

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Wednesday, 9 March 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor G Duggins (Chair)
Councillor N Akhtar (Deputy Chair)
Councillor S Bains
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor T Khan
Councillor R Lakha
Councillor J Mutton
Councillor K Taylor
Councillor D Welsh

Other Members: Councillors L Bigham, J Clifford, J Lepoidevin, A Lucas,
K Maton and P Seaman

Employees:

G Faherty, Chief Executive's Directorate
G Holmes, Resources Directorate
L Knight, Resources Directorate
J Moore, People Directorate
L Read, Resources Directorate
M Reeves, Chief Executive
A West, Resources Directorate

Apologies: Councillor M Mutton
Councillor A Khan (Cabinet Member)
Councillors Miks, Noonan and O'Boyle and Mrs Hanson
(Scrutiny Board (2))

Public Business

71. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

72. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 10th and 24th February, 2016 were signed as true records. There were no matters arising.

73. Update on Combined Authorities

Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, Councillor Lucas, Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership and Councillor Maton, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Employment provided an update on the latest position regarding the West Midlands Combined Authority (CA).

The Committee were reminded that at their meeting on 23rd February, the Council approved the draft order to establish the West Midlands Combined Authority and endorsed the draft constitution for adoption. The previous day, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council had become the last of the seven local authorities to agree to become part of the CA. The next step was for the Order to be laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State. The order would be statutory basis on which the CA would be established.

The Committee were updated on the latest position as regards to other Authorities in the West Midlands area who were now considering the business case for joining the CA. Further information was provided on the two types of membership, constituent and non-constituent.

The Committee questioned the Officer and Cabinet Members present on a number of issues including who was responsible for making statements on behalf of the CA and the benefits of being a constituent member compared to a non-constituent member.

RESOLVED that the latest update be noted.

74. Coventry Alcohol Strategy (2014-17) and Coventry Drug Strategy (2015-2017)

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Public Health which provided an update on the progress made in delivering the city wide alcohol and drug strategies which had been developed by partners to steer and guide work to tackle and address alcohol and drug misuse in the city. Members of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) attended the meeting for the consideration of this item, in particular the update on the Family Drug and Alcohol Court. Councillor Clifford, Deputy Cabinet Member Health and Adult Services also attended.

The report informed of the estimated numbers of individuals who were alcohol dependent or were opiate and crack users in the city and reference was made to the increasing use of psychoactive substances (legal highs). The Coventry Household Survey revealed that the rate of those drinking above recommended NHS guidelines had decreased from 46% in 2007 to 30% in 2012. The national figures for drug use among young people showed fewer young people using drugs.

The key themes of the strategies were:

- (i) Providing effective prevention and recovery focused treatment
- (ii) Changing and challenging attitudes and behaviour
- (iii) Controlling the supply and promoting alcohol-free and drug-free environments.

The strategies were owned and driven by the multi-agency Drug and Alcohol Steering Group which was chaired by Councillor Clifford and included representatives from the partner organisations.

The report set out progress in relation to the above three key themes of the strategies.

Regarding the first theme, the report referred to the specialist treatment services available; the alternatives to structured treatment; tackling hidden harm, early intervention and young people's treatment; treatment for dual diagnosis patients; domestic violence and abuse; and the Alcohol Liaison Nurse Service. Information was also provided on the new Family Drug and Alcohol Court which was a pioneering initiative specialising in tackling drug and alcohol issues in families whose children are subject to care proceedings. A specialist team of partners work alongside families throughout the court proceedings and families saw their judge every fortnight to address problems.

For the second theme, the report drew attention to a number of issues including the Alcohol Intervention and Brief Advice intervention; intelligence building; communications strategy; street drinking; contingency management intervention; young people and housing; and legal highs.

The report referred to the following areas in relation to the third theme, Public Space Protection Orders; review of licences; and undertaking intelligence led underage test purchasing.

