

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Wednesday, 7 September 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor R Lancaster (Chair)
Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor G Crookes
Councillor D Gannon
Councillor L Kelly
Councillor A Lucas
Councillor J McNicholas
Councillor R Singh (Deputy Chair)

Other Members: Councillor G Duggins

Employees:

G Holmes, Resources Directorate
P Jennings, Resources Directorate
L Knight, Resources Directorate
M Reeves, Chief Executive
A West, Resources Directorate

Other Representatives: Alan Markey, Coventry Independent Advice Service

Apologies: Councillor M Mutton, substitute Councillor Lucas

Public Business

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest declared.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th July, 2016 were signed as a true record subject to the inclusion of Councillor J McNicholas in the attendance for the meeting and the inclusion of the following bullet point in the seventh paragraph of Minute 7 headed 'Crime and Community Safety Performance': How the funding was allocated according to evidence and identified need.

There were no matters arising.

15. Business Rates Reform

The Committee considered a briefing note and received a presentation of the Executive Director of Resources on the national changes to Business Rates (BR) that were expected to be introduced from 2020 including 100% local retention of

Business Rates. Information was provided on the potential impact on Coventry as well as key issues relating to students and the university sector. Councillor Duggins, Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership attended the meeting for the consideration of this item along with Alan Markey, Director of Coventry Independent Advice Service.

The briefing note indicated that the fundamental change proposed by the Government related to local councils retaining 100% of BR income compared to the 49% retained currently. The Government was currently consulting on changes and had invited views on the future running on the BR scheme. This covered a number of aspects that would influence the financial impact on local government as a whole as well as the allocation of funding between individual authorities. The outcome would dictate whether the early years of the changes would result in a positive, negative or broadly neutral impact on Coventry's financial position.

Information was provided on the key financial aspects likely to be determined. The briefing note highlighted a 20/21 model which showed some of the factors involved and how these could affect Coventry's position including the current system position with 49% retained BR and grants, the new system 'optimistic' position with 100% retained BR and grants the new system 'pessimistic' position with 100% retained BR and no grants.

The presentation referred to the current position, the headline changes and to the consultation responses which were still being developed and were to be submitted as a Combined Authority response.

In relation to the university/ student sector, the Board were informed that any properties providing student accommodation were not liable for a business rate charge and that Council tax legislation allowed for full time students to be exempt for Council Tax purposes. This affected approximately 3,800 properties in the city. Further information was provided on the mandatory (charitable) relief on the non-dwelling properties owned by the city's two universities.

Alan Markey provided an explanation about the current position relating to Attendance Allowance that was paid at two rates and was used to improve an individual's quality of life. There was a possibility that the responsibility for payment could transfer from the Department of Work and Pensions to Local Authority control.

Members questioned the officers and the Cabinet Member on a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- A concern about the lack of information relating to the 36 consultation questions and proposed responses with a request for an additional meeting to provide the opportunity to consider these
- A concern about the inclusion of the reference to the two universities and their students, with an acknowledgement of the partnership relationship with the Council and the major economic impact they bring to the city
- Clarification about how the revenue support grant was assessed, including the compensation element for students
- A detailed explanation about the financial model set out in the briefing note

- An acknowledgement of the importance of getting the right consultation responses back to the Government and the potential of the new system to bring further cuts to the Council's finances
- Details about the possible impact of Attendance Allowance, including the current number of claimants in the city and the associated costs
- The potential financial impact of having a directly elected mayor for the Combined Authority area
- A request for further information about the potential for BR pooling within the Combined Authority area and what the Council was doing to maximise BR growth.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The content of the briefing note and presentation be noted.

(2) An additional meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee be held in the week commencing 19th September, 2016 to allow members the opportunity to consider the Government consultation questions and the relevant responses.

(3) A further report with the consultation questions and any available responses as well as the potential for the pooling of business rates within the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Council's strategy for maximising business rates income be submitted to the additional meeting.

16. West Midlands Combined Authority

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Chief Executive which informed about the scrutiny and audit arrangements of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). Cllr Duggins, Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership attended the meeting for the consideration of this item.

The briefing note indicated that the WMCA was establishing a scrutiny function alongside an Audit Committee with representation on both from the member councils. Appendices to the note detailed the governance structure for the WMCA with the links to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee; the terms of reference for these Committees; and the minutes from the first meeting of the of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15th July. The Committee were informed that Councillor Bains had attended this meeting, however, following changes to the finalised constitution for the WMCA concerning appointments, Councillor John Mutton had subsequently been appointed as the Council's nominated representative with Councillor Rupinder Singh as the nominated substitute. The issues being considered by this Committee were highlighted.

