

COVENTRY CITIZENS' PANEL

Wednesday 9th September 2015

Report by Kelly McBride, the Democratic Society

Hosted by

[The Democratic Society](#)

Commissioned by

[Coventry City Council](#)

Introduction	3
Background to the Panel	4
<i>About Combined Authorities</i>	4
<i>What are the proposals for the West Midlands Combined Authority?</i>	5
<i>Coventry and the West Midlands Combined Authority</i>	5
<i>Public Consultation in Coventry about a combined authority</i>	6
Method and participants	7
<i>About Citizens' Panels</i>	7
<i>Participants in the Coventry Citizens' Panel</i>	7
<i>Charts showing representation on the panel</i>	8
<i>The Expert Witnesses</i>	11
<i>The Facilitators</i>	12
<i>The role of the council</i>	12
<i>The brief for the panel</i>	12
<i>How the event was conducted</i>	13
<i>Reporting and social media (see appendix 1)</i>	15
The discussion	16
<i>Session 1: Word Cloud</i>	16
<i>Session 2: The expert witnesses and what they said</i>	17
<i>Stephen Banbury, Chief Executive Voluntary Action Centre, Coventry</i>	17
<i>Kevin Maton, Councillor, Coventry City Council</i>	18
<i>Louise Bennett, Chief Executive, Coventry Chamber of Commerce</i>	22
<i>David Williams, Programme Director - Local Reconciliation, Coventry Cathedral</i>	24
<i>Clare Wightman, Director, Grapevine Charity</i>	26
<i>Rachael Bermingham, Campaigner and Local Resident</i>	28
<i>Session 3: Images of Coventry</i>	30
Themes and Conclusions	35
Appendices	38
<i>Appendix 1 - twitter storify</i>	38
<i>Appendix 2 - wall words</i>	43
<i>Appendix 3 - additional comments</i>	45
<i>Appendix 4 - expert witness notes</i>	47
<i>Appendix 5 - event feedback</i>	49

Introduction

Coventry City Council commissioned The Democratic Society to run a one-day Citizens' Panel event with the aim of understanding what people think are the most important elements of Coventry's local, city-wide, national and global identities, and exploring what people who live in Coventry want for the future of the city.

The consultation was in the context of, and to inform, the Council's decision on whether to participate in the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority, and the Citizens' Panel formed part of the Council's consultation on this issue.

This report has been prepared on the basis of the contributions from participants at that event. The raw notes of the discussions on the day, taken by Democratic Society staff, can be found online at www.demsoc.org/coventry-citizens-panel/report/

Background to the Panel

About Combined Authorities

Combined authorities are a new type of local government organisation. They are created by central Government on the basis of requests from groups of councils. The first was created in 2011, in Manchester, and there are currently an additional four. If approved, the West Midlands Combined Authority would be the sixth in the country.

Combined authorities are a type of legal partnership between authorities in an area. The combined authority has no powers of its own, it can only exercise powers that are given to it either by central government or by the participating councils. It also does not replace the existing councils - it is not a merger - though councils can give some of their powers to the combined authority if they want to.

The current Government has made clear that it wants to see the creation of combined authorities, because it believes that strategic issues such as transport and economic development can be planned better at that level, rather than by councils acting on their own, or Government planning in Whitehall. Others have argued that taking decisions at city region level reduces the impact local voters have on decisions, and can prioritise the city region core over outlying areas.

There is more background to combined authorities in a briefing prepared by the independent House of Commons Library, which can be found at:

<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06649>

To get a sense of the arguments for and against combined authorities in general, the results of the consultations on the three most recently-created Combined Authorities are available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279469/140212_Consultation_Summaries.pdf

The five existing Combined Authorities in the UK are based around five of the eight Core Cities. Greater Manchester was the first, in 2011, and the four others are North East (centred around Tyneside), West Yorkshire, Greater Sheffield and Greater Liverpool.

There are current proposals for other combined authorities: Derby and Derbyshire; Nottingham and Nottinghamshire; the Tees Valley; Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire; Leicester and Leicestershire; Hull and East Yorkshire.

What are the proposals for the West Midlands Combined Authority?

Proposals for the West Midlands Combined Authority will see the Black Country, Coventry & Warwickshire and Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Economic Partnership areas working together to coordinate the delivery of economic and transport functions. This will not change the power held by local councillors in their own councils. Each of the seven metropolitan councils in the West Midlands area, and other participating councils, will have equal partnership in the project.

Five priorities have been set out by the West Midlands Combined Authority in its launch statement. Developing a strategic economic plan is the first of these, which the three Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) will use to develop the second - access to finance and a collective investment vehicle. They also want to create a transport system that is successful and efficient now but will also adapt to any future changes. The West Midlands Combined Authority also plan to set up a joint programme to encourage education, employment and skills, and create a pool of knowledge and expertise on which future decision can be based.

There are plans for setting up a number of commissions, including one for land, one for a mental health & public services and one for productivity. These commissions will be independent but the combined authority will seek the help of Government to work with each to fulfil their commitments. They will put forward their first ideas at the end of this year and will continue to deliver proposals thereafter.

The West Midlands Combined Authority's launch statement can be found at: <http://www.westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk/assets/docs/WestMidlandsCombinedAuthorityLaunchStatement6JULY2015.pdf>

Coventry and the West Midlands Combined Authority

Central government sets the process for agreeing a combined authority and the

first step is to agree a possible combined authority area. At present, Coventry City Council has agreed in principle to create a West Midlands Combined Authority with at least the seven metropolitan councils in the West Midlands, and with other councils in the three Local Economic Partnership areas.

In October 2015 Coventry City Council will make a decision on whether to be part of the West Midlands Combined Authority. Negotiations between the Government and participant councils will then take place during the rest of the Autumn, and the West Midlands Combined Authority is planned to launch in April 2016.

The key criteria for the Government's decision on whether to create the Combined Authority is whether it will improve decision making and efficiency and achieve better results on transport and economic development.

Public Consultation in Coventry about a combined authority

The Citizens' Panel explored Coventry's different identities, as a place to live, as a city in its region and as a world city. This was both to inform the decision about whether to be part of the Combined Authority and to understand what residents felt was needed for the city of Coventry, whether that was as part of the Combined Authority or outside it.

The Citizens' Panel is just one part of the public engagement that has taken place as part of the consideration of the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority in the city. The work has also included ward forums, drop in sessions, online consultation opportunities, as well as traditional routes of communication such as petitions and letter-writing.

Details of this consultation will be included in any proposal submitted to government, and in considering the proposals central government will also seek the views of residents. There are more details of the broader consultation on Coventry City Council's website at:

http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/205/proposed_west_midlands_combined_authority/2498/proposed_west_midlands_combined_authority

Method and participants

About Citizens' Panels

Citizens' panels are groups of people with a connection to a particular area, usually broadly representative of the local population, which are used by councils and other public sector organisations to consult and get views on important issues. They are not to be confused with Citizen Juries, which are purely randomly selected. Citizen Panels are usually chosen from volunteers, but with the aim of achieving good representation.

Participants in the Coventry Citizens' Panel

For the panel, 42 citizens from across the city were invited and agreed to take part. 35 attended on the day. The panel selection was undertaken by the Democratic Society with the aim of getting a broadly representative panel of the people of the city, both by demographics and geography. Census data was used as a baseline for representativeness. Coventry City Council had no say in who was on the panel.

The selection was carried out in three steps:

(1) A list of people who completed a recent telephone survey.

In July 2015 Coventry City Council commissioned an independent market research company to conduct a random telephone survey of 1,117 people across the city about the West Midlands Combined Authority plans.

Out of those contacted, 214 people said they would be happy for their details to be passed on for future work. The Democratic Society took this list of 214 people and split them by city ward. A random selection was taken within each ward to get two names and they were then invited to be on the panel. A demographic analysis of gender, age and ethnicity was undertaken on this list and where people were unable or did not want to take part, another name was selected from the same ward. This was not a random selection as the names were selected with the intention of balancing the demographics. The list did not provide a group that reached our representativeness threshold, so the process proceeded to stages (2) and (3).

(2) Applications following direct contact with organisations representing groups who were at that stage under-represented on the panel.

Demsoc then took steps to ensure that there was a fair representation of people across the city. There was, for example, a gap of people age under 25 so a number of youth organisations across the city were directly approached by the Democratic Society to find these voices.

(3) An open callout and application process

Finally, to make up the last few places on the panel, people were allowed to apply to attend. Those invited to join were again balanced for demographics.

Charts showing representation on the panel

The following four charts show the different characteristics of participants who attended the event. They focus on ward, gender identity, age groups and ethnicity and aim to give a graphical representation of who was in the room.

