

Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 28 September 2022

Attendance

Members of the Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Wendy Dalton
Cllr Celia Hibbert
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Mak Singh
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair)

In Attendance

Cllr Stephen Simkins (Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy)
Cllr Steve Evans (Cabinet Member for City Environment and Climate Change)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Senior Governance Manager)
Richard Lawrence (Director of Regeneration)
John Roseblade (Temporary Director of Housing and Environment)
Ian Fegan (Director of Communications and Visitor Experience)
Isobel Woods (Head of Enterprise)
Crissie Rushton (Visitor Economy Manager)
Julia Cleary (Scrutiny and Systems Manager)
Kimberly Dawson (Scrutiny Officer)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Claire Simm, Cllr Paul Birch and Cllr Craig Collingswood.
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
Cllr Simkins, Cabinet Member declared an interest under the Inward Investment item as a Board Member of West Midlands Trains.
- 3 **Minutes of previous meeting**
The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2022 were approved as a correct record.

4 **Inward Investment**

The Director of Regeneration gave a presentation on the subject of Inward Investment, a copy of the slides presented are attached to the signed minutes. He showed a short video on the Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus and spoke on the assets and opportunities within the City. There were a lot of opportunities coming forward in the future. Now i10 and i11 were fully let there was a need for more and better commercial office space. They were consequently looking to develop a project known as Interchange 8.

The Vice-Chair asked what assurances Officers were able to give that some of the projects highlighted in the presentation would come to fruition. He referred to the West Side Project which had been presented to Scrutiny in the past, but which was no longer going ahead in the form that had been detailed.

The Director of Regeneration with reference to West Side explained that the Council had exhausted all opportunities with the developer Urban & Civic. The project had started with a large capital receipt due to the authority and ended up with Urban & Civic asking the Council to under write a significant amount of funding. This was considered too much of a risk for the organisation. The demand for a hotel had not gone away and the need to develop a new one for the City. A new hotel would require significant investment by the authority, unless a partner could be found to develop one.

Members discussed funding arrangements for regeneration projects in Wolverhampton. The Chair and Vice-Chair asked for an update on this matter at a future meeting.

A Panel Member asked how the Council was going to promote diversity in the City within regeneration. He asked about the opportunities that would be available. The Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy referred to a diversity project that had been put in pace which was the glazed café. The Art Gallery put on regular cultural events. They would be working with providers in the sector to see what cultural events could be arranged. Members and Officers had a detailed discussion about attracting a diversity of businesses in the City.

A Member of the Panel remarked that there were insufficient hotels in the City. She was aware that the Mercure Wolverhampton Goldthorn Hotel on Penn Road would soon be lost to the Supermarket Chain of Lidl. The choices had been very limited for people to stay in the City during the Commonwealth Games Cycling Trial. She asked if a more aggressive approach was needed to attract investment for Hotels in the City. Her second question related to the number of people using the new train station in Wolverhampton and whether there was data monitoring the numbers passing through the station.

The Director of Regeneration responded that when considering new hotels, the location was very important. A City Centre location was going to be very important for the Council because that would support the Civic Halls, the Art Gallery, the University and local businesses. There was demand for more than one hotel. A hotel could be developed as the Local Authority or the Local Authority could work with a developer as part of a wider scheme.

Footfall was monitored in the City and he would look into whether the train companies monitored the footfall at the station.

The Chair stated that the efficacy of the business case for hotels in the City was critically important. An effective business case could only be developed if the market research had been completed.

Members praised the Investment Prospectus that had been presented. A Member stated that Wolverhampton was part of a national and international economic macro. It had suffered in the past when national and international circumstances had changed. He asked if the Council would be able to continue at the pace they wanted, when taking into account the national and economic situation.

The Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy responded that it was a fragile economic climate. There were however considerable opportunities which could be utilised. He referred to the Green Innovation Corridor which would stretch from the City Centre through to IGNITE down the Stafford Road and to the Science Park.

