would be ensuring there is further support for the employee networks.

4. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

Future financial modelling within the MTFS should consider the full impact and risk of key underlying assumptions e.g. demographic change, inflation, and policy on issues such as real living wage.

5. Financial accounts

The Council should make swift progress to sign off and publish their outstanding financial accounts.

6. Transformation programme

The transformation programme is at a very early stage of development, and the Council should focus on rapid engagement and mobilisation of the right skills, capacity and capability needed to deliver.

7. Communications

The Council should develop a refreshed external communication strategy.

8. Performance management

The Council should use the established performance framework to drive improvement and bring greater prioritisation and visibility to areas that require improvement.

9. Elected Member training

Elected Members are keen to engage with opportunities for training and development and the Council should review barriers to take up of the current offer and how these can be addressed.

10. Workforce Diversity

The Council should take further steps to improve diversity across the organisation at all levels.

1.22. The Council's response (Appendix B) describes the work that is being undertaken to address each recommendation. Many of the actions set out in the action plan were

already in progress before the Peer Challenge and have not been initiated as a direct result of Peer Challenge feedback.

- 1.23. Some of the work to address the Peer Team recommendations will be complex, requiring input from a range of stakeholders and consideration of resource requirements but this will only become clear as the work progresses.
- 1.24. There is an expectation that each Council will commit to a progress review visit within 10 months of the Peer Challenge. The purpose of this is to help the Council assess the impact of the Peer Challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the Peer Team. The progress review is anticipated to take place in November 2024. The LGA will then produce a Progress Review Report which is expected to be published within twelve months of the Corporate Peer Challenge (January 2025).
- 1.25. The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all Councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that Coventry will commission its next Peer Challenge by 2029.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1. There is an expectation that all Councils will take up the Peer Challenge offer, at a time of their choosing, as an effective tool for improvement. Independent evaluations of the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge programme have previously concluded that there is a positive impact and a range of benefits from the Council receiving a Peer Challenge.
- 2.2. Cabinet is recommended to support the work to address the recommendations identified in the LGA's feedback report.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1. A range of partner organisations and stakeholders were engaged in the Peer Challenge which included Council employees, Elected Members, Trade Unions, partners and residents.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1. The improvement plan associated with the Peer Challenge will be monitored through the Council's Leadership Board and implementation responsibility will be identified in the action plan.
- 4.2. As outlined above, there is an expectation that the Council will commit to a follow-up progress review within 10 months of the Peer Challenge. This will provide some assurances on progress following the Peer Team's initial visit.

5. Comments from the Director of Finance and Resources and the Director of Law and Governance

5.1. Financial Implications

There are no specific financial implications associated with this report. Should it transpire that the delivery of any of the specific actions require additional resources, these will be sought from within existing resources, ensuring appropriate organisational governance is in place to identify the requirement and the associated funding source.

5.2. Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications associated with this report.

6. Other implications

6.1. How will this contribute to the One Coventry Plan?

Progressing the areas identified during the Peer Challenge will make a positive contribution to the delivery of the Council's priorities, particularly in relation to promoting the growth of a sustainable Coventry economy and improving the quality of life and outcomes for Coventry people.

6.2. How is risk being managed?

The Council's Leadership Board will be responsible for oversight of delivery of Peer Challenge recommendations. Where recommendations are associated with other change or improvement programmes, risk will be managed through individual programme governance arrangements.

6.3. What is the impact on the organisation?

There are no direct implications at this stage.

6.4. Equalities / EIA?

No specific analysis of equality impacts was completed in the course of the Peer Challenge.

6.5. Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment?

None

6.6. Implications for partner organisations?

Although led by the City Council, the Peer Challenge included a number of partner organisations as well as representatives from various partnership boards across the city and wider geographical area. Progressing the improvements identified will require input and leadership from everyone.

Report author(s):

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Transformation

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LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Coventry City Council

15-18 January 2024

Feedback report





Contents

- 1. Executive summary 3
- 2. Key recommendations 6
- 3. Summary of the peer challenge approach 8
- 4. Feedback 9
- 5. Next steps 24

1 Executive summary

Coventry is an ambitious place that is on the up, with examples of innovation and a willingness to embrace change, whilst not forgetting its heritage. The council is well-run, with strong officer and political leadership. Employees and elected members are passionate and proud about what they do. There is recognition that tough times are still ahead, but people are up for the challenge. Partners and residents are eager to step up and become more involved, and this will need to be grounded in better external communications and engagement.

Coventry has rebounded quickly post covid to see visitor numbers above those in 2019. The Council has a significant opportunity to work now with Destination Coventry, the West Midlands Growth Company and other partners to refresh the tourism strategy and to ensure that the structures are in place to sustain its strong performance.

The peer team heard about and were able to see at first hand the significant regeneration that is ongoing in the city. This includes, among a range of schemes, the Friargate scheme and the development of city centre south. At a strategic level the broad vision and ambition for the city is well articulated through the One Coventry Plan. However, partners told the peer team that there was a need for a city centre masterplan.

The peer team were pleased to see that the One Coventry Plan has good brand recognition within the council and good political and officer buy-in. The Plan is intrinsically linked to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as both are aimed at securing the level of services and supporting the ambition needed to address the council's priorities. Partners are signed up to One Coventry, and they now want to be more involved in the development and implementation of actions that emerge from the plan.

Residents told the peer team that they saw, and were benefiting from, a number of investments the council has made in the city, this included improvements to the cityscape and more generally the impact and legacy of the City of Culture, particularly the arts offer.

The resident survey provides the council with rich insights which can and should be used with partners to tackle some of the city's biggest issues including inequality and

resident engagement and satisfaction with services.

Partners told the peer team that the council was seen as a strong partner both strategically and operationally. Together partners are seeking to address challenging issues such as rough sleeping where multi-disciplinary teams are being deployed to support individuals with complex needs. The community and voluntary sector told the peer team that it was working well with the council on the ground but raised some concerns about the mechanisms for it to engage strategically with the council.

The council benefits from strong political leadership. The Leader has been in position since May 2016 and the peer team were told that he is widely respected within the council and across city and West Midlands partnerships. The Cabinet is a strength with portfolio holders working together to deliver for communities while having a detailed understanding of the financial pressures. The council already plays a significant leadership role across the region but given its strengths it could do even more.

The council's Chief Executive (CEO) has been in post for around six months and there was universal praise from employees, members and partners for her visibility, engagement and leadership approach; the peer team perceived that she has been immediately impactful.

The residents that the peer team met were concerned at the quality of the communication from the council. There were two main elements to this: the timeliness and meaningfulness of engagement on key decisions; and a perception that the council's communications were not telling communities about all the good work that is going on. On this latter point, concern was also shared by front-line councillors.

The council is committed to delivering on its equality and diversity ambitions and there are examples of good practice including the apprenticeship scheme operating in legal services. The peer team heard from some employees that they felt there was still a ceiling on progression for employees from diverse backgrounds. More work needs to be done to realise progress on equality and diversity within the council. The leadership teams lack diversity and this could impact on the council's ability to meet the needs of its diverse communities.

The peer team got a real sense that employees felt empowered and wanted to

deliver great things for the City and its communities. This is being supported by action to address what had been a siloed working culture within the council.

In the view of the peer team, the council's approach to financial management has been prudent, as evidenced by the current healthy level of reserves, underpinned by robust financial management processes, but there is recognition that the financial situation is getting tougher.

The peer team note that Coventry has unaudited accounts for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23. In the view of Coventry's external auditor, Grant Thornton (Annual Report 2021-2022 published November 2023), the delays in the preparation of the financial statements could expose the council to financial risk.

There is a genuine recognition across the council of the need for transformation and a real ambition to 'save, do more, do better'. The approach being taken to transformation is owned by senior leadership and this will be invaluable to its future success.

There is real innovation emerging, for example within Coventry Connects, the aim of which is to improve the way the council engages with residents and the way it uses data to improve services by considering the use of technology and integrating processes. The agile and iterative approach is enabling some early examples of what the overall programme could achieve.

Part of the purpose of the transformation programme is to generate savings, but given the programme is at an early stage, the timing of financial and non-financial returns on investment are yet to be fully clarified. The council will need to continually review the profile of savings from the transformation programmes and consider when these should be included within the MTFs.

The council is keen to resource the transformation programme without incurring additional costs. To do this it is diverting and coordinating existing capacity and establishing a 'Transformation Squad'. This approach has advantages and using talent from across the council provides development opportunities for employees. However, it is not clear whether all of the skills and expertise required to deliver on complex transformation programmes are held within the council currently. The peer team heard from employees that capacity is a current constraint and this will also need to be taken into account and transformation projects prioritised if the

programme is to be delivered within existing resources.

At this early stage of the programme, using all available insight and benchmarking on value for money of service delivery could accelerate identification of benefits and programme design and we would urge the council to take every opportunity to parcel data together to give a system wide analysis.

