

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 11.00 am on
Wednesday, 17 June 2020

Present:

Members: Councillor R Brown (Chair)

Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor A Andrews
Councillor J Clifford
Councillor L Kelly
Councillor G Ridley
Councillor K Sandhu
Councillor R Singh

Other Members Present:- Councillor G Duggins, Leader of Coventry City Council

Employees: D Ashmore, Director of Housing and Transformation
V Castree, Law and Governance
B Hastie, Director of Finance
G Holmes, Law and Governance
K Nelson, Director of Education and Skills
R Moon, Director of Property Services and Development
S Newing, Director of Human Resources
J Newman, Director of Law and Governance
G Quinton, Deputy Chief Executive
A Walster, Director of Streetscene and Regulatory Services
A West, Law and Governance

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March, 2020 were agreed as a true record.

3. Covid- 19 - Impact, Reset and Recovery

Cllr Brown, Chair of Scrutiny Co-Ordination Committee introduced the item by outlining the role and structure of scrutiny during the pandemic period, which would be timely, proportionate and supportive in line with guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny. The focus of scrutiny's work would be on reset and

recovery post-covid-19 and the impact of the pandemic on individuals, communities, groups and business.

Gail Quinton, Deputy Chief Executive, gave an overview of the shift of the organisation from its emergency planning phase into reset and recovery, which would take a One Coventry Approach. This work had been identified as seven pillars which were presented to the Board for scrutiny, along with a number of principles which would sit behind the work. There were three external pillars; Regeneration and the Economy; Health and Wellbeing and Working with our Communities and New Social Economies and three internal pillars; Organisational Future Operating Model; Financial Management and Political Leadership and Governance Support.

The Board would not scrutinise the seventh pillar at this meeting “Covid-19 Measures and Decision making: Business Continuity Recovery” as that was a piece of transition work to step services back up following the pandemic.

Health and Wellbeing Pillar

Gail Quinton presented the Health and Wellbeing Pillar on behalf of Liz Gaulton, Director of Public Health and Wellbeing. Key points raised during the presentation were;

- The work was being overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- Work was underway to quantify the impact of Covid-19.
- There had been a significant impact at a local- level and due to the Council’s work as a Marmot City Officers were aware the impact was disproportionate across the City
- Developing a vibrant economy would be key to improving outcomes for residents.

Members asked a number of questions and received the following responses;

- There was a tension between developing a ‘clean, green Coventry’ and the existing planning process which Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee would include on their work programme, which linked to sustainable travel.
- How well test and trace performed would be important and scrutiny would look at this issue.
- Scrutiny would look at the impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities.
- Data on the impact of Covid-19 would be shared with Members.

Regeneration, the Economy and Sustainability Pillar

Richard Moon, Director of Property Services and Development, introduced the Regeneration, and the Economy Pillar. Key points raised during the presentation were;

- These were unprecedented times and Governments have never been forced to shut down economies on this scale before which had resulted in a GDP drop of 20% between March and June.
- The possible depth and scale of the likely recession and depression were unclear, but it was becoming more apparent that businesses will be operating in a new normal until a cure or vaccine could be found.

- An increase in unemployment would occur and would probably impact most on the young as they are more likely to work in the leisure, hospitality and retail sectors.
- The loss of jobs would have a public health effect as it was recognised that there are significant health benefits to individuals of being employed.
- There were signs of a return to economic activity – there had been an increase in numbers of cars on the road, construction sites were working and retail had opened.
- National Government had borrowed billions of pounds, which would need to be repaid at some point and this would likely have a negative on council finances at time where there would be an increased demand for services and rising unemployment.
- There was an opportunity to build on the high-tech Green investment in the city and attract other related businesses.
- The Council were looking for opportunities to attract Government funding to support growth and job creation
- There was a need to be open for business as the private sector had a choice about where to invest. Therefore, there was a need to be welcoming and work as quickly and efficiently as possible to enable companies to invest in our city.
- The recommitment to the Job Shop would be important in helping people reskill and find employment.
- As a significant landlord in the city, the Council had been supportive of local businesses through rent deferral, which supported businesses throughout closure and helped them to reopen. There would need to be a balance between maintaining support whilst ensuring essential income to the Council from rent.

Members asked a number of questions and received the following responses;

- The digital divide and digital exclusion were a concern regarding the impact on people's ability to apply for jobs. An issue about application processes at UHCW would be fed back to Andy Williams to ask the job shop to discuss with the hospital.
- Issues about free parking ending at the hospital site at a time when people are being discouraged from using public Transport would be raised by/with? Colin Knight.
- There were no finalised proposals for a Gigafactory in the UK yet. As a City we were actively talking to people who may be in the market to build one.
- City of Coventry 2021 would give us a unique opportunity to show investors what Coventry had to offer.

Working with our Communities & New Social Economies Pillar

Kirston Nelson, Director of Education & Skills presented the Working with our Communities & New Social Economies Pillar. Key points raised during the presentation were;

- The pandemic had provided opportunities to galvanise volunteers, with a network built to support the shielded.
- There was an opportunity to build on the momentum and continue this work which was supported by the Council but often driven by community groups.

