

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 16 October 2019

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors D Wilcox (Chair), P Cockeram, G Giles, D Harvey, R Jeavons, D Mayer, J Mudd and R Truman

In Attendance: Mr W Godfrey (Chief Executive); Ms B Owen (Strategic Director (Place)); Mr J Harris (Strategic Director (People)); Mr G Price (Head of Law and Regulation); Mr O Jones, Ms Non Jenkins and Mr Gareth Jones from Wales Audit Office.

1 Introduction and Welcome

The Leader opened the meeting by welcoming Sheila Davies as the Council's Chief Executive. The Leader confirmed the appointment had been unanimously agreed by a cross-party appointment's panel.

Congratulations

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills congratulated the Leader on being made a Baroness following her elevation to the House of Lords as a Life Peer, which was a well-deserved recognition of a lifetime of commitment to public service as a teacher and councillor. Cabinet colleagues unanimously expressed their personal support and congratulations for the open, transparent, honest approach and great leadership the Leader has given since being voted in as Leader of the Council.

The Leader thanked her Cabinet colleagues for their kind words and support afforded to her since becoming Leader.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 18 September 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2019 were confirmed as a true record

4 Corporate Plan Annual Report

The Leader presented the second Corporate Annual Report (2018/19) on Newport City Council's Corporate Plan 2017/22, based on the Labour Group Manifesto.

The purpose of the report was to reflect back on 2018/19 achievements, identify what more can be done and to look at the Council's ambitions for the remainder of the Corporate Plan.

The Annual Report was presented in September to the Overview and Management Scrutiny Committee and their feedback and recommendations were included in the report to Cabinet. The Leader had been happy to attend the Scrutiny Committee to answer questions.

A Welsh version of the report will be released alongside the annual report.

The Leader explained to Cabinet the background to the report in that:

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act requires public service bodies (including Newport City Council) to deliver an annual report that reflects on progress in delivering the four Wellbeing Objectives which are:

1. To improve skills, educational outcomes and employment opportunities;
2. To promote economic growth and regeneration whilst protecting the environment;
3. To enable people to be healthy, independent and resilient, and,
4. To build cohesive & sustainable communities.

The Annual Report focused on the progress of delivery against the four themes (Resilient Communities/Aspirational People/Thriving City/Modernised Council) which support the Wellbeing Objectives.

In 2018/19 the Council faced challenging financial pressures which were managed effectively and led to a £2.4m underspend at the end of the financial year.

The report noted the medium term budget is showing a funding gap of £30m and this Cabinet will have to be courageous, transparent and open to its residents and service users in the decisions that are made going forward.

In the reporting of the Council's national performance measures for 2018/19 against the other 21 councils in Wales, Newport Council reported above the national average for nine measures out of 18 measures which included important items such as:

- Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training;
- The number of new homes created as a result of bringing empty homes back into use.

Where Newport Council is underperforming against the Welsh average, the Council's Chief Executive, the Senior Leadership Team and Corporate Management Team will monitor the measures to ensure that improvements are made to the delivery of those services.

The Leader highlighted some of the achievements made in 2018/19:

- The introduction of the **Young Person's Promise** that has been developed by the young people of Newport for the young people of Newport. The Promise has set out six Promises for Newport Council to implement and incorporate into the decision making processes and activities of the Council. (A montage will be situated in Committee Room 1 to celebrate this). The Leader, at her own expense has asked for a copy of the montage to take with her to the House of Lords.
- The Council's commitment to provide opportunities for young people to work for Newport Council through its **Apprenticeship programme** which has once again seen them fulfil their potential and take up full time employment in the Council or go into further employment and training. This has also led to the development of a Graduate Programme which had its first intake of graduates at the start of September.
- The support and care to look after and safeguard children and young people in the care system remains a challenging but rewarding area. In 2018/19 the Council purchased and redeveloped **Rose Cottage** to bring young people back from out of county placements

into Newport. This has been very successful in providing one-to-one care and support and has seen one of the young people being returned back to their home. This has also led to further exploration of purchasing a second property in the city to provide similar care and to have the facility to maximise young people's potential and opportunity to succeed.

- The redevelopment of Oaklands House which provides respite care for young people and their families.
- Last year the Council received a positive **Estyn Inspection** for its Education Services and is using the feedback from Estyn to improve services.
- In 2018/19 A Level (53.7%) and GCSE (57%) results improved and demonstrate the hard work of pupils and staff in schools.
- In 2018/19 Cabinet supported the redevelopment of **Chartist Tower** into a hotel which will generate over 350 jobs and support the further redevelopment of the city centre and the new convention centre at the Celtic Manor. This has led to the same developer redeveloping the former post office sorting office building into new office space.
- The relocation of the **National Software Academy** to the Information Station for undergraduate and post graduate students.
- The commitment to reduce **waste** taken to landfill and to recycle more in Newport. The Leader took this opportunity to thank the people of Newport for embracing the use of the smaller bins and the contribution to more recycling which has had an immediate impact on the recycling figures for the first quarter of this year.
- The work undertaken to **introduce civil parking enforcement** which has already seen a step change to the parking in the city and positive results to the environment across the city.
- This year will see the launch of the **Ringland Neighbourhood Hub** which will bring a multi-agency approach for customers and improve a collaborative approach to providing services.