The peer team was struck by the commitment and ambition of elected Members and officers for further improvement in the way that the council is managed and the services it delivers to communities. The council builds on a track record of improvement as evidenced through the Children's services performance journey and the commitment to do better still.

Member training is delivered within the context of the One Coventry Elected Members Training and Development Strategy. Take up of training by Members has been low. The peer team heard a number of reasons why this might be the case, including time pressures, but also that the mandatory aspect of some training was not being enforced (most of these training programmes are available through the Council's online learning portal). The peer team also heard that Members would value training more if it was accredited.

2 Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

2.1 City Centre masterplan

The council should continue to work at pace to develop a city centre masterplan with the support and involvement of partners.

2.2 One Coventry Plan

The next iteration of the One Coventry plan needs to include a corporate delivery plan supported by consistently developed service plans and should include a review of the corporate strategy framework to ensure strategies are linked and gaps are identified.

2.3 Employees

The council has rich data from the recent workforce survey and should develop actions to address the issues it highlights. A key element of this would be ensuring there is further support for the employee networks.

2.4 Medium Term Financial Strategy

Future financial modelling within the MTFS should consider the full impact and risk of key underlying assumptions e.g. demographic change, inflation, and policy on issues such as real living wage.

2.5 Financial accounts

The council should make swift progress to sign off and publish their outstanding financial accounts.

2.6 Transformation programme

The transformation programme is at a very early stage of development, and the council should focus on rapid engagement and mobilisation of the right skills, capacity and capability needed to deliver.

2.7 Communications

The council should develop a refreshed external communication strategy.

2.8 Performance management

The council should use the established performance framework to drive improvement and bring greater prioritisation and visibility to areas that require improvement.

2.9 Member training

Members are keen to engage with opportunities for training and development and the council should review barriers to take up of the current offer and how these can be addressed.

2.10 Workforce Diversity

The council should take further steps to improve diversity across the organisation at all levels.

3 Summary of the peer challenge approach

3.1 The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Pam Smith – CEX, Newcastle City Council
- Cllr Eamonn O'Brien – Leader, Bury Council
- Rupa Raghvani - Director of Finance & Procurement – Financial Control and Interim Chief Financial Officer, LB Hounslow
- James Partis - Assistant Chief Executive - Chief Transformation Officer, LB Newham
- Tinu Olowe - Director, Human Resources & Organisational Design, Enfield Council
- Eamon Lally - Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

3.2 Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to

address its financial challenges?

5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, the council asked the peer team to provide feedback on **Transformation**: the organisation's corporate capacity and plans for service transformation.

3.3 The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent four days onsite at Coventry, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 35 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 100 people including a range of council employees together with members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

4 Feedback

4.1 Local priorities and outcomes

Coventry is a compact city located in the West Midlands. It has a population of 345,300 and the city is growing with an increase of nearly 9 per cent in the 10 years to 2021. Coventry is home to two universities, Coventry University and the University of Warwick, and it has a student population of around 67,000. Coventry also has a

rich diversity with 45 per cent of the population identifying as being from an ethnic minority community. The City's population is relatively young with a median age of 35 and with 20 per cent of the population aged 18 or under. However, growth in older people is expected to accelerate and outpace other groups within 10-15 years (*JSNA 2023*) and this will have implications for the delivery of council services.

The city is relatively deprived, ranking 46th most deprived borough in England, with 14.4% of the city's neighbourhood amongst the 10% most deprived areas in England. Men living in the most deprived areas of Coventry live around 11 years less than those in the least deprived areas.

Coventry's corporate plan, the One Coventry Plan, seeks to address the challenges faced by the city. The plan has three core priorities:

- Increasing the economic prosperity of the city and region
- Tackling the causes and consequence of climate change
- Improving outcomes and tackling inequalities within our communities

These core priorities are underpinned by two enabling priorities: Continued financial sustainability of the council; and the council's role as a partner, enabler and leader.

The city has an abundant history and heritage and was the UK City of Culture in 2021. Although Covid restrictions were still in place at the beginning of 2021, overall, the City of Culture was a success with substantial inward investment and community engagement. The city continues to reap the benefits of the initiative with new venues and an improved cityscape. The city was also a co-host for the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Together these events contributed to Coventry rebounding quickly post covid to see visitor numbers above those in 2019. The Council has a significant opportunity to work now with Destination Coventry, the West Midlands Growth Company and other partners to refresh the tourism strategy and to ensure that the structures are in place to sustain its strong performance.

The peer team was pleased to see that the One Coventry Plan has good brand recognition within the council and good political and officer buy-in. The Plan is intrinsically linked to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as both are aimed at securing the level of services and supporting the ambition needed to address the council's priorities. Partners are signed up to One Coventry, and they now want to be

more involved in the development and implementation of actions that emerge from the plan. **The next iteration of the plan needs to include a corporate delivery plan supported by consistently developed service plans.**

The council has a well-developed performance management framework, which takes a balanced scorecard approach focusing on outcomes, finance, workforce and quality. For 2023 complaints are down by 35% on their 2021 levels. Also, workforce grievances are down by 75% from their 2019 peak. In its latest One Coventry Plan performance report, for 2022/23, the council noted that 74% (42/57) of the directional metrics (excluding cannot say or not available) improved or stayed the same.

Coventry's children's services were rated 'good' following an inspection by Ofsted in July 2022 and the council is ambitious to achieve an "outstanding" rating. The council continues to address inequality in the city as evidenced by the continuing decline in the numbers of 16-17 year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET)- currently at 3.5% and the lowest bar one of the city's statistical near neighbours (this is also below the national median of 4.4%). This is positive but there are also areas where the council's performance is below that of councils nationally and near neighbours, for example in recycling. An LGInform headline report on Coventry's performance can be found [here](#).

The peer team was impressed with the level of innovative practice in the council aimed at addressing challenges and improving outcomes for communities.

Coventry's Local Job Shop is an example with over 1000 residents supported each year into employment since it opened in 2012.

The council is developing innovative approaches to addressing climate change, including the partnership with the Coventry based company E.ON. This strategic energy partnership, which the council and E.ON have described as being the first in the country, is for 15 years and will include 'the creation of a 30MW solar farm, bringing solar power into schools across the city and decarbonisation of a number of Council vehicles and depots'. The peer team heard that this partnership was also aimed at improving the local economy, providing jobs locally, strengthening local supply chains and skills and also addressing the cost-of-living crisis.

Residents told the peer team that they saw, and were benefiting from, a number of investments the council has made in the city, this included improvements to the

cityscape and more generally the impact and legacy of the City of Culture, particularly the arts offer.

The resident survey provides the council with rich insights which can and should be used with partners to tackle some of the city's biggest issues including inequality and resident engagement and satisfaction with services. The challenge is known. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2023) prepared by public health with input from internal and external partners said that '*Although the city is cohesive, people do not feel they have influence over local decisions*'. The resident survey shows that in 2022 only 40 per cent of residents were satisfied with the way that the council was running things; this compares with an LGA benchmarking figure of 63 per cent for the same period. The peer team heard from residents that they did not feel informed about, or able to engage with, the council in its decision making. The positive message from residents is that they really want to be involved and believe they have a lot to offer the council as it seeks to meet challenges and take advantage of opportunities to improve the city and its services. In its residents, the council has an enthusiastic and ambitious resource that it can tap into.

The Peer team heard about and were able to see at first hand the significant regeneration that is ongoing in the city. This includes, among a range of schemes, the Friargate scheme and the development of city centre south. At a strategic level the broad vision and ambition for the city is well articulated through the One Coventry Plan. There is an area action plan for the city centre dating from 2017, which is subject to review and there are masterplans for specific schemes. **However, partners told the Peer team that there was a need for a city centre masterplan, which we understand is in development, and that they wanted to work at pace to influence and support its progress.** The masterplan will be an opportunity to consider the city's social and economic development in the round to achieve cohesive, sustainable and impactful change.

The One Coventry Plan is the council's corporate strategy and it is supplemented by a range of strategies and plans both themed, including the transport strategy, the culture strategy and the climate change strategy, and departmental strategies and service plans. Many of these strategies link explicitly to the One Coventry Plan, such as the climate change strategy, but others do not (the transport strategy is an example). There are also potential gaps in the coverage of strategies, for example a

Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy and a capital and investment strategy (as required by Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)). The Peer team also heard that the council did not have a corporate asset management plan. These are seen as good practice by CIPFA and help align the management of assets with the council's strategic objectives for its communities. The Council should review the corporate strategy framework to ensure strategies are linked and gaps are identified to support One Coventry Plan.

