

Scrutiny Annual Report to Council

2012/2013

To be considered at the City Council meeting
25th June 2013

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Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/2013

Introduction by Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Introduction by Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

In May 2013, the Council appointed me as the new Chair of the Scrutiny Coordination Committee. After a year spent as Chair of the Wellness, Liveability and Public Health Scrutiny Board, I am looking forward to the opportunity to ensure that Scrutiny continues to make a positive contribution to the challenging decisions facing the council.

Scrutiny in Coventry has continued to develop year by year. During 2012/13, scrutiny boards received evidence at their meetings from a wider range of witnesses than before. This included housing developers, foster carers, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Cabinet Members from other Local Authorities, NHS partners, service users and residents. Task and finish groups have been used to assist with policy development in areas including housing and ensuring our Olympic legacy and they provide an opportunity for short and focussed pieces of work by councillors on priority issues. The work begun last year on issues associated with Houses in Multiple Occupation is a good example and I look forward to this producing helpful recommendations in the next few months.

The current financial climate is extremely challenging for local government and its partners and these pressures are set to increase into the future. Policy setting and decision-making become even more important as the council works to use its limited resources most effectively for the city. Scrutiny has a fundamental contribution to make in ensuring that the best possible decisions are made for local people.

This report summarises just a few examples of scrutiny work from the last year which illustrate the breadth of topics covered by the Boards and I look forward to continuing this work with scrutiny colleagues and partners over the coming year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Colleen Fletcher
Chair, Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Remit

In 2012-2013 the Committee increased its remit to include the portfolio of the Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources) as well as continuing its responsibility for overseeing the Scrutiny function (including call-ins), considering cross-cutting issues and for overseeing the portfolio of the Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance).

Membership

Councillors: Councillors Abbott, Bigham (Chair), Blundell, Fletcher, Foster, Howells, Lakha, M. Mutton, Skipper (Deputy Chair) and Welsh.

Co-opted members for education matters: Mr R. Potter (Roman Catholic Church), Mrs S. Hanson (Church of England), Ms Kelly Jones (Primary Parent Governors) and 2 vacancies (Secondary Parent Governors and Other Faiths).

Activities and outcomes

Scrutiny Management issues

At the start of the year, Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee reviewed the priority issues that had been identified at initial meetings of the boards to ensure a balanced scrutiny work programme. This was particularly important in the context of the introduction of an additional scrutiny board and changes to the remits of existing boards.

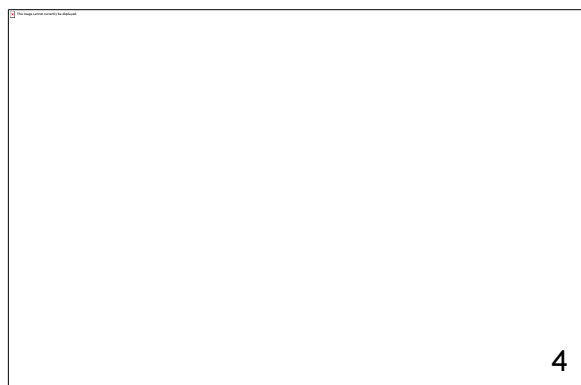
The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee took an overview of council priorities including performance against priorities in the Council Plan, the abc Transformation Programme and the Medium Term Financial Strategy and identified issues that needed to be addressed as part of the scrutiny work programme.

No decisions made by Cabinet or Cabinet Members were called in for Scrutiny consideration during the year.

The Board also scrutinised a range of issues under its remit and papers from their meetings are available via the weblink on page 19.

Examples of Scrutiny work undertaken by the Committee in 2012/13

abc Transformation Programme



An on-going focus of the Committee's work in 2012/13 was the Council's abc Transformation Programme which is carrying out fundamental reviews of all council services. This programme has now moved into the "A Bolder Coventry" stage of work, which means there is a stronger focus on outward facing services.

The Board received regular progress reports on the programme of reviews, explanations about new ways of working and savings targets identified across the programme, as well as future reviews. It also received detailed reports evaluating the outcomes of two significant reviews of ICT and Business Services.