The Committee noted that, alongside the regular reports provided to all Members at Council meetings by Councillor Duggins, it was expected that Coventry members of the Committees would report back to the relevant Scrutiny Boards to ensure that there was a full overview of WMCA activities.

An executive summary of the Strategic Economic Plan was set out at a further appendix to the report. Councillor Duggins held the key portfolio of productivity and

skills and would provide regular feedback to Members on this priority action in the SEP. He was a member of the SEP Board which monitored progress against the SEP actions.

Members questioned the officers and the Cabinet Member on a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- The potential complexities for any call-in arrangements for the Scrutiny function
- The Council's representation on the audit and overview and scrutiny committees
- How the Council representatives could feedback information and how this could be managed and shared
- The priority actions in the Strategic Economic Plan, specifically that HS2 growth should also prioritise the wider transport network and infrastructure to support economic growth
- The timescales for delivery of the SEP and performance management of progress delivery.

Members were concerned that by appointing a Cabinet Member to either the Audit Committee or Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the WMCA there could possibly be a conflict of interest and it would be more transparent to appoint a Member from Scrutiny.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The governance structure of the WMCA including the scrutiny function be noted.

(2) Regular updates from the Council's representatives on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.

(3) Progress reports on the WMCA Strategic Economic Plan be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.

(4) Councillor Duggins, Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership be requested to make future City Council appointments to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Audit Committee of the WMCA from non-executive Members of the Council.

(5) Feedback from any Forums set up to consider Scrutiny across the WMCA be reported back to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee or the appropriate Scrutiny Board for discussion.

17. Report Back on Conference - Civic Visit to Kiel Week, 17 to 20 June, 2016

The Committee considered a report of the Lord Mayor, Councillor L Harvard concerning his visit to Kiel, Germany from 17th to 20th June, 2016 and the associated Kieler Woche (Kiel Week) celebrations. The report detailed the costs and benefits of attendance.

RESOLVED that the report of the Lord Mayor's civic visit to Kiel and the Kieler Woche celebrations be endorsed.

18. Scrutiny Management

In accordance with the Constitution, the Committee were informed that Councillor Lancaster, Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee attended the Cabinet meeting on 2 August, 2016 for the item relating to "Coventry City Council Response to InterCity West Coast Rail Franchise Consultation" and agreed that the decision was urgent and that call in should not apply. The Committee were informed that the reason for the urgency was that the City Council's response to the Consultation needed to be sent to the Department of Transport before the closing date for submissions which was 11.45 p.m. on 2nd August 2016.

In addition, Councillor McNicholas, acting as nominee of the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, attended the meeting of the Cabinet Member for City Services on 15th August, 2016 for the item relating to "Part Closure of Cox Street Car Park - Objection" and agreed that the decision was urgent and that call in should not apply. The Committee noted that the reason for the urgency was that, to enable the first phase of the development to open for the academic year commencing September 2017, a planning application needed to be submitted in early September, 2016 for consideration at Planning Committee on 29th September, 2016. If the application was not submitted in time, then the programme of works would be delayed and the timescales for opening would not be achievable.

19. Outstanding Issues

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator the purpose of which was to bring to the Committee's attention the responses received from Cabinet Members and officers in regard to recommendations and actions from previous meetings.

Appendix 1 to the note detailed the recommendations and actions from the last Board meeting on 16th July, 2016.

At the start of the year, the opportunity was introduced for members of the public to suggest topics that Members of the Committee could consider adding to the Committee or Scrutiny Boards work programmes. Details of the four suggestions received to date were set out in a second appendix. The Committee considered each issue determining whether the items were appropriate for Scrutiny to consider or if they could be dealt with in another way as follows:

- To debate/ investigate the rise of the extreme right wing in Coventry - a report from Superintendent Chief Inspector Danny Long, West Midlands Police be submitted to a future meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee
- Improvements to the Upper Precinct and Market Way/ Smithford Way – current position noted and officers to be requested to consider potential discussions with future new building owners of the Upper Precinct
- Review the regularity and promotion of Ward Forums – Refer to the current review of Ward Forums and to the meeting of the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) on 16th November, 2016 when the Board

would be considering the Empowered Citizen's Programme, engaging with residents

- The permission to build Finham Park 2 within two miles of Tile Hill Wood and Woodlands Academy – Refer to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) who would be considering Academisation suggesting the Board also consider the wider issue of Free Schools across the city.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The outstanding issues set out at Appendix 1 be noted.

(2) Arising from the Committee's considerations of the four suggested Scrutiny topics as summarised above, the Scrutiny Co-ordinator be requested to provide a written response to the persons submitting the requests.

20. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2016/2017

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

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be updated to include the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Drugs and Alcohol Re-Commissioning being considered at the Board meeting on 12th October, 2016.

21. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no additional items of business.

(Meeting closed at 11.40 am)