5 **Visitor Experience, Culture and Leisure Offer**

The Director of Communications and Visitor Experience introduced the slides on the Visitor Experience, Culture and Leisure offer in Wolverhampton. He stated that the Council was already an Events City. IPW Consultants had provided the information for the slide on Events City, it stated the following was applicable to Wolverhampton:

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- 1000+ events a year
- 30,000 football visitors every fortnight
- 300,000 per year to the Grand Theatre
- Estimated 300,000 to new Civic Halls
- 120,000 visitors to the Racecourse a year
- Admired civic / community events programme
- Range of local events delivered by partners (e.g., BIDs) and event companies

The Director of Communications and Visitor Experience commented that the Council made a significant contribution to the City wide programme through investment in arts, culture and city events. The Council had five venues which were used for major events and they had 76 outdoor events each year. 273,000 visitors in 2021/2022 came because of the events held by the Council. There was £650,000 in direct economic impact as a consequence and £9 million in in-direct economic benefit. The £9 million figure was based on the West Midlands in the 2015 Great Britain Day Visits Survey.

The Visitor Economy Manager spoke about the Commonwealth Games Cycling Time Trial. The start and finish line had been hosted in West Park. 20,000 attended across the event and people also lined the streets of the City, representing an indirect economic benefit of £665,000. The event received global TV coverage. The Fireworks spectacular had been hosted in partnership with Dunstall Racecourse in November 2021. A profit of just over £11,000 was raised and 15,000 attended the event, representing an indirect economic benefit of £500,000.

The Visitor Economy Manager presented a slide on the Grand Slam of Darts. This has been hosted at Aldersley Leisure Village in November 2021. The event had a budget of £7,320 and there was an income of £70,000 from the event. 12,500 had attended and this represented an indirect economic benefit of £420,000. A large production crew had stayed in the City for 2 weeks at an estimated cost of £140,000. There had been global TV coverage via Sky Sports.

The Visitor Economy Manager stated that the World Snooker Player's Championship had been hosted at Aldersley Leisure Village in February 2022. There was no budget for the event and it cost £9,416. 4000 people had attended the event, representing an indirect benefit of £140,000. A large production crew stayed in the City for two weeks at an estimated cost of £200,000. There had been global TV coverage via the BBC.

The Visitor Economy Manager presented a slide on Vaisakhi Mela. There had been a celebratory event in May 2022. The budget for the event had been £15,000 and it had cost £14,700. 23,209 had attended the event, representing an indirect economic benefit of £770,771. Local leaders took the opportunity to urge attendees to take up the Covid-19 vaccination. There had been coverage on Midlands Today and ITV Central. She listed a number of other significant events that had taken place over the last twelve months, these were as follows: -

- Relight Festival – 4,598 tickets as Covid-19 restrictions lifted.
- Diwali Mela – 8000 attendees to Phoenix Park
- Christmas Lights Switch Ons across the City – City Centre, Bilston, Wednesfield, Tettenhall and Bantock.
- Literature Festival – at venues across the City.
- Launch of the British Kabaddi League at Aldersley.
- Armed Forces Day – Over 5,000 attendees.
- HM The Queen - Jubilee Beacon Lighting in St Peter's Square
- Krazy Races – 15,000 visitors to the City Centre
- Ibiza Proms in the Park – Large local audience of 3,000 attended
- WV1 Fest – 7,000 visitors to West Park
- Airing HM The Queen's Funeral in Queen Square

The Director for Communications and Visitor Experience stated that they intended to build on their current position. They had completed an internal review to reprofile budgets to match city ambitions, cost inflation and the core programme was now complete. The team had faced challenges to mitigate the post pandemic market and had suffered with increased costs and the cost of living crisis affecting buyer behaviour. IPW Consultants were completing a review to inform the five-year strategy. Their report would be completed by the end of October 2022. The IPW research to date was listed on a slide as follows: -

- Current events – what's on lists from past years and current programme for 2022.
- Audiences – Data on audiences and attendance patterns via ONS, local surveys, national bodies studies.

- Organisational – public, private, cultural, sports, academic, community.
- City of Wolverhampton Council – direct events supporting including funding and staffing, indirect support, policy and strategy.
- Conducted 21 stakeholder interviews.
- Looked at case studies for 6 core cities, and 6 key cities to identify best practice.

IPW had identified 3 objectives;

1. Change perceptions of the City – by enhancing profile and reputation nationally and internationally.
2. Increase the social benefit and value from events – by creating opportunities for employment and skills development
3. Increase the economic benefit and return from events – by generating significant new direct and indirect spend.

