

# Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 1 December 2015

### Attendance

#### Members of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Harman Banger  
Cllr Payal Bedi  
Cllr Val Evans  
Cllr John Rowley  
Cllr Paul Singh  
Cllr Tersaim Singh  
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair)  
Cllr Martin Waite  
Cllr Daniel Warren  
Cllr Jonathan Yardley (Vice-Chair)

#### Cabinet Member

Cllr John Reynolds , City Economy

#### Employees

Mark Blackstock	Head of Visitor Economy
Deborah Breedon	Scrutiny Officer
Martin Fox	Finance Business Partner
Keren Jones	Service Director - City Economy

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*    *Title*

- 1 Apologies**  
Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Cllr Welcome Koussoukama.
- 2 Declarations of Interest**  
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 Minutes of Previous Meetings**  
Resolved

That the minutes of the previous meetings held on 24 September 2015 and 10 October 2015 be approved and signed as correct records.

4 **Matters Arising**

6 October 2015

Item – Wolverhampton’s Cultural Offer.

The Chair paid tribute to Cllr Phil Bateman for highlighting that road disruption during the development of the bus station had impacted on the number of coach bookings to the Grand Theatre and his determination that something should be done to address the number of coach trips to the Grand Theatre.

She advised that coach trip bookings were addressed and re-established with –in a couple of days of the meeting by the Chief Executive, Adrian Jackson.

The Chair highlighted that several key items had been raised during both scrutiny sessions and actions implied that had not been captured in the resolutions, but that she thought were worthy of bringing back to the final meeting of the municipal year when summarising the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panels work and outcomes.

Resolved:

That a summary report of actions and outcomes be submitted to the final meeting of the municipal year.

5 **Budget 2016/17**

Martin Fox, Finance Business Partner provided a summary of the report and highlighted the key points about the savings proposals. Cllr John Reynolds, Cabinet Member City Economy, highlighted the main points about each of the savings, redesign and income generation proposals, as follows:

**Phased Removal of remaining Grand Theatre Grant:**

The Panel were reminded that Adrian Jackson, Chief Executive of the Grand Theatre had attended the previous meeting and an in depth discussion had taken place relating to this proposal.

The Panel welcomed the appointment of the new Chief Exec and, in particular, his intention to have a business and profit centred approach to the theatre's development.

The Chair highlighted that the budget cuts to venues in the City could have direct and negative impact on the overall Visitor Economy strategy if care is not taken. The Panel highlighted that it was important for officers to continue to advise and guide management of those venues to assist in their business development. The Panel requested future feedback on how the venues mentioned have produced business plans for future financial sustainability.

**Review remaining Lighthouse Media Centre Grant:**

The Panel were reminded that the position relating to the Lighthouse Theatre had been discussed at a previous meeting. The Financial Business Partner and the Service Director had met with the Lighthouse Theatre management and given them an opportunity to come back to the Council for assistance, as it would be useful to change the offer around digital and technology. As yet they have not taken the opportunity up

**Further restructure of City Economy Services:**

Cllr Martin Waite highlighted business rent retention in the autumn statement and highlighted the need for employees in the City Economy Service, who work directly with potential investors, to be genuine account managers that manage 'P and Ls'. He suggested that in order to separate Wolverhampton from other Local Authorities we need to be in a place where the account managers add value to the business community.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that the business improvement does understand the impact of the extra business levy and increases. He highlighted that Scrutiny Panel had heard from Wiggle company representative how pleased they were with the account manager who had done a lot more than other Local Authority account managers.

The Service Director advised that the report had been produced some time ago and that things had moved on since to restructure into five key areas. She advised that the Head of Enterprise was responsible for several managers, who in effect were account managers. She advised that the strategic management had been strengthened to correspond with Area Action Plan (AAP) and alongside that there would be City Development, Skills and Employment, Visitor Economy, Service support and external funding.

Whilst there were reductions to the mainline budget, it was explained that the Council had reached the financial stage of some substantial bids from European Union which if approved would increase staffing capacity around business support and account management. It is expected that the Council will also be able to continue the ERDF funded Black Country Gold Grant Scheme for businesses. Together with the ESF funded Skills and Employment bid there could potentially be up to ten people funded by European funding for the next three years.

The need to match fund means that it was difficult to reduce mainline staffing any further.

**Increase new commercial activities within cultural venues (Archives, Art Gallery, Bantock House):**

The Panel was reminded that scrutiny of the cultural venues had taken place in depth at a recent scrutiny Panel meeting.

**Further external funding of Outdoor Events:**

The recent bonfire event at the Race course was praised as a really good family event. There had been an issue with the car park marshalling but this would be addressed at future events at the race course and the boxes would also be available. The Head of Visitor Economy was asked to consider the need to double up on events, such as horse racing and the Madness Concert that had taken place in the summer.

The Panel requested further information back to the Panel about business plans at other venues.

**Bilston Craft Gallery – review current service provision including delivery of exhibitions and craft play:**

The Cabinet Member advised that since the report was written there had been a review of the situation and the collections would continue to be kept at Bilston Craft gallery. The Panel highlighted that there are groups in the Bilston area that would be willing to pay for the service provision. The Scrutiny Panel voiced concerns about maintaining and keeping the premises clean and operational in addition to the delivery of the craft play service and one off events.