Addressing climate change is one of the council's key priorities. The council is committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 (and if possible by 2041, which is the West Midlands Combined Authority target) and reducing carbon emissions to 55% of the 1990 level by 2030. The council has established an independent climate change board, with representatives from public, private and voluntary sector to oversee the council and the city's strategic direction and progress. The council expects that its strategic partnership with E.ON is a significant step in helping it to achieve its ambitions in reducing emissions and improving skills and job opportunities. The council has been successful in bidding for funding and is investing in green infrastructure including 5km of segregated cycle routes and a network of EV charging points (the largest outside London). The council has sought to accelerate action on domestic retrofit and has been successful in attracting around £30 million in funding to support all tenures. However, the peer team was told that the retrofit challenge was significant in a city where the housing stock is typically small and old and a lot of houses are not to modern efficiency standards. Data for 2021 shows that 20% of Coventry households live in low-income low energy efficiency households, compared to just 13% nationally. As the council's climate change strategy makes clear, the approach to addressing these challenges needs to be equitable and people centred.

4.2 Organisational and place leadership

The Peer team was impressed by the committed and cohesive leadership shown by the Leader and Cabinet who work together to deliver on cross cutting issues. There has been a good degree of stability in the Leadership which means that cabinet members have a good understanding of their portfolios. Members see their

leadership role as encompassing the council, the city and the wider West Midlands area.

The council is engaged in a number of partnerships within Coventry and across the West Midlands. These include: the One Coventry Partnership, with senior leaders from health bodies, the police, universities and the voluntary and community sector; and the Coventry and Warwickshire Anchor Alliance, which includes senior leaders from city, county and district and borough councils, two universities, three health trusts and the Integrated Care Board.

Partners told the peer team that the council was seen as a strong partner both strategically and operationally. Together partners are seeking to address challenging issues such as rough sleeping where multi-disciplinary teams are being deployed to support individuals with complex needs. The community and voluntary sector told the peer team that it was working well with the council on the ground but raised some concerns about the mechanisms for it to engage strategically with the council.

Coventry is a member of the West Midlands Combined Authority, which is a legal entity based on voluntary collaboration. The Peer team heard that the council and the work it does is really valued by the Combined Authority. And Coventry benefits from being a member of WMCA; for example, the city centre south regeneration scheme has received £113 million in funding from the WMCA-the biggest investment the Combined Authority has made into a single regeneration scheme.

The council benefits from strong political leadership. The Leader has been in position since May 2016 and the peer team were told that he is widely respected within the council and across city and West Midlands partnerships. The Cabinet is a strength with portfolio holders working together to deliver for communities while having a detailed understanding of the financial pressures. The council already plays a significant leadership role across the region but given its strengths it could do even more.

The Chief Executive (CEO) has been in post for around six months and there was universal praise from employees, members and partners for her visibility, engagement and leadership approach; the Peer team perceived that she has been immediately impactful.

The residents that the peer team met were concerned at the quality of the

communication from the council. There were two main elements to this: the timeliness and meaningfulness of engagement on key decisions; and a perception that the council's communications were not telling communities about all the good work that is going on. On this latter point, concern was also shared by front-line councillors. It was notable that during the peer team's visit external communications was raised again and again with some describing it as 'lacklustre'. There is desire for it to be more positive about Coventry. Residents also spoke about the accessibility of front-line councillors. It is clear that councillors do a lot to engage; 19 councillors hold surgeries; all make their contact details available; and they are all regularly in the community. If this is not perceived by residents it again possibly points to a communication issue. **The council should develop a refreshed external communication strategy.**

The council is committed to delivering on its equality and diversity ambitions and there are examples of good practice including the apprenticeship scheme operating in legal services. The council has collected equalities data across the workforce since 2017. Using December 2020 data the Workforce Equalities and Inclusion Strategy 2021-23 noted that 7 per cent of senior leaders were from a minority ethnic community. The Peer team was told that just 5 of the 85 members of the extended leadership team was from a minority ethnic community (around 6 per cent). It is worth noting again here that 45 per cent of Coventry's population is from a minority ethnic community. This is by no means an issue that is unique to Coventry. There is a general recognition that people from ethnic minority groups are under-represented at senior levels in local authorities (see this 2023 [report](#) from Solace). The Peer team heard from some employees that they felt there was still a ceiling on progression for employees from diverse backgrounds. More work needs to be done to realise progress on equality and diversity within the council. The leadership teams lack diversity and this could impact on the council's ability to meet the needs of its diverse communities. **The council should take further steps to improve diversity across the organisation at all levels.**

4.3 Governance and culture

The Peer team found governance to be taken seriously by the council and this was recognised in the latest external auditor's annual report published in June 2022. The

Council's governance arrangements are regularly reviewed and a statutory officer group is in place and meets regularly to discuss and address issues.

An area of governance that the council has addressed in recent years is that relating to the council's group of companies. Like many councils, Coventry has a number of subsidiaries and jointly owned companies. In November 2021, these were brought under the umbrella of Coventry Municipal Holdings Limited (the arrangements are set out in the council's Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23). The peer team notes that the external auditor said in its Annual Report for 2021/2022 (published in November 2023) that 'the revised structure is appropriate'. **The council's oversight of external company structures would benefit from continued external scrutiny and the Peer team understand that the council will review these arrangements in 2024. As part of that review the council should consider how it can ensure that elected Members have a good understanding of the complex arrangements for the governance of these companies.**

The Peer team found there to be an appropriate consideration of risk and there is a very high awareness of the main risks that the council faces, including finance, children's safeguarding and workforce stability, and temporary accommodation and homelessness. Member oversight of risk management comes from the Audit and Procurement Committee. The council knows the issues and it will be important to maintain a strong approach as it faces a challenging national and local environment.

Scrutiny is seen as a valuable function within the council. The council has five themed scrutiny boards and scrutiny coordination board. The chairs of the scrutiny Boards are drawn from the ruling party. Scrutiny is a key part of the decision and review processes of the council, feeding into the Cabinet and Full Council. The Peer team heard that it is seen as a place for good cross-party working that addresses pre and post decision-making and there is a good relationship between scrutiny and Cabinet. Call-in of decisions is not a significant feature of the scrutiny approach. Scrutiny also engages with the community. An example is the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board's engagement with representatives from the Ukrainian Association, the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, and Ukrainian guests and hosts, to talk about their experiences of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

The Peer team got a real sense that employees felt empowered and wanted to

deliver great things for the City and its communities. This is being supported by action to address what had been a siloed working culture within the council. Efforts to change the approach are coming from the top of the organisation. Measures brought in by the new Chief Executive include a flatter structure that disperses leadership, operating through a leadership board and supported by three themed boards. One of the aims of this approach is to bring more corporate checks and balances into the policy development and delivery processes and to enable a corporate view to be taken on key issues.

The council has a set of values which are included in the One Coventry Plan. These are: open and fair; nurture and develop; engage and empower; create and innovate; own and be accountable; value and respect. Although these seem a little unwieldy, they did appear to be understood and appreciated by employees. There was recognition from the Chief Executive that these values had to be owned and displayed at the top of the organisation and down through the chain of management.

The recent workforce survey results provide rich data for the council to act on.

There is a lot to be positive about, including that employees understand how their work contributes towards the success of the Council. However, employees are concerned that poor performance is not dealt with effectively. Employees have also expressed concern that it is not safe to speak up and challenge the way things are done at the Council. There is a need to mobilise the entirety of leadership to deliver on career progression, performance management and get buy-in from the whole organisation to its values and behaviours. Getting these aspects of the culture right will be an important achievement towards delivering better outcomes for communities. Employee networks have attracted over 1000 members and the Chairs and the networks are valued. **Further support for the employee networks would ensure that they are sustainable.**

The council welcomes external challenge and should continue this approach to support its further development and transformation.

4.4 Financial planning and management

In the view of the Peer team, the council's approach to financial management has been prudent, as evidenced by a healthy level of reserves, underpinned by robust financial management processes, but there is recognition that the financial situation

is getting tougher. No immediate concerns were expressed by external or internal auditors. The last Annual Auditor's report is for year 2021/22 and was published in November 2023. In this report the Auditor noted that the council has a history of stable financial and budgetary management and noted that its reserves position (as at March 2022) meant that it was in a good position to manage any future shortfalls in funding. Demand pressures have meant that the council's finances have been under greater pressure in 2022/23 and in the current year.

In 2022/23 the council reported an overspend of £6.7 million which was balanced by a contribution from legacy covid reserves. Overspends resulted from pressures in Adults and Children's services, compounded by the impact on domestic and commercial refuse collection of the HGV driver strike and strike mitigation costs.

In the current financial year 2023/24 the council continues to experience in-year overspends. Based on outturns for the first half of the year the council was projecting an overspend of £11.5 million. Overspends again reflect demand pressures in Adult and Children's services, but in addition pressures in the provision of temporary accommodation; this is a sector wide challenge. To manage in year overspends the council has put in place measures including: restrictions on non-essential spend; a recruitment panel to control the filling of vacancies; and greater scrutiny of higher risk areas. The council expects these measures to reduce the level of overspend, but it is likely that the council will need to balance its final position by a contribution from reserves.