Scrutiny continued to promote a series of briefings, chaired by the chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee and open to all members on key elements of the abc programme. These briefings have covered:

- programme progress for 2011/12
- the Children, Learning and Young People review
- an introduction to the bolder Coventry programme of reviews
- the review of Special Educational Needs, Children's Disability and Transitions
- Reviews addressing Operational Property; City Deal; and Strategic Regeneration and Business Rates Growth

The briefings have given Members the opportunity to find out more about the reviews; aims and objectives as well as progress. Members were also able to raise their own concerns and question officers on the content of the reviews

Charities Information

Following a task and finish group to identify which outside bodies would report to the Committee, it was identified that there were charitable organisations in the city which could support individuals in financial difficulty, but that there was patchy and inconsistent information available about how to access their support.

There was particular concern considering the impact of the Welfare Benefit changes and an increase in the number of people in financial hardship. Therefore a quick task and finish group was established to identify the best way to gather and disseminate this information.

Officers from the Council and the Citizens Advice Bureau supported the group and recommendations were presented to the Cabinet Member (Community Safety and Equalities) at his meeting on 11th April 2013 proposing that:

- a page be created on the Council website providing links to other organisations that can provide goods, services and direct financial support to those who are in financial need
- opportunities for partnership working should be taken advantage of, such as those with the Community Support Grant, the Department of Work and Pensions and Voluntary Action Coventry, etc.
- a small leaflet/postcard providing information about the web page be distributed to organisations, groups and individuals that will come into contact with those people who are experiencing financial hardship and Elected Members.

The recommendations were accepted.

Olympic Legacy Scrutiny Panel

Coventry was an Olympic City during the London 2012 Olympics and there was a desire to ensure that the spirit and success of the Olympics in the city was maintained and built on. A report on the Olympic evaluation and legacy report considered by the Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) recommended that a scrutiny panel should be set up to oversee the legacy work.

The panel has met three times so far and has identified recommendations for the sustainability of the Coventry Ambassadors which were so successful over the summer. The recommendations were that the Coventry Ambassadors continue as a social enterprise supported by Coventry University. It was proposed that initial grant funding for the scheme up to £20,250, which will be met from existing Council budgets and that an Elected Member be identified at the Council's Annual General Meeting to represent the Council as a director on the board of the social enterprise company.



These recommendations were accepted by Cabinet on 16th April 2013. Further areas of work that the panel have looked at are the Community Games and city dressing, including public art. A final meeting will take place in the new Municipal year to complete this piece of work.

Wellness, Liveability and Public Health Scrutiny Board (1)

Remit

In 2012/2013, the Scrutiny Board took responsibility for the scrutiny of Public Health, culture, sport and physical activity and equalities.

Membership

Councillors Singh Auluck, Bigham, Caan, Fletcher (Chair), Innes (Deputy Chair), Lepoidevin, Singh Sehmi, Skinner, Thomas.

Activities and outcomes

The Board scrutinised a range of issues under its remit and papers from their meetings are available via the weblink on page 19.

Examples of Scrutiny work undertaken by the Board on 2012/2013

Coventry's Cultural Offering



At the January meeting, the Board discussed Coventry's Cultural Offering. In preparation for the meeting, Members visited the Lunt Fort (pictured above left); Belgrade Theatre; Albany Theatre; Herbert Art Gallery and Museum; St Mary's Guildhall; Priory Visitor Centre (pictured above right) and Transport Museum.

Following the visits, the Board made a number of recommendations to the Cabinet Member (Neighbourhood Action, Housing, Leisure and Culture) about investigating new ways of working to best promote the City to both residents and tourists. These recommendations were all accepted at the Cabinet Member meeting on 11 April 2013.

Passport to Leisure and Learning Scheme Review

The Scrutiny Board have considered this item three times during the year, receiving in April the outcome of the consultation and proposed offer to holders of the card. Members revisited the item as they want to ensure that access to leisure and learning is as open as possible to Coventry citizens and that the card offers what people want it to. Members also sought assurance that officers were working closely with Public Health to help strengthen the baseline information.

The Wellbeing Fund

Public Health was in its transition year across to the Council and the Board were keen to start scrutinising their services. One of the areas the Board looked at was the Wellbeing Fund. This fund provides community organisations with a £500 grant to deliver activities which benefit the community.

A number of pilot areas had been identified where the wellbeing fund could be used to facilitate community-led ideas to work towards the ideals of the “10 ways to feeling good and doing well”.

