

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)
held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 6 November 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor J McNicholas (Chair)
Councillor J Clifford (Substitute for Councillor C Miks)
Councillor M Heaven
Councillor T Jandu
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor A Lucas
Councillor E Ruane
Councillor B Singh

Employees (by Directorate):

Place G Holmes, G Hood, M Salmon, S Weir, T Wetherhill, B Yorke

Apologies: Councillor P Male
Councillor C Miks

Public Business

18. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th July 2019 were agreed and signed as a true record.

Further to Minute 16/19, headed 'Work Programme', in so far as it related to the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Board requested that an update on the current position regarding the expected Government Guidance on the Levy, be circulated to them.

20. Scrutiny Management

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) were informed of the Chair's, Councillor McNicholas, agreement to the publication of exception notices about Key Decisions that were considered by Cabinet where it had been impracticable to give at least 28 clear days' notice of the intention to make the Key Decision, in accordance with Regulation 10(1): Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, in respect of the following items of business:

- i) 'B&M Stores, Antsy Road, Walsgrave, Coventry – Investment Acquisitions' - This was a key decision and a private report and in order to meet the timescale for completion by the 30th October 2019 deadline, the matter was urgent requiring consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 8th October 2019. The report was also considered at the meeting of the Council on 15th October 2019 therefore call-in did not apply.
- ii) UK Battery Industrialisation Centre – Additional Funding Award from the WMCA – This was a key decision and consideration was required urgently by Cabinet at its meeting on 8th October 2019, due to the purchases or large items being made with suppliers and the potential risk of the Council running out of approved available grant funds before the next scheduled meetings of Cabinet and Council. The report was also considered at the meeting of the Council on 15th October 2019 therefore call-in did not apply.

21. **Draft Urban Forestry Strategy**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) considered a Briefing Note of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) on the progress being made in the development of the City Council's Urban Forestry Strategy. The draft Strategy was attached as an Appendix to the report.

The draft Coventry Urban Forestry Strategy outlined the current condition and state of the urban forestry and recognised the value and importance of the urban forest, particularly in mitigating pollution, heat, flooding and wind as well as its value towards biodiversity, wildlife, the community's health and wellbeing, overall quality of the urban environment and economic value.

Reductions in government spending had led to a decreased spend in greenspaces resulting in the lack of funding identified as a main constraint in improving and maintaining tree stock. Focus would be made in maximising funding through S106 agreements, exploiting opportunities arising from Regeneration and Business Improvement Districts in establishing sustainable urban forests, along with establishing effective partnerships with developers and landowners.

The importance of strategically managing the urban forest was highlighted and the Strategy made reference to Council Policies which touched the City's urban forest, including the Coventry City Council Area Action Plan, Development Strategy and the recently adopted Greenspace Strategy.

The draft Strategy acknowledged the significant work of Coventry's Urban Forestry Team to explore new ways of working and provide better value for money in tree maintenance. A number of aspects were recognised as significant, including the management of all street trees, the adoption of Tree Risk Management processes to ensure the establishment of new trees.

In addition to measures in Coventry to protect urban trees, the Strategy suggested that the need to communicate the benefits of trees as well as enforcement was important and identified a number of issues for consideration, including policies which took into consideration the life cycle of the tree and its value to the environment, strong policies on enforcement and sustainable compensation measures and the protection of ancient woodlands and veteran trees.

The need to develop a resilient and sustainable urban forest was highlighted and which should be directed by strong policies to establish wide ranging tree sizes and species distributions. Aspects seen as important in achieving this were tree mapping to identify gaps and establish population improvements, achieving a balance of numbers and genetic diversity, aiming to plant more and fell less, developing a species mix to protect against the impacts of disease and pathogens.

The draft strategy contained themes and key actions on:

- Planning: ensuring we have robust and relevant urban forest policies and technical guidance to facilitate high quality design and development.
- Protection: putting biodiversity and the health of trees at the heart of all our work.
- Procedures: ensuring we have appropriate operational plans and processes that are regularly monitored and reviewed.
- Projects: developing and creating long term projects for the management and enhancement of the urban forest in Coventry.
- Prosperity: making the link with the urban forest and natural capital for sustainable economic regeneration.
- Promotion: having a presence and getting the message across to all our stakeholders and customers.
- Partnerships: building on existing and facilitating new working relationships for the benefit of the urban forest in Coventry.
- Profile: having a presence and influencing colleagues, stakeholders and professional networks in decision making.
- Pioneering: using technology and new ways of working to create innovation and efficient working.

The Strategy was now a final draft and ready for the foreword to be included, prior to consultation. Consultation would include internal City Council departments, all Ward Councillors, Coventry Tree Warden Network, Coventry University, Warwick University and any other stakeholders that became apparent.

The Board questioned officers, received responses, and discussed the following issues:

- Tree management - relationships with developers for the protection of existing trees and the planting of new trees, whilst progressing the need for housing.
- The inclusion of the architectural benefits of urban forestry and green space, especially in the City Centre, in the Strategy.
- Current tree planting in the City Centre – example, planting in the Upper Precinct as part of the recent improvement works.
- Linking with individuals, communities and businesses for their input and grow the forestry in the City.
- The inclusion of the City's high-level aspirational thinking and vision for tree planting, in the Urban Forestry Strategy, to bring it into line with the Green Space Strategy.
- The development of the Council's aspiration for the planting of a tree for every member of the population in the City – involvement of schools and businesses and organisations.

