

Minutes



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 3 February 2023

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors P Hourahine (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, M Evans, L James, C Baker-Westhead, P Bright, B Davies and G Horton

Samantha Schanzer (Scrutiny Adviser), Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director - Transformation and Corporate Centre), Tracy McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation) and Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance)

1 Apologies

Councillors Routley and Cleverly in their capacity as Scrutiny Chairs for the Performance Scrutiny Committees – People and Place respectively.

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

30th September 2022:

The Committee asked whether a response had been received in relation to their concerns regarding University student numbers. The Committee asked whether the University would be able to attend Committee and explain why student numbers were low.

- The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development would be providing an answer on this topic in due course.
- The Strategic Director stated that the Committee had no powers to call in the University, although an invitation could be extended, and that this topic could be brought to the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

The minutes of the previous meeting held 30th September 2022 were **accepted as a true and accurate record**.

Minutes of 25th October 2022

The Committee asked for clarification regarding the wording of the Scrutiny Annual Report verbal update.

The Committee asked when they would receive the Scrutiny Annual Report 2021-22.

- The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that this report was with the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager and would come to Committee for comments before it went to Council

This document is available in welsh / Mae's ffurflen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

The minutes of the previous meeting held 25th October 2022 were **accepted as a true and accurate record**.

4 **2023-24 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan**

Invitees:

Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate)

Tracy McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation)

Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance)

Budget Overview and Process

The Head of Finance introduced the report to the Committee and provided context regarding setting contingencies to manage risks and the points of note.

Questions:

The Committee asked for clarification regarding RSG sensitivity, where a large element of funding from Welsh Government was assumed to be a 3% increase on last year. The Committee also asked that as the percentage increase had now been clarified to be 8.9%, what did this mean in relation to the current size of the gap in funding.

- The Head of Finance confirmed that there was a 3.5% increase on the figure originally expected; the report that went to Cabinet in December 2022 stated the expected gap was £16 million at that time, but no school savings had been included. The extra settlement came to £11.7 million, which is an increase of just under 9%.

The Committee asked for an update regarding the current status of the deficit.

- The Head of Finance confirmed that the Cabinet would announce the final details and decisions in the upcoming Cabinet meeting.

The Committee asked whether the Cabinet would be looking to plug a gap of £15 million.

- The Head of Finance noted that the gap was much smaller than £15 million and the final budget to be announced in Cabinet meeting on the 15th February 2023.

The Committee asked how negotiations were going with partners and contractors in achieving savings, and queried the level of confidence that these savings could be delivered.

- It was confirmed that the Committee would be provided a written answer as it was not within this Committee's remit.

The Committee asked about streetlights and commented that budget savings seemed lumped into one and queried how much had been saved in budget maintenance.

- It was confirmed that the Committee would be provided a written answer as it was not within this Committee's remit.

Budget Public Engagement

The Head of People, Policy and Transformation introduced the report. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that:

- This was part of an all-year-round consultation on various things, with 40 activities last year.
- It was the highest level of response in several years and was the longest possible period of consultation undertaken.
- Activities undertaken included online surveys, a supplementary survey on bus Wi-Fi (with a more nuanced response option given for online surveys rather than just yes or no answers), social media promotions with 39 social media posts and press releases and promotion through schools. Consultations were also held with council staff, reflecting the significant number of staff live in Newport and other community events were attended.
- Several meetings had taken place with pre budget engagements in the Autumn to consult on the Corporate Plan and budget proposals.
- A response was also expected from the Fairness Commission, and trade unions had been met with through the Employee Partnership Forum. This was attended by service leads and trade unions, and chaired by the Cabinet Member.

Questions:

The Committee welcomed the pre-budget consultation.

The Committee asked for more information regarding the type of question asked and the level of detail included in the question. The Committee also asked what focus groups were involved as smaller savings such as the Shop Mobility saving of £7000 a year was a relatively small saving but could have a large impact on this organisation.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed the survey included questions to ascertain which services were important to residents but noted it was complicated, as much of what is important to residents is universal, whilst a lot of high-cost services are important to smaller groups of residents due to their needs. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that managers were aware of this when determining their budget proposals. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that given the scale of the savings required, it would be difficult to respond to all the feedback from residents whilst still making the necessary savings.

