

Minutes



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 23rd September 2022

Time: 10am

Venue: Committee Room 1

Present: Cllr P Hourahine, M Al-Nuaimi, M Evans, P Bright, G Horton and B Davies

Apologies: Councillor C Baker-Westhead, L James

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Claire Baker-Westhead.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting: held 29th October 2021

The committee asked for clarity about a committee member that wished to be recorded as in attendance at the previous meeting.

The minutes of the previous meeting held 29th July 2022 were **accepted as a true and accurate record**.

4. Strategic Equalities Plan Annual Report 2021-22

Invitees:

Janice Dent – Policy and Partnerships Manager

Donald Mutale – Equalities Officer

Dimitri Batrouni – Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation

The Policy and Partnerships Manager introduced herself and the Equalities Officer. The Policy and Partnerships Manager also introduced the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager stated that equality, diversity and inclusion are core values, underpinning everything that the Council does and helping to highlight areas for improvement.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager introduced the report and highlights, and welcomed questions and recommendations. The Policy and Partnerships Manager noted that the report spanned the 2021-2022 and the progress made against the strategic equality objectives during that period. The Policy and Partnerships Manager stated that this was the second annual report produced that meets the Council's legislative duty under the Equalities Act.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager stated that the equalities objectives were developed with internal and external stakeholders, including the community, to develop and deliver both strategic and tangible outcomes for residents. The Policy and Partnerships Manager noted that although the pandemic was rife during this period, significant progress had still been made against objectives. The Policy and Partnerships Manager also noted that the end of free movement in the EU happened during this period and that there was a lot of focus on support for Newport staff and residents regarding this.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager commented that the Leader of the Council had been named WLGA Lead for Equalities, Migration and Anti-Poverty. The Policy and Partnerships Manager remarked on the significant amount of training provided for senior staff, including looking into bias in the recruitment process as well as increasing awareness of inclusion. The Policy and Partnerships Manager noted the participatory, budgetary and process for the year aimed to challenge inequality during the pandemic, and informed the committee that this had resulted in funding for 79 community projects, totalling £415,000.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager wished to note the good work achieved by the Staff Networks that had been set up at the start of the year and had been instrumental in influencing policies, delivery and strategic decision making. The Policy and Partnerships Manager added that the networks had been part of the assessment process in the recruitment of senior leaders.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager confirmed that they had been working with Schools and that there had been an increase in emotional support and floating support schemes. The Policy and Partnerships Manager also noted that they had been working hard to support accessing and maintaining accommodation for adults with learning difficulties, refugees, people escaping domestic abuse and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

The Policy and Partnerships Manager highlighted some areas that they need to improve on and these would be targeted as part of the action plan in the next 12 months. The Policy and Partnerships Manager confirmed that this would begin with analysis of data available to better understand any issues.

Questions:

A committee member asked if there was more detail about the 6 specific objective points.

- The Policy and Partnerships Manager confirmed that there is a summary for each point as well as further detail in the feedback in the full report.

A committee member welcomed the report and summary, and queried whether previously raised concerns regarding the fortnightly meetings the police have with community representatives had been followed up on.

- The Policy and Partnerships Manager stated that they would look into this and get back to the committee with information regarding their previous concerns.

A committee member noted that the Strategic Equality Group (SEG) had been a useful forum for exploring issues and asked when they had last met. The committee member also added that it may be useful to cover the topics of those meetings in the report and suggested that Islamophobia is a topic that the group could consider.

- The Equalities Officer noted the comments and confirmed that the SEG meet every quarter; the last meeting was in August and the next meeting is planned for October.

A committee member noted that the Leader had been appointed as WGLA lead and echoed the previous comments enquiring about the outcomes of the queries raised previously regarding the Community Cohesion Meetings.

- The Policy and Partnerships Manager noted the comments and stated that they would look into this and get back to the committee with information regarding their previous concerns.

A committee member asked about the data regarding new starters and leavers and their protected characteristics.. The committee member noted staff retention is challenging and queried whether there was any underlying causes that could be identified.