A Panel Member applauded the events team for the events they had arranged in the last twelve months. For one event in his constituency involving the GKN Temple some of his constituents had felt there had been a lack of communication from the Council.

A Panel Member stated that the British Art Show had a target of 50,000 people to attend the show in Wolverhampton. He asked if this target had been achieved and whether the City could have the show again in the foreseeable future. The Director for Communications and Visitor Experience responded that the target was hit through a combination of direct visits to the art gallery and the fringe art festival.

A Member of the Panel asked when the Britannia Hotel would be open again for general public use. The Cabinet Member responded that Britannia was a private operator and had a contract with Serco. They could influence them but had no direct control.

A Panel Member asked if the 300,000 visitors expected to visit the Civic Halls on an annual basis was a realistic figure. He also asked if it was true that Molineux stadium was not pursued as a potential venue for the Euro 2028 Football Tournament, as reported in a recent press article.

The Director of Communications and Visitor Experience responded that the 300,000 visitor figure was based on the IPW predictions and the AEG business model. The AEG approach would be very different to the approach taken to the Civic Halls in the past. The Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy responded that the Council would fully support Wolverhampton Football Club if they wanted the Molineux to host any of the football matches as part of a bid for Euro 2028.

A Panel Member raised the importance of diversity at events. She was of the view that some events were only attended by specific groups, rather than a broad diverse section of the community. She thought a holistic review looking at this question would be prudent. The Director of Communications and Visitor Experience responded that some events were free which helped to attract people. Other events were paid for sometimes due to partnerships with other community organisations. There was some work to take place on data and how it was collected. The Art gallery was very good at collecting data. He had been very pleased with the diverse nature of the crowds during the Commonwealth Games event. The Chair suggested that the Director of Communications and his team could work with some of the Council's BAME Council Members on processes regarding data for market research.

The Director of Communications and Visitor Experience commented that events did not sit on their own, they were part of a wider city offer and context which included marketing, transport, environment, and Food and beverage / accommodation. He presented a slide on the early recommendations from IPW, which were as follows: -

1. Create a shared vision
2. Create a performance framework
3. Create a city-wide governance structures
4. Better use of market intelligence and data
5. Generate more private sector investment in high quality events
6. Find the balance between accessible public events and commercial events that generate income for reinvestment in the programme

Over the next 12 months the plan was listed on a slide as follows:-

- Support and funding for annual Eid event
- Support and funding for annual city Pride event
- Building on the legacy of Commonwealth Games
- Build on the British Art Show legacy
- Develop and deliver an improved digital city visitor offer - Visit Wolverhampton
- Maximise the AEG relationship
- Implement the five-year event strategy and IPW recommendations

The Chair remarked that she would like to meet with the Director of Communications and Visitor Experience once the report from IPW had been completed, so she could discuss the next steps for the Council. She was happy for the Cabinet Member to attend the meeting.

A Panel Member commented that there had been no mention of community and volunteering on the slide detailing the plan for the next twelve months. He mentioned Wednesfield in Bloom and the Canal Festival as examples of growing opportunities.

A Member of the Panel commenting on the slide detailing the plans for the next 12 months stated there was nothing listed specific for the black community. She added

that she would welcome a conversation with the events team about unique selling points in five years' time for the City.

A Panel Member asked for an update on the Eye Infirmary and the Pipe Hall by the next meeting. The Director for Regeneration responded that Pipe Hall was being led by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). They were actively engaging with the Heritage Preservation Trust to consider how the site could be brought forward. They updated the Council on a monthly basis and so he could provide the Panel Member further information. On the matter of the Eye Infirmary, the developer had submitted a planning application, which was going through the planning process. The developer was also in negotiations with the WMCA on potential grant funding and the outcome was awaited.

The Visitor Economy Manager stated that there should be a strong community volunteering angle in the five-year event strategy. This area was really important to generate opportunity. The Cabinet Member supported the viewpoint.

Resolved: That the Director of Communications and Visitor Experience and his team work with the Council's BAME Councillors on processes regarding collecting data to assist with marketing research for events.

