

Minutes



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 26 July 2018

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors J Guy (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, G Berry, M Evans, C Ferris, L Lacey, M Spencer and K Thomas

Daniel Cooke (Scrutiny Adviser), Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change), Eleanor Mulligan (Democracy and Communications Manager) and Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance)

In Attendance:

Apologies: Councillors C Evans

1 Declarations of Interest

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 June 2018

The minutes of the Meeting held on 21 June 2018 were accepted as a true and accurate record, subject the following amendments:

- Item 2, Minutes of the Meetings held on 26 April 2018 - "Councillor C Evans queried the recording of ~~him~~ *his* abstentions during the voting of the meeting."
- "The Committee agreed to forward these comments to the Cabinet Member for ~~information~~ *clarification*."

Regarding Item 5, Draft Annual Forward Work Programme, the Committee requested that the update on Decriminalised Parking be on the Committee's work programme for half way through the implementation, to ensure that the process was on track to complete within the 18 month timescale.

3 Budget Process and Public Engagement - Recommendations Monitoring

Attendees:

- Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change)
- Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance)

The Head of People and Business Change presented an overview of the report providing an update on the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on Budget Process and Engagement in January 2018. This update included the progress had been made and the current plan for the consultation and engagement of this Year's budget proposals.

The Officer then discussed the Hierarchy of Engagement and the examples within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) gave examples of how to move from *Informing* to *Empowering* citizens. The Council were at the consult phase, and on occasions had moved towards involving citizens. Empowering citizens to be decision makers was a longer process, but the Council was in a similar position to other organisations.

Additionally, the Officer discussed online surveys and advised Social media online surveys (SNAP) were being developed. The Newport Youth Council aimed to involve young people in the engagement process.

The Members asked the following:

- The Committee had previously been told that a review of Public Engagement would be brought back to the Committee in November. The Committee raised concerns that this would be too late to impact upon the process for this year's budget, and as such were concerned that the timescale meant that the Council would not have sufficient time to properly engage on this year's budget. The Officer acknowledged that an earlier start to the public consultation, or a year round process of consultation would be preferable, however the decisions on the timing of the budget process was a corporate decision based on a number of factors, and had to be met from within its resources. The Officers team resources this year had focused on the implementation of the Wellbeing Assessment.

The Officer advised the Committee that the concerns raised at last year's budget Consultation by Scrutiny were being addressed and that a review of Public Engagement was being undertaken. This full review was being reported to the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15 November to look at the longer term approach to consultation.

The Committee were offered more frequent progress updates every meeting until November to keep them informed.

- The Members commented that the reasons why public consultation had not progressed from last year then this needed to be understood, whether it be staff resources within the team, or part of a more strategic decision. Some Committee Members noted that the Committee could make recommendations to the Cabinet to start the consultation process earlier.
- Members commented on how it was disappointed that the Council had not improved in the Hierarchy of Engagement. The Involve stage needed to be reached and it had been thought consulting on the Budget would be a good opportunity. The public consultation could not be restricted by the budget cycle, but there were issues that can be consulted throughout the year. The Belle Vue Park Car Parking was given as an example by a Member. People could be consulted on whether free parking in parks or a small rise in Council Tax was preferable.
- Comment was then made that the Council had not taken advantage of some opportunities. An example was given that Welsh Government offered a sum of money to be applied for by Local Authorities so they could liaise with local businesses to allow the public to use their toilets however the Council had not applied. The Officer acknowledged that this opportunity had not been taken up. The Officer advised that it was a challenge to move up the Hierarchy of Engagement as it was difficult to change the culture and mind-set to enable this to happen. The arrangements for this year's budget consultation were being developed, and pre consultation engagement ideas were being looking into, such as Hereford Council's method of engagement.