The council reports that it has total reserves of £196 million as at March 2023; £122.5 million of General Fund reserves of which £112.2 million are earmarked. In the council's view, it is *'adequately provided for in terms of its reserves compared to its overall level of budget and better provided for than some other similar authorities'*. The council notes that *'the level of uncommitted General Fund Reserves [£10.3 million) provides a sufficient level of short-term resource to meet any other unforeseen eventualities'*.

The Peer team consider that the council's financial situation is well understood by the leadership team and Members. There has been regular engagement through the year on the financial position, and proposals to address challenges, in which scrutiny plays an active role.

The council is now consulting on its budget for 2024/25. It anticipates achieving technical and service savings of around £33 million (technical savings here mean those that can be achieved within the existing policy framework. Service savings are those that arise from new political decisions). £11.7 million of these savings relate to management actions to reduce the budget gap. Some of the biggest savings within this category include: £3.3 million from the Children's Placement review; £2.4 million from an increase in financial contributions from partners towards statutory delivery; and £1.95 million from maximising the use of Grants for service delivery to release core funding. The peer team note that financial monitoring reports to the council's Cabinet for 2023/24 indicate that some service areas are finding it difficult to meet savings targets and it will be important for the council to keep a tight grip on savings performance to ensure that the council can manage down its budget gaps in 2024/25 and subsequent years.

Within the proposed 2024/25 budget, £3 million of the expected service savings are due to come from transformation projects under the heading of the One Coventry Model. The council's Transformation programme is still at an early stage of development. Projects included within the 2024/25 savings bundle, including Coventry Connects, will require culture change and organisational restructuring across the council and between partners. There are two risks. The first is that the transformation programme does not deliver at the pace required to meet savings targets. The second, is that the transformation programmes themselves are diverted from longer-term aims to meet short term targets. The council will need to take a corporate view on how the transformation programme and MTFS relate to each other; to what extent is the transformation programme delivering savings for the current MTFS and/or to what extent is the MTFS helping to prioritise areas of focus within the transformation programme? **The council will need to continually review the profile of savings from the transformation programmes and consider when these should be included within the MTFS.**

The peer team is aware that the council is currently facing 180 equal pay claims all of which it is defending at an Employment Tribunal. As of January 2024, the council said it had not made any formal assessment of the costs of the claims and is clarifying the basis of the claims which it is defending. The council also said that it had not as of January 2024 set aside any funds to use for compensation payments in

the event it loses any of the equal pay claims. However, the council has noted in its corporate risk register that ‘meeting liabilities, including potential additional pension fund contributions, may necessitate further spending reductions in service budgets.’ As would be expected under these circumstances the budget consultation for 2024/25 and the estimated budgets for 2025/26 and 2026/27 have been prepared without reference to the potential costs of the equal pay claims. The peer team recognise that for the council to lose the equal pay claims, even with the current strong reserves position, would have a significant financial impact.

The current budget consultation includes estimates for 2025/26 and 2026/27. The projected deficits are £13.4 million and £14.5 million respectively. However, the Peer team was told that these estimates did not model potential changes to the city’s demographics, policy changes, or potential changes to inflation and interest rates. Any potential understatement of budget estimates for spend is an area of risk, especially for Coventry which is growing at a relatively fast pace. **In the view of the Peer team, the future financial modelling within the MTFs needs to consider the full impact and risk of key underlying assumptions e.g. demographic change, inflation, and policy on issues such as real living wage.**

The finance team is well regarded. The support it gives across the council on financial management is valued and should be used to drive financial accountability across the organisation’s leadership.

The Government is soon to consult on proposals to deal with the backlog in audits, which is expected to include a compulsory deadline of 30 September 2024 for all outstanding financial assessments. The proposal is that after this date council accounts that are outstanding will be qualified or disclaimed. Although this approach is broadly accepted by the sector as the only way forward, given the backlog in audits, it is unclear what the impact will be in individual cases. The peer team notes that Coventry has unaudited accounts for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23. In the view of Coventry’s external auditor, Grant Thornton, (Annual Report 2021-2022 published November 2023), the delays in the preparation of the financial statements could expose the council to financial risk. **The council should make swift progress to continue to sign off and publish these outstanding accounts.**

4.5 Capacity for Improvement

The peer team was struck by the commitment and ambition of elected Members and officers for further improvement in the way that the council is managed and the services it delivers to communities. The council builds on a track record of improvement as evidenced through the Children's services performance journey and the commitment to do better still.

The council should use the established performance framework to drive improvement and bring greater prioritisation and visibility to areas that require improvement. This work has begun. A new Safeguarding and Performance Board is being established to oversee performance reporting and management across the council. This Board will report to the Leadership Board and Cabinet. In the view of the peer team a key strength of this approach will be the ability to take a cross-organisational view on key issues and to strengthen the understanding of communities and their needs. To support this approach the council can develop further a more corporate and integrated business intelligence approach bringing together the rich insight the council already has.

The council is innovative. Examples include:

- Accessing funding for the development of a prototype Very Light Rail system with a city centre demonstrator route being constructed in Coventry later this year.
- Accessing funding from DfT to be the first all-electric bus city by 2025
- Establishing the largest network of electric vehicle charging points outside of London
- A training academy has been developed for local people to learn green skills and grow the local workforce to support the decarbonisation of 2000 social homes.
- The UK's first AI assisted recycling centre.

This desire to innovate, to compete to be first, is something that the council can be proud of.

The peer team saw and heard of existing best practice across the council which can be shared and deployed to support continued improvement in other areas. Through its transformation programme the council is removing internal overlaps and is seeking to make the best use of resources across partner organisations. The focus here is to ensure that the priorities set out in the One Coventry plan can be met.

Partners and residents are a key resource for the council's improvement journey and we heard that they are keen to be involved.

The peer team found a motivated and engaged workforce who want to be seen and heard and want their talents used. Grievances are in decline, but the council had a relatively high level of sickness absence at 13 days per FTE in the year to 31 December 2023. The council appeared to the Peer team to be very committed to addressing equalities issues both within the council and across the city. However, there is an opportunity to do more to demonstrate this commitment to the workforce. The Council's current Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy came to an end in 2023 and there is a real opportunity for the council to now renew its plans and commitment to EDI.

The peer team heard from employees that they are already feeling stretched. The transformation programme will want to draw on the talents of existing employees, but this will need to be balanced with the 'business as usual' (BAU) pressures that arise from increasing demand and scarce resources. A focus on, and consistent approach to, workforce planning will be important in managing these tensions.

There is evidence of an increased focus and improved performance on meeting high standards of customer service, which the council must maintain as it transforms. In December 2023 the council met, for the first time, its target for the percentage of abandoned calls, at 5 per cent, although the average for the year remained at 10 per cent.

Member training is delivered within the context of the One Coventry Elected Members Training and Development Strategy. Take up of training by Members has been low. The Peer team heard a number of reasons why this might be the case, including time pressures, but also that the mandatory aspect of some training was not being enforced (most of these training programmes are available through the Council's online learning portal). The Peer team also heard that Members would value training more if it was accredited. **The peer team heard that Members are keen to engage with opportunities for training and development and the council should review barriers to take up of the current offer and how these can be addressed.**

4.6 Transformation

There is a genuine recognition across the council of the need for transformation and a real ambition to 'save, do more, do better'. The approach being taken to transformation is owned by senior leadership and this will be invaluable to its future success. The transformation programme as outlined by the council will deliver savings but the key intention is to modernise the delivery of public services for the benefit of communities within the city. There are a number of aspects to the corporate transformation programme including: changes to the way the council interacts with residents (Coventry Connects); a review of advice services; and the development of integrated place-based service hubs. These corporate programmes build on and support the transformation that is taking place in individual service areas including adult and children's services.

There is real innovation emerging, for example within Coventry Connects, the aim of which is to improve the way the council engages with residents and the way it uses data to improve services by considering the use of technology and integrating processes. The agile and iterative approach is enabling some early examples of what the overall programme could achieve. The Peer team heard about the success of the approach in dealing with and reducing complaints (from a peak in June 2023 complaints have declined month on month) and the team's engagement with the private sector to improve digital connectivity in the community.

However, in general, the corporate Transformation programme is at an early stage and rapid engagement and mobilisation of the right skills, capacity and capability needed to deliver will be critical, for example the full engagement of HR.


Part of the purpose of the transformation programme is to generate savings, but given the programme is at an early stage, the timing of financial and non-financial returns on investment are yet to be fully clarified. The peer team heard a number of estimates for the savings from transformation. The budget consultation report builds in savings of £3 million for 2024/25 (increasing to £4 million for 2025/26 from the One Coventry Delivery Model which is one element of the transformation programme). The peer team was told that other savings from transformation were included in the £32.7 million budget savings for 2024/25 that the council is consulting on from December 2023 to February 2024, particularly those elements of service change that focus on prevention and managing demand; these include savings to be achieved

through the children's placement review, and the improving lives programme. The council is aware of the risks that savings may not materialise at the speed and scale required and have said that there are contingency plans in place to mitigate these risks. If not mitigated, there is the risk that overspends could arise which could lead to a further call on the council's reserves.

