

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 18 October 2023

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Mudd (Chair), D Davies, D Batrouni, J Clarke, Y Forsey, D Harvey, J Hughes, L Lacey and S Marshall

1 Apologies for Absence

None received.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Hughes was Chair of the Gwent Regional Partnership Board.

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes from 13 September were accepted as a true record.

4 Gwent Regional Partnership Board Area Plan/Gwent Regional Partnership Board Annual Report

The Leader introduced the first item on the agenda today, which was the Gwent Regional Partnership Board (RPB) Annual Report as required in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

The Strategic Director, as the designated Director for Social Services, had a statutory duty under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWB) and as amended by the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 to produce an annual report.

The Gwent RPB Annual Report set out duties for the Council to complete an Area Plan and Annual Report.

The Welsh Government set out the statutory framework for the development of our regional Area (action) Plan to include how joint health and social care priorities would be delivered in partnership across the region.

The RPB fully adopt the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2105 (WFG) principles and were aligned to the SSWB Act principles.

The progress on the delivery of our Area Plan was set out in the RPB Annual Report. The format and nature of the report was determined by Welsh Government with a requirement for the report to be submitted to the Welsh Government and statutory partners.

The report highlighted that in Children's Services, the correlation between accessing care and support and poverty was well documented in research. In adult social care the role of

unpaid care givers created particular socio-economic challenges for those with high levels of vulnerability.

During 2022 -2023, the impact of the cost-of-living challenge can be clearly seen in the referrals and requests for support to Social Services and the increasing demand for Prevention and Inclusion Services. This impact was reflected throughout this report.

The Leader was pleased to note that there was a good discussion with Members when the report was presented to the Council's Performance Scrutiny Committee (PSC) for Partnerships on Tuesday 10 October. The Leader thanked the Chair of PSC for their contribution.

The Leader invited the Cabinet Member for Social Services (Adult Services) to say a few words.

The report set out the Council's responsibilities focussing on working with partnership organisations to create synergy across the services. Councillor Hughes attended a recent in-house staff conference with his Cabinet Member colleague Councillor Marshall, which showed how the Council came together. Taking pressure off the NHS was crucial as well as decreasing the number of babies, children and young people entering care. Health and social care services were under immense pressure and support for young families, keeping young people out of care as well as looking after an increasingly aging population was a financial challenge. Working to strengthen partnerships was making a real difference as there was an increased focus on community care and integrated pathways of care in Newport and the Council was leading the way. Councillor Hughes thanked members of the Performance and Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships for their contribution.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Davies welcomed the latest action plan, which adopted the Marmot principle with a focus on mental health. Councillor Davies looked forward to seeing future reports with their progress documented.

Decision:

Cabinet

1. Considered the joint regional commitments within the Area Plan.
2. Reviewed the RPB Annual Report and progress made against the objectives; and provided any feedback/comments.

5 Bassaleg Bridge

The Leader presented to Cabinet colleagues, the next report in relation to Bassaleg Bridge. The report provided background on the work undertaken since the structural defects in the bridge were identified, and the details and outcomes of an options appraisal exercise undertaken.

The report was for noting the need for a new structure, to agree that Option 3, being an offline replacement of the bridge, but in close proximity, was the preferred option and to agree and note the Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WeITAG) assessment required to assist with this and help in securing external funding.

Bassaleg Bridge suffered scour damage which resulted in an emergency closure. Following this closure, stabilisation works was undertaken, and the bridge was opened to pedestrians. Since that time, unfortunately, due to the condition of the bridge, it was concluded that work to repair and rehabilitate the structure was not possible.

On that basis, officers looked at a number of options to deal with this issue and was seeking to progress an option that would see the replacement of the existing bridge with a new bridge in the immediate vicinity of the existing bridge.

Clearly this was not an easy or quick task, nor was it a low-cost option and the costs identified at this early stage of £5.6M - £9M far outstripped the Council's available resources. Officers engaged with Welsh Government were advised that their "Resilient Roads" funding stream could be used to bid for funding to commence design and other preparatory works on a replacement bridge.

Welsh Government advised that any bid for funding should be accompanied by a Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance assessment, and this would be progressed to enable a bid to be made.

The Council fully appreciated the disruption to the residents of Forge Mews that the ongoing closure of the bridge to vehicles was having on them. The Council engaged with residents since the initial closure of the bridge and the subsequent reopening to pedestrians. Pedestrian access continued to be maintained and the structure monitored to ensure it was safe for this purpose and emergency access has also been maintained since this time. This would continue while the Council made progress on the replacement bridge. Residents were advised of the current position and plans, and they would continually be informed as progress was made.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Lacey was pleased that the report was presented to Cabinet and wanted to reiterate the cost position. Taking this into account, it was right for the Infrastructure team to monitor the movement over a significant period of time, working with consultants and external agents to rule out work to be done. The Council was now looking to seek funding of £40,000 to provide the WelTAG assessment for Welsh Government in order to apply for the funding. Councillor Lacey therefore fully supported Option 3 within the report.
- Councillor Clarke echoed the comments of his cabinet colleagues and fully supported the report.

