

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)
held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 3 April 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor J McNicholas (Chair)
Councillor J Birdi
Councillor G Crookes
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor C Miks
Councillor K Taylor

Other Members in attendance (by invitation): Councillor J Clifford (Deputy Scrutiny Chair)
Councillor J O'Boyle (Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration)

Others in attendance (by invitation): Nick Cleaver, Canal and River Trust

Employees (by Directorate):

People L Gaulton

Place G Holmes, R Moon, M Salmon, J Seddon, A Walster

Apologies: Councillor R Auluck
Councillor B Singh
Councillor T Skipper

Public Business

The Chair, Councillor McNicholas, welcomed Members of the Board to their last meeting for the Municipal Year 2018/2019. The Chair took the opportunity to thank Councillor Skipper, who was unable to attend the meeting and who was due to retire from the Council in May 2019, for his contribution to the work of the Board and asked that their thanks and good wishes for the future be placed on record and conveyed to him.

46. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

47. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th March 2019 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

48. Canal Basin - Plans for 2021

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received an update on the work being done at the Canal and Canal Basin to prepare for City of Culture in

2021. The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration and Nick Cleaver from the Canal and River Trust attended the meeting for consideration of this matter.

At their meeting on 15th May 2018, the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) approved the recommendations of the Canal and Basin Task and Finish Group (minute 50/18 refers). The Canal and Rivers Trust provided a briefing, attached as an Appendix to the briefing note, on work they had been doing in Coventry and preparations for City of Culture 2021.

Following the announcement that the City of Culture would be in Coventry and the identification by the Canal & River Trust that Coventry was a key strategic location, a Community Roots project had been implemented in the area to improve the canal environment and help it reach its full potential and work alongside the Scrutiny Board's Task & Finish Group.

The project, that took the form of three phases, was now ending its first year and had achieved the following progress:

Phase 1

- Identification of the communities living on and around the canal and any issues for the community and Canal and River Trust concerning the canals in the project area, were profiled.
- Key partners with wider community links who could be approached were identified and engaged.
- A series of activities were organised. Further discussions and meetings could be held in order to prioritise actions for the remainder of the project.

Phase 2

- "Taster" activity days could be organised to give groups a flavour of the kind of activity that would help Canal and River Trust.
- Discussions and planning concerning other sympathetic enhancements to the canal environment were carried out and planning begun.
- Other groups could be developed to help with further engagement activities such as running their own events on the canal or helping Canal and River Trust plan and deliver events such as Heritage Week or environmental surveys or boating experiences for the wider public.
- Some groups may adopt sections of the canal.

Phase 3

- Canal adoption groups and other volunteer groups introduced to existing waterway volunteer lead staff and decisions taken about groups most likely to continue and those not likely to continue after the end of the project.
- Waterway staff continued the logistical support and planning and running of volunteering activity by sustainable groups.
- Further activity developed by groups themselves with help from waterway staff.

By year three the bulk of the engagement work should be done and a legacy developed that could be sustained for as long as possible by existing waterway volunteer lead staff. Community Roots did not exist as a standalone entity but from the engagement officer and other staff were embedded within the regional team. In this way the regional team could become familiar with project staff and volunteers and the aim of the project.

Over the past 9 months several groups and agencies had been engaged with either at events or giving presentations and talks or at meetings. These ranged from Local Authority Departments, major events teams, local resident's groups and faith groups. The briefing note provided details of the groups that had been engaged with and the engagements activities to date, together with planned canal and community engagement events. This activity would continue as more partners who could support the regeneration of Coventry canal were identified.

Considerable effort had begun by volunteer groups to improve the canal corridor itself. This was in its infancy, but already significant improvements had been recorded and good feedback given about improvements so far.

In the immediate future several further improvements were planned: signage in basin and at Hawksbury Junction replaced; banners advertising Canal and River Trust and businesses in the Canal Basin to be installed on lamp posts; towpath task force to continue access clean ups and begin work with other volunteer groups on offside litter clearance; and dredging planned for Coventry Canal.

Good progress had been made on engaging with relevant agencies, partners and local communities and this effort was ongoing with new contacts being made each month. Several volunteers had already begun working and significant improvements had been achieved. A programme of events to increase footfall to the basin and use of the canal corridor was well into its planning. Further improvements would be made to the environment and the built environment alongside the canal. Work was underway with partners to try and develop the basin as a destination. The Canal and River Trust was focused on the basin and the 5.5 miles of canal corridor and all local teams were involved in delivering improvement and creating a vibrant, well used and well maintained canal corridor for Coventry.

The Board questioned officers and discussed the following issues:

- The installation of artwork at the Canal Basin
- The location of and arrangements for emptying litter bins, including big belly bins
- Publicising and promoting features, events and facilities to maximise interest and footfall – Newspaper, Facebook, Radio
- Canal dredging and magnetic fishing – undertaken by professionals to ensure task is undertaken correctly and safely
- Commercial traffic on the canal limited - consideration of future use of the canal for river taxis, boat trips, etc
- Engagement of further community groups e.g. temples and churches
- Habitat creation for wildlife in the area
- Selection of appropriate tenants to encourage regular visitors and to maximise benefits for the Canal
- Promotion of the 5 ½ miles canal tow path as a cycle route
- Continuation of improvement work with volunteers, interested groups and canal users – litter picking, cleaning, attractions and events
- Including the Canal and Canal Basin in the marketing of the city

- Involvement of university architecture students in design projects which include a micro-brewery, dance and exercise venue, and artist's studio for residents

Members of the Board acknowledged the valuable contribution that the Canal and Canal Basin Task and Finish Group had made to facilitate improvements to and the better use of the Canal and Canal Basin. The Board agreed that the Canal and River Trust be asked to establish a Friends Steering Group for the co-ordination of the improvements at the Coventry Canal, Canal Basin and Tow Path, and that local residents, Members of the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) and the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration be invited to participate in the Group.