Members asked a number of questions and received the following responses;

- There was an opportunity to work with communities to develop creative solutions to effective preventative services, for example, around smoking cessation.
- There had been positive outcomes in communities from the work community groups had delivered with the Council's support.
- Collaboration opportunities arising from that way of working are a way to make an impact at a greater rate

Political Leadership & Governance Support Pillar - Julie Newman

Julie Newman, Director of Legal and Governance Services, introduced the Political Leadership & Governance Support Pillar. Key points raised during the presentation were;

- The pillar would focus on ensuring Elected Members had the right tools to operate effectively in the new normal.
- The pillar would include reviewing the advantages, for example the increased use of IT, and disadvantages of the new normal, with some Members having felt isolated.

Members asked a number of questions and received the following responses;

- There was an opportunity to explore virtual surgeries for Members with their constituents
- Work was underway to determine the impacts of home working on staff
- Impact of social distancing on public meetings and accountability – the regulations for remote meetings were in place until May 2021.
- Data on viewing figures of remote meetings would be provided.

Financial Strategy Pillar

Barry Hastie, Director of Finance and Corporate Resources introduced the Financial Strategy Pillar. Key points raised during the presentation were;

- The aim of the pillar was not different to the normal financial strategy as the budget needed to be sustainable to enable the achievement of the objectives.
- Priorities and objectives had changed and the amount of money available had also altered. The pillar work would provide the framework to undertake an assessment of priorities to ensure the best realignment of resources.
- Another challenge would be managing the in-year impact of the pandemic. Costs to the organisation to date had been roughly £34 million in outgoings and lost income. The Government had provided around £21 million towards the shortfall.
- The impact of the national economic position of significant borrowing and how fiscal rules would be reset were unknown. There was a lot of uncertainty in the system.

Members asked a number of questions and received the following responses;

- Where the Council had commercial investments, they had applied for government grants were eligible. In some cases, eligibility for schemes was unclear due to the Council being the parent company.
- There was a conflict between climate change and raising income in some cases, for example, with the Council's holding in Birmingham Airport. However,

the need to think of the wider economic benefit to the region of, say the airport, as well as the environmental impact.

Organisational Culture and Design Pillar

Sue Newing, Director of Human Resources, introduced the Organisational Culture and Design Pillar. Key points raised during the presentation were;

- The pillar was focused on Organisational Aims/Outcomes and Workforce Aims/Outcomes.
- The Organisational element was about; keeping Coventry at the heart of all we do and the green agenda; Partnership working and our innovation and passion for it; to give residents greater understanding of what we do; digital connectivity and embrace diversity.
- The Workforce element was to be a socially responsible employer of choice; to enable staff to do right thing at the right time and to maintain work/life balance.
- A workforce survey was being undertaken to look at the experiences of staff during this period around homeworking.
- To support staff during the pandemic, equipment had been provided, there were online mental health support sessions and online physio.
- Would look at recognising and rewarding the workforce and how you measure and evaluate performance, focussed on output as opposed to presenteeism.
- Focus on talent for the future as the Council has an aging workforce.

Members asked a number of questions and received the following responses;

- Managers were keeping in touch with their team
- Information on homeworking would be sent to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Digital Coventry

David Ashmore, Director of Housing and Transformation, spoke about Digital Coventry. Key points raised during the presentation were;

- During the pandemic the Council's infrastructure has worked well to enable agile working. The Council would like to take that success and build on it.
- The success was a result of increased investment in ICT over recent years.

Following the presentation, concerns were raised regarding the interim scrutiny arrangements and the use of spotlight groups. Reassurance was given by the Chair that Spotlight Groups would involve members of all political parties, the scope would be agreed by Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee and the outcomes and recommendations would be reported to the Committee.

Officers were thanked for their presentations and contributions.

RESOLVED that:

1) The following be included in the work programme:

- **Test and trace**
- **Workforce survey results**

- **Finance**
- **Employment in the City**
- **Digitally Enabling Elected Members**
- **The impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities.**

2) Additional information to be provided on:

a) Data on viewing figures of remote meetings

b) Information on Home working guidance for staff to be sent to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee.

3) The presentation slides to be circulated to all Members.

4. Work Programme and Outstanding Issues 2020/21

RESOLVED that Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Members use the information provided at the meeting to inform the Work Programme.

5. Scrutiny Management

The Committee noted that Councillor R Brown, Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, had attended the meeting of Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration held on 3 June, 2020 for consideration of an item relating to “High Street Safety Fund”

Councillor R Brown had agreed that the decision was urgent and that call in should not apply. In accordance with the Constitution, this matter was reported to this meeting to inform the Committee of the reason for urgency which was that following the award to the City Council of £334k from the High Street Safety Fund by the Department of Communities and Local Government, work needed to be undertaken to develop and implement measures under the Fund at the earliest opportunity, particularly in light of shops potentially opening on 15 June, 2020 in line with Government guidelines.

6. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 1.15pm)