The Committee asked whether residents had been asked what was less important to people in terms of services they used as part of the consultation.

- The Head of People Policy and Transformation informed Committee that corporate front line services were generally less important to people, whilst the priorities were services for the most vulnerable people.
- It was noted that Newport City Council had a low corporate spend compared to other councils.

The Committee asked whether the consultation asked what services residents would be happy to pay for.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that the public were not asked those kinds of questions.
- The Strategic Director stated that the service was developing the transformation programme to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan, and this was a valid point to take forward.

The Committee noted it was a difficult task to balance the budget and commended the quality of the survey. The Committee asked for an outline of the engagement initiated with stakeholders before Cabinet met.

- The Chairperson noted that only work done up until this point could be scrutinised fairly.
- The Head of Finance confirmed that work on the final details on the budgets were currently in progress and could not be discussed at this point. The Head of Finance confirmed that this would be announced by the Leader at Cabinet with the Council tax rate to be the Cabinet's decision.

The Committee felt that many people did not know about the Glebelands parking charges and other proposals.

- The Strategic Director noted that it was a significant task to engage with all schools and that Finance and Education were working closely with individual schools regarding this. The Strategic Director did not feel that there was an issue with engagement in this area. The Strategic Director noted that if the Committee felt a written response was required, then this could be provided.
- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that there was service area specific engagement with service users and potential service users, giving the a number of examples; meeting with parents who accessed the Oaklands service, library staff speaking directly to users, schools being made aware through trade unions and the Employee Partnership Forum, and passing information to parents. Other stakeholders such as SRS, Newport Live, Newport Norse were engaged with separately.
- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that this consultation had received the largest number of responses in memory.

The Committee again commended the quality of the survey and noted that the format of the survey presentation of proposals should be used in Performance Scrutiny Committees when considering proposals due to the ease of understanding they provided.

The Committee asked for more information regarding trade unions and the Fairness Commission.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that many meetings had been held with trade unions directly and through the Employee Partnership Forum. The Fairness Committee responses had also been received and would be looked at.

The Committee asked for the number of social media posts and how effective the posts were, with reference to how many individuals the posts reached and what actions arose from the posts.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that 39 social media posts were made. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation informed Committee that the figures requested could be provided to Committee if they wished.
- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation reminded Committee that the consultation was now closed but a reflective 'Lessons Learned' activity was always completed and Scrutiny attendance was also part of the consultation.

The Committee asked if data would be tracked from responses in relation to where the individuals lived.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that location, age and the ethnicity of the person were requested as part of the completion of the survey.

The Committee noted that they would have liked to have seen the data assessed before it came to Committee and could this be done for in future budget cycles.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that as they had allowed the maximum consultation period, the brief turnaround time meant that the analysis of responses was not available in time for Scrutiny to consider.

The Committee noted that the consultation covered a population of 155,000, and responses measured half a percent with 900 responses. The Committee agreed that many activities had been undertaken to maximise engagement but felt that there could be a proportion of people living in the city who were affected by the budget that had not submitted their views. The Committee asked whether the results received offered a skewed view of the budget as these responses were likely not received in the same number.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation clarified that there were 1,300 responses received, and participation numbers are historically low which is challenging. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that this could potentially skew results but those who engaged were the ones largely affected.

The Committee asked whether residents in good financial positions were specifically engaged with, and whether Newport City Council undertook comparative review against similar Local Authorities for best practice on this approach.

- The Strategic Director confirmed that Newport City Council did look at other LA's processes. The Strategic Director felt that Newport City Council had improved in putting out consultations. The Strategic Director noted that there had been intelligence building on what mattered to residents a result of engagement, and this needed to be incorporated into how we adapted the proposals.
- The Strategic Director noted that it was fair to say that service users are the most likely to comment about it in consultation and that their responses matter most.
- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that residents are more interested in some proposals than others, and gave the examples of the city centre safety survey, which received 1,600 responses and the Perception of Newport survey where 2,000 people responded. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation felt that the way forward was to pick up wider intelligence to ensure that the Council's engagement with the public is only one part of the understanding.

