

Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 25 November 2019

Attendance

Members of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Payal Bedi-Chadha
Cllr Dr Paul John Birch J.P.
Cllr Craig Collingswood
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Asha Mattu
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair)

Employees

Isobel Woods
Sue Lindup
Helen McGourlay

Head of Enterprise
Skills and Employability Manager
Finance Business Partner

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Udey Singh and Cllr Jonathan Yardley.

Cllr Louise Miles as Portfolio Holder for Finance submitted her apologies.

The Director for Regeneration, Richard Lawrence submitted apologies due to being away on work related matters in China.

2 **Declarations of interest**

Cllr Bateman declaration an interest as he sat on the Advisory Board for the Canal and River Trust.

3 **Minutes of previous meeting**

Cllr Collingswood stated that he had given his apologies for previous meeting and requested that these be noted.

4 **Matters arising**

Cllr Paul Birch provided a verbal update on the matters referred to on page eight of the minutes.

Cllr Birch stated that he had attended a meeting in St. Peter's and was very pleased to report that the team had found a solution to the problem of the lych gate which was very important as it was relied upon for every civic event.

The Church had a small community of its own of about 150 people and it was very important to protect these people and to enable them to continue to worship at the Church. The resolution involved traffic flowing in one direction only, which would also deal in part with issues concerning the buses.

Cllr Bateman stated that plans for public transport services and the way they would be integrated appeared promising. There had been a decent debate at the meeting and he was pleased to see that bus operators had been present.

Another meeting was planned with the chair of the committee and the Operator would be in the room to respond to some of the issues. It was thought that this would be hugely beneficial to hear. Issues were now being addressed in a way that would not have happened without Cllrs Bateman and Birch present.

Cllr Sweetman stated that she was glad to hear that some resolutions were being put forward but was also conscious of making sure that the Panel were kept informed of these and the decisions that were then made.

The Panel queried where the funding had come from for the scaffolding at St. Peter's. It was confirmed that this would have come from the community and the Church Commissioners (Diocese of Lichfield). Cllr Birch stated that Ruth Taylor was the Officer who accompanied him and that she was very impressive.

The meeting had also considered the issue of dirty buses. Cllr Bateman stated that the Head of Service had responded to him on this matter but that more information was required and that discussions were needed with the Traffic Commissioner.

The Panel considered that issue of building 10,000 homes in the city and that this was actually 10,000 homes across the city and queried whether anyone had information about these homes.

The Head of Enterprise stated that this information could be provided and agreed that it was important for transport issues.

The Head of Enterprise updated the Panel regarding the issue of City branding and reputation that had been raised at the previous meeting. Since that meeting, the Director of Communications had adopted a more holistic view regarding marketing the City and how best to attract business tourism and investors etc. The Director would be keen to share this with the Panel in the early part of next year.

5 **Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-2021 to 2023-2024 - Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel**

A report was considered seeking the Panel's feedback on the budget relevant to its remit and how it was aligned to the priorities of the Council.

In addition to this, the Panel's feedback was also sought on the Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020-2021 to 2023-2024 that was presented to Cabinet on 16 October 2019 including budget proposals relevant to the remit of the Panel.

The Panel welcomed the Finance Business Partner to the meeting. It was noted that the format of the report was slightly different this year. The net revenue budget 2019-2020 for Stronger City Economy was £6.4 million and the approved general fund capital programme 2019-2020 to 2023-2024 was £159.6 million.

The Panel queried the format of the reports and the fact that income was shown in parenthesis which was different to how some members were used to seeing it; there was concern that it could lead to confusion.

It was noted that businesses and local authorities had to abide by different accounting rules and officers agreed to circulate copies of the appropriate guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

The Panel considered that many of the items under its consideration dealt with improving and changing the City to attract more people and increase footfall. Concerns were therefore raised about the table on page 15 of the agenda which appeared to show a weaker budget in this area when a stronger budget was required if the aims of the Council and the aspirations of the Panel were to be realised.