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

- Further information about what was being done to identify and support children at risk where their families were involved with drugs and alcohol
- The measures used to identify and help children aged 0 to 5 years
- Concerns about the toxic triangle (substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental health) and details about the work of midwives and health visitors
- Information about the new Family Drug and Alcohol Court
- Patient referrals to the Recovery Partnership and what could be done if patients refused to engage
- Partnership working with the Police in relation to problem areas with significant drug and alcohol issues
- A potential correlation between decreasing numbers of recreational drugs users and the increasing numbers of young people being prescribed anti-depressants
- A request for further information on recent trends in the behaviour and attitudes of young people in relation to the recent reduction in drug and alcohol misuse
- Further details about the declining levels of alcohol dependency alongside the increasing numbers who drank far more than the recommended levels
- The importance of early prevention measures
- The work being undertaken in schools to support pupils and their families.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The progress made over the last year with Coventry's Alcohol and Drug Strategies be endorsed.

(2) Future reports to include details of the numbers of referrals made by the Recovery Partnership to the Referral and Assessment Service, including details of the referrals not taken up.

75. Annual Canvass Update

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Electoral Services Manager which informed of the outcome of the 2015 Annual Canvass under the new requirements following the introduction of individual Electoral Registration (IER). Information was also provided on the up to date electorate figures following additional activities following completion of the Canvass.

The briefing note indicated that during the last two years work had been progressing for the introduction of IER which had been monitored by the Electoral Arrangements Advisory Panel. Legislation required the Electoral Registration Officer to send all properties in their area a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) which provided information on who was currently residing at the property aged 16 and above. Potential electors identified on the form were then sent an Invitation to Register (ITR).

From 31st July, 2015 each property in the city received a HEF. Two reminders were hand delivered in August and September to households that hadn't responded. Any non-responders then received a personal visit during October. The overall response rate to the HEF was 86%. An appendix to the briefing note provided a breakdown, in Ward and Constituency, of the numbers that did not respond to the HEF.

The briefing note also informed of the arrangements for encouraging potential electors to register. ITRs were sent out in August followed by two reminders and then a personal visit to non-responders which commenced in November.

The Committee were informed of the current engagement activities to encourage registration. They also noted that as set out in legislation the transition to Individual Electoral Registration ended on 1st December, 2015 and 3,571 unconfirmed electors were deleted from the electoral register and further details were provided about this.

From all the work carried out during the canvass on 1st December there were 17,889 pending electors in the city. Engagement work was on-going to obtain responses.

Lessons learnt from the first annual canvass since the introduction of IER will be implemented as part of a more comprehensive plan for the 2016 annual canvass. This will also involve closer working with Coventry University, Warwick University, residential care homes, sheltered accommodation, housing association partners, landlords of houses in multiple occupation and other Council Directorates.

Members questioned the officer on aspects of the briefing note and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- Clarification regarding the number of unconfirmed electors who had been removed from the electoral register and the measures that had been undertaken to encourage them to register
- Further details about the number of empty properties in the city including student properties and the issue of foreign nationals

- Concerns that the details about the way in which properties where no eligible voters have been identified are shown as empty properties could give the wrong message to members of the public implying there were far more empty properties than there actually were
- Details about an individual registration case
- Further information about the issues concerning student halls and student registrations and what could be done to encourage more students to register.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The outcome of the 2015 Annual Canvass be noted.

(2) A briefing note be sent to members providing further details on the 24,585 properties where no electors are registered to vote.

76. Report Back on the Work of Outside Body - Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre

The Committee noted a report of Councillor A Khan which detailed the work of the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre over the preceding twelve months and informed of Councillor Khan's attendance at meetings during this time. Additional information was provided on the benefits of the appointment and the financial contribution made to the organisation by the Council.

The Committee discussed the level of detail about the work of the organisation contained in the report and it was noted that the link to the organisation's Annual Report had been included in the report submitted.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The City Council continues to make appointments to the Board of the Coventry Refuge and Migrant Centre.

(2) Consideration be given to updating the template for reports back on the work of outside bodies to include reference to the significant issues and developments for the year.

77. Outstanding Issues

The Committee noted that all outstanding issues had been included in their Work Programme for the year, minute 78 below refers.

78. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2015/2016

The Committee considered their Work Programme for the current municipal year.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be noted.

79. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no additional items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.00 pm)