

# Minutes



## Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

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Date: 10 June 2019

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Evans (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, G Berry, J Clarke, D Fouweather, I Hayat, J Richards and D Williams

In Attendance: Councillor R Truman and D Mayer (Cabinet Member for Community and Resources)

Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Emma Johnson, Andrew Wathan (Chief Internal Auditor), Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change), Tracy McKim (Partnership Policy & Involvement Manager) and Daniel Cooke (Scrutiny Adviser)

Apologies: Councillors K Critchley

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### 1 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

### 2 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 April 2019**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2019 were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

### 3 **2018-19 Service Plan Year-End Reviews**

#### **Law and Standards**

Attendees:

- Councillor Ray Truman, Cabinet Member for Licensing and Regulation
- Gareth Price, Head of Law and Regulation

The Cabinet Member presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration. Members were advised that there had been a sustained level of performance throughout 2018/19 in achieving the Performance Measures and in delivering the key projects within the Service Plan, however the Performance Measures and objectives remained challenging, particularly in times of diminishing resources and increased demand. Performance in relation to issuing prosecution and resolution of Public Protection complaints had dipped slightly due to sickness absences in both teams, however this still reflected a good level of performance.

The service area was currently predicting an under-spend of £170,000 for 2018/19, against a net operational budget of £6.9 million. Despite budget pressures, good work was being delivered and Officers were doing their best to maintain high quality services. The Cabinet

Member also advised the Committee that the Registration Service had been commended externally following their inspection by the General Register Officer as a “high performing service”, and the Newport Dog Kennels had been presented with the CAWF Gold Standard Community Animal Welfare Footprint Award for their work with stray dogs, which was really good for the Council.

Members asked the following:

- **(Objective 1)** Members queried the statement in the End of Year Update on Page 24, “A more streamlined management structure will place increased pressure on management and supervisory staff and this has to be factored into future work planning” and asked would this be a concern to meet targets, and would there be more pressure on management? Members were given context of the restructure of the Public Protection department, which started 18 months ago, when the management structure had been streamlined and the Public Protection Manager post had been deleted. This had worked, but in order to deliver a new structure the Section had to look at the ways that services were being delivered. There was a thematic approach to service delivery, and the Officer gave an example of the Community Safety Team working together with Environmental Health Officers for community safety.

Smaller teams working in budget pressures were still delivering statutory services and meeting targets in terms of the Service Plan objectives. The concerns were not happening currently, but possibly in the future with budget savings and increased demand for services.

- **(Objective 4)** Members queried the end of year status on page 34 which shows as “In Progress” however on page 42 it shows as Amber – “Short of Target” and asked was this the same piece of work? Members were advised that this performance measure would be ongoing as combating anti-social behaviour was a continual process and was not a finite project, so it would have been difficult to mark as Green – “On Target”. This performance pressure had only just dipped into Amber, and was almost in resolution, so the service area could justify raising the benchmark, however it needed to be realistic due to available resources. The Officer advised the Members of the excellent rate, anything over 90% being excellent performance.
- Had the impact of Welsh Language legislation had a greater impact than expected on the service area, such as struggling to find staff to provide a service in Welsh if required? The Committee were advised that it wasn’t greater, as the impact was anticipated. However it had impacted financially on the Governance Team side as Agenda and Minutes need to be translated into Welsh. The front facing services had not been a problem, as premise registrations had always been done in Welsh and due to collaboration with other councils, Newport could request to use their Welsh speaker when needed.

There had been difficulty in recruiting Welsh speakers on Main Reception.

- A comment was made about “In progress” status, and which way were they trending? Were they progressing well or not? Members were advised that the directions of travel were shown at the end of the service area’s report. There were a diverse range of services which are continual, so they would show as “In Progress”, but the service area may have had to include milestones. Officers had indicated in the narrative of the report a number of key dates the service was aiming to meet.
- **(Objective 4)** Members queried the Service Area Comment “*The resolution rate is constantly over 90% but performance tailed off very slightly over the last two quarters*”

*because of the numbers of service requests received” and asked* was there a concern going forward of getting more requests? Members were advised that the Service Area had noticed a pattern of complaints, and past experience had been that complaints tended to peak in the summer months. There had been some complexity to some of the later requests in the last 2-3 months of the year, which had impacted on resource allocation in the service area.

