

Minutes



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 24 September 2020

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors L Lacey (Chair), G Berry, P Hourahine, M Al-Nuaimi, Y Forsey, C Ferris, M Evans and C Evans

In Attendance: Beverly Owen (Strategic Director (Place)), Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation), Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change) and Chris Humphrey (Acting Director of Social Services)

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th January 2020 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

3 Annual Report 2019/20

Invitees;

- Cllr Jane Mudd – Leader of the Council
- Beverly Owen – Chief Executive Officer
- Rhys Cornwall – Head of People and Business Change
- Chris Humphrey – Acting Director of Social Services

The Leader introduced the third Corporate Annual Report on Newport City Council's progress against the corporate plan 2017-2022. It was advised that the purpose of the report was to reflect back on 2019 – 20 to assess the achievements the Council have made, where performance can be improved and looking forward to the remainder of this term.

Well aware last 6 months been very challenging for our communities, the council and partners who work with us to deliver Council services. Covid-19 has and continues to impact on our economy and communities in Newport. There is a very fine balance to be had on easing restrictions to support the economy to recover, but also to protect the most vulnerable and marginalised in the city.

The Leader advised that this is why the opportunity was taken in the report to reflect back on what we have learned and to recognise the effort that the Council, our partners and communities have done, and continue to do since March 2020. Covid-19 has also highlighted inequalities that still exist in society, and we are fully aware of the challenges and further work that need to be done in order to reduce this gap, and to also ensure that services can still be delivered sustainably in the long term for the Council. The Leader added that there are also new opportunities for the Council to re-examine how we improve the delivery of our services more efficiently using technology. This is why we've endorsed the Council's Four Strategic Recovery Aims that are closely aligned to the Corporate Plan objectives. These

objectives enable the Council to recover its services, develop these new opportunities and learn from the Covid-19 crisis.

The delivery of the strategic recovery aims will be monitored through the service plans and the Performance Scrutiny Committees will have the opportunity in November to review the progress of these actions. The Council's Cabinet will also receive monthly updates on the Council's Covid-19 response and an overview of the Council's progress against the recovery aims. The Leader then wished to make clear of the aspirations and aims contained within the report, that as our current situation makes very clear that whilst we have set our strategic recovery aims that at some stages in the foreseeable future, we will have to be in a position where we are in a response mode. The Leader regrettably advised the committee that this week, the city council and Welsh Government made the decision to move towards enhanced restrictions in order to try and limit the spread of Covid-19 throughout the city area.

The Leader then advised the committee that it is really important to take this into context when considering the plan and the aims in the plan, there are external factors that may continue to impact on this. The Leader then highlighted some financial elements contained in the report. Social Services budgets remain critical to budget pressures alongside our Council's schools. This is something that Cabinet continues to keep a watchful eye on. Lastly, the Leader advised that whilst the Council welcomed the additional income from Welsh Government, considerable budget pressures remain due to Covid-19. It was then advised that £3.7million was lost from revenues streams and additional expenditure of £1.1million in social care and school budgets.

The Chair thanked the Leader and officers for attending the meeting and commended everyone for their work throughout the pandemic, helping with business loans and the quick turnaround keeping services going. There are many positives through this time and also lessons to be learnt.

Members asked the following:

- Members praised the excellent work with providing children with devices for home schooling. Comment was made that the Covid-19 crisis highlighted the inequalities in our society, that children without I.T equipment at home were struggling. Now 800 devices had been provided across the city, what percentage of children now have a suitable device? The Leader praised the work with children, and agreed that the crisis had highlighted issues around digital exclusion across the city. Teams have been working hard to ensure that we do have inclusion going forward. Members were also advised that digital learning and support is now a key aim going forward and forms a key part of the Council's recovery strategy. The Chief Executive advised the committee that the percentage can be sent out to the committee.
- Members made query about one of key aims for Newport is to increase its Grade A office space for businesses in the City Centre. Will the Covid-19 crisis change this objective, as more people may be working from home? Members were advised that the situation is constantly monitored. Forecasts indicate that Grade A office space are still needed in the medium to long term. Members were advised that soon the Council will be holding an economic recovery roundtable, in which the Leader will be speaking to representatives from businesses across all sectors who operate, and would like to operate within the area, to try and establish what their priorities are going forward and ensure that we have been able to align their priorities of business with our priorities in the corporate plan and strategic recovery aims.
The Chief Executive added that six to eight months ago the Council were on a clear trajectory to increasing the provision of office space, but currently we have to pause and listen to what the market is telling us about what the demand and requirement for office space are.