The council is keen to resource the transformation programme without incurring additional costs. To do this it is diverting and coordinating existing capacity and establishing a 'Transformation Squad'. This approach has advantages and using talent from across the council provides development opportunities for employees. However, it is not clear whether all of the skills and expertise required to deliver on complex transformation programmes are held within the council currently. The peer team heard from employees that capacity is a current constraint and this will also need to be taken into account and transformation projects prioritised if the programme is to be delivered within existing resources. **In the view of the peer team there could be cases, for example, in the technical aspects of improving the customer experience where the council should not rule out the use of specialist external support, as and when this is needed.** The peer team also heard that partners are keen to support the council in its transformation of services to communities and it should consider how to take up this offer.

Transformation requires a solid understanding of communities; their service needs; and how communities want these services delivered. Data to support transformation will be held across the council and with partners. At the same time the council can draw on benchmarking data to assess capacity for value for money improvements. The peer team did not get an opportunity to consider in depth the sources of data and insights and how these are being used to underpin the transformation programme, but at this early stage of the programme, using all available insight and benchmarking on value for money of service delivery could accelerate identification of benefits and programme design and we would urge the council to take every opportunity to parcel data together to give a system wide analysis.

5 Next steps



It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a progress review within twelve months of the CPC, which provides space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the recommendations from this report.

In the meantime, Helen Murray, Principal Adviser for the West Midlands, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Helen is available to discuss any further support the council requires.

helen.murray@local.gov.uk.

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LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Appendix B: Council Response to Peer Team Recommendations – May 2024

No.	Peer Team Recommendations	Council Response
1.	<p>City Centre masterplan The Council should continue to work at pace to develop a city centre masterplan with the support and involvement of partners.</p>	<p>In February 2024 we began work on our City Centre Vision 2050 which will set out our ambitions for the city centre including high level masterplanning and setting out a development framework for private investment in the city centre. This will be completed in July 2024 – a group of core partner organisations will help guide this work with wider public engagement to follow.</p> <p>One of the key drivers for the City Centre Vision 2050 is how Coventry city centre needs to change in order better serve communities – both people living in or close to the city centre and people travelling into the city centre for work, shopping or leisure. Work is currently underway to consider this, and a number of other drivers – Economy, Mobility, Digital, Open Space, Sustainability and Culture.</p> <p>Another related piece of work is a more focused look at how a 50 acre area on the northern edge of the city centre could accommodate physical regeneration and development and the delivery of new homes whilst making better use of cultural and heritage assets, green space and public realm. This was completed in March 2024 and informs the wider City Centre Vision and we are now looking at how to begin delivery of key sites in this area.</p>

2.	<p>One Coventry Plan The next iteration of the One Coventry plan needs to include a corporate delivery plan supported by consistently developed service plans and should include a review of the corporate strategy framework to ensure strategies are linked and gaps are identified.</p>	<p>New governance arrangements have been implemented with responsibility for oversight and enabling delivery, of key organisational strategies and plans, aligned to the Council's One Coventry Plan vision and priorities. Three new Strategic Boards have been established to support the Leadership Board with a more explicit focus on delivering our One Coventry priorities and taking forward work to ensure we are as efficient and effective as possible.</p> <p>This new governance and performance approach will enable the Council to have oversight of all Council activity and ensure necessary corporate and service delivery plans are in place. This will include the identification of any gaps and response required to address this. For example, work is in progress to respond to develop an asset strategy.</p> <p>An important role of the new governance structure will be to identify synergies and interdependencies across services areas. These relationships can then be managed to ensure the maximum benefits and impact are delivered, in line with One Coventry Plan objectives.</p>
3.	<p>Employees The Council has rich data from the recent staff survey and should develop actions to address the issues it highlights. A key element of this would be ensuring there is further support for the staff networks.</p>	<p>An action plan is currently being developed in response to the workforce survey and will be available in September 2024.</p> <p>In addition to this and as part of our on-going commitment to being an inclusive employer we will ensure continued growth and development of our employee networks. As part of this commitment the Council has commissioned 'Reboot' an external organisation who will provide training for our Network Chairs and Co-chairs in September 2024 in order to support their growth and development.</p>
4.	<p>Medium Term Financial Strategy Future financial modelling within the MTFs should</p>	<p>The MTFs is reviewed on an annual basis. This will include a review of wider contextual data, including population and demand projections, to support the medium-term financial planning assumptions of the Council. Specific models are already used in key areas of financial risk such as Adult Social Care, Childrens Social Care and</p>

	consider the full impact and risk of key underlying assumptions e.g. demographic change, inflation, and policy on issues such as real living wage.	Housing to understand and plan for future impact. These models will be reviewed again as part of the next iteration including whether further evidenced based assumptions can be used.
5.	Financial accounts The Council should make swift progress to sign off and publish their outstanding financial accounts.	19/20 Statement of Account (SoA) was approved and published in October 2023. The 20/21 SoA has now been produced and published. The Government have consulted on indicative backstop dates for both prior years' SoAs (September 2024), and the current year SoA (May 2025). The outcome of the consultation is unknown, however the Council are in discussion with its external auditor, Grant Thornton, to ensure there is an agreed plan which aims to achieve both of these.
6.	Transformation programme The transformation programme is at a very early stage of development, and the Council should focus on rapid engagement and mobilisation of the right skills, capacity and capability needed to deliver.	<p>A One Coventry Transformation Board is meeting on a monthly basis to oversee and enable delivery of the Council's Transformation Plan. The role of the Board includes understanding and determining delivery resource requirements and an ongoing responsibility for the One Coventry Transformation Board will be to ensure that sufficient resources are available to deliver what is required.</p> <p>A Transformation delivery resource plan is being developed to identify the resources required to effectively deliver the One Coventry Transformation Plan. This will focus on making best use of existing resources in the first instance but will also identify any gaps in capability or capacity where there may be a requirement to consider commissioning more specialist resource/support for a limited period. This will only be considered where all options to make use of internal capacity have been exhausted or where there is a clear cost benefit (e.g. pace of delivery).</p> <p>The OneCov Squad initiative will also provide support in delivering the Council's transformation ambitions whilst also providing opportunities for employees to develop their skills. A number of Council officers are being matched with projects/initiatives and</p>

		will be working with across a range of services to help to deliver the One Coventry Transformation Plan.
7.	<p>Communications The Council should develop a refreshed external communication strategy.</p>	A refreshed internal and external communications strategy has been researched, prepared and approved with Leadership Board for Cabinet consideration. Approval with Cabinet will be sought in May 2024, with several key actions including strategic key themes for communications, a bigger focus on value for money communications to residents, and using our digital channels more proactively.
8.	<p>Performance management The Council should use the established performance framework to drive improvement and bring greater prioritisation and visibility to areas that require improvement.</p>	<p>A new governance model for Performance has been established including the creation of a Safeguarding and Performance Board, which now meets on a monthly basis. This is supported by a cross-organisation performance Working Group.</p> <p>A review of Data and Performance is underway and is focusing on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A review of corporate performance measures - The creation of new performance reporting products - Maximising the use of corporate data tools - Performance workforce models - Establishing a new performance culture
9.	<p>Member training Members are keen to engage with opportunities for training and development and the Council should review barriers to take up of the current offer and how these can be addressed.</p>	As part of its review of the 2023/24 programme and preparation for next year, the Member Training Advisory Panel is carrying out a survey of Members to identify barriers. The Ethics Committee reviewed the 2023/24 Members Training and Development Programme at their meeting on 21 March when they considered ways in which to increase Members' participation in training and development and to address barriers experienced in accessing the programme. The outcomes from both will be built into their respective work programmes and planning for 2024/25. Members survey will be recirculated to encourage additional responses.

10.	<p>Workforce Diversity The Council should take further steps to improve diversity across the organisation at all levels.</p>	<p>A new Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2025 – 2027 is being written and will cover all 9 protected characteristics. The focus of the new strategy will include both workforce and service delivery D&I actions. In addition to the work that we are delivering on Diversity & Inclusion, we are also taking a pro-active approach in tackling racial inequality across the organisation.</p> <p>We have a new Executive Sponsor for Race and are in the process of producing our first race equality action plan which will be launched in the latter part of 2024.</p>
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Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Date: 10th June 2024

Subject: Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-24

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To present the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2023-24 to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee and recommend that it be submitted to Council.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended to:
 - 1) Accept the content of the draft report at Appendix 1
 - 2) Recommend that Council consider the Scrutiny Annual Report at its next available meeting

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 The Constitution requires that Scrutiny report annually to inform Council of its work. The draft report for 2023-24 can be found at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 If approved, the report will be submitted to the next Council meeting.