The Board heard from representatives of two community groups about their experiences of accessing the fund and the difference that it has made in their areas. The Bell Green Silver Surfers had used the fund to buy in a teacher to show the basics of computing. The group used sessions as a purpose for meeting people, social interaction and learning new skills. They were hoping for further assistance in completing in one off applications for additional funding from other sources, in order to continue with the work once current funding ended.

The Ekta-Unity Group had similarly accessed the fund to set up a knitting club facility targeted at isolated, elderly Asian women. The group’s specific aim was to encourage and promote wellbeing. As with the Silver Surfer’s Group, they were working towards securing additional funding to ensure the future of the group.

The Scrutiny Board was impressed by the enthusiasm of the groups and the support given to them to start up and felt the input from the two community groups was very valuable to the content of the meeting.

The Board welcomed efforts being made within groups to share their knowledge and experiences in order to promote access to the fund and wellbeing generally. They asked that such positive examples be incorporated into a guide for community groups seeking to access start-up funding.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Board (2)

Remit

In 2012/13 the Scrutiny Board was responsible for the scrutiny of issues relating to children and young people, their social care, early years and education.

Membership

Councillors: Councillors Ali, Singh Auluck, Chater, Lepoidevin, Miks, Mal Mutton (Chair), Sandy, Sweet (Deputy Chair) and Williams.

Co-opted members for education matters: Mr R. Potter (Roman Catholic Church), Mrs S. Hanson (Church of England), Ms Kelly Jones (Primary Parent Governor) and 2 vacancies (Secondary Parent Governors and Other Faiths).

Activities and outcomes

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Examples of Scrutiny work undertaken by the Board in 2012/2013

Adoption and Fostering Service

With budgets under pressure, it is more important than ever that when a child is judged to need to come into care, the Council is able to provide as many in-house foster carers as possible. There have been concerns raised regarding our ability to support, and therefore, retain, our foster carers.

The service has undergone a review during the year and assured the Board that a number of measures have been put in place to speed up the recruitment process and to ensure foster carers feel fully supported in their role.



Educational Attainment

Following a report published by the Department of Education citing Coventry as having amongst the lowest number of primary schools in the Country being OFSTED rated 'good' or 'outstanding', the scrutiny board considered this issue, as well as a subsequent update.

The Cabinet Member attended the meetings and presented to the Board the steps he and Officers were taking to improve education in primary schools across the City.

This is still work in progress but he set an ambitious target that all schools will be 'good' or 'outstanding' within the next OFSTED inspection cycle (3 years) and the board will continue to review progress.

Serious Case Review

During the year, the Board looked at the outcome of the Serious Case review of Child W. Members questioned officers and partners on the progress they had made on their actions to ensure lessons learned are addressed to try and prevent the same failings impacting upon another child.

Members were particularly concerned that they had not received the reassurance they were looking for that the challenges around domestic violence had been fully addressed. A subsequent meeting of the relevant officers from Community Safety and Safeguarding provided the necessary reassurance.

A meeting with further updates on progress will be held during 2013/14.

Jobs, Skills and Growth Scrutiny Board (3)

Remit

In 2012/13, the Board was responsible for the scrutiny of, skills and employment, economic growth, regeneration, post 16 education and training and the project work of the Local Economic Partnership.

Membership

Councillors Clifford, Gannon (Deputy Chair), Lakha (Chair), McNicholas, Maton, Miks, Taylor, Walsh and Williams.

Activities and outcomes

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Examples of Scrutiny work undertaken by the Board in 2012/13

Apprenticeships and Looked After Children

As part of Elected Members' Corporate Parenting Role, Members were concerned that Looked after Children and Care Leavers were missing out on opportunities to undertake apprenticeships at the City Council due to a number of barriers. The Voices of Care Council (which is formed of young people in care) raised a number of the challenges they face accessing apprenticeships. The Jobs, Skills and Growth Scrutiny Board set up a task and finish group to look at what the City Council can do to help Looked After Children and Care Leavers successfully obtain, and maintain, an apprenticeship.

The task and finish group made 8 recommendations to Cabinet Member (Children and Young People), which were accepted. It is hoped that these changes, which included additional pastoral and financial support, will enable looked after children to gain suitable work placements and for them to be successful.

Post 16 Education

The Board considered information on the current position regarding post-16 education and training in terms of both participation and attainment. The Chair outlined the Board's intention to seek to identify any gap between the City's skills offer and jobs available.