- Was the Council up to standard with inspecting food premises? It was clarified that 100% of food premises were not inspected during a year due to limited resources, however premises classed as A to C, or high risk outlets were prioritised. There had been initial funding from the Food Standards Agency for premises classed as C to E to be inspected. Had this funding been delivered earlier in the year it could have been utilised sooner, however it made a difference upon the backlog of inspections. Members were advised that without such funding, the Council annually inspects A to C rated premises and new food premises within 28 days.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

## **Finance**

Attendees:

- Meirion Rushworth, Head of Finance
- Andrew Wathan, Chief Internal Auditor
- Emma Johnson, Income Collection Manager
- Richard Leake, Procurement Manager

The Head of Finance presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration. Good progress had been made last year, with lots of actions Completed or In Progress. A number of actions spanned into this current year and beyond, and the Service Area had made a start on the majority of them. Performance was relatively good, with only one performance indicator being off target and one close. The Service Area had come in slightly under budget.

Members asked the following:

- Members commented on the £30m savings the Council had to make and asked how much could the Council sustain from debts and arrears collections, was the Council approaching those in debt and signposting them to agencies such as Citizens Advice? The Income Collection Manager advised that with arrears the amount owed wouldn't reach £30m. The Council had adopted Welsh Government's Council Tax Collection protocol which set out high level targets and how to deal with collecting council tax arrears. One part of the protocol involves residents who were in arrears working with organisations to look at the causes of the debt and ways of proceeding ensuring that their personal circumstances were not made worse. The Council worked with partners such as Step Change and Money Advice Service to help find a way forward and reduce an individual's debt. This work was currently ongoing. Members were advised that the department was working hard to ensure policies and the way the Council collect arrears are compliant with Welsh Government legislation. The legislation had introduced a six week breathing space for people who have been approached about Council Tax debt, however the Council did this already.

The Head of Finance added that the Council have had some successes collecting difficult debts, however the main problem was engagement, but all available means were being used to enable the collection of difficult debts.

- With regards to Performance Indicators, the Committee asked for clarification of the difference between “Short of Target” and “Off Target”? Members were advised it related to the percentage by which the target had been missed. If below the target percentage it would be Off Target. 15% above the target was the cut off.
- Comments were raised about funding cuts to Citizens Advice Bureau. How well did the Council collaborate with partners, and were they working with other charities? Members were advised that the Money Advice Service was an online service, to which the Council Tax team would initially signpost customers if they had problems. The Council also deals with Pobl, Newport City Homes and people tended to go to Citizens Advice. Engagement could sometimes be an issue, as sometimes customers do not advise the Council of problems, but when they do they could signpost help.
- Had there been any interaction with faith groups, mosques to engage with the hard to reach populations in Newport, and did the Council take into account the diverse communities that can be impacted when any financial decisions were taken? Members were advised that there had not been any policy changes needed other than the Empty House deduction. When that specific change came about there had been a Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment carried out to ensure there would have been no adverse effects of on the protected communities. Regarding issues around collections of council tax, language barriers had been identified, but the Service Area strives to meet the requirements of the customer.
- Members queried the comment on page 50 of the report, second paragraph “*The Chief Internal Auditor will risk assess all allegations of fraud / corruption received from any source and decide whether or not to investigate further. In conjunction with relevant Heads of Service the Chief Internal Auditor will also determine if the matter should be referred to the Police.*” It was asked if a matter should be referred to the Police, would Members and/or the Leader have had any involvement? Members were advised that the Leader would be made aware of any referrals. Elected Members would be informed of any decisions with relevant Heads of Service to take such a matter to the Police, but would not be involved in decision making.
- Member asked why the end of year status of action 2.04 on page 50, which was, Raise awareness of the Council’s Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy was labelled as “Stopped”. Members were advised that the service area was continuing to raise awareness of corruption as part of business as usual, and although it had not been completed it was still being pursued.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

## **People and Business Change**

Attendees:

- Councillor David Mayer, Cabinet Member for Community and Resources
- Rhys Cornwall, Head of People and Business Change
- Tracy McKim, Policy Partnership and Involvement Manager

The Head of People and Business Change presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration. It was advised there were three performance measures off Target in Red, those being: “% of challenges to Welsh language provision upland”; “Number of employees trained in Welsh Awareness”, and; “Number of staff trained in Prevent PVE”. The training figures were significantly lower due to a number of staffing changes and loss of the previous course provider.

