

Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 20 June 2017

Attendance

Members of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Herman Banger
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Welcome Koussoukama
Cllr Tersaim Singh
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair)
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Daniel Warren
Cllr Jonathan Yardley (Vice-Chair)

Witnesses

Paul Birch

Revolver Records

Employees

Keren Jones
Charlotte Johns
Mark Blackstock
Heather Clark
Ricardo Almeida
Neil White
Donna Cope

Service Director - City Economy
Head of Strategic Programmes
Head of Visitor Economy
Service Development Manager
Work Experience, Place
Scrutiny Officer
Democratic Services Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Philip Bateman and Councillor Payal Bedi-Chadha.

2 Declarations of interest

The Chair informed the panel she has known Paul Birch, Chief Executive, Revolver Records, for several years and they have worked together in the past.

3 Minutes of previous meeting

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

4 **Matters arising**

The Chair requested an update on the following items:

- Consultation on the draft Library strategy
- Smart City concept

Charlotte Johns, Head of Strategic Programmes, advised that the library consultation will be considered by Cabinet in July 2017 and the Smart City concept would be considered as part of the presentation.

5 **Developing a creative, cultural and visitor economic strategy**

Charlotte Johns, Head of Strategic Programmes, introduced the work on developing the Council's strategy and vision for a creative, cultural and visitor economy that was highlighted in the report.

The Head of Strategic Programmes advised that the strategy was being drawn up to bring all the work together that was going on in the city.

The Head of Strategic Programmes played two videos to highlight this work on:

1. the work of Tech City UK, a Government-backed organisation designed to accelerate the growth of London and the UK's digital economy, and
2. Gen-Y-City, a European initiative that the Council is part of, allowing groups to share ideas internationally.

The Panel welcomed the findings that Wolverhampton has a higher proportion of micro businesses in the culture and creative industries than the national average and questioned how this can be sustained and developed.

Keren Jones, Service Director – City Economy advised that this was being worked on and would be part of the strategy as it was developed.

The Panel commented that London was so successful, with lots of clusters of networks that work together in the cultural sectors and that it was important for a network to make connections.

The Service Director – City Economy, informed the panel that her team are still working on networking issues and stressed more space is needed to facilitate this as meeting space is crucial, as is making technology more affordable and accessible.

The panel considered that its multi-cultural nature was one of its strengths which had been shown by how diverse the Sikh festival of Vaisakhi had become over recent years. It would be good to organise a Camden type market in Wolverhampton but it would need to be advertised widely.

Mark Blackstock, Head of Visitor Economy, advised the panel that poster boards have been introduced around the city which appear successful but there was still a need to broaden the understanding of these events.

Following a question about the future of the Lichfield Street development the Service Director – City Economy advised that was being led by the University.

Following a question why Wightwick Manor wasn't included in the list of cultural venues in Wolverhampton, the Head of Visitor Economy advised that the authority is currently trying to build a better relationship with Wightwick Manor and Moseley Old Hall.

The Chair welcomed Paul Birch, the creator and Chief Executive of Revolver Records to the meeting and asked for his views on how the council could help these sectors.

Paul Birch congratulated the Council for running the most successful Civic Hall in the country. He highlighted the importance of allowing clusters of businesses to develop naturally rather than creating artificial ones which were likely to be much less successful. An example of this was Jaguar Land Rover and its associated supply chain with its ability to attract inward investment. He suggested the Chubb building would be as a good place to provide office space as a start for a cluster.

Paul Birch recommended that the Council should follow the approach that Birmingham followed 20 years ago, when it only had a Holiday Inn. The council opened a Hyatt under licence and it was the catalyst that brought growth to the city. An opportunity existed in Wolverhampton if the Council were to do the same through transforming the Magistrates Court building into a hotel.

Paul mentioned Cannes MIPIM event as an international investment opportunity and the Service Director – City Economy, confirmed that the Council had attended the last two years as an opportunity to raise the City's profile and attract inward investment.

The Service Director – City Economy acknowledged that Paul's words had emphasised the importance of getting the West Side development right.

Paul Birch commented on the number of media and cultural students that were leaving the University each year but were not remaining in Wolverhampton. The Council should encourage them to remain in the city and work together in co-ops.

The panel noted that would be also be worthwhile for IT students and could be used to showcase talent in the city. Paul Birch advised that he would be able to help with setting this up.

Resolved:

The panel agreed that the priorities for Wolverhampton in developing a creative, cultural and visitor economy should include:

- How micro businesses can be supported including alternative forms of governance.
- How the city's diversity can be incorporated more widely into its cultural events including how to introduce new technology ideas such as internet café, and
- How to attract and sustain a franchise hotel chain in the city.