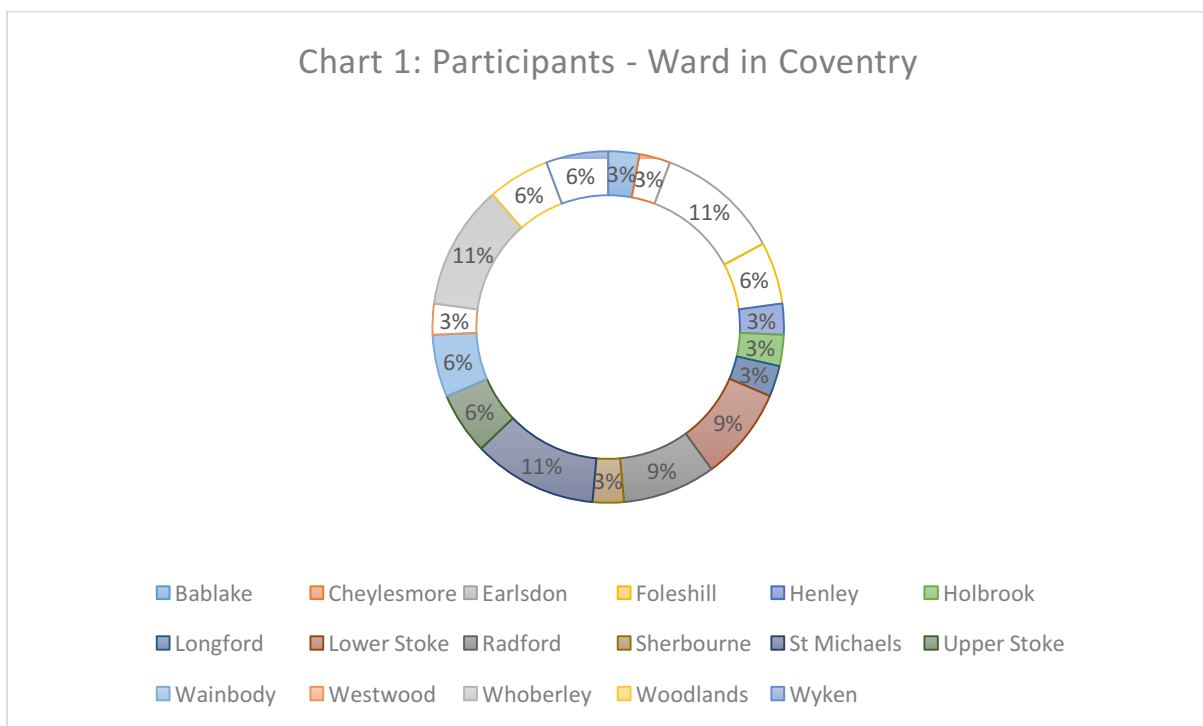


Chart showing % participant representation from each of the 18 ward areas

All wards were represented on the day except for Binley and Willenhall - the participants invited from those wards did not attend on the day.

Chart 2: Participants - Gender Identity

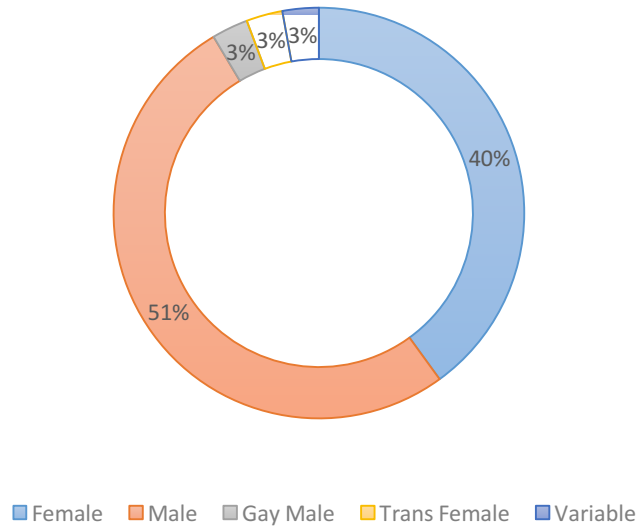


Chart showing % representation of participants by gender identity (self-identified)

Chart 3: Participants - Age Group

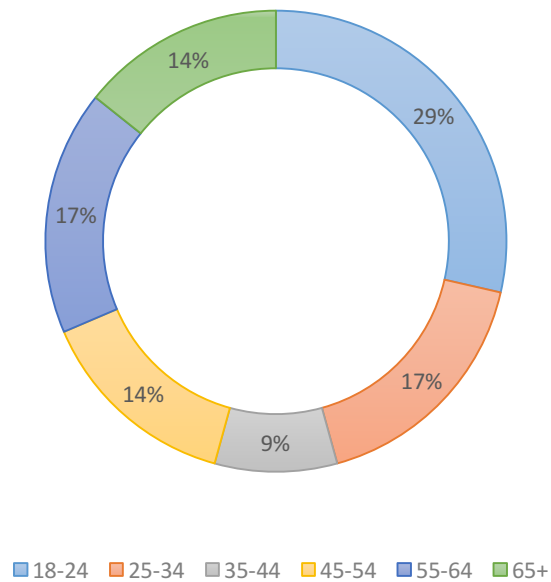
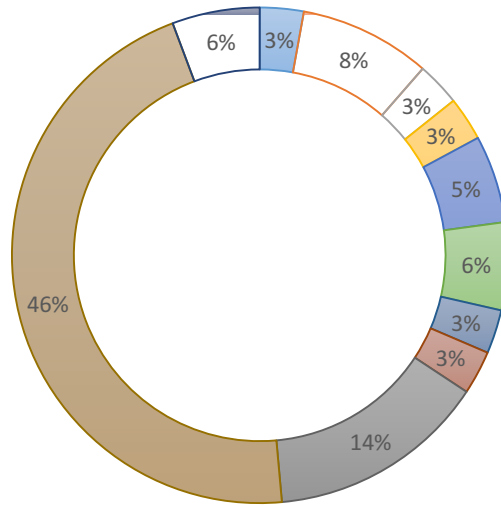


Chart showing % representation of participants by age group

Chart 4: Participants - Ethnicity



- African
- Asian
- Asian British
- Black
- Black/African
- British
- German
- Mixed
- White
- White British
- White Irish

Chart showing % representation of participants by ethnicity (self-identified)

The Expert Witnesses

The format selected for the event, set out in more detail below, included a world café section. Participants were able to choose four short discussions (from six) to join, each led by an “expert witness”, who had an opinion to share on the future and identity of the city.

The Expert Witnesses invited to the panel were people that Demsoc had identified as having knowledge in an area that could help inform debate, and included people from a range of sectors with different perspectives on the combined authority plan. Some were for, some against, and some neutral, representing a range of different sectors of the community. The relevant portfolio holder from the council, Cllr Kevin Maton, was invited in his official capacity.

The expert witnesses at the Citizens’ Panel were:

Name	Job Title	Organisation	Sector
Louise Bennett	Chief Executive	Chamber of Commerce	Business
Stephen Banbury	Chief Executive	Voluntary Action Centre	Voluntary
David Williams	Programme Director - Local Reconciliation	Cathedral	Community
Rachael Bermingham	Campaigner	Resident	Community
Kevin Maton	Councillor	Coventry City Council	Government
Clare Wightman	Director	Grapevine Charity	Voluntary

Two expert witnesses, Prof. Colin Copus (Academia) and a representative from the Federation of Small Businesses (Business) were invited but were unable to attend at the last minute.

Joe Elliott MBE was invited and gave an introductory speech setting out his view of the city and its identity.

The Facilitators

The event was designed, recruited for and facilitated by The Democratic Society, which is a not-for-profit organisation trying to build a more participative democracy, based on good information, transparent government, and open decision making. It is a small networked organisation and has staff in Brighton, Edinburgh and Cambridge. None are residents of Coventry or of the region and do not have any pre-existing working relationship with the council or any of its elected officials, or any view on a West Midlands Combined Authority. Our role was to approach and report the conversations heard objectively and without any vested interest in the outcome. Demsoc is paid a fixed, pre-arranged fee for this work and that fee is not dependent on any outcome. There is more information about Demsoc here www.demsoc.org

The role of the council

The Council commissioned the Citizens' Panel and will pay for the work. They have agreed Demsoc's approach but the work is being carried out independently of them. Cllr Maton acted as an expert witness. A small number of council officers were present at the event to listen to conversations, but they did not take part in them.

The brief for the panel

The brief for the panel from the Council was to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the concerns that are held about Coventry joining a combined authority, through extended and highly focused deliberation.
- Gain a deeper understanding of what factors influence the question of identity.
- Raise the level of public debate with regards to the risks and opportunities of the devolution agenda for the city of Coventry. Observe and explore the factors that inform and affect public views.
- Explore the risks and opportunities of the devolution agenda alongside the risks and opportunities of maintaining the status quo.

- Enable informed citizens to have a meaningful impact on public policy by creating recommendations to inform the debate and decision whether to proceed with Coventry joining a combined authority scheme - not to make a decision on whether to join or not.

How the event was conducted

The panel ran from 9:30am to 4pm and 35 people attended.

The day started with a welcome from Anthony Zacharzewski, Director of the Democratic Society and Joe Elliott MBE who talked about Coventry and its place in the world. This was designed as an **information session**, where participants were introduced to the issues being discussed, what devolution is and the plans currently being proposed.



