

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 28 February 2022

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Cleverly (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, Y Forsey and J Richards

In Attendance: Councillors Jane Mudd (Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Investment) and Jason Hughes (Cabinet Member for , Tracey Brooks (Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing), Matt Tribbeck (Regeneration Manager), Ross Cudlip (Carbon Reduction Manager), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser) and Louise A Thomas (Governance Officer)

1 Apologies

Councillors Martyn Kellaway, Graham Berry and Mark Whitcutt.

2 Declaration of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 January 2022

The minutes of the meetings held on 24th January 2022 were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

4 Economic Recovery Strategy - Update Report

Invitees:

- Councillor Jane Mudd – Leader of the Council Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Investment
- Tracey Brooks – Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing
- Matt Tribbeck – Regeneration Manager

The Leader gave a brief overview of the report before the Committee. The pandemic had intensified the need to focus on outcomes for people that promoted resilience and sustainability, rather than just focus on growth. She reported that the Council had done a lot of work aligning the objectives of our economic growth strategy to recovery whilst ensuring how to best focus on the economy going forward. Targets and priorities had been set and we had been able to distribute significant amounts of money through rate relief and various grant schemes. This had involved a huge effort across a number of Service Areas. Newport's economic response to the pandemic had also relied on collaboration with partners to find the most innovative solutions, and businesses were involved in decisions that affected groups such as Newport BID. Collaboration remained key to delivering the Council's Well-being Objectives around improving skills, educational outcomes and employment opportunities. Some important actions to date had been the securing of over £15m from the

Welsh Government's Transforming Towns framework, and some significant projects had progressed such as the restoration of the Market Arcade and the redevelopment of the indoor market.

The Empty Property Group, a multi-disciplinary group led by the Regeneration, Investment & Housing service, was set up and sought to bring about the re-use or demolition of key vacant properties in the City. In 2020, officers and elected members participated in training sessions facilitated by Welsh Government on how to tackle long-term empty properties through enforcement action. An action plan, since approved by Welsh Government, had now begun to be implemented which targeted specific, problematic properties in the city. Newport Council also supported organisations to apply to the UK Government's Community Renewal Fund. This enabled local organisations and groups to access funding up to the value of £3 million pound to deliver various schemes focused on investment in skills, local businesses and communities while supporting people into employment. 7 bids were successful and awarded funding, and would be primarily focused on skills, employment and rejuvenation of areas in Newport, and tertiary education. A successful bid to this fund saw a programme to link young people in Newport to a range of career opportunities in the screen sector, provided placements and work experience opportunities for Coleg Gwent students and created strong, ongoing links between education in Newport, screen sector employers and organisations and Careers Wales. Also, the Newport Youth Academy programme which offers a range of vocational qualifications and careers pathways for 16 and 19 years olds identified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) enrolled a number of students and of those who had left the programme, the vast majority were successful in gaining positive destinations and achieved accredited qualifications.

The Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing stated that the recovery strategy in the original report had stood the Council in good stead for the position in which we were currently. The replacement Local Development Plan embodied the need to ensure the right developments in the right place. It provided the opportunity to re-look at how Newport would grow in the future and whilst not a quick process, would provide significant engagement opportunities. This would not be in isolation as we worked closely with a number of partners such as Newport BID and regional partnerships and this enabled us to take opportunities that came our way.

The Regeneration Manager highlighted some of the financial support given to businesses during this period. A total of 3233 businesses had been assisted with 74 start-ups assisted. 350 expression of interest forms have been received for the Business Development Fund and £100,000 awarded to date. The roll out of rates relief and grant support to businesses had seen 7312 grants delivered across the 4 Covid Business Rate grants at a total of £46,785,201.00 and they had processed Covid Extended Business Rates Relief of £20,004,058.24 for 1411 businesses in total.

