

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)
held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 23 September 2020

Present:

Members: Councillor C Miks (Chair)
 Councillor L Bigham
 Councillor G Hayre
 Councillor M Heaven
 Councillor T Jandu
 Councillor R Lancaster
 Councillor P Male
 Councillor E Ruane
 Councillor B Singh

Other Members (by
invitation):

Councillor J O'Boyle (Cabinet Member for Jobs and
Regeneration)
Councillor Maton (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)
Councillor P Hetherton (Cabinet Member for City Services)
Councillor G Lloyd (Deputy Cabinet Member for City Services)

By Invitation: I Old, Job Centre Plus

Employees (by Service):

Education and Skills K Mawby
Law and Governance V Castree, G Holmes
Transportation and
Highways J Shore

Apologies: There were no apologies

Public Business

41. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

42. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th February 2020 were agreed as a true record.

Further to minute 34/19, Councillor Bigham requested a that a copy of the 'Trees and Development Guidelines Supplementary Planning Document' be sent to her.

There were no further matters arising.

43. **Public Realm Projects**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a briefing note of the Director of Transportation and Highways that provided an update on progress with key City Centre Public Realm Projects. The Cabinet Member for City Services and the Deputy Cabinet Member attended for this item.

The Cabinet Member for City Services introduced the item indicating that the Public Realm works in the City were important to the regeneration of Coventry. The City Centre would flow better, there would be more trees and greenery and the experience of going to the City Centre would be improved.

Jo Shore, the Council's Head of Public Realm, gave a presentation to the Board which highlighted the following:

- The challenges which included; transforming the City ready for City of Culture 2021; creating plans that people could support; changing perceptions of Coventry; ensuring the city stayed open for business while the work was underway; creating a place all could be proud of and combining the best of the old and best of the new.
- Highlighted opportunities including City of Culture 2021 and the Commonwealth Games, which had helped with accessing grant money. An improved public realm would be an important tool for regeneration to accelerate change and maximise investment.
- A number of specific schemes were highlighted including Upper Precinct; Smithford Way and Market Way and Bull Yard. Upper Precinct was on schedule for completion in March 2021.
- Significant work was being undertaken to ensure the Heritage of the City was showcased through the public realm works.
- Lighting was being enhanced to include the Whittle Arches, the Three Spires and Greyfriars Green.
- A number of projects were in development including Greyfriars Lane, Pepper Lane, Canal Tow Path, Bayley Lane, Pool Meadow, Hertford Street and Unity Lawns.
- Wayfinders were being developed to get the City ready for visitors.
- Protective and security measures were being put into place in readiness for City of Culture.

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

- The vision was to build connectiveness between the City Centre and the rest of the City. Work was being undertaken with Public Health to maximise the benefit of the Wayfinders and encourage people to walk/ride into the City Centre. The changes at Junction 7 would be the first example of this taking place.
- It would be great to make imaginative use of the ring road, however there were restrictions due to funding and highways regulations.
- The Coventry Point site, now clear, would be used initially for a logistics and storage area for other work taking place in the City Centre. It would then be opened up and resurfaced in line with the improvement works in Smithford Way. This would be complete by March 2021.

- An update would be provided to Members on the number of pieces of permanent public art which would be installed in the City Centre and minutes of the Public Art Gateway meeting would be requested and circulated if appropriate.
- There were plans to review vehicle access to roads which had been closed due to Covid-19, including the High Street. An update on the outcome of these discussions would be provided to Members.
- There were plans to dress the concrete blocks on The Burges.
- The flow and style of new buildings were subject to the planning process.
- The new fountains in the City Centre would be subject to a schedule of works and maintenance programme. Light and colour had been built in but not music as that required the purchase of licences at an additional cost.
- Officers would feedback to West Midlands Transport colleagues, issues around the readability of the wayfinding posts at the station.
- An App was in development to make the City accessible ahead of City of Culture. Ensuring those who do not use Apps are not excluded, was noted.
- Welcoming signs across key arrival points were being considered.
- It was challenging to get the message to residents about the work in the City Centre and the Team used a range of media to get communications out.
- There were ongoing discussions about the use of murals in the City Centre.

The Cabinet Member for City Services highlighted the importance that the public could envisage the end vision for the City Centre and that the Wayfinders would be important for helping people get the best from the City.

The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration indicated that the City Centre needed to evolve, to get the best of the old and the best of the new, including St Mary's Guildhall and the Telegraph Hotel. The current project was the biggest capital scheme the City had seen, and others were watching us to see what we achieved.