- The Policy and Partnerships Manager stated that they hadn't seen a correlation from the leavers interviews with regards to any discrimination, but that it would still be looked into as part of the planned data analysis. The Policy and Partnerships Manager noted that there would be an action plan based on the findings of the data analysis by the end of the year, and the team are already working alongside this with HR to look at strategies regarding people and culture.

A committee member asked about the exit strategy and whether sufficient data was being captured regarding protected characteristics in the application process.

- The Policy and Partnerships Manager stated that there was a need to further analyse the data so that actions could be informed by the findings.

A committee member queried whether different questions were needed for the leavers' interviews to capture more or different information.

- The Policy and Partnerships Manager noted that the questions would be given to the committee for consideration.

A committee member asked whether it would be possible to benchmark against the approach that other organisations may take to capture data, and how the Council's data trends compare.

- The Equalities Officer stated that Newport is part of a wider group of Councils that regularly meet and noted that Newport staff are playing an important role in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion but there is further collaboration need to become more inclusive and address issues.

The committee member asked whether it was possible to cast a net out wider than these Council's as this could help to save time developing tools and approaches that already exist;

- The Chair recommended that this be brought back to the committee as an update.

- The Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation thanked the committee member for the points noted that they had been taken on board. The Cabinet Member addressed staff retention, confirming that this is an issue in every institution and that the data analysis was needed to truly understand any patterns, and assured the committee that suitable approaches would be developed for any issues identified.

A committee member noted that there was an inconsistency in the data over two tables.

- The Policy and Partnerships Manager stated that they would check and get back to the committee.

A committee member noted that there had been a large increase in the number of female employees whereas the number of male employees had stayed roughly the same and asked whether this was due to a specific policy and whether it included school staff?

- The Policy and Partnerships Manager confirmed that it did include school staff at a senior level. The Policy and Partnerships Manager noted that there had been a recent restructure which may have contributed to a change, but this would be reviewed and confirmed with the committee. The Policy and Partnerships Manager noted the positive work that had resulted in improvements in the gender gap.

The chair thanked the officers for their attendance.

Comments and Recommendations:

- The committee were happy with the report and its contents and thanked Officers for their work.
- The committee wanted to highlight the importance of updating committee as to whether recommendations from previous years had been implemented.
 - On this, the committee asked for an update as to whether the recommendation to include white community representatives in the fortnightly meetings with Gwent Police had been implemented.
- The committee felt that more transparency regarding the membership of the fortnightly meetings would be beneficial.
- The committee commented that information regarding the Strategic Equalities group and the areas it explored could've been beneficial to include within the report.
- The committee felt that there could be more clarity when presenting how aims have been achieved.
- The committee asked for a copy of the exit survey questions to better understand what was being asked of leavers and make any recommendations and comments where necessary.
- The committee asked for an answer regarding expanding the network of Councils.
- The committee asked for confirmation regarding the data on pages 40 and 42 regarding employees as of the 31st March.

5. Climate Change Plan Annual Report

Invitees:

Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez – Head of Environment and Public Protection
Paul Jones – Strategic Director of Environment and Sustainability
Ross Cudlipp – Service Manager Climate Change

The officers introduced themselves. The Strategic Director of Environment and Sustainability noted that the Report is going to Cabinet on the 12th October 2022 and that this is an introductory report.

The chair asked whether an annual report would be sufficient given the rate of change in the area. The Strategic Director noted that this is something that the committee can discuss.

The Head of Environment and Public Protection gave an overview and stated an emergency was declared last year and so they were looking at ways to improve and update the climate change plan which was approved March last year. The Head of Environment and Public Protection informed the committee that there was a long list of actions and objectives supporting the aim of being Net Zero Carbon by 2030. The Head of Environment and Public Protection explained that there will be frequent updates on the progress of these and some actions will be incorporated as part of service plans.

The Head of Environment and Public Protection stated that it will come to Scrutiny on a quarterly basis as well as there being updates from the Cabinet Member through Council. The Head of Environment and Public Protection stated that whilst the report covers the year before the approval of the plan, it does introduce the key delivery themes and priorities in each area.