- Members commented of a concern that was raised last year was that if you compare with the original plan, it is great that there are examples going forward but we seem to put in things that have happened as opposed to how they related to the plan previously, although it was appreciated that it needs to develop. Comment was also made about the performance indicators. It was great to see many Greens, but there are a number of Amber and Reds that don't have explanations for them, in particular performance indicator – "Percentage of care leavers in education training or employment at 12 months", had a target of 45% but we actually achieved 14%. Members asked if it would be ensured that any future Amber or Red measures have an explanation for them and what we plan on doing about them.

- Members queried Strategic Recovery Aim 3, fully restoring Children and Adult Services, supporting partners that have been impacted by Covid-19. What are the barriers and concerns in relation to this? The Leader advised the committee that it was important to note that during the Covid period, Social Services had been running for a longer period of time and been more accessible than they had been previously, running for 8am – 8pm for 7 days a week, although they needed to adapt the way they work. Example was given that some centres that people would normally visit to receive services were closed, so a large number of people received their services within their homes.
 The Acting Director of Social Services then reassured the committee that the vast majority of Social Services across both Children and Adult services continued through the pandemic. Centres for Day Services had to be closed because of requirements about social distancing and the risks around bringing people who have underlying health issues into close proximity to each other. Urgent assessments had be prioritised in the community. Care homes and colleagues within domiciliary care, who have been at the forefront throughout the pandemic, have been supported throughout with access to PPE require to continue to provide care and support in peoples homes. A weekly report had to be returned to Welsh Government, which indicates the ability to deliver and maintain social care in the current state.
 Members appreciated the continued hard work that is going on, and suggested maybe some of the wording could be changed to show this.

- Members praised Newport for being amongst the first administrating Welsh Government's funding for children to have face masks in school. Comment was then made about the budget and the unavoidable loss of £3.7m and costs of £1.7m during the crisis. If the crisis is still going by March 2021, what is the projection of loss of income and expenditure, and what are the Leadership Team doing to mitigate that moving forwards in terms of forecasting and contingencies? It was also asked if there was any indication whether potential money come from Welsh Government or from Council reserves.
 Members were advised that Cabinet are monitoring the costs of services and loss of income on a monthly basis. Cabinet are also looking into the potential risks around further risks of civic income, specifically around council tax collection and an increase of claims against the council tax reduction scheme. The Leader advised that Officers are working very closely with Welsh Government on this, and gave reassurance that in terms of the expenditure incurred in relation to Covid-19 and loss of revenues streams, Welsh Government has made available around £78m for local authorities to submit claims for reimbursement during this first quarter.
 Members were also advised that officers are continuing to work closely with Welsh Government around the issues with council tax, as we are mindful that even a small percentage drop in council tax reduction has a significant impact on our revenue income streams.

The Chief Executive added that as seen in the budget monitors, the situation has improved significantly from where we were from the July monitor through to September, and all treasurers within Welsh Government are taking a very mature approach to try and target where funds are needed most. The Head of Finance is monitoring the situation very closely, and the Corporate Management Team discuss the Council's finances at least once a week to see what the impact of Covid-19 is doing to the budget.

- Members queried Well-being Objective 4 in the Annual Report – “Build cohesive and sustainable communities” and Strategic Aim 4 in the Recovery Plan – “Provide people with the resources and support they need to move out of the crisis, considering in particular the impact that Covid has had on our minority and marginalised communities. What steps have been done, or planned in order to achieve this? The Leader advised that a lot of work has started to implement this. An example was given that the Council had supported the homeless and rough sleepers in finding accommodation, which Welsh Government had clear expectation for all local authorities to have a duty to find temporary accommodation. The support reflected the strength of partnership work. The Rough Sleeping Group include Council officers housing associations, charity partners Pobl and Wallach, Public Health and the Police. The Leader then praised the Police for their contribution. The Council has also put in a bid to Welsh Government for further capital funding and revenue funding to be able to forward this response, and stressed to the committee that in relation to this particularly marginalised group there is a need for ongoing funding. Close work has also been taken with our registered social landlords during this period to try and hasten the availability of properties to bring them back into use so people can move into them. Close work had also been undertaken with private rented sector. The Leader then thanked all officers in the community hubs across the city, who worked with vulnerable groups and those who are financially marginalised to ensure they have been supported.
- The committee were given information on shared ongoing work during this period as a response to the Black Lives Matter movement. A series of roundtables with representatives from the Black and Minority Ethnic Community across Newport and will continue to work together with them to deliver on some of the aspirations of the Black Lives Matter manifesto. This is something that is being looked at not just as an individual local authority, but with partners across Newport. The Leader also wished to highlight that whilst this work is still ongoing, the Council is doing a lot of work to establish the evidence base by undertaking community impact assessments across the city with a range of groups and communities to understand the impact that Covid-19 and lockdown has had on them, and to also highlight issues that we may need to address going forward.
- Members made comment on the impact that Covid-19 has on taking so many ethnic minority casualties, and hoped that in next year's Annual Report, it can point out real progress in terms of cohesiveness. The Leader advised that a series of meetings have been set up with representatives, and wished to make clear that the intention from the outset was to see real action, and our actions will be based on our response to the Black Lives Matter manifesto because it is important for everyone to understand that this is what people have brought forward to other groups in society, to help support them to have their rightful place in society. There are many actions contained in the manifesto that as a public body we can respond to.