- Concerns were raised regarding the Council moving away from paper surveys as an engagement tool. Members were advised that paper surveys required a member of staff to manually input responses which was an additional resource requirement. However, paper copies would still be available, and the Council was not moving away from this method of engagement. Last year both paper and face to face surveys were produced and included in the overall data.
- It was also asked if it would be better if the Budget Consultation could be tailored in a way that people could choose which questions and areas that they wished to provide opinion on. Members then suggested that links to the survey could be given to those directly impacted such as parents at schools and library users if those were to be affected by the budget. Members were told that this could be considered, Officers also stated that the previous survey was overcomplicated, when the information needed to be balanced and clear.
- The Officer advised that the figures around the impact the bus WIFI had could be provided to the Committee. There were around 150,000 unique sign-ons using the bus WIFI, which asked users five questions around consultation and engagement. However the bus WIFI was not able to provide sufficient data to base a budget consultation on. The bus WIFI had been used last year in the budget consultation to raise awareness and to find out if people would complete the consultation or not. 45% of people said they would not respond to budget consultations.
- Members were told that the times that had the best results were when survey questions were asked in a face to face, one to one setting, an example was given from last year when a day was spent in the Market talking to people about the budget. The Market session discussed the budget proposals with around 40 people responding to questions. This brought in better quality data, however it was resource intensive.

The Committee then thanks the Head of People and Business Change for attending.

The Head of Finance presented an overview of the report to the Committee. The Officer advised that the framework was in place to allow for medium term and strategic approach to the budget. There was a 4 year plan that had identified where funding was going during that period and the cost pressures which allowed for saving proposals or strategies on how the Council would deal with budget pressures. In terms of the Corporate Plan, it had been very explicit with “20 promises by 2022” with most of them being achieved using existing resources. There were a few which would require additional budget provisions, such as the new Household Waste Recycling Centre.

In terms of approach, the Council had now established four strategic groups that work around the four key themes of the Council – Resilience, Aspirational, Modernised and Thriving. Future budget pressures in Social Services, Education and Special Education Needs were going to be challenging. The Council was currently overspent on the Social Care budget. There were contingency funds in the budget however, this was also overspent. Even though there were challenges, the Council had a good track record of delivering savings.

The Officer acknowledged that the public consultation should be happening as early as possible, however there would be little flexibility on where the Council could make savings.

Members asked the following:

- Members were advised that the Council were making sure that budget proposals were meeting the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, however

the Council's fundamental obligation was to ensure that it was considering the implications as part of the decision.

- The Officer advised that the 4 Strategic Groups were based around the four key themes of the Council – Resilience, Aspirational, Modernised and Thriving. They were Officer Groups led by the Chief Executive Officer, the two Corporate Directors and contained a mixture of Officers from across the Council. There were around ten or twelve Officers in each group, with each group reporting to the Senior Management Group and they did not contain any Cabinet Members. The Committee then requested for further information on these of the four groups.
- Members were advised that an updated customer services system was being implemented which would be more efficient in dealing with issues brought to the attention of the Council by the public. The new system was being developed over the next 12 to 18 months and was being overseen by one of the strategic boards.
- The Officer advised that a lot of the issues around the content of the proposals had improved with work conducted by the Business Improvement Team. The proposal writer needed to explain how the proposal would have affected services, Welsh Language and any impact on the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. For the next year's budget process Senior Accountants would be working with Heads of Service to undertake quality assurance on the written reports.
- In response to questions regarding the consistent quality of the Business Cases, the Committee were advised that Business Case proforma ensured sure that people were consulted with and the author had to demonstrate any issues that arose as a result of the consultation and how this had been considered. All budget savings proposals were checked to ensure that they are completed fully and meet the standards required.
- Members asked for clarification on the general contingency fund of £1.5m and the £2.2m allocated for budget overspend risks in Out of County Placements and Community Care budgets. Members were advised that Children's and Education services were overspending in relation to Out of County Placements, so the £2.2m had been allocated between them. The £1.5m had been spread across the remainder of the Council.

The Head of Finance was thanked by the Committee for attending and answering their questions.

Recommendations and Comments

The Committee acknowledged that the Officers were working towards improving public engagement for the budget process and that this was only one part of the overall, Council wide public engagement review that was being undertaken. It was noted that this review was being reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in November for consideration.

However, the Committee expressed concern that the outcome of this review would be too late to impact upon the consultation for this year's budget process. The Committee felt that the quality and consistency of the information within the Business Cases was of particular concern last year, within inconsistent levels of information.

The concern for this year was that the resources to ensure the quality of these Business cases had been reduced with the removal of the Business Improvement and Performance Team from the process, and that this reduction in resources could negatively impact upon the quality of this year's proposals.

The Committee requested the following information:

- Head of People and Business Change to provide additional information on the impact of bus WIFI had on engagement levels, including the types and depth of response and information on samples.
- Head of People and Business Change to provide a brief overview of the four Strategic Groups, their remit and reporting arrangements.
- Head of Finance to provide a brief to outline the quality assurance process which will be used for this year's budget process.