Questions:

A committee member commented their approval on the format concerning the 6 Key Objectives, and welcomed actions taken already, and said they felt that the cycle lanes were a waste of money due to being in small sections.

- The Strategic Director agreed that there was a lot of work that needed to be completed with the cycle lanes, but that a lot of funding had already been used for active travel improvements in other areas, such as enhancing connectivity along the canal and installing the Devon Bridge footbridge. The Strategic Director noted that there had been an update in national policy in active transport that gives prioritisation to pedestrians and cyclists.

The committee member commented that the case study was useful but that there was a lack of depth and detail in the report such as lack of detail on deadlines and financial commitments.

- The Strategic Director agreed that whilst the report did not contain full details, as yet the report was shared with Scrutiny at this time so that they are able to comment and feedback on the Strategy.

- The Head of Service added that there are indicative timescales that are regularly reported. The grant structure from Welsh government is constantly evolving which informs the Council's planning, and these details will be clarified in the strategy as soon as is possible.

The committee member noted that the aim to be Net Zero Carbon by 2030 was positive, but they were concerned that the Civic Centre was an inefficient building.

- The Strategic Director noted that there was a lot of decision making on what needs to be prioritised in order to manage the Council's building assets, which includes schools. The Strategic Director added that whilst the Civic Centre is a very challenging building to make more energy efficient due to its age, all new builds are energy efficient as standard so that the issue is not being compounded.

- The Service Manager added that they are using a programme of the re-fits which will address 10-15 buildings at a time, and this manageable approach means that the Council is able to tackle the more difficult, historic buildings that need updating.

A committee member asked about plans to reduce carbon emissions for example, in home to School transport;

- The Strategic Director noted that they had been successful in funding for electric busses and that the council now has 20 and plan on expanding further.

A committee member asked whether the electric vehicles were fitted with lithium batteries as there had been media reports regarding an electric vehicle fitted with a lithium battery being on fire.

- The Service Manager confirmed that they were all fitted with varying types of lithium batteries. The Service manager added that as they are newer there is more media coverage around them and that there is no increased risk with electric vehicles.

A committee member asked about the cost of a replacement battery.

- The Service Manager informed the committee that the batteries need replacing every 8 years which is longer than the Council retain vehicles for due to wear and tear through heavy use.

A committee member noted that the Council used to have Hydrogen powered vehicles.

- The Strategic Director noted that they do not predict Hydrogen vehicles becoming as mainstream and so it would be harder to source more specialised vehicles required for Council services.

A committee member asked about whether the lack of cycle lanes would resolved;

- The Strategic Director noted that they are aware that more work needs to be done but that it would fall mainly under the active travel plan. A large amount of work in this area is being reviewed by the Burns commission work which will have an impact on the cycle network and infrastructure. The Strategic Director wished to inform the committee that work was ongoing.

A committee member asked about segregation of cycle and footpaths and that there is a public perception that segregating them is just a case of painting lines which could be done quickly, and lessen the number of accidents.

- The Strategic Director informed the committee that it was a much more complex issue than that, as there is a lot more work that is legally required, for example implementing Traffic Orders, carrying out public consultation and road safety audits.

A committee member asked whether there was a joint approach with businesses that are also installing charging points so that these are evenly distributed across the City;

- The Service Manager informed the committee that publicly accessible charging stations are recorded and monitored as a map. The Service Manager added that they had looked at supplying points to residential areas with no off-road parking and that they had measured and assessed walking times for residents to the nearest charger.
- The Strategic Director added that there are different types of charging points and that there had been a huge increase in not only Council supplied ones but also charging points from private businesses. The Strategic Director confirmed that they would confirm the numbers for the committee.
- The Service Manager confirmed that by the end of the financial year the Council will have implemented about 100 publicly accessible charging points.

A committee member praised the report, in particular the case study regarding 'No Mow May'. The committee member asked whether there were any plans to increase the number of staff accredited with the Carbon Literacy course;

- The Strategic Director agreed that they were slightly behind and have some catching up to do.
- The Service Manager noted that there were 3 additional training sessions that were added and are mandatory and they plan to roll the training out across the whole organisation.
- The Head of Service added that there had been a change in the structure in directors and that there was new training available.
- The Head of Service encouraged the members to attend the Carbon Literacy course and informed the committee that this was part of a nationwide programme.