Gennie Holmes
Scrutiny Co-ordinator
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024 7697 1857

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Coventry City Council

Scrutiny Annual Report to Council 2023-24

To be considered at the City Council meeting
on the 9 July, 2024

Introduction by Cllr Naeem Akhtar, Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Welcome to the Scrutiny Annual Report for the municipal year 2023-24. It contains a few highlights from the year, including cross-cutting themes, as well as work by the individual boards.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Councillor Ruane for his work chairing the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board and also Councillor Thay in his role as Deputy Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee during 2023-24

This year we welcome Councillor Jobbar as chair of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board, and Councillor Kelly as Deputy Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee.

Scrutiny is an important part of the Council's democratic structure which is led by non-executive Councillors. It works to the common aim of improving services for the local community and is involved in the following:

Policy review and development: Helping to shape the way public services are delivered.
Scrutinising decisions of the executive: Is the right action being taken? Are services working effectively?

External scrutiny: Examining services that impact upon the local community, such as health and policing.

Scrutiny uses evidence to make recommendations to the Cabinet to request change; it does not make decisions.

The focus for scrutiny in 2024-25 will continue to be how we work with partners to sustain and improve services, particularly within the current economic and financial situation. Learning from the LGA Peer Review and delivery of The One Coventry Plan will be central to this work, but other areas such as the Climate Change Strategy will all be considered by scrutiny this year.

Get involved:

- Email the Scrutiny Chairs and Team via scrutiny@coventry.gov.uk
- Follow us on twitter @covscrutiny
- Find meeting dates and agendas here: [Coventry City Council Meeting Papers](#)

Scrutiny 2023-24



Scrutiny Co-ordination (SCRUCO)



Chair: Cllr N Akhtar
Deputy: Cllr R Thay

- Scrutiny Coordination
- Policy and Leadership
- Policing and Equalities
- Designated Crime and Disorder Board

Finance & Corporate Services (1)	Education & Children's Services (2)	Business, Economy & Enterprise (3)	Communities & Neighbourhoods (4)	Health and Social Care (5)
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Cllr E Ruane

- Strategic Finance
- Council Resources
- New Ways of Working



Cllr CE Thomas

- Early Help
- Children & Young People's Social Care
- Schools
- Adult, Higher & Further Education



Cllr R Singh

- Business, Enterprise & Employment
- Inward Investment
- Transportation
- Climate change & sustainability



Cllr M Ali

- Public Services
- Social Enterprise Strategy
- Community & Third Sector
- Homelessness
- Housing
- Arts & Heritage



Cllr C Miks

- Health
- Adult Social Care
- Health Inequalities
- Sport



Cross Cutting Scrutiny Themes 2023-24

Climate Change

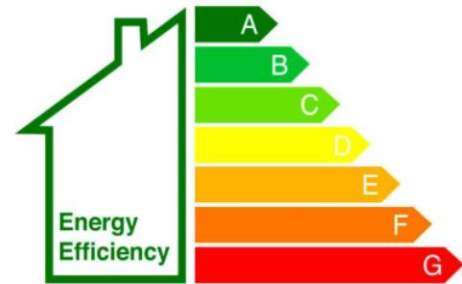
Scrutiny has continued to maintain a focus on Climate Change and work the Council is undertaking to address the impact of climate change. Scruco considered the responses to the engagement on the Climate Change Strategy at their meeting on the 20th September 2023. Members asked detailed questions about the engagement process and which groups has been involved. The Committee requested that their comments be considered as part of the consultation process, as well as identifying better ways to engage young people including through schools and social media.

As well as the overarching Climate Change Strategy, Scrutiny have considered several items which contribute to its aims and objectives. Scruco considered an item looking in detail at the Strategic Energy Partnership with EON, The Committee asked questions and received responses specifically on the procurement process and any benefits or risks associated with the venture and its ability to provide the expertise and investment to help support the delivery of the Council's Climate Change Strategy and the One Coventry Plan. The committee also requested regular updates on progress as well as the opportunity to pre-scrutinise any related Cabinet Reports.



Other Boards also considered items that will support achieving the outcomes of the Climate Change Strategy. The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received an update on the Local Air Quality Action Plan, including current monitoring of CO2 levels and progress on delivery of cycle lanes and Liveable Neighbourhood projects. The Board also considered an item on the progress on installing charging points for electric vehicles. Members asked questions regarding objections from residents to installations and requested that officers ensure that the wording in the consultation process is revised to make the process clear when an objection is received requesting removal of an EV charging point. The Board also requested further updates on progress.

At another of their meetings, the Business, Enterprise and Economy Scrutiny Board (3) considered an item on an update to the Domestic Retrofit programme. The Board questioned officers and the Cabinet Member on the eligibility criteria and affordability, how information about the scheme was publicised, with Members asking for information about the scheme so they could promote it with residents, as well as use of local media outlets. Members were also interested in the training programme and ensuring that the city had the skills to call on to deliver the programme.



The Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) also considered items that contribute to delivering the Climate Change Strategy, one of which was the School Streets programme. The board had already received a briefing on the project to reduce traffic and encourage active travel around schools, the previous year and had requested a progress update on the newer schemes. The board asked questions of officers and the Cabinet Member on areas such as enforcement powers and the involvement of the police, how the specific schools had been identified as well as ensuring that delivery vehicles and sat-navs would pick up the traffic restriction information. The Board recommended to the Cabinet Member that other measures should be explored such as traffic management for the schools that had not been included in the current school streets programme.

It is planned that scrutiny will consider the draft Climate Change Strategy as part of the 2024-25 work programme.

Partnership Working

Many of the Boards this year scrutinised the work of external partners and how effectively the Council work to deliver the One Coventry Plan priorities alongside those partners. Scrutiny has specific powers to scrutinise health and community safety partners but can invite any organisation that affects the residents of Coventry to attend a scrutiny meeting.

During 2023-24 a wide range of partners contributed to discussions about services in Coventry. These included voluntary organisations such as the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre and Ukrainian Society to talk about the Homes for Ukraine scheme, as well as other public sector organisations such as the Integrated Care Board to talk about the Integrated Health and Care Delivery Plan for Coventry and Warwickshire.

Other partners who have engaged this year are Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust (CWPT) particularly on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services at a joint meeting of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) and the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5). Compass, as a provider of services for children and young people also contributed to this meeting.

UHCW presented on Improving Lives, as well as A&E waiting times at the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5). More information about how the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board has worked with partners can be found in the section below.

The Business, Enterprise and Economy Scrutiny Board (3) also invited external partners to answer questions for an item on buses. There were representatives from both National express and Stagecoach as well as Transport for West Midlands. The Board were keen to examine proposals for future delivery of bus services in the region, including bus franchising. The Board had a further item at their meeting in January and have asked to scrutinise the final report to the Mayor for the West Midlands before any decision is made on future models of bus delivery.

Overall, scrutiny considered twenty-one items that included external delivery partners, which will be a continued theme throughout the coming year as part of the One Coventry approach. Scrucro also considered the Annual Reports of the Council subsidiaries, which are arms-length companies of the Council.

Scrutiny Board Highlights 2023-24

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Community Safety

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee considered several items that focused on Community Safety and the work of the Police. There were three items that covered the Community Safety portfolio of the Board, which included the Coventry Community Safety Plan, the Serious Violence Duty, and the Local Policing update in February. There was also a representative from the police when the committee considered an item on Parking and Road Safety.

Following an item on the Coventry Community Safety Plan in July, the committee recommended that steps were taken to increase safety in the city centre, which led to the committee arranging an additional meeting to provide pre-scrutiny of the Cabinet Report on amendments to the city centre PSPO to restrict bikes and e-vehicles. The committee supported the recommendations in principle but expressed concern about enforcement. The committee requested a further report on progress on the implementation of the city centre PSPO, as well as recommending that the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities write to the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner

requesting a higher policing presence in the city centre and for the police to use their powers to seize illegal e-vehicles.

At their meeting in November the Committee also welcomed a report on the implementation of the Council's Serious Violence Duty. This was led in partnership with Public Health, Education, Community Safety, NHS partners, and the Police. The Committee heard more details about the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence. Members requested a further update in 6 months-time as well as referring an item on school exclusions to the Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) for further scrutiny.

The Committee had also requested an update on the effectiveness of the local policing model which they had received a report on the previous year. The Committee received a presentation which covered a wide aspect of the policing model including KPI's and performance measures, the outcome of the HMIC Review of the West Midlands Police, responding and calls and response times to incidents, as well as priorities and key activities.

Members requested contact details of local lead police officers for their communities, to ensure strong links between the police and residents, which were circulated.