Introductory speech by Joe Elliott MBE

Participants were then given a few minutes in groups to reflect and write down words that capture what they feel or think about Coventry.



Post-its with words written by participants

The second session was the **world café session**. There were two sessions of 45 minutes each, and in each session three of the expert witnesses hosted two sessions. This meant that all participants attended four of the six sessions available. Each expert witness presented a five-minute statement that they had prepared in advance, touching on the identity of the city and their views on the proposals. They then answered questions and facilitated discussion with participants, allowing the participants to explore different points of view from people representing a variety of stances and expertise in different areas in more depth.



The third session, after lunch, was a **deliberation session**, with participants placed in small mixed groups to discuss issues picked up in the previous session, explore them in more depth, and come up with recommendations and ideas.



Reporting and social media (see appendix 1)

One member of the facilitation team acted as a social reporter, tweeting pieces of the discussion on the hashtag [#greatercov](#). The main parts of the event were webcast and can be accessed online through www.demsoc.org/coventry-citizens-panel



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Coverage: Coventry Citizens' Panel

WEDNESDAY 9th SEPTEMBER 2015, 9:30am - 4pm, COVENTRY

We covered the Coventry Citizens' Panel LIVE on Twitter, Periscope and through the webcast. We also filmed sections of the event and some vox pops. You can find the details and relevant feeds on this page. We also invited local media to cover and report on the event.

Session 2: The expert witnesses and what they said

Below is a summary of what was discussed in each session. Expert witnesses gave a short introduction and, where we have been provided with a full text, this can be viewed in appendix 4. Each session included a chance to ask questions of the expert witnesses. Summary details of the expert witness introductions and following discussions are below.

Stephen Banbury, Chief Executive Voluntary Action Centre, Coventry

Voluntary Action Coventry (VAC) is a membership organisation with about 450 members and in contact with about 1,000 formal and informal bodies across the city. Coventry has a strong voluntary sector, compared with other places. There is an independence of spirit and a self reliance, as a city. There is lots of local pride and there is already lots of partnership working within the city and regionally (with the West Midlands and with Warwickshire.) There is a strong Birmingham pull to that work but when Coventry works hard to get its voice heard, there are great benefits.

There are opportunities and also threats in joining a West Midlands Combined Authority. For the Voluntary sector it would mean creating an area with 20,000 other voluntary organisations, collectively worth £1.4billion, with 1.5 million volunteers. This sector makes a big contribution to the economy.

VAC has carried out a survey of members about whether Coventry should be part of a combined authority. 34% agreed - 24% disagreed - 41% didn't know and didn't know about impact. Advantages that people could see were that it could bring people together, bring in money and maximise resources. Reasons for not being part of a combined authority include concern for the loss of grassroots Coventry voices, and that small organisations would get lost. But many respondents did not know what the impact would be.

Stephen wants to make sure that any agreement about a combined authority has a community and voluntary sector aspect, and would not be purely business focused. The sector makes a considerable contribution to the economy through, for example, skills development and support for young people. Regional working should benefit everyone. The voluntary sector should be involved in the new structures, and they should be designed to ensure they are in the best interests of

people including those who had not benefited previously and the most vulnerable.

The discussion

Stephen was questioned about whether he felt smaller voices would get lost. Coventry Youth Councillors, for example, felt it was difficult getting their voices heard in the City as it was and this extra regional level would make it harder for a small, volunteer-run organisation. Participants felt there was a risk that larger organisations with staff and structures would be in a position to benefit from the opportunities, while smaller organisations got lost. There was also discussion of how to do more with shrinking resource. VAC; as with all areas of the voluntary sector; has less money than a few years ago and is able to do less. Participants discussed how the sector could maximise its impact, in an environment of limited and shrinking resources, and manage to get voices heard?

The area proposed for the Combined Authority was seen by discussion participants as very diverse. What, for example, do voluntary groups in Coventry have in common with voluntary groups in Wolverhampton? For all the diversity, participants also saw that there were similarities. They were different neighbourhoods, but trying to achieve the same things. This could lead to opportunities to work together or it could mean increased competition for funding. Participants saw that there were opportunities and threats, so we needed to make the most of any opportunities and work to counter any threats - at the moment there was not enough information to know any more.

The business focus of any plans was discussed. It was felt that the voluntary sector finds it hard to have its voice heard, for example at the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Participants stressed that the voluntary sector should be included from the start in any planning, not added on afterwards.

Kevin Maton, Councillor, Coventry City Council

Cllr Maton talked about the benefits of the Combined Authority and what is in it for the people of Coventry. 100% of all the uplift in business rates would be retained in Coventry as part of the devolution deal, if new businesses are attracted. There would be devolution of all adult training funds to local

government - this is currently funded by central government but locally it is difficult to fill skills shortages such as engineering. There would be a mental health commission looking at issues around mental health and support, because mental ill-health had a major impact on productivity in the area. This would not be a merger of health services or social care but common action on mental health.

The important question that the Council will be asking itself is: does the new structure bring in new money the Council can use to make a difference, such as regeneration funding?

Benefits would be the starting point for negotiations with central government and there is already some indication from government as to what they will agree. There have been no negotiations with government yet - but there is a final signing of a document is planned for next April. Coventry can pull out up to that point and the Council vote in October will be about whether to continue to support Coventry being part of the combined authority.

The discussion

There was discussion about whether the West Midlands area would be the best geographical extent for a combined authority and whether Warwickshire would be a more natural partner for Coventry. Cllr Maton said that the evidence was that this would not be supported by central government. Combined authority approval was in the hands of central government and they had said that Coventry combining with Warwickshire would not meet with their approval.

It was pointed out that if Coventry decided not to be part of the West Midlands Combined Authority, it would not stop the Combined Authority coming into existence without Coventry. Whatever happened, other structures such as the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) would remain the same (Coventry and Warwickshire LEP) even though Warwickshire County Council had decided not to be part of the discussions about the combined authority.

The role of the universities in the city was discussed, including the benefits of the jobs they bring, and the impact of student accommodation that was being developed on sites across the city centre (rather than in residential areas).

The 'building boom' across the city was discussed and the value of council borrowing questioned in times of tight funding. Cllr Maton replied that borrowing money for a local authority is relatively inexpensive and good investments release money to invest in other areas of council expenditure.

Cllr Maton said that the council was investing to generate more tax in longer term and attract more businesses; increasing business rate revenue. With a combined authority the council would be able to keep any increase in business rates and this could be invested in council services. Currently the Council's income was falling as the grant from central government was reduced so they were relying more on council tax and on cutting services. This view was countered by suggestions that those in student accommodation are not council taxpayers and there were many sites across the proposed combined authority area which would be competing with Coventry for businesses and might offer lower rates.

The planning for High Speed 2 (HS2) would be part of the work of the Combined Authority, and Cllr Maton said that Coventry City Council were keen to spread the benefits of this across the area. This was why areas such as Solihull were interested in being part of a combined authority. Participants felt that the benefits were less clear for Coventry. They thought it was unclear whether a combined authority would deliver the better more integrated transport system promised: one that linked up key local and regional points and improved the transport networks.

The power structures of the new authority were discussed and how it would work in practice. For example, the Council might well fight for the best interests of the residents of Coventry, but they might be overruled by more powerful or a block vote of other councils. Cllr Maton said that on the current proposals all votes needed a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority, making it harder for Coventry to be outvoted.

Participants felt that the big attraction to businesses and people who move to the area was how close to London they were. Connections to motorway and rail network and ability to move people and goods around more effectively made it attractive to invest in Coventry. Participants felt HS2 would make Coventry more attractive in this respect, although there was concern that this would lead to fewer fast conventional trains to Coventry.

In discussions about the green belt in the West Midlands, Cllr Maton said that a combined authority would have no role in planning and that this would stay with the city council in Coventry.

Participants had had reports from other combined authorities such as Manchester, that smaller authorities were not happy, but Cllr Maton said that the proposed model for the West Midlands was likely to be different from that used in Manchester.

Participants mentioned the local petition requesting a referendum, which had been decided against by the Council. Cllr Maton said he disagreed with the referendum proposal, saying it would be a tick box exercise and in a representative democracy we needed to trust our representatives to consult widely then make the best decision, in the interests of those they represented.

When asked if he had made up his mind about the way forward, combined authority or not, Cllr Maton said he and his fellow councillors were open to all coherent approaches but that he was yet to hear a good argument against being part of the West Midlands Combined Authority. "There are difficulties, but that is politics."

Participants said that a combined authority, in the view of central government, needed an elected mayor, and pointed out that an elected mayor for the city of Coventry had been rejected in a public vote a few years before. Cllr Maton said that the elected mayor would be mayor for the combined authority and only accountable for the delivery of the combined authority strategic economic plan. An elected mayor would not be an executive mayor as in the referendum proposal. All existing powers would remain with the City Council.

"Combined authorities are highly political but devolution was in all national political parties' manifestos at the last elections, so it won't be going away soon."