The Panel advised that a programme should be developed for Bilston Craft Gallery through rigorous business planning. Management confirmed that detailed five year business plans that have been produced for each venue to enable better control of income and expenditure, as well as planning.

Mark Blackstock, Head of Visitor Economy advised that the new approach, meant that there were more displays and events now being delivered by partners and local groups, which required minimal input by curatorial staff, the groups tended to carry out most of the work to set up displays themselves.

**Financial transaction and base budget revisions as follows:**

**Drawdown of one off grants for City Economy:**

The Finance Business Partner outlined that the drawdown was as a result of grant funding being available to reduce the net costs of the service for 2016/17 without impacting on service delivery.

Panel thanked the Finance Business Partner for identifying the drawdown funding.

Resolved:

That the comments of the Panel be reported to Scrutiny Board 15 December 2015.

**6 Employment and Skill Commission Report**

Keren Jones, Service Director City Economy and Cllr John Reynolds, Cabinet Members City Economy, provided a report to share the progress by the Council and its Partners to develop and deliver a Skills and Employment Action Plan for the City to take forward the recommendations emanating from the work of the Skills and Employment Commission, led by Professor Tony Travers.

She outlined the main points arising from the Final Commission report (Appendix 1 to the report). She indicated that the actions arising from the work would be at three levels, local, sub-regional and national. She advised that the wider priorities for action were:

- Influencing the Wider West Midlands agenda for Skills and Employment
- Securing additional funding from Black Country European Union Structural Investment Funds

She circulated a paper which detailed the 'Job Box' – The Integrated Model Key processes at City level. She highlighted that the City Board was keen to develop a flagship project for action that delivers against the priority interventions focused on the following five key themes:

1. Holistic careers advice
2. A city skills system

3. Ready for work
4. Moving up
5. Cross sector collaboration

She explained that the Job Box was one of the programmes to deliver against the recommendations. She informed the Panel that initially it would be a virtual one stop shop for information and support on job vacancies, training and employment, but that development would be through a number of phases. The aim of the Job Box was to provide residents with links to the support they need through a single portal.

She advised that the four programmes would be as follows:

- **City Job Box** – Three phases to enable development of virtual model and internally aligning services and external marketing. Engagement with partners with the Councils integrated model and e-communication channels and last phase a one stop shop as part of the City Regeneration programme and linked in to the development of the Combined Authority and the proposed devolution of budgets.
- **Skills for Growth** – Addressing supply and demand for skills in the City.
- **Centre One City One Campus** – Specialist provision bringing together skills in the City alongside further education.
- On-going influence of the wider West Midlands

The Service Director informed the Panel that anyone who needs to improve their skills can use the Job Box, and it would cater for those that needed significant support to those where minimal support was sufficient to help them make the right choices.

She advised that the 'one' City Skills and Employment Team will have one representative from all main partner organisations and that the combined partner performance management, research and intelligence will feed the 'Job Box'. The Job Box would inform the individual what is available:

- Marketing, communication and engagement
- Individual approach
- Informed choices
- Right route for progression
- Right support

The Service Director responded to Cllr Martin Waite, who referred to the number of companies that approach schools and colleges to recruit young people to develop specific skills. She advised that the business community would be active stakeholders in the delivery of the Job Box.

She advised that the University, the College and Adult Education Services are already on board with the Job Box to help individuals find the right route. She highlighted the critical role schools have to provide informed choices, and that some key schools were already involved and will be champions, to promote and grow informed choices to other schools. The Panel noted the importance of getting devolution of the skills budget to the Combined Authority right.

Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman, Chair, referred to the need for some individuals to develop soft skills and asked what the Job Box would do in such cases. The Service

Director advised that the last two stages 'Right route for progression' and 'Right Support' would be key to this. She advised that the Job Box would develop opportunities for partners to add value to mainstream provision e.g. a mentoring programme being developed by the Economic Growth Board. The Cabinet Member added that the Way Youth Zone has much planned aimed at soft skill development.

In response to a question relating to the co-ordinating agent and monitoring, the Service Director advised that the City of Wolverhampton Council would provide a leadership role and that an online performance management tool is being developed.

The Chair on behalf of the Panel congratulated all that had worked on the Employment and Skills Commission report; she said that it was a tremendous and long awaited piece of work. The Service Director highlighted that the initial work to inform the Commission had been carried out by Scrutiny Review of Employability and Skills 2014-15.

Cllr Daniel Warren indicated that at the time of writing the report the Combined Authority was merely a bright idea and now there is so much more to work with. He urged employees to ensure that there is buy-in from all parties at each stage of the programme. The Service Manager confirmed that the team had been tasked to gain buy in at each stage of the programme and that there would be more to report about early actions in the spring 2016.

Resolved:

1. That the Scrutiny Panel endorse the framework and priorities for the Wolverhampton Skills and Employment Action Plan, that form a key strategy for managing the City of Wolverhampton Council's Corporate risk of 'Skills for Work'.
2. That an update report is provided to Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel in March 2016.
3. That a note of thanks be recorded for all involved in the 'Wolverhampton Skills and Employment Commission Final Report'.