The Committee asked that the Scrutiny Adviser summarise previous recommendations made on consultations and provide the information to Committee.

The Committee asked whether people completed the survey or skipped responses.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that while the full view was sought, people could skip on responses. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation informed Committee that this analysis of data was not complete yet but could be provided to Committee at a later date.

The Committee asked what percentage of the survey was fully completed.

- The Strategic Director confirmed that analysis would be done on this but was not ready at this time.

The Committee asked how the analysis was completed.

- It was confirmed that there were multiple feeds analysing the data.

The Committee asked whether the results of the consultation came back to Committee.

- It was confirmed that it would be provided to Committee as an information only update.

The Committee felt that there was a level of complacency in terms of responses from residents and it would be interesting to see how Newport's responses compared to other authorities ahead of next year's budget setting process.

- This is a topic that could be addressed in Lessons Learned. WLGA would also be consulted, particularly as when comparing consultation response a community with a similar makeup and urban areas would be required for a reasonable assessment.

The Committee asked how responses were fed back to the public.

- It was confirmed that the responses would be communicated back to the public as part of the transparency in decision-making. It was confirmed that a summary would also be included in the Cabinet report.

The Committee felt that more pre-consultation publicity should be given to future years' budgets.

Performance Scrutiny Committee (PSC) – Place Minutes

The Committee raised questions regarding page 52 where the PSC – Place had commented on whether some residents could pay more council tax, if they felt they could afford it.

- The Strategic Director informed Committee that council tax regulations confirmed that this could not be put in place.
- The Committee commented that maybe residents could donate to a library or another service in lieu of this.
- The Strategic Director stated that charities could take donations, but Newport City Council could not do this.

The Committee asked whether there would be a re-banding for private properties.

- The Strategic Director noted that there would be a review of council tax banding and there would be a brief note on this to be provided to Committee.

The Committee noted and endorsed the minutes from the Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place Committee.

Performance Scrutiny Committee - People Minutes

The Committee noted and endorsed the minutes from the Performance Scrutiny Committee - People Committee.

5 Conclusions of Committee Reports

The Committee welcomed the improved consultation, particularly the increasing methods of consultation through different channels and the inclusion of the pre-budget consultation, that took place prior to drafting budget proposals.

The Committee noted that it would be helpful to have access to consultation data before the meeting occurred, however the Committee appreciated the restrictions that the Council works within concerning availability of information that feeds into the budget setting process and statutory consultation timescales.

The Committee welcomed the Council's use of the longest consultation period possible but felt that there should be a period of advertising the consultation in advance of it happening.

The Committee felt that whilst resource should be focussed on people using the services impacted by the proposals there could be an expansion of engagement to those who have limited interaction with the Council and its services to capture a broader picture.

The Committee felt more face-to-face consultation should be used.

The Committee recommended that the results of the consultation be brought back to Committee as an information only update. The Committee also asked that a benchmark comparison of performance in engagement between Newport City Council and other Local Authorities be brought back to Committee. The Committee also asked that an update on the post-consultation 'Lessons Learned' (where the process of the consultation is reviewed to inform continuous improvement) be brought back to Committee.

The Committee recommended increasing engagement and participation throughout the year wherein residents could provide feedback on the impacts of the budget proposals.

The Committee also recommended that there be a greater attention focused on collecting and analysing data from individual calls and enquiries raised via channels like the contact centre or webforms.

6 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Actions Arising (Appendix 1)

- The Scrutiny Officer on 2 outstanding actions which were the details of the 38 businesses who received grant funding and an update on the money set aside by the Council for regeneration projects and an update would be provided on these shortly.

b) Forward Work Programme Update (Appendix 2)

- The Scrutiny Adviser informed Committee that the item to be discussed during the next meeting (3rd March 2023) would now be pushed back to 28th April 2023 meeting at the request of the report writer.
- The Scrutiny Adviser asked Committee whether they would like to invite officers back to present the further information requested in this meeting on the now empty 3rd March 2023 meeting.
- The Committee felt that it would be more efficient to have 2 items on the 28th April 2023 agenda.

The date of the next meeting was noted to be the 3rd March 2023 at 10am.

7 **Live Event**

The recording of the meeting can be viewed [here](#).

The meeting terminated at Time Not Specified