The Board asked that their thanks be conveyed to those concerned for the substantial work undertaken and is on-going at the Canal and Canal Basin.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1) Notes the information in the briefing note from the Canal and Rivers Trust on the progress made on the work undertaken at the Canal and Canal Basin.**
- 2) Agrees the following recommendations for the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration:**
 - i) The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration be requested to give consideration to the selection of appropriate tenants for Council owned property to ensure benefits for the Canal Basin are maximised.**
 - ii) The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration be requested to help facilitate, with the Chair of the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) and the Canals and Rivers Trust, the establishment of a 'Friends of Coventry Canal/Basin Group'.**
- 3) Agrees to receive progress updates on the work at the Canal and Canal Basin in due course.**

49. The Council House as a Democratic Centre

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) were invited to consider options for the use of the Council House as a Democratic Centre. The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration attended the meeting for consideration of this matter.

The Council House was the Democratic Centre of the Council, where Elected Members and Civic Functions were based. It had committee rooms and the Diamond Rooms as meeting venues on the Ground Floor, the First Floor was used by Members and Members Services as office space and the Second Floor and Basement was used by other Council teams as office space and storage. There were also meeting spaces and breakout spaces available for staff in the building.

Since One Friargate opened in 2017, some of the staff teams once located at the Council House had moved to the new offices. The vacated office space was used as touchdown space for officers based elsewhere but who wanted to work at the Council House. Part of the space on the ground floor was used by The Wheelhouse as shared office and co-working space and this provided an income for the Council.

Members of the Board agreed that the information they needed to discuss were details of financial information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and the amount of expenditure proposed to be incurred by the Council under a particular contract for the supply of goods or services, which was required to be kept private in accordance with Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The Board therefore agreed that this agenda item be considered in the private part of the agenda.

50. **Coventry Air Quality Action Plan**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received an update on the Air Quality Action Plan. The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration attended the meeting for consideration of this matter.

At their meeting on 12th February 2019 (their minute 106/18 refers), Cabinet approved the recommendations contained in the Coventry Air Quality Action Plan report which was attached as Appendix A to the Cabinet report. The action plan was submitted to Government and officers had been waiting on a detailed response, once received Members would be updated on progress.

The Board questioned officers and discussed the following issues:

- Scrutiny's involvement in the shaping and developing the Plan
- The change to the Plan relating to the Coundon Road proposals – traffic flow improvements, reduction in traffic pollution (emissions and effects on health), displacement of traffic to other major routes creating congestion and rise in emissions on those routes, current petition opposing road closure
- Traffic pollution – effects on health, emissions on all major routes considered having regard to local buildings, residential premises, open spaces, etc.
- Clean Air Zone – oppose any introduction of this measure as congestion charges would severely affect the economy of the City
- Reduction of individual vehicle use and the encouragement of public transport use, walking and cycling
- Buses – subsidising bus fares to encourage bus use, consideration of delivering similar Model to the London Model for this public service
- Development of very light rail scheme
- Media PR for publicising the health agenda in connection with traffic pollution

The Board requested that a further report be submitted to them following receipt of the Government response and prior to submission of the report to Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1) Notes the information in the Cabinet Report – Coventry Air Quality Action Plan, and the update on the current position of the Plan.**
- 2) Agrees that a further report be submitted to the Board following receipt of the Government response and prior to the report being submitted to Cabinet.**
- 3) The health agenda in connection with air quality be publicised.**

51. Outstanding Issues

There were no outstanding issues.

52. Work Programme 2018/2019

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1) Notes the completion of the Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2018/2019 and the visits proposed and matters for consideration at future meetings of the Board.**
- 2) Agrees that the following matters be added to the Work Programme for submission to future meetings of the Board in due course:**
 - i) The Council House as a Democratic Centre – Progress Report.**
 - ii) Canal and Canal Basin - Progress update reports**
 - iii) Air Quality Action Plan – A further report be submitted to the Scrutiny Board following receipt of the Government’s response and prior to submission of the report to Cabinet.**

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

There were no other items of public business.

Exclusion of Pres and Public

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) agrees to exclude the press and public under Sections 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 relating to the item of private business in Minute 54 below headed ‘The Council House as a Democratic Centre’ on the grounds that the matter involves the likely disclosure of information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as it contains information relating to the financial affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information) and in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

54. **The Council House as a Democratic Centre**

Further to Minute 49 above, the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) considered an item of private business of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) on the commercially confidential matters relating to the options for the use of the Council House as a Democratic Centre. The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration attended the meeting for consideration of this matter.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1) **Notes the update.**
- 2) **Agrees the following recommendation for the Cabinet Member Jobs and Regeneration:**
 - i) **The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration is requested to ask officers to undertake a review of the current occupancy and security measures in place at the Council House and identify proposals to maximise usage of the building and the security of users, and provide further income for the Council.**
- 3) **Agrees that a progress report be submitted to the Board in due course.**

55. **Any other items of Private business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved**

There were no other items of private business.

(Meeting closed at 4.10 pm)