The relationship between Birmingham and the smaller cities was a worry for some participants, but others said that Coventry's long and unique history was well known, and the city would be joined by other authorities such as Solihull and Lichfield who had an equal reluctance to lose their identity.

The consultation of the citizens of Coventry around the combined authority was discussed and participants disagreed over whether the Council's consultation efforts had had broad enough reach.

Louise Bennett, Chief Executive, Coventry Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce has existed for 112 years. It is business led but is not for profit. The Chamber supports and is a voice for business. It gathers intelligence from across the city and Warwickshire and feeds business intelligence into national and local government.

The Chamber wants a strong and vibrant city with a good brand. Good reputation and good brand are important for the industry. The city needs to be a good place to invest. Businesses create jobs so businesses need to be attracted to Coventry. Businesses believe that Coventry is a really good place to do all sorts of business; not just retail, warehousing and distribution. The city is easily accessible from the motorways although there is a problem with congestion. Business communities love the ring road which flows freely. Another plus for Coventry is that it's one of the best in the country for planning permissions. The planning department is fast and friendly - encouraging investment and growth.

Bigger areas can create more efficiencies by joining up to sharing of services and this delivers better value for money. Businesses understand this, as it is what they would do.

However, while they understand the need to consolidate, there is a massive loyalty to "Coventry Warwickshire" as a brand and so it is important to maintain the partnership and the brand of "Coventry Warwickshire", while also creating a better business model in terms of local government reform.

Business rates are an important part of doing business, so if a combined authority gets to set business rates then businesses want to have a say in that. Businesses do not get to vote; citizens do. But businesses like a say in what happens through partnerships.

Employment especially through apprenticeships has grown a lot recently and that must continue. To do this we must retain the businesses as those create jobs and wealth. The Local Enterprise Partnership between Coventry and Warwickshire is

strong and should continue. For bigger investment decisions that affect large areas of the country such as transport infrastructure, there is a need to work together. Businesses don't see local authority boundaries. They do business wherever they can, right across the world.

There is a lot of negotiation still to be done on the terms of the combined authority and it is important to have faith in councillors to get the best out of the deal - that's the job they are elected for.

The discussion

Participants raised concerns over the governance arrangements of the combined authority and the ability of local councillors to fight the city's corner. There were also concerns that there would not be longevity or continuity in governance. Participants felt that the options were too narrow and all the possibilities had not been considered.

The issue of boundaries was discussed and the perceived contradiction between businesses preferring to work across boundaries and yet liking the Coventry brand. Could the same benefits not be realised from just working together when beneficial? Against that, it was argued that businesses may not see boundaries but that they did want to see strong partnerships such as the Local Economic Partnership.

Another perceived contradiction that was brought up was that businesses saw an efficiency argument for a combined authority, but had a strong attachment to the Coventry Warwickshire brand.

As in other discussions, it was felt that businesses did not feel that they had all the information that they would need to make a full, informed decision about the combined authority and how it would work. They wanted a say in delegated powers, particularly planning and setting of business rates if these were delegated.

The possibility of withdrawing from a future combined authority was discussed. It was said that it was possible to withdraw, whereupon any national powers devolved would be lost, but any powers delegated to the combined authority

would revert back to the city. Participants reported stories from Manchester, who are further through the devolution process. They perceived that EU regeneration money borrowed or received through the combined authority traps local authorities in the structure, as they cannot afford to pay the money back that they are jointly liable for.

There were concerns raised that freedom for businesses to move into an area is also freedom for them to move out - for example to large brownfield sites in the Black Country. Participants worried that Coventry could lose under this arrangement rather than gain. There was discussion about how the combined authority would redistribute any money that came in, and worries that it might go to other areas far away.

David Williams, Programme Director - Local Reconciliation, Coventry Cathedral

There are six candlesticks in the cathedral in the shape of wool bobbins. This represents a strong history in Coventry of weaving and silk manufacture, which along with watches and clocks moved us into the industrial revolution. The car industry and ammunitions factories were the reason why the city was bombed in World War II. So the fact that the city does lots of peace and reconciliation work really stems from those earliest manufacturers.

The work of the cathedral is about building a gentler world and rebuilding with our enemies. Coventry is an international city which provides seed learning about peace and reconciliation; people come from all over the world to learn about it and take it home to their countries.

A cross of nails is the symbol of Coventry's destruction and rebuilding. It's made of medieval nails, which were in the ceiling of the cathedral and were found after it was destroyed. The cross, as a symbol of the death and resurrection of Jesus is a reminder to the people of Coventry that whatever happens there will be something that comes next.

Coventry has universities, Godiva, the cathedral and much to see but we need excellent connections between Birmingham and Coventry to attract people down from Birmingham as visitors.

The city is not what it was. It has lost a lot from the city centre. Broadgate and Friargate are uninspiring and the city has lost its heart and soul. There were suggestions that Cathedral Lane should have been removed as part of the redevelopment. Maybe some of the developments need to be more sensitive to highlight the medieval.

The discussion

Participants felt that there was not much in the city for young people. There were still some nice bits in Coventry, but there's nothing much to see. Most buildings were run down. There should be some new architecture and some new buildings that look good, and more student accommodation. There needed to be a celebration of the different foods and cultures such as a food fayre at the cathedral. Students could help strengthen the city by for example volunteering to show people round.

Participants felt that a key part of Coventry's identity was with Warwickshire and that needs to be retained, whereas in joining with Birmingham they saw risks the city would be overshadowed. People felt that Birmingham would draw people away from Coventry for socialising and working when what is needed is people to come to Coventry. People need to come to Coventry to learn about the city.

Participants felt that the city had great strength and used to be great in many areas which could be built on into the future. It was important to embrace the past and build on the medieval history. People came to Coventry as students and got to know the city but the city is not as well known as other UK cities. By combining with other authorities it could become better known and have a stronger voice in the world. It was important to rebuild and sell the city to people, by for example keeping the students who have come here to study as long-term residents. Coventry should be known for being a place where there are excellent students and universities that attract people to the city.

Participants said that the city had great diversity and had been built on refugees, who had contributed to its culture. The city needed to keep this multicultural identity and the sense of Coventry putting people together, but there was a risk

this could be lost if Coventry became part of a combined authority, like the villages and towns of London and Manchester had merged into the city.

Participants felt that attracting people to the city needed things like good shopping. There was a need to improve the shopping centre. Shops wouldn't come to the city unless there was pedestrian footfall, but people won't come unless there are shops - so it was a vicious circle.

In terms of attracting businesses, participants felt there was a need to target a range of businesses - big, medium and small. Smaller businesses were seen as having more loyalty, whereas big business followed the money.

Some participants thought that the combined authority was a chance to build on Coventry's identity and make it better known. Others felt it would lead to a loss of identity.

Clare Wightman, Director, Grapevine Charity

Coventry feels like quite a poor city with real pockets of inequality and poverty. The city centre feels neglected and young people don't feel their future is in Coventry, they feel like the need to move away. It's a Labour city and that is a big part of its identity. The Council and services are quite paternalistic but the city has a vibrant charity and voluntary sector.

It feels like there's more civic action going on in Coventry than elsewhere, for example the Fargo Initiative, Godiva Festival and Olympic football at Ricoh Arena. Sometimes it feels like a "done to" place. There are concerns that sharing between councils will change things in a way that the Council can't control anymore.

Clare mentioned the need to see a relationship with people enabling solutions, rather than plugging, needs. How will the trickle down of economic prosperity happen? There is concern about influence, control and how that would operate. People who live in Coventry haven't had a part in trying to construct its identity until now. How do you bring the voices of people that use services into decisions about service provision? There is a worry about a loss of democratic control and influence.

The discussion

Participants had concerns about how the local populations in the council areas that make up combined authority would have a say on anything, when it is already difficult to influence the Council in any of their current decision-making processes. It was felt that citizens' panels like this were just a tick box exercise. The links between Coventry and Warwickshire worked well and were established. So much of partnership working was through relationships and that is possible at a local level - but how could it be done on a bigger scale?

There were concerns about perceived financial mismanagement on the part of Birmingham City Council and worries that money spent by the combined authority would be wasted.

Participants said it was important for the council to be clear about the advantages of combined authorities and what will be the advantages for Coventry. There were suspicions that it was a way of central government blaming the regions for unpopular decisions, and that even if it was a good vehicle for EU grants, if the UK left the EU there would be no grants to apply for.

Participant felt that while historically Coventry had been built through philanthropy, when the government started giving money people stopped doing this. For example, an OAP club was built with subscriptions from workers but did not survive long once state funding was introduced.

The council took it over and now it's gone through different identities as a youth club and a "young persons centre", and now you need to have left school to attend.

It was important to find a way to get groups together to do things - "you shouldn't have to entice people in - they should want to come". But young people needed support to set things up. It would be great if you could have a place where people could meet with no barriers, or no cost.

Participants was felt that all Coventrians had a duty of care to each other but that not enough was being done to help people who live in the city. For example, in Wood End and Stoke there were no activities for young people. There were

questions about whether the combined authority would help these disadvantaged areas and reduce the significant inequalities in the city. Would it, for example, benefit the city centre and not the other areas in the city? What would be done for the other areas?

