

ECONOMY & CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 OCTOBER 2020

Present: Councillor Howells(Chairperson)
Councillors Henshaw, Gordon, Gavin Hill-John, Lay, Parkhill,
Robson, Sattar and Stubbs

11 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Hill-John advised that he would have to leave the meeting early due to another commitment.

12 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Interest in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct were received as follows:

COUNCILLOR	ITEM	NATURE OF INTEREST
Chris Lay	4	Personal Interest – Chair of Cardiff Bus
Gavin Hill-John	4	Personal Interest – Non Executive Director of Cardiff Bus

13 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2020 were approved by the Committee as a correct record of the meeting.

14 : CASTLE STREET CLOSURE

The Committee received a update report regarding the closure of Castle Street. Members were asked to consider the impact of the closure on the economy of Cardiff, on businesses – those near to Castle Street as well as in the rest of the city centre and adjacent areas – as well as any impact on the visitor economy.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Caro Wild (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning & Transport), Neil Hanratty (Director of Economic Development), Andrew Gregory (Director Strategic Planning & Transport), Richard Hyett (Principal Inward Investment & Aftercare Officer) and Jason Bale (Programme Manager, Clean Air Cardiff) to the meeting.

After a brief statement from the Cabinet Member, the officers were invited to deliver a presentation.

The Chairperson opened the debate and invited Members of the Committee to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received.

- Members queried whether the footfall growth figure should be 5%

and not 15% bearing in mind there had already been a growth in footfall to 10%. It was noted that the wider role out in licensing on-street food and drink arrangements; the fact that people were restricted to outdoor dining and the Eat Out to Help Out scheme all supported footfall growth during August, as well as the Castle Street closure and cafe. The outdoor dining experience came to a natural end in September, due to end of school holidays and adverse weather conditions.

- Members did not believe that the figures in relation to clean air should be a measure of success bearing in mind that the scheme required the closure of a main arterial road. FOR Cardiff noted that it was impossible to gauge the impact of road closures. Concern was also expressed about the two different time periods used when assessing the air quality levels and queried whether it would be better to use the same time period. Members were advised, from the recent tube data, that the most recent figures do compare like for like from May to August in both 2019 and 2020. It shows there had been a decrease in the levels across the city.
- Members referenced the turnover for the individual businesses, there was discussion about the percentage share that the delivery apps would charge. At the outset it was managed through Yoello, but as time went on other delivery agents were allowed to bring food. Over 60,000 users bought food using a variety of different apps. It was noted that it was the footfall to the area that was important. In terms of anecdotal comments, comments have been received from some businesses that this has been their busiest periods and they would have struggled without it. There was some confusion initially amongst local businesses about the reasoning behind it but it was all about creating some outdoor space for those who could not do it themselves.
- Members were advised that there were significant costs involved in providing the facility; the cost of undertaking the road closure and the costs of the staff involved in managing the on street arrangements, but it was a cost that was worthwhile in terms of supporting local businesses. Other proactive cities in the UK took similar measures to protect changes in terms of footfall. Cardiff, comparative to other core cities, was the most successful in increasing its footfall at that point.

The capital costs were £264,000 which have been totally covered by Welsh Government. In terms of the revenue, the revenue costs for closing the road was £40,000 a month. It is hoped to get a proportion of that from Welsh Government also and a bid has been submitted.

- Members discussed whether the closure of Castle Street had

drawn footfall away from the local arcades to different areas of the city. It was noted that at the start of the recovery the arcades were treated as indoor space, and businesses struggled with that because of lack of footfall. Officers did not believe that the closure of Castle street was the issue, and the activation of High Street and St Mary Street brought more footfall to the area at the time.

With reference to the reduction in footfall figures and spending figures, officers advised that initiatives like Castle Street helped to offset the impact lockdown during the summer, but if it happens again now it will be more difficult because the weather affects outdoor activity. Cardiff has the 4th highest drop in footfall in September of the core cities, it is anticipated that one of the explanations for that is the nature of employment. There are more people working from home in comparison to other cities – due to Cardiff's knowledge based work.

Members asked whether the reduction in footfall could be because of the access to the city centre due to the closure of Castle Street and referenced the feedback received from 99 people. The Director advised that it was a survey of city centre based residents, all residents were contacted and asked to complete an online survey. That consultation was taken under emergency measures. It was noted that there have been concerns raised about bus access arrangements.