The Board received evidence from Coventry University, Warwick University and City College. All the represented organisations worked with local employers and had developed services to meet business needs including courses to develop 'soft' and generic employability skills as well as technical skills.

It was acknowledged that the field of post-16 education was vast and for the Board to make a positive impact there would need to be concentration on a particular area of work.

Streets and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)

Remit

In 2012/13, the Board continued to be responsible for the scrutiny of issues relating to the environment, including refuse collections and parks and open spaces as well as being the designated Board for scrutinising the Community Safety Partnership.

Membership

Councillors Abbott (Chair), Akhtar, Andrews, Bains, Clifford (Deputy Chair), Crookes, Lakha, Sandy and Thay.

Activities and outcomes

The Board scrutinised a range of issues under its remit and papers from their meetings are available via the weblink on page 19.

Examples of Scrutiny work undertaken by the Board in 2012/13

Review of the Waste Strategy 2008-2020



As part of the review of the city's Waste Strategy for 2008-2020, Scrutiny Board 4 established a task and finish group to look at a refreshed action plan. Members were provided with information on recycling tonnage and the amount of recyclable waste in residual waste, as well as the city's performance on reducing waste over the last 5 years. There has been a considerable reduction in household waste, however there could be many factors driving this including the current economic climate.

Also site visits were made to:

- The Waste to Energy plant at Whitley
- The Biffa anaerobic digestion plant at Cannock
- The landfill site at Bubbenhall

The site visits were then followed up by a further meeting of the group to agree changes to the action plan and to identify further work and recommendations to the Cabinet Member (City Services). Members were provided with additional information on recycling tonnages and the amount of recyclable waste in residual waste, as well as information on the city's performance on reducing waste over the last 5 years. There has been a considerable reduction in household waste, however there could be many factors driving this including the current economic climate. The figures should also be put into the context of a steady increase since the end of the war.

Street Trading Content Policy

The Streets and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board contributed to the development of the consultation and also the consultation results for the revised Street Trading Licensing Policy.

The original Street Trading Consent was considered by Scrutiny in 2012. The Street Trading Policy had been successful in meeting its initial aims, in particular dealing with nuisance car sales. However, following the first 12 months of implementation, the policy has been reviewed in response to comments from local street traders and officers' experiences of administering and implementing it.

The Scrutiny Board considered that the feedback from the consultation was generally positive with overwhelming consensus on the proposed changes to the fee structure, including deemed consent arrangements. The Scrutiny Board noted that the reduction in fees would not have an impact on departmental budgets. The Board supported the proposed changes to the policy and recommendations to Cabinet Member (Community Safety and Equalities).

Monitoring of City Centre Low Speed Environments



Following a call-in and a petition about the “shared spaces”, the monitoring of the new Low Speed Environments was referred to the Streets and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board.

The Board received two separate reports on the monitoring of speeds in the city centre. The Board were concerned to ensure effective involvement of disabled groups in the consultation process for further developments in the city centre. The Board requested further updates and recommended to the Cabinet Member (City Services) that the current engagement arrangements should continue through the development of the Phase Two Public Realm Works.

The Elected Police and Crime Commissioner

Following his election in November 2012, the Streets and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board invited the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands, Bob Jones, to a meeting. He answered questions covering areas including:

- How the Community Safety Partnership be developed, specifically in terms of local representation and the future structures
- How funding and commissioning will be developed
- Links with other PCC's across the wider region? i.e. Warwickshire, Leicestershire
- How the stability of Community Policing can be supported. Members were concerned that they build good relationships with their local Police Officers and then they can be moved to a different area.
- Domestic violence and child protection is considered to be a priority for Coventry. How is this reflected across the West Midlands area?
- Concerns from Members on illegal and counterfeit tobacco products

Health, Social Care and Welfare Reform Scrutiny Board (5)

Remit

In 2012/13, the Scrutiny Board continued to be responsible for scrutinising issues relating to community services, as well as being the Council's designated Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee under the Health and Social Care Act 2001, incorporating scrutiny of local NHS services. In addition the Board was given responsibility for scrutiny of the local implementation of the Government's Welfare Reform agenda.

Membership

Councillors: Councillors Bigham, Clifford, Galliers, Hetherton (Deputy Chair), Hammon, Noonan, Singh, Thomas and Welsh (Chair).