The marketing of the city and the activities within it needed to be improved and participants felt there was a need to find opportunities to market Coventry for free. People knew how to Google, but they didn't know how to Google for things in their community.

Rachael Bermingham, Campaigner and Local Resident

Rachael said that there should be a referendum on the issue of joining a combined authority, and there is concern about the current lack of information available. A combined authority is a major decision which will affect the city for years to come. The leader of Coventry City Council has said that there is only one option: the West Midlands Combined Authority. At the moment there is only one option on the table and the consultation, including this citizens' panel, is all just one big marketing exercise. It is not a consultation process when there is only one option.

The West Midlands Combined Authority statement focuses on transport, skills, and economic development. The national spending review coming up next month could lead to cuts in funding and if there are ambitious regional skills plans, they are going to have to be funded somehow. What is needed is proper investment using a prudent source of funds within our control.

"You cannot rely on big business to stick with the city". Big business doesn't have loyalty to regions; they go where the funders are. The West Midlands Combined Authority bid focuses on the High Speed 2 (HS2) growth strategy but this bypasses Coventry so there will be no benefit from that. The West Midlands Combined Authority wants Coventry and Warwickshire to be included because it would add around 860,000 people to its population and increase its headcount. Birmingham wants a population to trump Manchester's.

The discussion

Some participants were unhappy that the West Midlands Combined Authority was

the only combined authority being offered and there were no choices. Many people mentioned that they would prefer to combine with Warwickshire, and said that they were aware that Warwickshire County Council felt the facts didn't add up for the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Participants thought that they had not been told everything. In particular, "what is there to lose and what to gain?". For example, would Coventry lose free bus passes if not part of the combined authority? There needed to be more information about the consequences, and this needed to be explained in a way that showed impact on peoples everyday lives.

There was discussion about the politics. Warwickshire was Conservative but that did not concern the group. It was felt that the West Midlands Combined Authority was being driven by a desire to access EU funds. There was concern that Birmingham would want to borrow for various schemes, as participants believed that Birmingham had overspent and were not good financial managers. It was felt that there was no certainty that money that came into the West Midlands Combined Authority would go into the different constituent parts of the combined authority fairly. Participants were worried that there were as yet no clear answers to that question. Would the money go to the combined authority and be distributed, or directly to the individual authorities?

There was concern that the Combined Authority would be a net drain of resource rather than an advantage to the area, though some participants said that the finances would be different for the two authorities and would not be merged. Participants were concerned that when it came to funding decisions, Coventry politicians would fight for Coventry but could be overruled by other authorities.

There was also concern over urban sprawl and whether the green belt between Coventry and Birmingham would be swallowed up in an urban area and the distinct identity of Coventry lost. "Coventry doesn't want to be a bit of Birmingham."

There was concern that the number of trains that go through Coventry will go down once HS2 is built. It was felt that Coventry did not need this expensive rail link to be an international city.

The table felt that what was needed was someone to present a really good picture of why it would be good to be part of a West Midlands Combined Authority. They felt that currently Coventry and Warwickshire was a powerhouse on its own, with Coventry and Warwickshire radio, and Coventry and Warwickshire Local Economic Partnership. Nobody had seen a list that outlines the benefits of West Midlands Combined Authority to Coventry.

Session 3: Images of Coventry

This section is a summary of the views expressed by participants across the four tables on the four themes of “Coventry as the place I live, as my city, in its region and in the world.”

Coventry as the place I live

“You need to feel connected with your neighbourhood as that’s where it all starts”
- quote from participant

Participants expressed that the areas around Coventry provide a sense of connection and neighbourhood. Some pointed out that Coventry is surrounded by beautiful, safe suburbs and felt that this should be celebrated, developed and protected, because “green spaces bring people together”. Lots of trees and wildflower meadows all create space that people want to share, with Charterhouse Fields mentioned as an example. Shopping areas, pubs and libraries were also mentioned as places that keep people local.

It was felt that these local hubs need to be supported and developed, and areas should have spaces in the city centre so people can see what’s going on locally, and that there is a minimum level of services that each neighbourhood needs to keep it thriving.

Citing Coventry’s diverse neighbourhoods, participants felt events such as festivals bring people together and that these are needed to link people together. It was highlighted that there are many active volunteers in Coventry’s neighbourhoods, and that these hard-working people need to be supported and encouraged.

Participants noted that Coventry’s more deprived areas should be acknowledged, with extra investment needed to make them thriving places to live. Especially

those with transitory populations which can make it hard to create a sense of place.

If refugees were to arrive in Coventry, participants believe the city will be very welcoming, with some feeling that any new arrivals should be spread out across the city.

Recent participatory budgeting exercises were praised as a good way to build a sense of local community and it was felt that people would benefit from more information about what is going on in the city, in their own and other neighbourhoods, with for example an 'Our Coventry' website, run by citizens which showcased the city and let people know what is going on.

Coventry as my city

Participants felt that Coventry is a beautiful city surrounded by countryside, but with lots of green space and trees within the city. It is considered to be quiet, calm, and self contained - small enough to get around easily, but large enough to offer a wide range of attractions and services - including the cathedral, universities, museums, Guildhall, civic buildings, the football stadium, theatres and the new hospital. Participants praised the many improvements over the years, highlighting the space outside the cathedral and The Herbert Museum and Art Gallery as real credits to the city.

Coventry's history was highlighted, with some stating that it had always been a proud and independent city and a sense that this had been reinforced by events such as the decimation of the city in bombing in World War II and its revival - as well as the loss of its manufacturing and industrial heritage. "We're a post-industrial rust belt."

Participants emphasised that Coventry is a diverse and welcoming city where, for generations, people have come from all over, including the Huguenots, Irish workers and international students and migrants. It was stressed that the city had welcomed many refugees from war, drawing on its role as a global centre for peace and reconciliation. The Godiva and Caribbean festivals, the Mela and Christmas market were mentioned many times as the way that the city comes together and barriers are broken down.

Innovations such as dyes and cogs were mentioned as those which led to the establishment of weaving and motor industries. It was expressed that though much of the manufacturing has now gone, there is still a spirit of innovation in the town which is built on by the Universities becoming world leaders in education and technology, along with the Business School developing successful entrepreneurs. Participants felt that the city needs to be a place where they want to study, work and invest, although the role of the universities in the town divided people. The value of jobs and investment was welcomed and students were seen as an important life force in the city; but also had negatives, with student accommodation bringing down housing quality in some areas. Participants felt there is a clear link between people coming into the city and innovation, and that the city is open and looking for new ideas to make it an attractive and welcoming place to be.

The transport and infrastructure in the city is seen as both a source of pride and frustration. The ring road is loved by many, making the city centre accessible from all areas and making traffic flow around the city. The subways appeared less popular, yet seen as convenient and public space that could be claimed, for example, as a space for each neighbourhood in the centre. Car parking and public transport were both areas which people felt could be improved. Participants felt that there are hidden gems in the city in the canal and the river (which is currently largely underground), and that more could be made of both.

Shopping is a less well-regarded aspect of the city, with some mentioning that there aren't enough big names, upmarket brands and independent shops. Participants felt that there is no heart to the shopping centre, that shops aren't competing well with the internet and people often go to other places like Solihull and Kidderminster for shopping. People want a virtuous circle created – a space where more people want to shop, that brings in more retailers, which creates a place where more people want to shop.

The safety and environment in the centre, particularly at night time was highlighted as a priority. Younger members of the panel felt it was a less safe place than before. Lighting and policing were seen as ways to achieve this but participants felt that it is also important to create a place that a range of people wanted to go so and welcoming to all sorts of people.

Planning and the look of the city was mentioned and the need to develop a 'Coventry Style' which was both modern and eco friendly while being inspired by the city's mediaeval history. Exciting, futuristic buildings were preferred to large swathes of concrete. It was felt that the city needed a centre piece - something modern and spectacular that people want to come and see and creates something people can gather around.

For the future of the city, people wanted to build on the history, the innovation and the welcoming nature of the city to make it a place where people want to visit and stay. It was felt that there are many great things about Coventry which should be promoted more to residents and visitors from all over.

Coventry in its region

In the region, Coventry's strong sense of history and pride shone through. Participants felt that its compactness and connectedness made it an attractive place, easy to get to, get around and get out of in to beautiful countryside. It fared well compared to neighbours and many people identified strongly with Warwickshire. There was a strong attachment to working in partnership with the county, as it was felt that the two had a good balance of urban / rural and industrial / service sectors which, if they can be joined up, would make the area more productive and everyone benefits.

The relationship with Birmingham and the wider West Midlands was more conflicted. Some felt that Coventry could be a bit lost and in the shadow of the bigger neighbour, swallowed up in an "urban sprawl". Others thought that their identity as a city was sometimes defined as 'near Birmingham' or 'in the West Midlands' and believed that some people might not have heard of Coventry, whereas the larger neighbour was more recognized.