The Committee requested that the Cabinet:

- Make necessary plans to put in place arrangements to ensure that the public consultation of the budget proposals begins as early as possible this year.
- Consider and plan how the Council will move up the Hierarchy of Engagement, and monitor the progress towards implementing this. The Committee considers that involving the public in the budget saving process was a key priority for developing how it engages with the public.
- Establishes and develops relationships with the Universities in Newport, to establish links with relevant students who may be interested in undertake research on behalf of the Council as part of their degree programmes.

4 **Scrutiny Annual Report**

Attendees:

- Eleanor Mulligan (Democracy and Communications Manager)

The Democracy and Communications Manager presented the Annual Report on behalf of the Scrutiny and Governance Manager. The Committee were advised that it was a constitutional requirement for Scrutiny to report to Council on its activity throughout the year. The report was designed to be a performance management tool, establishing the intended actions for the upcoming year, and to look back at last year's progress and achievements. The Officer advised it was important to note that this was the first report since the Election, in which time there had been significant changes to Scrutiny. These changes included more focussed work programmes, change of the Committee structure, and sharper focus on recommendations monitoring within the work programme. All of these changes were areas that previous Annual Reports had been identified as requiring improvement previously.

The Committee asked the following:

- Members made comment that Scrutiny has made significant progress, however there was still an issue with automatically getting updates, such as Decriminalised Parking. The suggestion was made that there be regular updates on the progress.
- Members queried Action 9, on page 69 and asked for clarification of the update, as it stated the changes proposed within the Public Engagement Strategy were not possible within the current format of the website. Members were advised that the department would like the public to go onto the Scrutiny website and be able to leave

feedback on Scrutiny's topics and agenda items. However the website does not have that functionality, so alternate ways were being looked into, such as using social media. When asked whether this was a technology or funding issue, it was advised that it was due to the technology; however the Democracy and Communications Manager is part of the Web Development Group and were looking at other technologies.

Members commented that they thought more of a history of each item should be included, to track where it had originated from. For example, Decriminalised Parking / Civil Parking Enforcement had originated from Members discussion of illegal parking in Stow Hill, which had been brought to the attention of the Cabinet Members, and Council which had led to the discussion regarding the Council taking over the parking function. The Scrutiny Adviser outlined the purpose of the Annual Report, to summarise the work of the Committee at its Scrutiny Committee meetings, rather than to track individual issues.

Regarding the Civic Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), the Committee asked for the first and second Consideration to be labelled Stage 1 and Stage 2 to make the role of Scrutiny clear. The Officer advised it could be looked into to include additional comments.

The Committee thanked the Democracy and Communications Manager for attending. The Committee **approved** the Annual report for submission to the Council.

5 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Attendees:

- Daniel Cooke (Scrutiny Adviser)

a) Forward Work Programme Update

The Scrutiny Advisor presented the Forward Work Programme, and informed the Committee of the topics being discussed at the next two committee meetings:

Thursday 20 September 2018

The agenda item included;

- Pill PSPO – Recommendations Monitoring
- Annual Information Risk Report

Thursday 15 November 2018

The agenda item included;

- Corporate Plan – Recommendations Monitoring
- Performance Management Strategy – Recommendations Monitoring
- Consultation and Public Engagement Review

The Committee requested that the Pill Ward Councillors and a community representative be invited to attend the meeting to provide additional viewpoints on how effective the PSPO had been.

b) Actions Arising

The Scrutiny Adviser explained to the Committee that there were three responses outstanding from the previous meetings actions, and that these would remain on the action sheet until they have been reported on to the Committee.

Members queried when the responses would be received by Members, noting that the Committees next meeting was not until September. Members were advised responses were emailed to Committee members as soon as they were received, these were then reported back to the next Committee meeting as part of the action sheet.

Regarding the Committee's recommendations to the Cabinet on Safeguarding, the recommendations were to 'inform' the Cabinet Member of the Committees recommendation. The Committee felt that this was not clear enough as a response back was needed from the Cabinet Member. The Scrutiny Adviser agreed to follow up with the Cabinet Member and ask for a response to the Committees point.

c) Information Reports

There were no information reports to be presented to the Committee.

The meeting terminated at 12.40 pm