Co-opted member: David Spurgeon (representing Coventry LINK).

Activities and outcomes

The Board scrutinised a range of issues under its remit and papers from their meetings are available via the weblink on page 19.

Examples of Scrutiny work undertaken by the Board in 2012/13

North Warwickshire Maternity and Paediatric Services Review



George Eliot Hospital in Nuneaton

The Board's June 20th meeting was dominated by the review by NHS commissioners into Maternity and Paediatric Services. Whilst this was largely focused on North Warwickshire (being centred on historical quality concerns about Children Services at George Eliot NHS Trust (GEH) in Nuneaton), this affected Coventry in that around 10% of the patients at GEH come from Coventry and the solution outlined by NHS managers

included significant input from University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire (UHCW).

The proposed solution to problems at GEH involved a complex arrangement of Paediatric Consultant posts and close co-operation between local acute Trusts. The Board expressed concerns about pressures on services at the University Hospital site and potential difficulties in recruiting to the new model of care which, whilst innovative, was nationally untested.

Safeguarding / Serious Case Review

During the year the Board as is usual considered the annual report of the Safeguarding Adult Board. Additionally this year the Board, along with the Cabinet Member for Health and Social care sponsored a half day seminar for Members on Safeguarding vulnerable adults.

In September the Board also considered the Executive Summary of a Serious Case Review (SCR) into the death of Mrs C. The circumstances of Mrs C's death were reported in this SCR and all of the agencies and partners working on Safeguarding in the City attended the Board's meeting to answer Members' questions on this death and the steps which were being undertaken to ensure as far as possible similar circumstances would not be repeated.

The Board were satisfied that the recommendations contained in the Executive Summary of the SCR would lead to significant improvements in the safeguarding of vulnerable elderly patients across the City. They did, however, feel that they would like more reassurance around the appropriate provision of alarm systems for elderly patients in extra care accommodation. In April officers and indeed the Safeguarding Adults Board reported back to confirm that the Action Plan and associated recommendations were progressing well, and that the additional work requested by the Scrutiny Board had been completed.

NHS Reforms / Changing Landscape of Local Health services



The new City of Coventry Health Centre on Stoney Stanton Road

The Board observed during the course of the year the local effects of changes in the NHS and the development of the new landscape of new commissioners and providers. The year marked the formal end of NHS Coventry (previously known as the Primary Care Trust) after two years of it being 'clustered' with NHS Warwickshire as the Arden Cluster. The

Coventry and Rugby Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) also took part in a number of meetings and will

increasingly be expected to support Health Scrutiny as its role in directing the commissioning of secondary and acute care becomes established. The shadow 'Local Area Team' for NHS England also attended one of the Board's meeting and they will be the main point of contact in future for issues related to the planning and performance of primary care.

Both of the main local provider Trusts – UHCW and Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust attended the Board to provide briefings on their developing Foundation Trust applications, and both Trusts provided updates on their challenging financial positions and the challenges of continued Quality Improvement Programme targets.

Welfare Reform Sub-group



The Board's Chair Cllr Welsh with Lisa Dixon of Whitefriars Housing Group

The Government Welfare Reform was of significant breadth and scale that the Board felt a dedicated Sub-Group would be best to monitor developments and provide feedback to officers on the various implications across the City. The Group considered draft proposals for the introduction of new requirements on the City Council (around Housing Benefit changes and the introduction of the Community Support Grant and added responsibilities around Discretionary Housing Payments). Members also considered the developing Advice Services Review in the light of the Welfare Reform agenda.

The Welfare Reform Sub-Group also encouraged work to ensure residents likely to be affected by these Reforms got as much notice as possible. Members were pleased to be able to visit a very successful Welfare Reform 'pop-up shop' held in Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre at which the key local agencies including CAB, the Law Centre and Whitefriars worked together with the Council to help residents, and particularly social housing tenants, to prepare for the changes.

Transport and Infrastructure Development Scrutiny Board (6)

Remit

This was a new board for 2012/13, which has responsibility for scrutinising issues relating to housing, sustainability and local transport.

Membership

Councillors: Councillors Hammon, Howells (Chair), T. Khan, Lancaster, Mulhall, Noonan, Sandy (Deputy Chair), Singh and Skipper.