The Panel referred to the City learning quarter budget listed on pg. 16 of the report and were understanding as to why a large budget was required for this but queried what the Targeting Disposals Programme was. Officers confirmed that this dealt with properties the Council owned that they were looking to dispose of in order to make the Council's estate more efficient.

The Panel also considered the tremendous impact that Wolves at Work had had on the City and questioned the proposal to discontinue its funding. Officers explained that they were currently looking for ways to fund the initiative into the future and confirmed that money from the City Learning Quarter and Cultural Estates could not be used as one was capital and the other was revenue.

The Panel questioned whether there might be any funding available through the West Midlands Combined Authority to help fund Wolves at Work which had now helped get just under 5000 residents into work and facilitated 600 business engagements (more than had been originally expected).

Officers stated that there had originally been 1.5 million input for the Council to Wolves at Work and 1.5 million from the Department for Work and Pensions and it was incumbent on the Council to evidence how it had used these devolved funds. There was another year of funding up to 2021 and it was important for the Council to make the initiative sustainable and prove this to the West Midlands Combined Authority and Central Government. Officers were also looking at what funding might be available from Europe.

The Panel considered that a potential source of funding might be businesses that had benefited from the initiative and stated that it was vital that the Council found a way to sustain this very successful model.

The Panel queried whether there were any figures to show the real impact the initiative had led to and the knock-on effect of people now being in work and not at home and issues such as medical costs. Officers agreed that yes, this information needed to be included in a clear business case and the value that Wolves at Work added to the City as a whole needed to be highlighted. The Panel considered that it would cost more in the long term if the project were to stop.

It was confirmed that Work Box was the online platform for Wolves at Work where people were able to find out how to get skills and training to get work ready. Wolves at Work then took over when they were work ready and this included monitoring all work placements for the first 12 weeks.

The Panel considered whether more funding might be available if Wolves at Work became a voluntary service and it was confirmed that all options were being considered and that the project did already work very closely with partners in the voluntary sector.

Officers stated that the team had worked hard on building relationships and identified something quite unique in Wolves at Work which was now seen as a trusted and credible company with a knock-on effect that had helped to increase transport links for people placed in work; and salaries as the Council requested those businesses it work with pay the living wage.

It was confirmed that the i54 western extension was a jointly funded project with South Staffs.

Resolved:

That the Panel:

1. Provide feedback to Scrutiny Board for consolidation and onward response to Cabinet on the budget relevant to the remit of this Panel and how it is aligned to the priorities of the Council.
2. Provide feedback to Scrutiny Board for consolidation and onward response to Cabinet on Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-2021 to 2023-2024 including budget proposals that are relevant to the remit of this Panel.
3. Approve that the Scrutiny Panel response be finalised by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Panel and forwarded to Scrutiny Board for consideration.

6 **Careers and Employability work in Schools**

The Skills and Employability Manager provided a presentation to the Panel, highlighting the careers and employability offer in schools which was directly provided by or commissioned by the Council, or delivered by partners such as the Black Country LEP in close partnership with the Council.

There were a number of services that coexisted and integrated through connexions which allowed users to access different services at different times.

The Council's Workbox initiative underlay all of this and Officers stated that they would encourage all clients to sign up to Workbox to get as much help and guidance as they could.

The main services that were provided to schools under the theme of careers and employability were:

1. Connexions
2. Work experience
3. Careers and Enterprise support

It was noted that Connexions and the Council's service provision to reduce young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS) was showing the best performance for many years. City of Wolverhampton was now best in the Black Country for the number of young people aged 16 – 18 who were participating in education, training and employment.

Work around those not in education, employment or training (NEETS) was also now based in the Civic Offices with drop in sessions available twice a week. This was working well and included support from an officer in the Youth Offending Team to help pick up young offenders and those with Special Education Needs.