- Members queried the line in the Emergency Plan – “Identify, develop and seek to sustain any positive developments emerging during the crisis”. What positives from the crisis can be carried forward? The Leader wished to highlight the strength of our partnership working at all levels, which included the effective work carried out by Civil Contingencies. The Leader praised the engagement of the Leaders of all the political groups in Newport, as political differences were put aside and to work together for the benefit of the people of Newport. The Leader also advised that during the first two months of the crisis, all 22 Leader of the local authorities met on a daily basis, which then moved to three times a week, then a week, and finally to a fortnightly pattern. Experiences were shared, and also mutual support, which had been key.

The Leader then wished to emphasise that Welsh Government have been very supportive of Newport. An example was then given that over the last week, the Council has had engagement with the Minister for Health and Social Care on almost a daily basis. At a meeting on Monday with other South East Wales authorities’ Leaders and Chief Executive, the First Minister consulted with our Council on our views on some of the decisions that he needed to make before he spoke to the nation that evening. The Leader then wished to pay tribute of the Chair of the One Newport PSB to our PSB partners.

- The Leader praised all officers for the ongoing work around technology and agile working in how quickly and efficiently, so that essential service provision for residents could be maintained. It was also advised that working like this has allowed us to work more closely and have some positive outcomes in what has been a real challenging and unprecedented period. The Leader also praised Social Services colleagues that have supported service users that had previously used building-based services, by putting alternatives in place.
- The Chief Executive praised the resilience, adaptability and agility of the Council by the way we responded to the pandemic, and also gave thanks to the range of partners, particularly through the Public Services Board. Thanks was then given to all officers to the support received over the last six months, and all staff in the organisation. The Chief Executive advised that the last six months has brought a new level of maturity across the organisation, and then discussed the new ways of working, which would be brought to the Scrutiny committees over the coming months to explore and discuss at a cross party level.
- Members queried the new ways of working, in particular for Social Services for support to adolescents on the edge of care and people with Alzeihmers. How would support for these groups be achieved? The Head of Adults gave example of engagement with younger people, they have been more comfortable with engaging virtually via Teams and Zoom, rather than the face to face contact as it is less confrontational and is something that Social Services will continue with. In terms of older people with Alzheimers, with some of the funding received from Welsh Government we have bought some interactive tools and screens which have been helpful in helping people in care homes keep in touch with their families. The committee were then advised that additional work has been undertaken in the Telecare service over the last twelve months, alongside partner authorities. The Head of Service advised this would be to supplement the personal one to one care, not

replacing it. An example was then given that people could use the technology to prompt medication intake.

- What effect do you think the local lockdown will have on the Strategic Recovery Aims, and what do you think would be the biggest concern? The Leader advised that it is currently too soon to say, as Newport has not long been in local lockdown, but is something that needs a constant review, and is hopeful that with the combined work from everyone in Newport, we will be out of local lockdown quickly. The Leader also added that today the Chancellor has today made comment about what additional support will be provided.
The Chief Executive advised that the economy is also being looked at. It is early days but we are engaged with some of our key partners to keep an eye on what is going on.
- Was there a positive or negative effect of the gating of the High Street Cambrian Road and Griffin Street? The Leader advised the committee that this was put in place to allow establishments to open up to the public whilst providing a safe environment for those businesses to operate and for people to move in the city centre whilst feeling confident about social distancing. There has been positive feedback from traders, the feedback will continue to be monitored. Feedback from the Newport BID has also been positive.
- Members enquired if taxis and other forms of transport would be allowed back through the High Street and Cambrian Road when infections get lower. Members were advised that it was too soon to comment on this, as currently cases of infections have spiked and we have no idea how long we will be in a local lockdown.

The Chair thanked the Leader, Chief Executive, Head of People and Business Change and the Acting Director of Social Services for attending.

4 Annual Forward Work Programme 2020/21

Invitees;

- Gareth Price – Head of Law and Regulation

The Head of Law and Regulation informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next committee meeting:

30 October 2020, the agenda items;

- Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report 2019-20
- Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report

The meeting ended at 17:15

5 Recording of Live event

The meeting terminated at 5.15 pm