The Leader welcomed comments from Cabinet colleagues on the Annual Report 2018/19.

Cabinet colleagues thanked officers for the hard work which had resulted in these projects being brought to fruition and reiterated the achievements made within their portfolios as per the bullet points above.

The Chief Executive confirmed the information contained in the report flowed well, and the aims and objectives in the five year plan are embedded in service plans to form a comprehensive plan.

Cabinet was asked to endorse the Annual Report 2018/19 in order to enable the report to be published before the 31st October 2019 deadline.

5 **Brexit Update Report**

The Leader introduced the report, the purpose of which was to provide Cabinet with an update on the preparations being undertaken by Newport City Council.

In July 2019 Cabinet was provided with an update on the Council's preparations in the run up to the original deadline of March 2019 and the events thereafter.

The Leader confirmed that all Councils across Wales are having to make preparations for leaving the EU on 31st October 2019 within existing resources.

Using guidance from the WLGA, Newport Council has established a Task & Finish Group to ensure a common approach which uses the WLGA toolkit.

The Leader confirmed the Council has assessed the impacts and issues for Newport covering three broad areas:

1. Organisation (Council's Priorities/Governance/ Finance & Funding)
2. Supplies & Services (Supply Chain/Core Operations/ Legal, Data and Regulatory activities)
3. Your Place (Community Cohesion/Civil Contingencies)

In preparation, service areas are continuously monitoring and reporting updates to the Task & Finish Group which has recently been meeting every fortnight and that Group is prepared to increase the frequency of meetings in the run up to 31st October 2019 deadline, depending upon the overall UK position.

In comparison to the initial deadline of March 2019, additional factors such as the threat of winter weather events have now had to be taken into consideration in the event of a No Deal scenario.

Officers across the Council have highlighted the following areas as being impacted and have taken appropriate measures/assurances on:

- **Food and medical supplies**
- **Stability of social care providers and homes**
- **ICT costs/cyber security/data protection**
- **EU Settled Status Scheme** (*The Leader has lobbied Welsh and UK Governments to roll this out across the 22 Welsh Local Authorities*); *NCC's staff are being trained to take this forward*
- **Community Cohesion**
- **Businesses trading with the EU**

There are concerns that not all small to medium sized businesses are making the necessary preparations for a 'no deal' Brexit scenario. The Council's Economic Development team are raising awareness for businesses to make preparations and signposting them to the UK Government website and events in Wales and the South West.

The table in Appendix 1 of the report provides full details across the areas covered by the Task & Finish Group.

Civil Contingencies' arrangements commence in October 2019 with regular updates being provided through the Gwent Local Resilience Forum and Welsh Government. Officers from the Council will be providing support with this process.

Arrangements are being undertaken to increase information and communications to councillors, staff, residents, communities and businesses that could be affected by Brexit over the next couple of months.

The Leader welcomed comments from Cabinet colleagues in relation to the information contained in the report and sought their agreement for Cabinet to accept the contents of the report and to receive regular updates as the 31st October 2019 deadline approaches

Cabinet colleagues welcomed the report which provides assurance to the public that work is ongoing with regard to Brexit and is well within the Council's sights in order to limit any

impact this might have. The Cabinet Member for Community and Resources confirmed an article will appear in the next edition of Newport Matters.

Cabinet are concerned that this work will have to continue for some time which will have staffing implications.

Cabinet was asked to:

- Consider the contents of the report;
- Note the Council's Brexit Preparations;
- And agree that Cabinet/Cabinet Members will receive updates from officers as part of their portfolio.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed the report

6 WAO Report - Corporate Safeguarding

The Leader introduced the report and confirmed this is the Wales Audit Office follow-up review of corporate arrangements for the safeguarding of children.

The findings in the report show the significant progress that has already been achieved by the Council in addressing the previous national recommendations and local proposals for improving corporate arrangements for safeguarding children. There is a clear action plan in place to address the proposals for improvement that have been partially met and the Council is committed to continually developing the recommendations. There will be regular monitoring and reporting of the management actions to ensure that they are implemented by the Council.

The report asked Cabinet to consider the contents of the report and receive regular updates on the implementation of the management actions.

The Leader introduced the Cabinet Member for Social Services to speak to the report:

The Cabinet Member for Social Services confirmed the safeguarding of children that are in the care of the Authority, or that the Authority has contact with, is paramount to the delivery of services across all areas of the Council. Everyone has a duty whether it be as elected members, officers, parents and carers to ensure that children are protected and are able to fulfil their potential.

The Cabinet Member was pleased that the Wales Audit Office had received assurances on what has been delivered so far since the original reviews, which also reiterates the ongoing work that is needed to be undertaken to ensure existing processes are further improved, he reiterated the Leader's statement in ensuring the remaining actions stated in the report will be implemented.