The Chair invited comments and questions from Members

- A member welcomed the report and commented that there appeared to be assumption of enthusiasm from traders with small businesses in particular occupying business units throughout the City, which was a welcome sign of recovery.
- Members asked about the communication channels between local businesses and the Council.

The Leader and Regeneration Manager replied that there was a high level of 2 way communication with small business throughout the City. We had representation on a number of groups and engaged with freelancers asking how we could assist them, taking on board any feedback provided. The Business Support team also

circulated a newsletter, which had been vital during the pandemic. We were members of business clubs and our website dedicated to business was also an important tool in engagement.

- A member queried how we had protected the Council against fraudulent claims for Business Support grants during the pandemic. The Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing confirmed that the team that processed application for grant assistance had been extremely diligent in making all the necessary checks. While people were desperate for immediate financial aid, we attempted to work quickly whilst ensuring robust checks were carried out. No grants were awarded without all the necessary paperwork and we were confident we had strong procedures in place to prevent fraud.
- A member commended the resilience demonstrated in the business area in continuing support for small businesses over the previous 2 years. The member then asked for further information about the Empty Property Group.

In response, the Leader commented that the elected members referred to in the report were the Cabinet and they had received joint training with officers to examine what options were available to tackle the issue of empty or derelict properties. One of the properties was the former TJs in Clarence Place and another property in the Stow Hill ward had just gone to auction. The Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing stated that the group had a priority list of 6 properties to focus on with the objective being to firstly encourage the owners to work with the Council in seeking solutions. CPO was not the only option, enforcement powers being another, along with grant funding to encourage re-use.

- Members asked about future prosperity and how we would maximise and exploit securing inward investment.

The Leader commented on our successes to date such as Monks Ditch, the Welsh Government collaboration with Celtic Manor Group and investment in the International Convention Centre but stressed we would continue to push forward to secure inward investments. We were able to do this through our partnerships such as the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, the first significant investment being £37m into the Compact Semi-Conductor plant in Newport alongside the largest data centre in Europe being based here also. Moving forward it was also important to focus on the economic wellbeing of the whole of the region and further afield. Success depended on what we did in partnership, whether at the regional level or based on our economic geography with our partners across the River Severn such as our partnership with the Western Gateway region which could impact us positively in terms of jobs and construction initiatives etc.

In response to a question about the University and Coleg Gwent relocation proposals in the City Centre, the Leader said that together with the National Wellbeing Centre this represented £100M of public sector investment coming into the City Centre, which was very welcome. The University were developing significant expertise in cybersecurity and the knowledge transfer work that the university carried out supported internships and businesses. Newport had a really strong cluster of small businesses starting to build up here and attracted significant contracts and we were keen to support the University in this aspect. By bringing all of that knowledge together in the heart of our City Centre would help us to build economic resilience for the future.

The Chair thanked the Leader and officers for attending

Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet

The Committee noted the Carbon Management Plan- Progress Monitoring report and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised. The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet:

- The Committee Members thanked the Leader and senior officers for attending and praised the commitment and work of the service area. Members noted that after two years of serious disruption due to the pandemic we have shown resilience as both a council and a city in relation to regeneration and economic growth and this should be recognised. Members also praised the ambition and excellent transformation of the Indoor Market, which a couple of the committee Members visited last week.
- Member were pleased to hear that the Council have good communication with local businesses, and commented that it is important that there is good two way communication and hopefully some of the increased contact because of the pandemic will be continued as we try to recover.
- Members commented regarding page 31 of the reports pack, Newport Intraregional Commuting and advised would be interesting to know how these journeys are made – car, bus, train, bicycle etc and to be able to compare this with 2020, 2021. The Committee think this data should be tracked so that we can see if we are making progress in terms of increasing sustainable travel.
- Members were pleased to see progress with the Empty Property Group, which has improved since before the pandemic. Members also noted their happiness with the successes of the youth academy, and request if the committee could have a list of the achievements made by the youth academy such as whether they go into employment or go into higher education.
- The report briefly abated that the Council must exploit and maximise the opportunities for bringing inward investment into the city. The Committee requested to have more details of how we can actually achieve both of these aims in the wake of the pandemic. Members also spoke of the importance that there is good two way communication between businesses and hopefully some of the increased contact because of the pandemic will be continued as we try to recover.