A committee member noted that although ambition is good is it achievable to be Net Zero Carbon by 2030;

- The Service Manager informed the committee that the term previously used to describe this was Carbon Neutral. The Service Manager that this means offsetting the carbon emissions the Council is creating through planting trees and better land management. The Service Manager noted that the best option will always be to reduce the Carbon produced as a first principle.

A committee member asked where the Council buys its electricity from;

- The Service Manager informed the committee that the electricity supplied to the Council has certificates to show that it is produced from clean energy sources such as Hydropower, Wind and Solar.

A committee member asked about the leisure centre and the need to lay a 11kv cable to support it. The committee member queried whether the Council have used a turbine instead, to help reduce the carbon produced;

- The Service Manager noted that a turbine would not be possible in an urban environment like the leisure centre location, and confirmed that the Council has used some of its land to have Solar Panels.

A committee member asked if there would be benefits in using a Combined Heat and Power process (CHP).

- The Service Manager noted that a CHP would continue to produce carbon emissions until the end of its functional life, and this would create higher carbon outputs than other potential options.

A committee member thanked the officers for the introductory report. The committee member asked about a survey circulated that referred some of these issues, and queried why the survey results were not contained in the report;

- The Service Manager confirmed that the survey formed part of the consultation with the public on a different, wider corporate plan that incorporates all of the Council's aims, including those around climate change.

- The Strategic Director added that the public sector is aiming to reach Net Zero Carbon by 2030, whilst the plan for Newport as a whole is to reach Net Zero Carbon by 2050.

- The Head of Service added that this is also linked to the local area energy plan which was approved in July, which the Council can help to influence, but that is a wider remit with different objectives.

A committee member asked if there was lower carbon reported during covid and if officers believe that there will be a step increase in the coming months;

- The Service Manager stated that the total overall trend should be downward. There was a dip during Covid but not as much as may be perceived, as many aspects of the Council were still open and functioning, so the overall costs were still relatively high. The Service Manager added that a new category was introduced for the 2021-22 period that measured emissions produced as a result of home working.

A committee member asked how that number could be improved;

- The Service Manager informed the committee that that they do offset Carbon production, as well as supporting staff in how to reduce their consumption.

- The Strategic Director commented that this area is in constant development. The Council can reassess the origin of the energy that they are purchasing but it can't tell people to do that in their personal life. It comes down to Sequestration.

- The Head of Service added that the emissions will rise over time as the population of Newport grows, and the need for more services from the Council arises.

A committee member noted that it was complex but asked whether the officers expected an increase as people wish to come back to the office due to the rise in energy prices.

- The Service Manager informed the committee that no assumptions have been made regarding this, but as buildings are still open the number of people in the buildings would not increase the costs or emissions.
- The Strategic Director added that the majority of staff are Teachers and the number of office working staff is relatively low. There would not be much overall change as travel and home working are incorporated into the total emissions.

A committee member noted that there are jobs which require staff to use cars, such as social workers, and that it wouldn't be wise to introduce a congestion charge as this may have an adverse effect on the city centre and therefore people's livelihoods.

- The Strategic Director confirmed that whilst there is a push towards active travel, a large amount of the vehicle fleet of the council is municipal and this will continue to grow as the City does.
- The Head of Service noted that there was a clear objective to reduce emissions but that there had also been a huge regeneration in the city centre and a balance is required regarding any decisions made.

A committee member informed the officers that they sit on the Newport Transport Board and in some cases, they do a trip where they pick up all the employees so that they don't have to use their own vehicles and whether that would be worth looking at;

- The Strategic Director noted that they wish to push and enhance public transport and is something to look into.

A committee member asked what happened to the savings that have been recorded as other authorities sometimes reinvested savings made into services.

- The Strategic Director noted that the vast majority of improvements that had been completed had produced savings.
- The Service Manager noted that much of the savings were utilised in repaying capital loans used to create capacity to deliver improvements.