- The importance of involving Ward Councillors to gain their local knowledge of their Wards, for planting proposals.
- The success of the Coventry Peace Orchard at Coundon Court School and Cardinal Newman School – link with officer involved in project
- Pursuing sponsorship and support for the Urban Forestry Action Plan and Tree Planting aspiration – Woodlands Trust and Severn Trent Water expressions of interest.
- Recognition of the value the urban forest in mitigating pollution, heat, flooding and wind and the importance of obtaining data on air pollution reductions and improvements to the environment – Warwick University expression of interest to undertake a study.
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council - dedicated Urban Forestry Strategy, separating from Coventry's Strategy.
- The Ring Road - opportunity to include some green space.
- Point of inspiration - Mexico City's Via Verde scheme, which has transformed thousands of highway pillars into vertical gardens.

The Board agreed that Ward Councillor be invited to submit their views and local knowledge on forestry planting in their areas.

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

- a) **Notes progress in the development of the Urban Forestry Strategy detailed within the Briefing Note.**
- b) **Supports the proposal to undertake further consultation.**
- c) **Recommends that the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities considers the inclusion of the following in the Urban Forestry Strategy:**
 - i) **the architectural benefits of urban forestry and green space, especially in the City Centre.**
 - ii) **the Cities aspirations and vision for tree planting, to bring it into line with the Green Space Strategy.**
- d) **Agrees that an update and Action Plan arising from the Urban Forestry Strategy be submitted to a future meeting of the Board.**

22. Report Back on UAE Capital Attraction Visit - April/May 2019

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that provided an update on investment interest garnered from UAE Capital Attraction Visit in April/May 2019 which Coventry City Council attended alongside West Midlands Growth Company, Birmingham City Council and City of Wolverhampton Council.

The report indicated that the UK had been a favoured destination for investment from the UAE, and although this had centred on real estate investments in London, investors had started to seek new opportunities across the UK in real estate, infrastructure and technology.

The UK Embassy in UAE invited Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton to visit the UAE to meet with Mubadala, this provided an opportunity to meet with a range of other UAE investors to discuss the steps for investing in the City. Meetings were arranged to focus on immediate and longer-term land and property investment options that would contribute to housing need and demand for new commercial space. Meetings highlighted that no other city/regions were pursuing a similar approach to engaging with overseas capital markets in this way, which provided the region with a competitive advantage and short-term action was required to ensure that the positive momentum generated from this visit continued. A capital investment senior officer group would be established with an emphasis on determining priorities for identifying/engaging overseas opportunity markets with a view to attracting investment for development and economic growth.

Details of the delegation, itinerary and costs of the visit were set out in detail in the report.

Coventry City Council continued to work alongside regional partners under the umbrella of the “Local Authority Capital Group” to identify and engage with key markets focused around capital investment. There was an opportunity to use the engagement with markets like the UAE to link large-scale investment into business growth and economic development opportunities. This would require additional/expert support, commissioned/provided through the WMCA/WMGC, to help develop outline business cases for energy / infrastructure and potentially SME investment opportunities. Further work should also be undertaken with the region’s universities to identify capital investment requirements and to utilise existing international networks established through the HE networks. Coventry City Council was well placed to continue a dialogue with this key market to secure capital to further the regeneration plans for Coventry.

The Board questioned officers and received responses, and discussed the following issues:

- Involving Elected Member representation at future visits and events, as appropriate, to provide a Member as well as officer perspective.
- Proposals for a ‘Coventry’ UAE visit to establish outcomes specifically for the City – looking for potential opportunities particularly for City Centre South and Friargate.
- The need for the Authority to broaden its horizons by exploring new opportunities for investment, across the world.
- MIPIM – an event for industry and government leaders to gather to launch development initiatives and discuss the current themes and issues of the property sector.
- Local investment – ensure all local investment opportunities are explored.

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

- 1) Endorses the report and confirms its continued support of the work being undertaken by the Economic Development Service to enhance Coventry’s international profile, secure Foreign Direct Investment, Capital Investment and support to local companies to access new markets.**

2) Requested that consideration be given to the future involvement of Elected Member representation on visits, as appropriate.

23. Outstanding Issues

There were no outstanding issues.

24. Work Programme 2019/2020

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) considered the Work Programme for the current municipal year and discussed the scheduling of issues for consideration at future meetings of the Board.

Members requested an update on work at St. Mary's Guildhall.

The Board also considered a Briefing Note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinators that provided an update on the Work Programme item regarding the Preston Model of Procurement, also known as Community Wealth Building, and sought support for the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to look in more detail at community wealth building in Coventry. Councillor R Brown, Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, attended the meeting for consideration of this matter.

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) requested that an item on the Preston Model of Procurement to be added to their Work Programme for 2019/2020.

At the meeting of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) on 3rd July 2019 (their minute 3/19 referred), the Board considered the Council's Social Value Policy, which contained some aspects of the Preston Model, and recommended that the policy was reviewed. This was accepted by the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources.

The establishment of a Task and Finish Group would enable other aspects of Community Wealth Building to be looked at in more detail. The Chairs (or their nominees) of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1), the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) and the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee would sit on the Task and Finish Group, and the Conservative Group would be asked to nominate a member. The Group would report to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee.

Members indicated that there was a Local Economic Event being held on 29th February 2020 that the Task and Finish Group could link into. Acknowledging that the Preston Model of Procurement was an example Model from which Coventry could begin in order to create their own Model, they also suggested that it would be useful begin the process by establishing what services were already procured locally.

The Chair indicated that the Chairs involved in the Group would keep Members of their Boards informed of the progress of the work undertaken and seek any questions Members may have to feed into the Group.

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

- 1) Notes the Work Programme for 2019/2020.**
- 2) Supports the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to look in more detail at community wealth building in Coventry with cross-party representation from:**
 - Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee**
 - Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1)**
 - Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)**

25. 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.

(Meeting closed at 3.45 pm)