Complaints Policy and Strategy Task and Finish Group

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman included the Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee in their annual review letter for the first time in July 2023. As a result of this the Committee agreed to establish a task and finish group at their meeting on the 20th September to update and refresh the Complaints Policy and Procedure. The task and finish group met three times and identified three recommendations for the Cabinet Member which were accepted. The recommendations were a. Update the Complaints Policy and Process as suggested by the T&F Group (Appendix A)
b. Identify timescales for implementation of the electronic complaints system to deal with complaints and c. Consider future strategic planning opportunities including the budgetary implications for savings from an alternative CRM system.

Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1)

Consultation on Spending, Saving and Council Tax Proposals for 2024/25



On the 11th January 2024, the Board contributed their comments to the City Council's public consultation on revenue spending and savings proposals for 2024/25 and future financial years. In noting the content of the briefing note and following the discussion, the board identified issues to consider including standardising residents' parking permit fees,

assessing the impact of free parking at War Memorial Park, clarifying inflation narratives, and analysing the impact of an overnight streetlight switch-off. Officers agreed to address outstanding requests for residents' parking schemes and provide responses to the points raised. A briefing note containing their comments around the budget consultation was shared with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources.

Delivering Value for Money in Placement Costs

The Board considered an item outlining the corporate controls in place to secure value for money when providing support to vulnerable residents. The Board were given details of the corporate controls in place to secure the best value in securing support for vulnerable residents and the issues faced across the services in Adult Social Care, Housing, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Home to School Travel Assistance in securing placements.

Members asked questions of officers and the Cabinet Member on areas such as the number of Adult Social Care service users and the total cost, percentage markup of profit for providers, reasons for the increase in demand, location of providers, City Council engagement with highest-cost housing placements, average length of stay for an individual and checks to ensure annual reviews take place for SEND package funding.

In respect of the home-to-school travel assistance package funding, concerns were raised regarding costs and providers' contractual obligations, for instance, the costs incurred when a child is absent from school and the service not used. It was noted that a review was currently underway on this funding and the Board requested that a further report on the Home to School Travel Assistance be brought back to the Board at the earliest opportunity.

Home to School Taxi

Following on from the Board's request for a further update on the Home to School Taxi service, a background on the establishment and use of the home-to-school taxi service and an update of its review were shared with the board on the 21st of March 2024.

The Board questioned officers and the Cabinet Member about the use of taxi service fares, concerns about the current process not providing the best value for money, and the percentage of parents transporting their children to school.

Following discussion, the Board agreed to further explore the issues raised, and establish a Task and Finish Group to ensure that the best value was being achieved and officers agreed to provide the information requested by Members.

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Cost of Placements

Following concerns raised by Members about the impact the high cost of children's placements was having on the Council budget, the Board requested an in-depth item on the issue. The Board received a copy of the recent Residential Children's Home Strategy which provided information about steps being taken to reduce reliance on external providers of children's placements, as well as position paper on the current situation. The Board were also able to take a private report on the details of the top 10 most expensive placements. This enabled Members to get a really comprehensive understanding of the complexities of meeting some children's needs and the options there are to source alternative provision. As a result of the item the Board requested a further update to track progress on implementing the strategy and whether there had been a reduction in costs. Members were also keen to visit the purpose build residential accommodation once complete.

Holiday Activities Fund



The Board have continued to receive updates on the delivery of the Holiday Activities Fund and this year they were able to watch a video providing positive feedback from children, families and staff who had benefited from the programme. The Board requested a formal thank you to the Cabinet Member for work done on the programme, as well as expressing concern about future funding for the scheme, as well as other assistance for families experiencing poverty as part of the cost-of-living crisis.

The Board also asked that the video and positive feedback was shared widely with governing bodies of those schools involved, as well as asking that activities were culturally appropriate for all communities across the city. The Board will continue to receive updates on the programme during 2024-25.

Business, Economy, and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)

Support for Businesses and the Work of Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub



On March 6th, 2024, the Board considered a report on the support Coventry City Council had been giving to businesses during the 2023/24 financial year, and how the Authority had worked alongside local business support partners including Coventry and Warwickshire (CW) Growth Hub to ensure that needs and opportunities facing Coventry businesses and the local economy were being as effectively addressed as possible.

The report outlined the support provided to businesses during the 2023/24 financial year and highlighted the Council's work on collaboration with local business support partners, including the Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub, to address the needs and opportunities of Coventry businesses and the local economy. Key areas of focus discussed between members and officers included specific support for SMEs, advice on energy bills, eligibility criteria for business support, data collection on business numbers, marketing promotion, further information to members on Business Support Services, an emphasis on innovation and university collaboration, and foreign investment figures indicating its attractiveness for investment.

Members requested the Council's Business Support Services consider all options for marketing the support on offer, to ensure promotion through various channels to maximise inclusion.

2024 Tourism Strategy and Destination Management Organisation (DMO) Model

On April 17, 2024, a presentation and briefing note were shared with the Board regarding the progress in establishing Destination Coventry as a Sustainable Destination Management Organisation (DMO) for the city. The Board discussed the increase in domestic visitor numbers, the need for collaborative working, the DMO's commitment to working as a brand and destination, the inclusion of Warwickshire, £107,000 secured from local private sector membership, and the DMO's support to businesses through the post-COVID 'Step back into hospitality' scheme. The DMO also assisted businesses in securing business or signposting them to secure business for their venues. The Board discussed the next 12 months, deciding on the best markets and how to bring in new business, targeting international events, and engaging with the city's universities. Members recommended that when the DMO Board is reviewed, consideration be taken to a mix of private and public sector representatives on the board, including the city's universities when the configuration takes place.



Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)

Local Plan Review

The Council's Local Plan is in the process of being reviewed and the Board had requested to be able to comment and have input in the consultation. Members initially had an informal briefing on the content of the consultation documents, before discussing the proposals at a formal meeting on 21st September. The Board robustly questioned the Cabinet Member and officers. There were six specific points that the Board wanted to be raised and included in the consultation response, which has been sent to officers. The Board also asked that all Members be made aware of other opportunities to contribute to the consultation.

Review of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Additional Licensing Scheme 2023

The Council is required to review its additional licensing scheme periodically, so the Board scrutinised the report that went to Cabinet reporting on the findings of the review. The Board were supportive of the Licensing Scheme in its current format and requested that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities considers that work to renew the scheme starts as soon as possible.

Members asked questions of the officers focussing on how landlords were engaged with the scheme and what work was being done to support landlords to improve properties, as well as share information and good practice.

Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5)

West Midlands Ambulance Service



NHS
**West Midlands
Ambulance Service**
University NHS Foundation Trust



WMFS
**West Midlands
Fire Service**

On the 19th of July 2023, the Board reviewed a presentation by the Interim Director of Nursing and the Strategy & Engagement Director. The information covered Coventry and Warwickshire, including University Hospitals, South Warwickshire Foundation Trust, and George Elliot Hospital. The board discussed regional incidents, transport rates, hospital handover delays, performance, staff recruitment, staff wellbeing, NHS investment in emergency community response, ambulance usage, response prioritization, service gaps, in-house call answering services, staff abuse, demand reduction, ambulance waiting times, handover delays, recruitment challenges, and the use of drones in hazardous areas. The board expressed gratitude for the service's work, gave support in their request for an independent review of the service and thanked them for their efforts. The Board also gave recommendations to health partners, that work be undertaken to enable the West Midlands Ambulance Service to gain access to social prescribing.

During the same meeting, the Board heard a presentation from the Group Commander of the Coventry & Solihull Command, West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) about their response to the pandemic, addressing health inequalities, the services provided by WMFS, Key Stage 2 education, and future plans. Following the presentation, members asked questions and received information from officers on various topics, including the back home safe and well service, response to accidents involving vulnerable individuals, triage based on vulnerability, provision of free smoke alarms, fire awareness workshops in communities, periodic risk reviews, evaluations of safe and well programs, statutory school curriculum, full-time staffing of firefighters, diversity initiatives, and the Vanguard project. The Chair expressed gratitude to the West Midlands Fire Service for their work in the community.

Adult Safeguarding Annual Report

The Board considered a briefing note and presentation which provided an overview of Coventry Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report 2022-23. The Coventry Safeguarding Adults Board (CSAB) is a partnership of organisations working to prevent and end abuse of adults with care and support needs in Coventry. The report, considered by the Board, covered various forms of neglect, self-neglect, and referral activities into social care. The CSAB has provided guidance and training to informal carers, partnered with GPs, and worked closely with community navigators.

Members requested improvements to the report, including descriptions of different types of abuse, a glossary of terms, a more easy-read report style, clarity and detail improvements to tables, and circulation of details of safe and well checks by the Fire Service.

Healthwatch Coventry

The Board reviewed Healthwatch Coventry's work to improve health and care, including barriers to access and health inequality for Coventry. Healthwatch is an independent health and social care champion, involving local people in decision-making and setting priorities. The Board discussed findings with officers from care homes, maternity care for asylum seekers and newly arrived women, and increased funding for local dentistry services. Healthwatch Coventry prioritised inequalities and focused on areas of deprivation for the outreach community.