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

- 1) Notes the contents of the briefing note and the presentation.**
- 2) Recommends that Cabinet Members further develop communication with residents on the end vision for public realm and that all Members support the dissemination of that information.**
- 3) Requested that the Board be provided with the following:**
 - a) Information on the number of public art installations which had been approved.**
 - b) The minutes of the Public Art Gateway.**
 - c) An update on the potential permanent closure of the High Street to vehicles.**

44. Employment, Skills and Training

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a Briefing Note of the Director of Education and Skills that introduced a document - Coventry Employment and Skills Priorities: Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic. The

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and a representative from Job Centre Plus attended the meeting for this item.

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills introduced the item and highlighted that the current pandemic had shown the importance of skills, including digital skills, for the population to enable them to gain employment. He reported that Coventry was well regarded by the West Midlands Combined Authority for its work on the employment, skills and training agenda.

Kim Mawby, the Council's Head of Employment and Skills, Steven Weir, the Council's Head of Economic Growth and Iona Old, gave a presentation of the Board based on the document. The presentation included the following:

- 'Coventry Employment and Skills Priorities: Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic' had been written in collaboration with key partners in the city and set out agreed employment and skills priorities for Coventry in response to Covid 19.
- Coventry's economy started in a relatively strong position when the pandemic hit with an employment rate of 77.2%, in line with the national average. Levels of youth unemployment were significantly lower than the national average and by far the lowest within the West Midlands Combined Authority area.
- The scale of job losses in the city due to the pandemic had been significant: nearly 8,000 new Universal Credit claimants, youth unemployment doubling from 2.8% to 5.7%, and 38,700 workers furloughed.
- Key challenges for the City were a high youth population that had been disproportionately affected by job losses, a low skills base and lower than average wages as well as a number of areas of deprivation.
- The document outlined priorities and actions. The priorities were; Young People (16-24); 50+ Age Group; Supporting BAME communities; Rapid Response to Redundancy; Long Term Unemployed; Supporting Those with Complex Barriers; Enabling Digital Inclusion and Mental Wellbeing and Social Isolation.
- The approach being taken to deliver action on the priorities were:
 - 1) A ONE Coventry Approach
 - 2) Flexing Resource
 - 3) Labour market tracking and rapid innovation
 - 4) Framing the Learning Landscape for the 'New Normal'
 - 5) Helping employers survive and thrive

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

- Officers would review the unemployment data and provide information on whether particular groups, for example women, had been disproportionately affected by redundancy.
- Kickstart was a scheme for 16 to 24 year-olds, which was funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and involved a six-month placement with an employer. To apply the young person must be claiming universal credit. 163 employers had expressed an interest in participating in the scheme and there was confidence there was sufficient money to fund any employers who wanted to join. The jobs created had to be new posts and the young person

- would go through an application process. Information on confirmed placements would be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Board.
- Digital access was a challenge – some libraries had bookable computers but there was a need to support community centres to provide digital access, including high quality WI-FI too, not only for job seekers, but also for young people needing access to online learning resources.
 - It was not possible to predict how many job losses would occur in the next six months, but it was anticipated there would be a restructuring of the labour market. An example was the move from care in care homes, to care being provided in people's homes which would require a different set of skills, which the Council and Partners would support people to gain. Office for National Statistics were predicting 15% of those on furlough would be made redundant. Unemployment figures in the City had risen from 6000 in March 2020 to 17,000 in September 2020. Regionally there were also 90,000 on furlough in Warwickshire.
 - It was anticipated that a replacement furlough scheme would be announced.
 - Schemes to support people with education, skills and training and into employment were shared throughout the City using a network of partners.
 - Additional resource had been placed in the Economic Development Team to analyse the possible outcomes of Brexit, including a no-deal.

RESOLVED that, following consideration of the Coventry Employment and Skills Priorities: Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic document, the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1) **Supported the identified priorities and actions within the paper.**
- 2) **Requested a breakdown of unemployment data to enable Members to establish whether women had been disproportionate affected by redundancy.**
- 3) **Requested detailed information on Kickstart Scheme placements.**
- 4) **Agreed that a further update be provided to the Board during the Municipal Year 2020/2021.**

45. **Work Programme 2020/2021**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) notes the Board's Work Programme for 2020/2021 and the scheduling of proposed issues for consideration at future meetings of the Board.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) notes the Board's Work Programme for 2020/2021 and agrees that the relevant Scrutiny Board be asked to consider the inclusion of the following on their Work Programme for future meetings:

- 1) **Gigafactory**
- 2) **Climate Change**

46. **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.

47. **Outstanding Issues**

There were no outstanding issues.

(Meeting closed at 4.30 pm)