Participants expressed that the post-industrial heritage was something Coventry shares with many of its West Midlands neighbours, but does not see advantage from; it was felt that other areas had bigger, cheaper areas of land to offer and more heavy industrial heritage to draw on, when attracting new business into the region.

As a regional centre, participants felt that Coventry needs to make itself more than a day trip - it needs to be somewhere people want to come for the weekend and

then want to stay. Participants do not want Coventry to be just another part of the West Midlands and feel that it needs to differentiate itself, sell its strong points and become more distinctive.

Coventry in the world

Participants felt that Coventry is a global city in many ways. The cathedral was mentioned many times as an important reference point in the city for local people and visitors. Some considered Coventry a global peace city since the bombing in the Second World War, welcoming people from around the world to share experiences of war, peace and ideas for making the world a less conflicted place.

Alongside this, brands such as Jaguar Land Rover were highlighted as those closely associated with the city. Although many of the manufacturing industries have gone, people felt that Coventry still has a reputation in a range of industries. The Transport Museum, for example, was seen as a place which celebrates this and attracts a wide and diverse audience.

World-class universities were seen to draw students and researchers from around the world, although some of the students in the audience felt that the city's brand could be stronger. Some mentioned that when they tell people they study in Coventry they have to say 'near Birmingham' and that it is not widely known that Warwick University is in Coventry.

Participants mentioned the city's strong reputation for martial arts and its recently developed computer and video games festival 'Insomnia', which is rapidly gaining in popularity. Also noted strongly was Lady Godiva, the Anglo Saxon noblewoman, who is known worldwide and celebrated in many ways including with a statue and a festival in the city each year.

Again people felt that there was a need to build on and promote the strong global brand that Coventry has. Participants felt strongly that there is a lot to be proud about, and a lot to work with - but a lot to work on, too.

Themes and Conclusions

The previous section of this report tried to stay as close as possible to the words that people used, summarising and collating them where necessary. In this section, however, we use our own words to draw out some of the key themes that were picked up at several points to today and relate them to the context of the citizens' panel, the combined authority proposal.

Need for more information

Participants said that there had not been enough information about what the combined authority would mean specifically for Coventry and the people that live in the city. They wanted to know about the impact on their everyday lives (e.g. transport and bus passes). Even after the presentation by the expert witnesses, there was still an uncertainty about what the practical effect of the combined authority would be. This was in part because it is a complicated local government structure, and also because we cannot know until after the negotiations with government have been completed what the exact nature of the proposal will be. We would recommend that the Council continues to communicate about the combined authority throughout the run up to a decision, throughout the negotiation process, and if it decides to join the combined authority. In particular, the Council needs to highlight the practical consequences for residents of Coventry joining a combined authority, the impact it will have across the city and how it could affect everyday lives. The opportunities for people to participate in shaping of decisions also needs to be communicated.

Seeing the decision as significant for the city's future identity

Many of the participants in the room felt that the decision on whether to join the combined authority was significant in shaping what Coventry would be in the future. Aside from the practicalities of regeneration funding, it touched on a sense of identity and difference from the other cities and towns of the West Midlands. People felt a strong connection with Warwickshire. They showed a deep loyalty to Coventry as a place, which was also shown in the words that people chose to describe it. In its decision about the Combined Authority, the Council will need to take these concerns about identity into account, but also recognise that

perceptions of the impact on the city's identity are perhaps greater than the reality.

Coventry's voice

One of the most significant concerns about the Combined Authority was that Coventry's voice and uniqueness would be lost. In particular, people pointed to the fact that other authorities would in theory be able to outvote Coventry on strategic issues in the combined authority. It was notable in this context that the participants seemed confident that the City Council would speak up firmly on their behalf; their worry was that they would be outvoted. They did not seem worried that the council would not represent their interests well.

Participation in the city

This worry about powerlessness at the regional level was mirrored by a worry about being unable to influence council decision-making further down at local level. Several participants said they felt it difficult to influence the council and to find out what was going on. The model of a citizens' panel, in which people have the space to express their views, was seen as positive for big decisions, but there was a desire for something more continuous and conversational at city neighbourhood level. One participant said there was a need for a "Google for communities", so they could understand what was going on, and an open opportunity to contribute to council decision-making.

Suburbs and centre

On the combined authority, specifically, people saw that there may be benefits to regeneration funding, but were worried that this would benefit the city centre and that the suburban areas of the city would not see the impact. The importance of funding for other areas of the city was mentioned several times.

City pride

One of the most striking elements of the conversation was the pride in which people took in Coventry global reputation and footprint. It was a city of connections at regional and International level. The rich multicultural heritage, and

the connections culturally and to transport links into the rest of the wider West Midlands were particularly celebrated. There was a concern, with a combined authority, that links to Warwickshire would be lost. An approach to the combined authority that saw Coventry as at the intersection of several different networks, in the combined authority, in Warwickshire, and in its region and more widely, would reflect the way that people saw the city. It is important to participants that any work with other West Midlands authorities does not create barriers to continued partnerships with Warwickshire.

A digital copy of this report and original notes taken by facilitators can be viewed online at www.demsoc.org/coventry-citizens-panel/report/

Appendices

Appendix 1

You can view the Storify online at <https://storify.com/Demsoc/coventry-citizens-panel/> - please note the tweets appear below in reverse order

Coventry Citizens' Panel

A summary of the social media activity surrounding the Coventry Citizens' Panel, discussing the identity of Coventry and the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority.

 **Demsoc Coventry**
@DemsocCOV [Follow](#)

A massive 'thank you' to everyone that came to the Coventry Citizens' Panel today - looking forward to writing the event report! #GreaterCov

4:39 PM - 9 Sep 2015

← ↻ 5 ★ 2

 **Demsoc Coventry**
@DemsocCOV [Follow](#)

Improving and regenerating the city centre has been a reoccurring theme throughout all of today's discussions #GreaterCov

3:46 PM - 9 Sep 2015

← ↻ 3 ★

 **Simon Gilbert** ✓
@TheSimonGilbert [Follow](#)

Have to say, residents involved seem far from universally positive about the prospect of joining Birmingham in the @WestMids_CA #GreaterCov

4:37 PM - 9 Sep 2015

← ↻ 1 ★ 2

 **Demsoc Coventry**
@DemsocCOV [Follow](#)

"We understand that there is no quick fix or sudden solution but we want to know our opinions are actually being listened to" #GreaterCov

2:39 PM - 9 Sep 2015

← ↻ ★ 2

 **Glenn Williams**
@Glenn_Williams1 [Follow](#)

Coventry should not be a pawn on Birmingham's chess board. #greaterCov

4:02 PM - 9 Sep 2015

← ↻ 1 ★ 1

 **Cllr. Kevin Maton**
@Cllr_KevinMaton [Follow](#)

I want more people at #greaterCov talking about proposed Mental Health Commission. Benefits to Coventry residents

2:02 PM - 9 Sep 2015


← ↻ ★

 **Rachael Bermingham**
@rebermingham [Follow](#)

How about a permanent citizens' drop in / visitor centre in the old Council House? #lovecov #GreaterCov

4:36 PM - 9 Sep 2015

← ↻ 1 ★ 2

 **Aimee Challenor**
@aimeec110 [Follow](#)

I think the #WMCA would be better and more democratic as a London style Assembly with elected Assembly Members #greatercov

1:52 PM - 9 Sep 2015

← ↻ ★

 **Sheila Millar**
@millar_sheila [Follow](#)

David Williams Expert Witness - my favourite, a really balanced discussion #GreaterCov

1:26 PM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 2 ⭐ 2

 **Rachael Bermingham**
@rebermingham [Follow](#)

Really interesting discussions on identity of Coventry. #GreaterCov

12:43 PM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 1



 **John Popham**
@johnpopham [Follow](#)

Expert witness sessions in full flow #GreaterCov

11:57 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 1 ⭐




 **Demsoc Coventry**
@DemsocCOV [Follow](#)

Round 1 of discussions with expert witnesses #GreaterCov

11:09 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 2 ⭐ 1

 **Aimee Challenor**
@aimeec110 [Follow](#)

"Small organisations are worried they'll be looked over or missed as part of a bigger #WMCA structure" S.Bradbury #VAcoventry #greatercov

11:07 AM - 9 Sep 2015


👤 ⭐

 **Demsoc Coventry**
@DemsocCOV [Follow](#)

This decision MUST involve citizens - consultations can't just be an "expensive marketing exercise" - Rachael Bermingham #GreaterCov

11:25 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 3 ⭐ 1

 **Aimee Challenor**
@aimeec110 [Follow](#)

"Coventry and Warwickshire would be more comfortable for many people" S.Bradbury #VAcoventry #greatercov #WMCA