Members asked the following:

- What was the biggest cause of sickness in the authority, and whether there were any services staff could be referred to. Members were advised that short term sickness was reasonably low, however the two biggest long term issues were muscularity and stress issues, which could be work or home related. Most other organisations were the same. Muscularity issues can be common in services areas such as City Services where staff are lifting items or conducting manual labour. The Council also have an Occupational Health department where managers can refer staff to. A number of policies were place such as flexible working, agile working and purchasing additional annual leave to alleviate some of the causes of long term sickness.

Members were also advised there was a Care First programme which offers advice regarding lifestyle choice, work home balance and finances, along with a counselling service. The service area had built up a coaching network across the Council, working with members of staff in different ways to deliver their work.

The Cabinet Member added that the Trade Unions appreciated the actions that the Council takes.

- Members queried the comment made on page 78 regarding positive feedback from the Wales Audit Office's review of the Council's delivery of its Well-Being Plan, and asked if the relationship between the Council and Wales Audit Office (WAO) could be elaborated. It was advised that WAO had a legal responsibility, and were also subject to the Future Generations Well-being Act. The Council regularly attended meetings with the WAO, who also understood the pressures the Council were under. They had a dual function, to give assurance to the public that the Council were doing what we should and informing the Council upon improvement. Engagement at early points could have been improved, requiring services to push things forward. It also clarified that this was not a free service. Members commented that this section in the report needed further clarification in future reports.
- Performance Measure "*% of challenges to Welsh language provision upheld*" was discussed, challenges upheld were 100% but shown as Red. Members asked did the Council lose the challenges, and was it usually the same complainants? Members were advised that appeals were upheld so action plans were needed to be put in place. Complaints can be from a range of people. An example was given where two years ago the Council were involved in a national complaint regarding the availability of welsh language swimming lessons. The most recent complaint was around on road signage. The Cabinet Member clarified that urgent information could not be translated in time and had been highlighted as a concern for the future.

Members asked would performance be affected in upcoming years, as more staff would need to be employed for translation services. Officers advised that Cardiff offered a cost effective translation service. Recently the Council website had been translated by Cardiff. The main issue was recruitment of Welsh speaking staff, this was on the work programme for senior staff to look at different ways of attracting Welsh speakers to the Council, and also how current welsh speaking staff could of been utilised. Members were also advised of a recent positive review from a mystery shopper. The main issue for Newport was having a very small population of welsh speakers. Systems and processes were in place, but the reality was that only a small number of people wanted to have their service in Welsh.

Members were advised that from a performance point of view, when Welsh language complaints were received, the team made sure each complaint was dealt with well and the issue not repeated in the future.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

### **Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet**

The Committee noted the End of year Service Plan Reviews and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.

The Committee wished to raise their concerns on the levels of anti-social behaviour in Newport and for this to be a focus for the Law and Regulation service area going forward into the 2019/2020 financial year.

The Committee requested that Officers in the Finance department were congratulated for their collaborative working arrangements with external organisations and the Third Sector in Newport. The Committee hoped that the service area would continue to support those citizens of Newport who required additional help to avoid incurring themselves to the Council through nonpayment of Council Tax.

The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet on the overall service plan reports:

1. The use of 'In Progress' throughout the report did not allow for the Committee to gain an insight into the level of progress towards completion of the action. The Committee requested that another way of reporting the performance towards the completion of actions be used for the mid-year service plans and future end of year service plan reporting.
2. The Committee felt that the use of business as usual work as actions did not fit with the nature of the service plans. They Committee felt that the actions would have been better suited to have aspirational objectives that the service area could strive to achieve as actions. This would allow the Committee to be able to better scrutinise progress and performance.

## **4 Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Attendee:

- Daniel Cooke (Scrutiny Adviser)

### **a) Forward Work Programme Update**

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next two Committee meetings:

- Monday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2019:
  - 2018-2019 Service Plan Year End Review for:
    - Regeneration, Investment and Housing
    - City Services
- Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2019:
  - Waste Strategy Action Plan Monitoring
  - Recommendations Monitoring upon the implementation of the 2019-20 Cabinet Budget Proposals

The Committee **agreed** the topics, as above.

**b) Action Plan**

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Action Sheet and advised the Committee that as indicated in the table the Draft Highway Asset Management Plan 2019-2024 – Conclusions and Comments would be formally forwarded to Cabinet Member and Officers following the approval of the Minutes.

**c) Information Reports**

The Scrutiny Adviser informed the Committee that there were no Information Reports to bring to the Committee's attention.

**d) Scrutiny Letters**

The Scrutiny Adviser informed the Committee that there were no Scrutiny letters to report to the Committee.

The meeting terminated at 5.25 pm