- Members sought information about the consultation to take place about the next steps for Castle Street both in relation to increasing footfall and allowing access for buses, cycles and taxis. It was explained that a large number of residents and companies have been contacted. The closure of Castle Street was always a temporary arrangement. It needed to be agile to help tackle a fast moving crisis and it is important to listen and adjust arrangements moving forward. There will be the opportunity for full engagement but we are still in the crisis at the present time.

Members asked about proposed dates for any consultation going forward. Members were advised that Castle Street needs some urgent review; it is anticipated that there will be a temporary, adjusted arrangement and at the same time a wider public consultation on permanent options. Once selected there would be a need to move quickly to implement the agreed option but officers cautioned it would take time, months rather than weeks.

Any consultation would have to involve a number of key stake holding groups.

- Members asked whether there were other roads in the city centre

that could be utilised which would not create the difficulties with access that Castle Street has and were advised that consideration is being given to others areas in the city as well as the following - wider spill out space; upgrading the quality of some of the streets with a view to making outdoor space more attractive; and the clean air proposals for various areas including Central Square, Westgate Street, and Dumfries Place. There are also the proposals for the Canal Quarter. It is important to maximise the outdoor space in Cardiff, but considering that space for outdoor leisure it is important to remember there has to be some access, for deliveries and emergency vehicles. Castle Street was wide enough to allow the necessary access.

It was noted that a large number of temporary licences were granted to allow for the use of outside space in various areas of the city.

- Members noted the change in shopping patterns, an increase in the use of retail parks and the fact that the traffic in the City Centre has become quieter, but the numbers on public transport is good. It was noted that car parking capacity has been reduced because of the need to social distance. It has not however caused any problems.
- Members discussed the possibilities of moving bus stops to outside the arcades on Castle Street, which would allow passengers to alight there and might improve the economic future of the arcades. Members were advised that when the future becomes clearer work will be undertaken to maximise the benefits for public transport. It is necessary to try and ensure a balance in designing public space for Cardiff but also to ensure that there are transport and economic benefits.

RESOLVED – That the Chairperson write on behalf of the Committee to the Cabinet Member conveying their observations.

15 : PLAYGROUND AREAS: UPDATE

The Committee received a update report regarding the reopening of playground areas following the pandemic, how the refurbishment programme has been impacted and any plans to address the impact. .

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Peter Bradbury (Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure), Steve Morris (Operational Manager, Sport, Leisure and Development), and Rosie James (Parks Strategy and Development Manager) to the meeting.

After a brief statement from the Cabinet Member, the officers were invited to deliver a presentation.

The Chairperson opened the debate and invited Members of the Committee to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received.

- Members referred to 3 adventure playgrounds in the Wrexham area and whether they give good value for money; they appear to give good value for children. Officers advised that there are some 120 schemes running at the present time, but need to move to a situation where there are more destination parks, such as Roath Park and Llandaff Fields; but are happy to look at the adventure playgrounds in Wrexham and liaise with officers in that area to consider whether something similar could be done in Cardiff. The Cabinet Member stated he would also like to introduce disability play areas/equipment.
- Members will be provided with the programme start up dates for all areas.
- Members discussed the amount of Section 106 monies outstanding, how that money is ring fenced for each area and any limits on when that money has to be spent. Members sought assurance that the Council is not approaching cut-off time limits for use of some Section 106 monies and were assured by officers that there are no red risks currently and officers would ensure that none arose.
- Members noted the numbers of play area inspections carried out on a weekly basis after the reopening of play areas was allowed and were advised that the work had started as soon as the announcement was made, however, a request had been made of the government that, if play areas require closure in the future, that advance notice of then reopening be provided so that inspection work can take place as soon as that information is known.
- Members noted that lessons have been learned over the last 6-8 months with the closure and thereafter re-opening of sites. There is now a better overview of the issues facing Cardiff in the playgrounds. There is now an understanding of how much people appreciate and use the playgrounds.
- Members discussed the issues arising from new drainage regulations and the significant costs associated with these and whether these had been factored into proposed budgets for revamps. Officers explained drainage costs varied from scheme to scheme and so it is difficult to accurately quantify but that they would be considered as part of scheme development.

RESOLVED – That the Chairperson write on behalf of the Committee to the Cabinet Member conveying their observations.

16 : WORK PROGRAMMING

RESOLVED: To approve the Work Programme as shown in Appendix B

17 : CORRESPONDENCE

RESOLVED: To note the update on committee correspondence.

18 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were tabled at this meeting.

19 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 5TH NOVEMBER 2020, 4.30PM

The meeting terminated at 7.00 pm