Activities and outcomes

The Board scrutinised a range of issues under its remit and papers from their meetings are available via the weblink on page 19.

Examples of Scrutiny work undertaken by the Board in 2012/13 **Homefinder Task and Finish Group**

At their meeting on 25th September 2012, the Transport and Infrastructure Development Scrutiny Board established a task and finish group to assist in a comprehensive examination and review of the Homefinder System and the Coventry Homefinder Nominations and Lettings Policy.

The group met four times between 1st November 2012 and 31st January 2013. They heard evidence from Council Officers from Housing, three Housing Associations in the City and two Advice and Support agencies that support Coventry residents with their housing needs.

The group questioned the witnesses on the effectiveness of the current system, whether there were any areas of weakness and how the system could be improved. Following analysis of the evidence that had been presented, the members of the task and finish group identified nine recommendations which were accepted by the Cabinet Member (Neighbourhood Action, Housing Leisure and Culture) at his meeting on 11th April 2013.

Housing Options with Housing Developers

The Board were interested in finding out how the Council could support the building of homes in the city so they invited several housing developers into the meeting to hear evidence from them.

The Board noted the difficulties that developers faced when creating housing developments in Coventry and the reasons for them choosing to develop outside of the City. The Scrutiny Board discussed the housing targets in Coventry, which had reduced from 33,500 to fewer than 12,000 in the recent submission of the Core Strategy. The developers raised their concern relating to the high Section 106 contributions, in particular for Education. It was noted that small sites were unviable to develop as the contributions were set too high. These small sites had been identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).

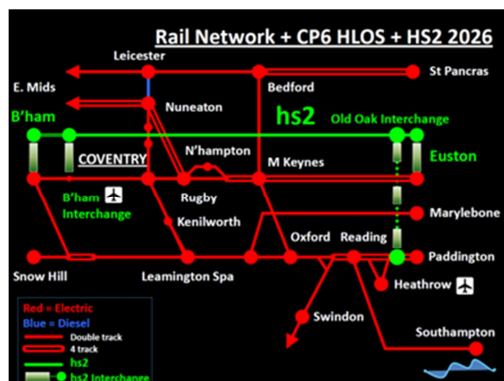
The Board also noted that working with neighbouring authorities was vital to delivering housing targets in the City and that more work needed to be done to achieve this. It was further noted that more retailers would be attracted to Coventry if they could see development potential. The developers were questioned about affordable housing in the North of the city, in particular, the impact of the social housing requirement. The developers discussed “land swaps” in Coventry and Members were of the view that this was a good idea and should be explored in more detail.

The developers further suggested a requirement for more aspirational housing to attract high earners to live in Coventry, which would allow the City to grow economically. The developers were also of the view that developing on green field sites would further increase the supply of aspirational housing and therefore support economic growth.

Members suggested that new housing developments should have a mix of types and sizes of properties which would enable residents wanting to move to either a smaller or larger property, to stay in the same vicinity.

The Board welcomed hearing evidence from external members of the public and suggested that this should be an approach adopted by Scrutiny in future.

Rail Story



The Board received a presentation on the future developments on the local rail network and the impact on the city. The information received included information on HS2, the NUCKLE and the electric spine (HLOS).

The presentation was based around the ambition that Coventry has for its future economy and the major factor that connectivity would play in supporting this economy. It was acknowledged that

Coventry’s existing rail connectivity was a significant and well used asset and a key selling point for the City. However, there was a need to build and improve on existing facilities and there were likely to be both threats and opportunities arising from proposals for both HS2 and HLOS (electric spine).

Having considered the issues identified within the presentation, the Board acknowledged the Council’s position in respect of HS2 but recognised that there was a need to plan for the future development of the rail network serving Coventry and the surrounding area, including opportunities to ensure that Coventry is linked closely to the Birmingham HS2 Interchange and that key links to London stations are maximised through the use of the HLOS. It was further acknowledged that there needed to be further work undertaken in order to fully understand the passenger usage of stations, including Coventry and Birmingham New Street, and the interaction of passengers between both of these stations, in order to push for further investment locally.

Details of how to find out more about Scrutiny

Agendas, papers and minutes for all Scrutiny meetings are on the Council's Committee Management Information System at www.coventry.gov.uk

More information on Scrutiny at Coventry City Council is available on the Council's website at www.coventry.gov.uk/scrutiny or from:

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