6 City Public Realm Works

The Temporary Director of City Housing and Environment presented slides on the City Public Realm Works. Phase 1 (Victoria Street) was currently on programme to deliver a new events square to support the Events Programme in the City. Phase 3 (Civic Halls) was currently on programme to deliver a completed scheme for handover to the Civic Halls operator. The project was funded by the Future High Street Fund.

The Temporary Director of City Housing and Environment stated a group had been established which met on a monthly basis to talk to traders about the progress of the works. It also provided feedback on specific issues and sought to obtain their ideas about events the City could hold in the space. Social media provided updates on the works and helped to communicate that businesses were still open. They had secured a business independent advisor to help the Council work with the local business in the area. It had been an intense period of work which had its challenges.

The Chair asked where the project could be improved. The Temporary Director of City Housing and Environment responded that there had been some challenges with engaging with some of the businesses. When works were about to start the City was still in Covid lockdown and some of the messages and leaflets couldn't be sure had been received and read. During the works a large damaged sewer had been identified with a 3 meter void, which needed to be repaired by Severn Trent, meaning that the work programme had to be changed.

The Head of Enterprise added that the Independent Business Advisor had helped with the communication. Some businesses had changed hands and there had been new businesses established.

A Panel Member praised the plans. They asked about car parking for the disabled and the vulnerable in the public realm areas. He stated that there had been problems in Bilston during the WMCA Tram works. He asked why an independent advisor had been employed after the traders had complained because it could have been foreseen there would be problems. He asked if an impact study had been completed before the works commenced. Six months into the works, traders were still struggling and he believed they had not yet received any compensation from the Council for profits lost.

The Temporary Director of City Housing and Environment responded there were plans for parking for the disabled. They had also been working with the traders to ensure they were aware of these plans. There was a liaison Officer employed, but it was true that they had not foreseen the extent of the impact on the traders. Coming out of a pandemic, switching in retail behaviour and the pandemic meant it was hard to predict the level of impact.

The Head of Enterprise acknowledged that a lesson had been learnt on the extent of liaison required with traders for the Public Realm project. Strong robust data and analysis was required on any level of compensation and support to be awarded to businesses. The businesses advisor was able to give impartial independent advice to the Council. Any compensation payments needed to go through the correct governance process of the Council.

The Temporary Director of City Housing and Environment added that the grant funding allocated to the Council for the project did not include provision for any compensation payments to businesses. Sometimes works were scheduled so shops could maintain access such as late night and early morning working.

A Panel Member commented that the feedback he was receiving from businesses within the City as a whole was one of a lack of support from the Council. He asked about the costs of the independent business advisor. The Head of Enterprise responded that a tender process had taken place for the advisor, which was required as they needed to be independent. A local business advisor had been recruited, 4 of his team had been liaising with the traders. Now European funding was coming to an end, the funding they received to support businesses more generally within the City would change and the criteria on how they could support them. The programme needed to be shaped going forward and work needed to take place with the WMCA. The Shared Prosperity Funding was a key part of the new system. Members asked for a report on the matter to be brought to the Panel at an appropriate time.

Members asked for a report on the compensation and support package to being offered to businesses in the area of the public realm works to be brought back to the Panel when there was a clearer picture.

A Panel Member stated that the Express and Star were provided with monthly updates regarding the public realm, they asked whether the Panel should receive them. The Temporary Director of City Housing and Environment responded that the updates were of a technical type. He could share them with the Panel but he wasn't sure of their value. The Chair said she would talk to the Director about whether there would be value in this course of action and would consider the agendas of the Panel moving forward.

Resolved: That the Panel receives a report on the compensation and support package being offered to businesses within the area of the public realm works, when it is clearer as to what is to be offered.

Resolved: That a report be brought to the Panel at an appropriate time regarding funding the Council would receive in the future to support businesses more generally across the City.

7 **Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Vice-Chair asked for City Centre Regeneration to be added to the work programme for the Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel, after it had been considered by Scrutiny Board.

The Panel gave a vote of thanks to Julia Cleary, the Scrutiny and Systems Manager who was leaving the Council. They commended her on her professionalism and work for the Council over the last seven years.

Resolved: That City Centre Regeneration be added to the agenda for the February 2023 meeting of the Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be agreed for the Economic and Growth Scrutiny Panel.

8 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next scheduled Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel meeting was agreed as 30 November 2022 at 6pm.