11:10 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 ⭐



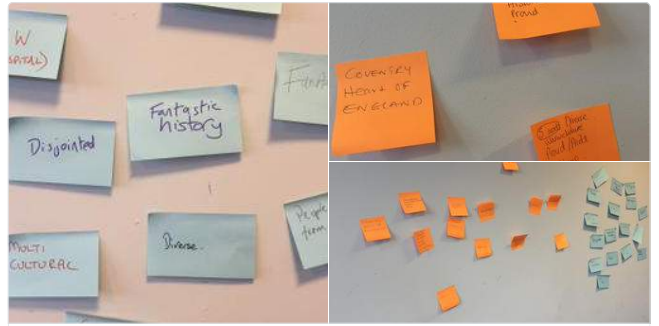
Demsoc Coventry
@DemsocCOV

Follow

"When you look at that wall, Coventry sounds like a place you would definitely want to live" #GreaterCov

10:25 AM - 9 Sep 2015

3



Demsoc Coventry
@DemsocCOV

Follow

Some of the word clouds put together about the identity of Coventry #GreaterCov

10:16 AM - 9 Sep 2015

1

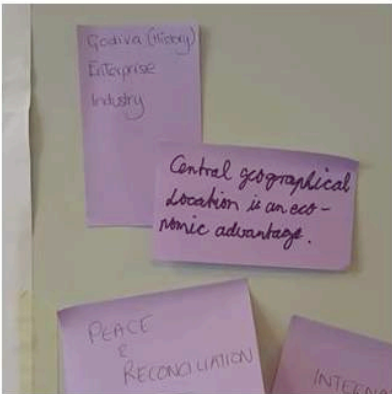
Aimee Challenor
@aimeec110

Follow

Biggest concern I've heard RE: #greatercov #WMCA is loss of Local #democracy

10:05 AM - 9 Sep 2015

2



More thoughts #GreaterCov @ The Welcome Centre [instagram.com/p/7Z5UzDgIAz/](https://www.instagram.com/p/7Z5UzDgIAz/)

JOHN POPHAM @JOHNPOPHAM · 9 DAYS AGO

Demsoc Coventry
@DemsocCOV

Follow

"Does it help make Coventry the place that people in Coventry want it to be?" #GreaterCov

10:05 AM - 9 Sep 2015

2 1

 **John Popham**
@johnpopham [Follow](#)

A combined authority is not a merged authority. It is a legal partnership between existing councils [#GreaterCov](#)

10:02 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 1 ★



 **John Popham**
@johnpopham [Follow](#)

Table discussions at [#GreaterCov](#)

9:54 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 ★

 **Aimee Challenor**
@aimeec110 [Follow](#)

What makes Coventry? The answer is simple; it's wonderfully diverse culture. [#greatercov](#) [#refugeeswelcome](#)

9:49 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 ★

 **John Popham**
@johnpopham [Follow](#)

Joe Elliott; we owe it to the people of Coventry to show we are in it to win it [#GreaterCov](#)

9:47 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 ★

 **Aimee Challenor**
@aimeec110 [Follow](#)

"Coventry has a lot going for it" [#greatercov](#)

9:45 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 2 ★



 **John Popham**
@johnpopham [Follow](#)

Joe Elliott MBE setting the scene at [#GreaterCov](#) ift.tt/1IXSNTI

9:40 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 ★



 **John Popham**
@johnpopham [Follow](#)

.@anthonyzach kicking off at [#GreaterCov](#) ift.tt/1UGhURM

9:37 AM - 9 Sep 2015

👤 ★



John Popham
@johnpopham

 Follow

People arriving for [#GreaterCov](https://ift.tt/1KDt7TW) event ift.tt/1KDt7TW

9:32 AM - 9 Sep 2015

  2 

Appendix 2

What people wrote for the wall in session 1:

- Coventry and Warwickshire (x4)
- Culture
- Resilient
- Versatile
- Hidden greenbelt (x2)
- Industry (x2)
- Community (x2)
- Sky blue
- Diversity (x5)
- Forward looking
- Godiva (x4)
- Students
- Refugees
- Coventry Uni
- Multi-cultural (x5)
- People come from all over
- Three spires
- Must include Warwickshire
- People with strong views
- I love the ring-road
- Fantastic
- Well known
- City of peace and innovation
- Disjointed
- UHCW (Hospital)
- Tired
- Dump
- Practical not political please
- Walled city and ring road
- Communication, combined authority - radio, TV
- History (x7)
- Ring road
- Village
- Migrants/ refugees/ multicultural
- Education
- Leisure
- Easily accessible
- Labour
- Peace and reconciliation (x2)
- International (twin cities)
- Central geographical location is an economic advantage
- Enterprise
- Coventry future: preserve Coventry's history, re-sum intense regeneration, utilise-development and research from the universities and innovation
- Retain: independence, enterprise, entrepreneurship, green belt, uniqueness.
- General: utilise Brownfield site, don't compete with Birmingham, build on quality not quantity.
- Coventry's LGBT community: pride, world AIDs day, PRISM youth group, Coventry & Warwickshire friend, Coventry pride charity
- Industry and change
- Accepting

- Heart of England
- Pride/ proud (x3)
- Heritage (x2)
- Community
- Home (x2)
- Green cathedral
- Beautiful green spaces
- Engineering

Appendix 3

Additional comments submitted by participants:

- If we don't know the facts and the offer on the table, how are we as a society supposed to be consulted fairly and come to our own informed decisions?
- Future longevity 1. Should go with WMCA, as the city will get more out of it. 2. Although Birmingham is a big city, still I believe it will do justice with Coventry. 3. WMCA plan should be made more elaborate in terms of who will have what power, and how it will be exercised.
- Why doesn't Coventry have one single councillor of black or minority ethnic group? What is the problem stopping all of the parties having one councillor from an ethnic minority?
- Coventry City had the first lady leader Ann Lucas which is fantastic but do we know when we will have the first black African councillor or second black Caribbean councillor - I hope it will be soon!!
- Why does Coventry not have one single councillor of black African or black Caribbean councillor? What is the problem that means all parties are not producing the next black councillors?? How has this not been dealt with and what will Coventry local parties do to recruit the next black African and Caribbean councillors?
- Combined authority: how will the management of CA be structured? How will the finance of CA be structured? How will the politics of CA be structured?
- Coventry is such a heritage city, although we should maintain that heritage the new developments should be done hand in hand
- Financial benefits/gain vs. additional costs of this proposal? (e.g. zero sum game or worse)
- If the plan is more elaborated then it will be more easy to understand and make decisions
- City vision (magazine by email), send City Vision as a link with council tax bills
- Coventry should not be a pawn on Birmingham's chess board
- There needs to be much better maintenance of all structures in Coventry (no neglect of buildings/estates)
- More housing and business/industrial estates - they need to be better - build TALLER (avoid one and two level developments)

- Make housing and busy industrial estates distinguishable from “mono-culture-developments”
- Any development needs to be balanced (e.g. do not rely heavily on imports)
- Coventry needs sustained innovation (e.g. inventions of products and services)
- There is only one option: yes or no

Appendix 4

Steve Banbury – CEO, Voluntary Action Coventry

VAC is the Voluntary and Community sector's membership body in the city, providing support, advice and information to over 450 member organisations and through our networks to well over a thousand groups in total. Coventry has a strong VCS with a real sense of local identification and pride and a clear desire to get things done independently.

In the West Midlands there are at least 20,000 groups with an annual turnover of around £1.4billion, 34,000 fte staff, nearly 500,000 volunteers (worth £1.3bn to the economy) and spending power of about £3.3bn.

Very keen for the sector to be involved in the planning and implementation of the WMCA. VAC's member groups support the communities who will deliver the growth agenda of a successful combined authority.

VAC recently surveyed the sector for reactions to this development. 34% agreed with the proposal; 25% disagreed but 41% didn't know if it would have any impact at all. There is still a lot to do to communicate to the public what a Combined Authority really is.

Those in favour thought it would be a good opportunity to collaborate with Regional sector colleagues to bring in additional funding or maximise the value of existing resources. Would devolved responsibilities give flexibility and resources to local Councils to stop the constant cutting of grants to the voluntary sector?

Those who were against the proposal were concerned about the loss of grass roots Coventry voices in a bigger structure and the impact on small organisations of contracting on a large scale. VAC and the sector have both positive and negative experiences of working regionally.

Positive: Many years working with sub regional colleagues through CWIC with no loss of funding or influence for the city (we actually did proportionally quite well). VAC is a founder member and current vice chair of RAWM the sector's regional body. Many local organisations work with regional colleagues without problems or loss of influence. Again the city has punched above its weight although we always had to work hard to ensure the Birmingham centric view didn't prevail.

Negative: In business and public sector led structures of recent years (Advantage West Midlands, the LEP's) our sector has been at best peripheral and marginalised

and at worst ignored completely.

At VAC we would want the city to be involved in any structure that could devolve resources and decision making away from Westminster. That however would need to be in the interests of all the people of the city particularly the most vulnerable and those who have not benefitted from the economic strength of the country.

The voluntary sector is a crucial part of the engine of growth and should have a critical role to play in the development of social entrepreneurship and the reform of public services. We would like to see social investment alongside the investment in capital (buildings) and transport infrastructure.

Appendix 5

An email was circulated to all participants and expert witnesses with a link to a feedback survey. 12 responses were received, although not every respondent answered every question.