The Enterprise Lead Officer worked in partnership with schools to ensure they were fulfilling their obligation with regards to careers such as ensuring students participated in enterprise activities, helping schools to forge links with employers, planning activities that were most effective in motivating young people, supporting independent choices and supporting positive outcomes.

Through delivery of the programme for the academic year 18-19 more than 15,000 students had benefited from the programme through the following activities:

- Work Experience preparation;
- Interview Preparation;
- Practice Interviews;
- Careers Fairs;
- Speed Networking;
- Guess My Job;
- Guest speakers for assemblies;
- Apprenticeship talks;
- Meet the real apprentice;
- Visit to Universities;
- Visits to the workplace;
- Enterprise challenges;
- Employers supporting teachers in linking curriculum learning to different careers

The Work Experience Lead Officer had supported schools and the College through the Work Experience Support Service Level Agreement for over 20 years. The service was fully funded via schools.

Achievements to date included:

- 2563 students supported to access work experience in 2018/19
- 387 new employers engaged in 2018/19
- 100 work experience placements supported in the Council with 34% being from BAME backgrounds and 5 with disabilities.

It was hoped that this work would help to bring the Wolves at Work initiative to phase 2 where the scheme would help a young person when leaving school or choosing their options. The scheme would involve having personal advisors in schools picking young people and supporting them before they left. By doing this it was hoped that even more barriers would be removed that might stop a young person getting into work, these included ensuring the young person had an outfit for an interview or was able to travel to an interview.

At the moment the Wolves and Work scheme was overperforming with 1605 people moving to an outcome (149%). The Council wanted to extend the scheme and Officers hoped to hear before Christmas if they would receive European funding to help the scheme extend to 2023.

There was also a desire to focus more on the 25 to 29 year age group. The main problem with this group was that they may have been unemployed for some time so were harder to reach.

Wolves at Work had been the Council's flagship project with around 5000 residents being supported into work in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, job centres and work coaches. Part of the upcoming work would also involve more focused work with the University to try and keep graduates in the city and support them into employment.

The Wolves at Work benefit to the economy was huge with an economic benefit of £30,311,400. This was based on getting 2307 people into work in the first year and over 5000 by end of March 2020, with around 3000 in sustained employment. The Panel considered that this was an extraordinary figure that needed to be highlighted and praised along with the benefit that having people in work would have for other organisations such as the health service and police.

The Panel considered the work the Council was doing with the University and queried what the University provided in terms of income for the help the Council was providing in bringing more students in on the bases that there would be jobs for them in the City when they finished their studies. Officers stated that they would look into this and that we were working in partnership with the University at the moment with no charge.

The Panel also noted that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority cost benefit analysis had been used and the question was raised as to why we did not have one of our own.

It was also noted that a number of the targets were self-set targets against which we were achieving but it would be useful to see our outcomes benchmarked against other similar local authorities.

The Panel considered that there was still more opportunity for investment in blue collar jobs and to look at further education and higher education establishments. Officers confirmed that work was carried out with academies and colleges too. Offers of help currently included work coaches to help applicants with internet-based applications where they had to go through processes including psychometric testing.

Work was also carried out with tenants in WV Living accommodation to help them find work and ultimately improve their general wellbeing. A pathway for tenants was currently being considered. It was confirmed that 15 development companies had signed up to a social value charter to engage with young people providing work taster sessions and apprenticeships. It was thought that there was more that could be done on this so the City and its residents could benefit. The Council had for example supported people into B&M and when the store closed, the Council went in the next day to help recruit those who had lost jobs. Any new store or business that opened, the Council offered support and help.

The Panel requested that an update on all the issues mentioned above be brought back to a future meeting.

Resolved: That the briefing note be received and Officers thanked for all of their hard work.

7 **Work Plan for the Panel**

The Panel considered that it was vital to ensure that all parts of the City were included in any policies or strategies moving forward.

Resolved: That the workplan be agreed.