A committee member asked whether cars that need replacing would automatically be replaced with an electric car as the old type of vehicles are cheaper;

- The Strategic Director informed the committee that it was complex issue and that different factors were taken into account to assess the best option, and so it is not assumed that they will immediately be replaced with electric vehicles.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance.

Comments and Recommendations:

- The committee were happy with the report and felt that while additional information was needed, they appreciated that this was an introductory report and more detail would follow as more information became available.
- The committee asked for a short written update regarding actions and outcomes to be provided and circulated to committee on a 6 monthly basis.
- The committee were happy for the report to come to Scrutiny on an annual basis alongside the 6 monthly written updates.
- The committee recommended including how savings were redistributed within the report.
- The committee asked for information regarding the number of privately and publicly owned electric vehicle chargers in the city to be circulated.

6. Annual Information Risk Report 2021-22

Invitees:

Mark Bleazard – Digital Services Manager
Tariq Slaoui – Information Manager

The officers introduced themselves and the Chair wished to confirm that the report was retrospective and was not supplement to the report received in July.

The Digital Services Manager noted that they produce two reports that are complementary but different. The Annual Information Risk Report is in its 10th year but that feedback is still valued. The Digital Service Manager informed the committee that the report is mainly a look back at the 2021-22 financial year, but there are some added updates from this financial year where relevant, so to be as transparent with the Scrutiny committee as possible.

The Digital Services Manager introduced the report and highlighted some positives such as Payment Card Industry (PCI) compliance as well as the cyber stock take, but there are also some negatives, such as issues with the public services network. The Digital Services Manager also noted that one topic that is frequently brought up is raising of awareness and training which is starting to improve again. The Digital Services Manager also noted the training that supported the Track and Trace Team. The Digital Services Manager noted that there had been many applications had been moved to the cloud, which will aid in security as well as a move to the Always On Virtual Private Network which will save money. The Digital Services Manager gave a brief update on information requests.

Questions:

A Committee member noted that the Council has historically fallen below the average for Wales.

- The Digital Services Manager noted that there had been less social services training but there are plans in place to increase this. The Digital Services Manager confirmed there had been more e-learning pieces to be able to reach more areas such as the password training that has been completed by 1400 people in the last few months.

A committee member asked about the Digital champions and whether they were trained or self-appointed;

- The Digital Services Manager noted that it is a voluntary network that have first access to new and are briefed on any new solutions that are rolled out. The Digital Services Manager noted that membership is reviewed.

A committee member asked about the Council data protection and whether it is acceptable to forward emails with pictures and information to officers that they have received from the public;

- The Information Manager noted that the general understanding is that the public know you will be forwarding the information and data to an appropriate officer however it is always best to double check or remind them of this.
- The Digital Services Manager added that consent is always beneficial so there is absolute clarity and that consent can be written or verbal.

A committee member noted the recent phishing attempt via email addresses, and that they were unable to access their account for 5 days. They queried whether if it happens again

would this wait time still be necessary;

- The Digital Services Manager commented that the phishing attempt was relatively minor but that it is still useful to look back and learn from. The Digital Services Manager stated that when fixing the issue there was a balance between the impact on the individual and the impact on the organisation and that they would always err on the side of caution.
- The Information Manager noted that the lessons learned from this could help improve the process and noted that they do hold practice runs to prepare for any similar events.

A committee member asked about the cost of administrating Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and whether this is something that could be reduced if more information was published online;

- The Digital Services Manager noted that responding to FOI's is a statutory requirement and that it is difficult to pre-empt the questions due to the wide range of information that is asked.
- The Information Manager noted there had been an increase in the number requests as more people are aware now nationally that the information can be requested.

Comments and Recommendations:

- The committee were content with the report and its contents.
- The committee felt that there should be a stronger drive for the area to ensure that training is completed.
- The committee felt that it could be beneficial to include information regarding whether the disproportionate cost clause regarding Freedom of Information requests had been enacted in the report.

7. Scrutiny Advisor Reports

The Scrutiny Advisor presented the Action Sheet and Forward Work Programme.

8. Date of the Next Meeting

30th September 2022 at 10am