Q1. What part of the event did you find the most useful or informative?

1. Group discussion
2. Expert Witness Views
3. Hearing the expert witnesses
4. Expert witness session
5. All of it but the expert witnesses in general were excellent
6. Discussion in groups in afternoon
7. Meeting fellow Coventry born and bred individuals. Hearing multiple opinions on the future of our city
8. Breaks, People were able to talk freely without appearing stupid
9. The question and answer session with expert witnesses
10. Moving within the group getting different perspectives
11. Group discussions

Q2. What part of the event did you find the least useful or informative?

1. None - All presentations were informative
2. Some of the expert witnesses were not that relevant I feel
3. None
4. None
5. One of the expert witness groups
6. Anyone suggesting we would benefit from the combined authority!
7. The amount of time taken up by the two supporters of CAs and the wasted time on explanations of what CAs are.
8. The facilitators - in the afternoon session my facilitator did not encourage group participation and didn't step in when things got heated
9. Nothing
10. One participant complaining about the past rather than thinking about the future.

Q3. Overall, how would you rate the scene setting session? This was the first part of the day that included the introduction to the day, speech and information

Answer Choices	Responses
▼ Excellent	20.00% 2
▼ Very good	60.00% 6
▼ Fairly good	10.00% 1
▼ Mildly good	10.00% 1
▼ Not good at all	0.00% 0
Total	10

Comments:

1. Informative and useful
2. The background information helped to identify the major aspects and definitions of a Combined Authority
3. I thought it was good to have a introduction from someone well known from Coventry (Joe Elliot) and have one of your members of staff explain a little bit about what being greater Birmingham would mean.
4. The scene setting went on a bit
5. Very well done
6. Good clear speakers. clearly passionate
7. This was a session where debate at the tables was allowed less time than the time for verbosity by others
8. This was beneficial to motivate us
9. Introduced well with some good info
10. Objectives made clear. Good to hear Joe Elliott.

Q4. Overall, how would you rate the expert witness session?

Answer Choices	Responses
▼ Excellent	25.00% 3
▼ Very good	33.33% 4
▼ Fairly good	25.00% 3
▼ Mildly good	0.00% 0
▼ Not good at all	16.67% 2
Total	12

Comments:

1. The "Experts" covered a wide range of views from Private Citizens, Voluntary sector, Business Sector to Political Sector
2. Most of the expert witnesses had some useful input.
3. No one explained what the bid entailed which I think most of us expected to hear. How can we make an informed opinion if we are not told the facts?
4. one seemed a little pointless and actually it would have been good to hear them all
5. Some sessions were interesting and gave space for q and a. One in particular though had me very confused!
6. I enjoyed hearing from local services the best
7. The Councillor would not debate his beliefs yet would not expand on the reasons for reaching that belief. The Business woman had no thoughts on CAs other than there may be more money available for businesses. The charity worker had no thoughts other than charities need more help and would follow any path to get it. The fourth I listened to was so memorable I can't even remember him other than I quickly moved to another table.
8. the experts were very well chosen
9. Was so good to hear views from those that are supposed to know
10. Expert witnesses seemed to have a specialised view rather than an overview.

Q5. Overall, how would you rate the the discussion session? This is when you discussed Coventry's neighbourhood, city, regional and global identities.

Answer Choices	Responses
Excellent	9.09% 1
Very good	63.64% 7
Fairly good	0.00% 0
Mildly good	18.18% 2
Not good at all	9.09% 1
Total	11

[Comments \(10\)](#)

Comments:

1. Opportunity for all to participate
2. There were wide ranging views from Student to Pensioner, including ethnic representatives. There was a good opportunity to express a personal viewpoint

3. This was a good little "brainstorming session" I liked hearing others ideas and seeing what people thought of mine.
4. I think the only one point we all agreed on was the enjoyment of green spaces in the city and even looking out of the window of the 'Welcome Centre' onto tree-tops
5. Good ideas and uplifting - we actually helped motivate a participant to make him feel more positive
6. Well facilitated, ensuring everyone was able to share their opinions and be heard. Interesting to hear views of people from varied demographic but all who want the best for the city.
7. Domineered by self professed experts who, when challenged, knew little of Coventry's' history or heritage. who expressed the view that what the Councillor said must be true because he is a councillor. Four at the table stated they did not know what the meeting was for.
8. The facilitator didn't regulate the discussion in the slightest. he just sat back and let discussion happen, even when it was off topic or going too far
9. Was good to hear other opinion and see how close we are getting
10. Some good ideas.

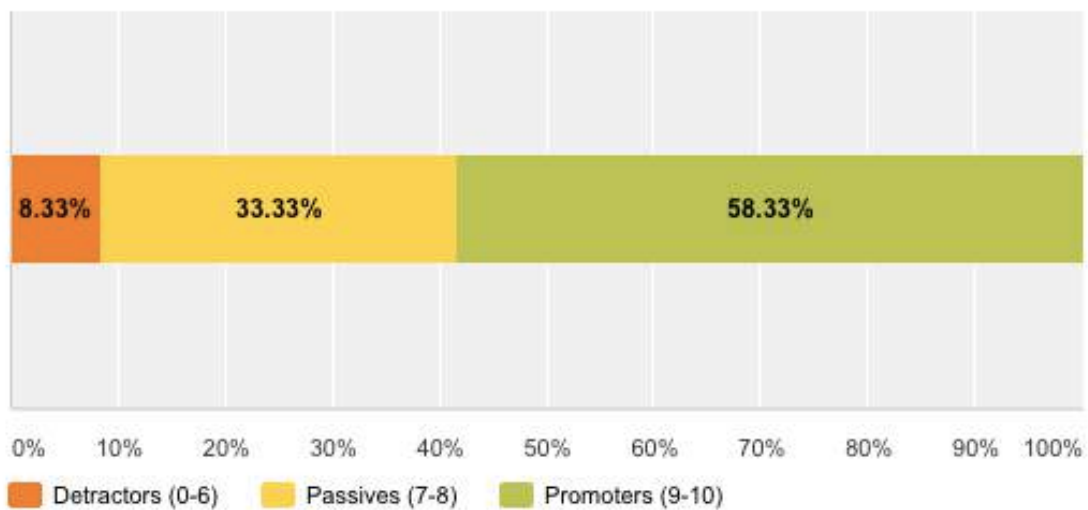
Q6. Understand and sharing your views

	Yes	Most of the time	Some of the time	No	Unsure	Total	Weighted Average
Do you feel like the basic information about Combined Authorities was explained to you in a way you can understand?	41.67% 5	25.00% 3	16.67% 2	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	12	2.17
Was there enough time to discuss the issues?	36.36% 4	27.27% 3	9.09% 1	27.27% 3	0.00% 0	11	2.27
Did you feel able to make a contribution to the discussion?	54.55% 6	27.27% 3	18.18% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11	1.64
Did you feel like your views were accurately reflected by facilitators in the summary feedback?	54.55% 6	18.18% 2	27.27% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11	1.73

Q7. Was there something you didn't get a chance to say at the Citizens' Panel or really want Coventry City Council to hear?

1. No, but I want the City Council to protect the interest of Coventry and its people
2. The only information on the combined authority we were given was from councillor Maton who said the only choice was yes or no to Birmingham, Warwickshire was never an option
3. Would like any decision not to be political. We did not discuss feasibility of an elected Mayor
4. No
5. Lots. All questions. I have asked them numerous times previously without getting answers but actually thought I would receive answers as part of a Citizens Panel
6. I'm not confident that our own opinion as citizens will be listened to and addressed by the council - many participators felt we were just a box to be ticked for consultation
7. I have a particular interest in transport issues but this was not the forum for discussing them, and there are other opportunities to discuss them such as the Coventry Area Engagement Group.

Q8. How likely is it that you would recommend similar events in Coventry to a friend or colleague?



Q9. Open space for comments - please write any additional feedback here

1. The day was well balanced and informative
2. More information should have been given to why the combined authority would be to our benefit

3. A democratic process allows for a truthful debate to take place allowing people to come to a knowledgeable conclusion. This forum failed on many fronts
4. the venue was very nice and felt very welcome. however with dietary requirements I don't feel I was catered for at lunch (I could only eat peppers, carrots and chips). went home hungry!
5. Brilliant way of hearing a cross section of views when all have the same Goal in mind
6. Very grateful for the chance to participate and willing to do so again

Q10 & Q11 asked people to provide their contact details if they would like to be involved in future work. 12 people said that they would.

Q12. What topics would you most like to learn about or discuss at future events in Coventry?

1. Topics relevant to the development of the city
2. Transport, Social Care, Education
3. Redevelopment around the Cathedral in the light of University redevelopment
4. How the council spend our money (Depth details about this) and what the government does for Coventry
5. All
6. city centre regeneration, Mayor
7. Retail, transport, development of the city centre
8. Most
9. Young people, local services and Coventry's place within our local area, country and world
10. City centre planning and promotion of Coventry on the world stage
11. Transport