The Leader welcomed Gareth Jones, Performance Audit Lead from the Wales Audit Office to speak to the report. He confirmed there is a very strong ethos to demonstrate that safeguarding is well embedded in Newport with recognition given to the importance of this activity and that management action has been taken/is ongoing in order to address the partly met recommendations.

The Leader thanked Gareth Jones and the WAO team for their partnership approach and work with the Council, as well as auditor for the Council the WAO also acts as a critical friend.

The Leader proposed that Cabinet noted the outcomes from the Wales Audit Office report and to receive regular updates on the implementation of the management actions.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed to note the outcomes of the WAO report and to receive regular updates on the implementation of the management actions as set out in the report.

7 WAO Certificate of Compliance 1

The Leader presented the report of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Certificate of Compliance following an audit of the Council's 2019/20 improvement planning arrangements.

The Leader asked Cabinet to consider the contents of the report and to reaffirm the commitment to delivering the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan 2017/22.

The Leader asked Gareth Jones from the Wales Audit Office to provide Cabinet with an overview of the Certificate of Compliance and confirmed he would be willing to accept any questions and/or feedback from Cabinet.

Gareth Jones confirmed that at the Cabinet meeting in September, Cabinet agreed to consider and accept the conclusion contained in the Auditor General's Annual Improvement Report on the Council's continuous improvement activity and to confirm its commitment to deliver the Council's Wellbeing Objectives from the Corporate Plan in 2019/20. Following that decision the WAO, having reviewed the document, confirmed the Council is discharging its duties and offered the certificate of compliance. Subject to the review of the annual report the WAO will look to publish the 2nd certificate in due course.

The Leader thanked once again the WAO for their partnership approach and work with the Council.

The Leader proposed that Cabinet accept the conclusion contained in the Auditor General's Certificate of Compliance Report.

Decision:

Cabinet approved the report and accepted the conclusion contained in the Auditor General's Certificate of Compliance Report.

8 Annual Report on Compliments, Comments and Complaints Management 2019

The Leader introduced the report and confirmed that all Public Services in Wales are required to record and respond to feedback from residents in accordance with the guidance and legislation issued by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (Ombudsman).

The report confirmed there are additional statutory requirements that must be met for complaints about Social Care.

Feedback, including compliments, comments and complaints are recorded in the My Newport platform.

The report summarised the complaints received in 2018/2019 and made recommendations for actions to improve the service provided by the Council.

The Leader introduced the Cabinet Member for Community and Resources to speak to the report and he confirmed that the Ombudsman requires public bodies to listen to feedback from the public and use that feedback to shape services and drive continuous improvement. This includes having systems in place to record, analyse and report on the feedback received from residents.

The Ombudsman is currently consulting about increases to his investigatory powers under the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019, particularly in relation to accepting informal complaints and undertaking public interest investigations on his own initiative, without any complaint. The Cabinet report noted that the Council may need to review its own internal procedures in due course in the light of these changes to the Ombudsman's statutory powers.

In terms of compliments and comments, the Council receives many compliments from residents about the services provided and the number received this year was higher than in previous years. The majority of complaints received are for City Services, as the most visible service with the most interaction with residents.

Comments are a way of recording the feedback from customers who are unhappy with policies and decisions made by the Council. City Services received the most recorded comments about policies for the same reasons it receives the most complaints.

The number of complaints received by the Council account for 0.001% of the total customer contacts recorded by Customer Services last year.

There were fewer informal complaints recorded year on year, more of which resulted in a formal review or being referred to the Ombudsman.

City Services and Law and Regulation received the most complaints, reflecting the nature of their work and direct interface with residents.

The volume of complaints received for social care services is in line with the number received in the previous year.

A small number of complaints were considered independently at Stage 2 and referred to the Ombudsman. One complaint was partially upheld at Stage 2 and resulted in a Public Interest Report.

The number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman's office is below the national average for Local Authorities in Wales.

Ten of the complaints raised to the Ombudsman were about failing to respond or meet deadlines for responding to complaints. The Council has taken steps to provide adequate support to respond to complaints and in his annual letter the Ombudsman thanked the Council for taking a positive position in response to the feedback on these matters provided by his staff.

With regard to service development, the Council is committed to developing the service provided to meet the revised legislation and to meet the expectations of residents who wish to submit their feedback.

Significant progress was made in 2019 towards delivering this, including consultation with the public and with officers, and the implementation of a new system making it easier for customers to submit their feedback, such as My Newport and the information contained on the website.

The report recommends that further action is taken to improve the service provided to residents based on the feedback they have provided during consultation. The Council will also review the existing policies and procedures to reflect the new legislation and guidance issued by the Ombudsman. This approach supports service improvement in the short and long term and the development of customer services across the Council.

The Leader moved the report for recommendation.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed the report and endorsed its recommendations for improvement

9 **Work Programme**

The Leader presented the Cabinet Work Programme.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed the updated programme.