

Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 21 March 2017

Attendance

Members of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Philip Bateman
Cllr Payal Bedi-Chadha
Cllr Hazel Malcolm
Cllr Mak Singh
Cllr Tersaim Singh
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair)
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Daniel Warren
Cllr Jonathan Yardley (Vice-Chair)

In Attendance

Cllr John Reynolds, Cabinet Member for City Economy

Employees

Heather Clark	Service Development Manager
Charlotte Johns	Head of Strategic Programmes
Keren Jones	Service Director - City Economy
Neil White	Scrutiny Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies**
An apology for absence was submitted by Councillor Val Evans.
- 2 Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest reported.
- 3 Minutes of previous meeting**
That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2017 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.
- 4 Matters arising**
The Panel reminded the Officers that they would investigate the difficulty of recruiting people to available jobs in the transport industry with very little focus on the skills required to do these jobs. Work was also being done with HGV and Rail track and a report on this was expected for a future meeting of the Panel.

Councillor Reynolds advised that the Council had been awarded funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) for wolves@work, a £3m employment project jointly funded by DWP and the Council (£1.5m each) which would enable National Express to recruit 60 bus drivers.

5 **Draft Libraries Transformation Strategy 2017 -2027: Consultation**

Councillor Reynolds, Cabinet Member for City Economy, introduced the Council's new strategy and vision for the City's libraries for 2017 to 2027. The strategy sought to maintain the Council's 16 branch libraries and would be subject to a 12-week period of consultation until 21 May 2017. The consultation sought the public's views on the proposals in the strategy and those views would help shape the final strategy which would be considered by the Council's Cabinet in the summer.

The Panel reflected on the journey taken by the Ashmore Park Library into a community hub and how successful it had been. It was suggested that members of the Councils should be encouraged to visit this hub as a good example of what could be achieved through co-location of a Library with other services.

The Panel commented on the difference in the number of hours that Blakenhall and Collingwood Libraries were open yet they served very similar communities and it was felt that the consultation was not clear enough in relating the usage of the Libraries to its opening hours to reflect the need within that local area.

Comment was made about those Libraries that were only open for a few hours a week and where staffed by volunteers it was important not to ask too much from the volunteers.

It was noted that the strategy sought to achieve 6 key improved outcomes for the City that were set out in paragraph 3.3.2. of the report and it was important that the ability of the Library service to match these outcomes was assessed to see how far this was being achieved.

Following a question from a member on the importance of life coaches and what their role was, Councillor Reynolds undertook to send a recent report on the skills needed for life coaches to those members who were interested in it.

The Panel queried whether there was scope to encourage commercial use of the Libraries for example encouraging the Historical Society in Wednesfield to base themselves at the library.

Charlotte Johns, Head of Strategic Programmes, advised that the purpose of the consultation was to seek the public's views and any submissions that sought additional commercial use or would help support the running of a local library were very much welcomed.

The Panel highlighted the need for individual Libraries to match their services to needs of their local communities, particularly for those areas where there are low wages or little public transport where the Library provides a vital local resource to that community.

The panel noted that it was intended to bring the results of the consultation to a Cabinet meeting in July 2017.

Resolved – that the Panel’s comments be considered as part of the consultation on the draft Libraries strategy and following the consultation a further report be submitted to the Panel.

6 **Smart City Report**

Keren Jones, Service Director – City Economy, outlined proposals to develop a Smart City Strategy.

The Panel noted that “Smart City” was a way to describe ICT led urban innovation, new modes of governance and urban citizenship. A Smart City would utilise digital technologies to manage data on way that helped support, inform and manage decision-making and operational task as well as providing new business opportunities and empowering citizens.

The Service Director commented that the City’s Economy Service has been the lead Black Country Local Authority providing support to the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership Green Growth Board. This has included the production of a Black Country Smart City Strategy providing a strategic framework for projects and for funding proposals. The projects are developed around a set of themes based on the European Smart Cities Framework.

Alongside the development and delivery of Smart City projects, a Black Country Smart City Network was being established to enable networking. The Network was being supported by the City of Wolverhampton Council, the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and the University of Wolverhampton and has already established links with other initiatives within the West Midlands Combined Authority such as Digital Birmingham and the Birmingham Smart City Alliance.

The Panel welcomed the initiative and the Council’s vision in pursuing the concept. It noted that it was intended to hold workshops with a wider group of stakeholders throughout the year and was excited by the idea of a competition to help raise awareness of the Council’s direction. The production of a marketing plan would also help to improve understanding.

The Panel noted that there were several existing champions for this work and that education and advice would be needed to help individuals to manage their own data to ensure privacy issues were overcome.

In response to a question, the Service Director advised that there may be a need to procure some time limited project management skills but that this concept could be only be completed through successful working with all partners across the city.

Resolved – that the proposals for a competition and a marketing plan to raise awareness of the Smart City concept and as a way to bring partners into the projects be submitted to a future meeting.

7 **Developing a new Strategic Economic Plan**

Keren Jones, Service Director – City Economy advised on proposals to refresh the City Strategy as the City Strategic Economic Plan. The aim was to ensure better alignment between the City Economic Plan, the Black Country Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and the West Midlands Combined Authority Super-SEP.

The Service Director drew the Panel's attention to a proposed framework for the new City Strategic Economic Plan which would sit within a hierarchy of plans to deliver inclusive economic growth. The plans would adhere to the principle of subsidiarity that issues would be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level.

The Service Director added that the research institute City-REDI had been appointed to compile a comprehensive evidence base for the refreshed plan which will be disseminated to stakeholders through workshops and an engagement and consultation process.

The Panel noted that the recent increase in improvement in KS1 and KS2 exam results at secondary school had not translated into a significant reduction in youth unemployment.

The Panel felt that it would be useful to have some scrutiny input into the development of the strategy and agreed that this should be at the workshop with key stakeholders to be held on 19 May 2017.

Resolved – that scrutiny members be invited to the workshop with key stakeholders on the development of the new Strategic Economic Plan to be held on 19 May 2017.

8 **Skills and Employment Update**

The Panel received a briefing note updating it on skills and employment statistics within Wolverhampton.

The Panel queried how Wolverhampton's performance in these areas compared to statistically similar local authorities.

Resolved: That the Panel receive an update on how Wolverhampton's performance in skills and employment compared to statistically similar local authorities.

9 **Chair's Thanks**

The Chair thanked the members of the Panel and the Scrutiny Officer for all their hard work and contribution to the Panel during the Civic Year.

The Panel expressed its thanks to the Chair for the way she had chaired the Panel's meetings during the year.