5 Carbon Management Plan – Progress Monitoring

Invitees:

- Councillor Jason Hughes – Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development
- Ross Cudlip – Carbon Reduction Manager

The Cabinet member for Sustainable Development introduced the item stating that this was Committee's first consideration of the Council's Carbon Management Plan 2018-2022. He acknowledged the challenges ahead and said we had built a strong foundation and could be proud of our achievements to date. The Carbon Reduction Manager gave a Powerpoint

presentation setting out the Council's vision, mission, objectives and strategy for carbon reduction from 2018 until 2022 and beyond.

Key points highlighted were:

- The ultimate target of the CMP is for the Council to achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2030 with plans running from 2018-2022, 2022-2026 and 2026 until 2030.
- Aim to be a globally responsible organisation by decarbonising our buildings, fleet and operations while reducing our costs and environmental impact for the benefit of future generations.
- Progress against 5 key objectives :-
 - Reduce total carbon emissions in the shortest possible timeframe - *Currently ahead of target*
 - Make our buildings more energy efficient and improve user comfort - *Draught-proofing and new lighting has improved user comfort in some buildings. This will to be replicated across the entire estate.*
 - Reduce our total energy demand and dependence on imported energy through the use of on- site renewable energy generation - *7% of the electricity we consumed in 2020/21 was generated from solar PV panels on our roof. In the future we will need to maximise this proportion.*
 - Reduce our business travel, fuel consumption and transition our fleet to electric or alternatively fuelled vehicles - *All of these metrics are being progressed as we move to video conferencing and an electric fleet.*
 - Where opportunities arise, engage with and support external organisations working to reduce carbon emissions in the Newport area - *We have supported diocese schools with community solar installations and engaged with other public sector organisations on a range of matters.*

Members then asked the following:

- Members commented that it was pleasing that we had a dedicated Carbon Reduction Manager post for this very important issue. It was then asked that in order to achieve 100% reduction in carbon emissions would require some offsetting. How could reduction be maintained each year?

The Carbon Reduction Manager responded that the reduction levels were not linear but rather a reduction each year. We were now at the stage of delivering retrofits for our buildings that had greatest consumptions and this would give us a reasonable idea of the measures we could take to achieve reductions each year. The ambition was to remove as much gas use from our estate so that we would be able to bring in zero carbon electricity to replace it.

- If our street lighting columns were LED and were there any grants available for domestic solar panel installation?

The Carbon Reduction Manager explained that not all the lighting columns had suitable fittings for LED lighting but the vast majority of our stock was now LED lighting. In regards to solar panels, there were no longer grants available, but householders with solar panels fitted were able to sell back their energy to suppliers and recoup installation costs in that way.

- A member asked about the use of heat pumps to replace gas boilers and the feasibility of this in households.

The Carbon Reduction Manager explained that much of our Council estate generally had space to accommodate heat pump paraphernalia such as on the roof of buildings or within grounds of existing sites. Whilst some of these could be fairly complex installations taking heat from the environment outside, for domestic properties these could be from the ground or water which could be much more inconspicuous.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their contribution and responses to Members questions.

Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet

The Committee noted the Carbon Management Plan- Progress Monitoring report and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised. The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet:

- The Committee thanked the officers for attending and praised the precise and information presentation. Members were happy with the information received in the Carbon Management Plan and the progress that has been made against the targets. Members also praised the ambition and aspiration for the city to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- The Committee also wished to voice their pleasure of the appointment of a Carbon Reduction Manager so Members and officers are able to readily get advice.

6 Live event

The meeting terminated at 5.29 pm