The Chair requested the Chief Officer pass on congratulations to the Healthwatch Board for their work, and the Board requested that the findings from Healthwatch Coventry care home visits be shared with care homes across the city.

Agenda Item 6

SCRUCO Work Programme 2024-25

Last updated 31st May 2024

Please see page 2 onwards for background to items

10th June 2024
LGA Peer Review Findings Draft Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-24
26th June 2024
Serious Violence Duty Community Safety Plan 2024-27 (Cabinet Report)
21st August 24 (If required)
City Centre PSPO Monitoring City-wide PSPO Consultation Climate Change Strategy (Cabinet Report)
18th September 24
Domestic Abuse
23rd October 2024
20th November 2024
18th December 2024
Coventry Cultural Strategy – progress report
29th January 2025
Peer Review Progress Update
5th March 2025
9th April 2025
2024-25
CCC Transformation Programme Health Inequalities and Marmot Adaption and Resilience Plan Cost of Living and Poverty Planning Performance Fly-tipping Prosecutions (Cabinet Report) Strategic Energy Partnership Projects The Local Plan External Partnerships Offender Management Shareholders Reports

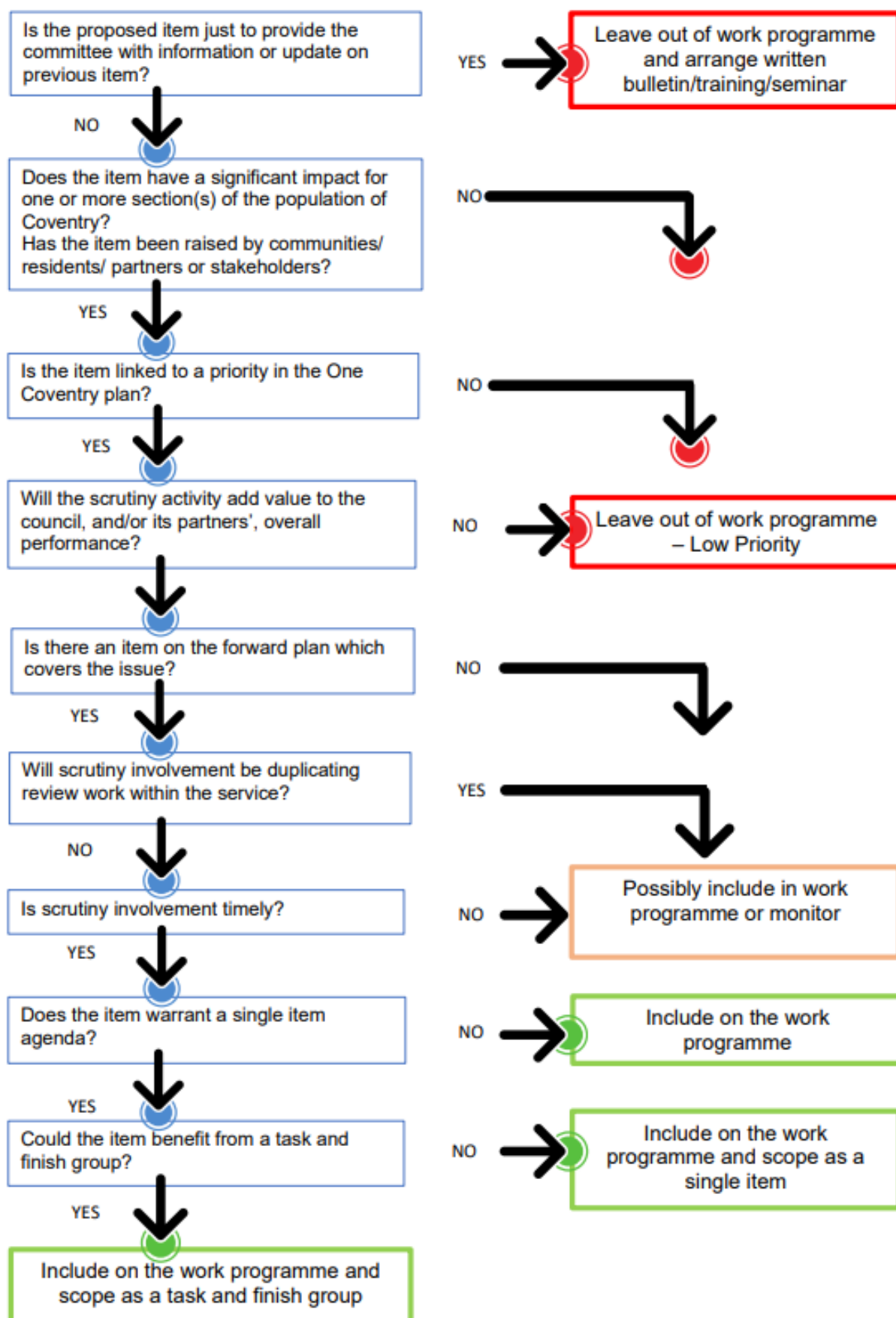
Date	Title	Detail	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer
10th June 2024	LGA Peer Review Findings	Following a visit by a peer review team in January 2024 Scrucoco will consider the recommendations and actions	Vanessa Millar / Michelle McGinty Cllr Duggins
	Draft Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-24	To consider the draft report before it is presented to Council	
26th June 2024	Serious Violence Duty	At their meeting in November 2023 the Committee requested a 6-month progress update, including the measurables identified by the Police and Crime Board to measure success. Check whether guidance has been sent to schools. Including the inspection report on tackling the risk of serious youth violence and criminal exploitation	Cllr AS Khan Allison Duggal Caroline Ryder Neil Macdonald WMP
	Community Safety Plan 2024-27 (Cabinet Report)		Joy Adams
21st August 24 (If required)	City Centre PSPO Monitoring	As requested, Scrucoco will consider progress on implementation of the new PSPO agreed at Cabinet 13 th June 2023	Liam Nagle Cllr AS Khan
	City-wide PSPO Consultation	Summary of findings from the Public Consultation and opportunity for members to be part of the consultation process which will form part of the final report to Cabinet.	Joy Adams Cllr AS Khan
	Climate Change Strategy (Cabinet Report)		
18th September 24	Domestic Abuse	A regular update item on the progress of delivery on the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy	Jayne Ross Cllr AS Khan Cllr P Akhtar
23rd October 2024			
20th November 2024			

SCRUCO Work Programme 2024-25

Date	Title	Detail	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer
18th December 2024	Coventry Cultural Strategy – progress report	Following their meeting on the 20 th December 2023, the committee requested a further update on progress in delivering the Cultural Works model, including communication with Members.	David Nuttall Cllr Welsh
29th January 2025	Peer Review Progress Update	12-month progress review report	
5th March 2025			
9th April 2025			
2024-25	CCC Transformation Programme	To review the impact of the CCC Transformation Programme and funding associated with it.	Cllr Duggins Kirston Nelson
	Health Inequalities and Marmot	To look at what the Council is doing to address health inequalities and to monitor progress OCP Indicators for Male/Female Life expectancy	Allison Duggal Cllr Caan
	Adaption and Resilience Plan	To consider what the Council is doing to protect the city from the impact of climate change, including partners involved in the delivery and represented on the Climate Change Board	Cllr O’Boyle Colin Knight Rhian Palmer Bret Willers
	Cost of Living and Poverty	To update on support offered to low -income families as well as the OCP indicator of % of children living in relatively low-income families.	Kirston Nelson Cllr Duggins
	Planning Performance	Development Management function - overall performance against Government targets. Annual monitoring report (AMR).	Cllr Welsh, Rob Back
	Fly-tipping Prosecutions (Cabinet Report)	To consider increasing the maximum fine that can be issued for fly-tipping	Cllr AS Khan Sarah Elliot

Date	Title	Detail	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer
	Strategic Energy Partnership Projects	Further from 11 th of March SB meeting to refer future Cabinet Reports for projects that reach Gateway 4 (Detailed Business Case) to the relevant Scrutiny Board. And regular updates from the SEP (a) Data on the criteria and priority of retrofitting homes (b) Data on EPC ratings (including privately owned properties) (c) Possibility of installation of charging points for mobility scooters (d) Possibility of generating energy from Coventry's rivers. (e) How value for money is ensured at each stage of the process (f) Income generation from EV charging (noted that this would be considered by Scrutiny Board 3) (g) Future investment from Severn Trent in water quality	Cllr O'Boyle Rhian Palmer
	The Local Plan		
	External Partnerships		
	Offender Management	Following an item on Local Policing Update at their meeting 21 st February 24 the committee agreed to consider a further item on Offender Management	
	Shareholders Reports	The Board asks that future reports are shared after the audited accounts are published.	Andrew Walster Cllr G Duggins

Work Programme Decision Flow Chart



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