Decision:

Cabinet

1. Noted the need for a new structure and agreed that Option 3, outlined in the report was the preferred option.
2. Agreed and noted the WelTAG assessment required to assist in the above and to assist in securing external funding.

6 Corporate Plan Annual Report 2022/27 (Annual Corporate Wellbeing Self-Assessment included)

The next report introduced by the Leader was the Council's Annual Corporate Plan Self-Assessment Report 2022-2023.

The purpose of the report was to provide an overview on the progress of delivery against the Council's Corporate Plan 2022-2027 and the effectiveness of the Council's governance and performance arrangements.

The report was prepared to comply with the requirements set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Local Government and Elections Act.

Cabinet Members noted that the report was presented to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee and the Overview Scrutiny Management Committee. The feedback and recommendations from both committees were fully considered by officers.

In summary, colleagues recalled that the Council approved its five-year Corporate Plan to deliver an '*Ambitious, Fairer and Greener Newport for everyone*'.

This annual report reflected on 2022-2023 and the achievements made by the Council as well as highlighting the challenges faced as an organisation.

Looking back at the last year it was an extremely challenging time for the Leader and Cabinet Members and officers across the Council, responding to the cost-of-living crisis, and the continuing pressures across front-line service.

Cabinet was committed to improving the delivery of services for communities and acknowledged that the challenges across our housing, social services, education, and highways needed a collaborative approach with partners, residents, and businesses.

This was even more challenging in the current financial climate, with the need to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Council's finances provided best value for its residents and businesses.

This was also supported by the continued commitment from the Chief Executive, her senior leadership team, and officers across the 11 service areas to respond and continue to improve the services delivered to residents across Newport.

As the report highlighted, a good start was made in 2 of the 4 Well-being objectives with the remaining 2 Well-being objectives needing further improvement.

The report also showed that the Council made significant progress in key areas such as Education, with no schools in Newport being in special measures following the improvements made by Newport High School and Malpas Church in Wales Primary School.

The Council continued to perform well across its waste services and the Leader was pleased to note a good start was made in reducing carbon emissions to achieve a target of being a net zero Council by 2030.

For the first time, the pay gap between men and women closed along with a range of important equalities work that was also covered with the next item of our agenda.

Within the Leader's portfolio for regeneration and economic development, the work that the Council was doing was acknowledged and its contribution with Cardiff Capital Region and Western Gateway to secure long-term, significant regeneration and economic development in Newport and the wider region.

Newport was securing its place as a leader of high-tech, semi-conductor industries in the region and the KLA semi-conductor plant development was just one of many examples, where 750 jobs were secured.

Even in the last month, Newport has welcomed Microsoft who will be setting up a data centre at Imperial Park.

Cabinet was fully aware of the challenges which city and town centres across the United Kingdom faced. Newport was in a period of transition as technology and society was changing in the way it shopped and interacted with each other.

The Leader was delighted to welcome the Minister last week who was pleased with the investment made in partnership with Welsh Government.

Cabinet was working towards ensuring that Newport's city centre was a place which would offer retail, accommodation, office space and a wide range of events for residents, businesses, and visitors.

Newport Market was making a positive impact, offering opportunities for small to medium sized retailers and food outlets.

Events such as the Newport Marathon, Newport Pride, Armed Forces Day, and the Food Festival showed Newport was a welcoming place which attracted people from across the country to visit and enjoy what Newport had to offer as a city. There was strong evidence that there was an increase of footfall due to these events.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Davies mentioned that it was a year since Council approved the wellbeing plan with the four clear objectives. None of the Newport schools were in special measures, there were only two other Local Authorities in Wales whose schools were not in special measures. Children were safe in Newport schools, and it was recognised where mental health was a challenge, that schools had worked to overcome this, providing bespoke provision for pupils. The schools were a credit to Newport and their best practice was emulated across the consortia and in Wales. Llanwern High received a professional teaching award under the Betty Campbell Category and Councillor Harvey should be especially proud of this award, as ward member.
- Councillor Forsey highlighted the excellent work on climate change and biodiversity, with improvement in electrical vehicles (EV) such as buses and refuse lorries and the reduction of carbon footprint within Council buildings. More consideration was given in relation to the Council's procurement systems as well as engaging with a wider community, regarding active travel routes and EV charging stations. Councillor Forsey thanked the biodiversity team for all their work and also thanked the Dragons RFC for their work on carbon footprint and wished them all the best for their match with Edinburgh on the weekend.
- Councillor Harvey mentioned that it was a good report and thanked all staff involved, who were not taking their foot off the pedal. Councillor Harvey agreed with Councillor Davies' comments and was pleased with Llanwern High and thanked all the staff within Newport City Council who provided 800 services within the city.
- Councillor Batrouni highlighted wellbeing objective four, listing the benefits of the work in the area. There was work to do with the digital strategy to support individuals in the community. The Council should be proud that 65% women occupied the highest paying jobs, which was no mean feat. Work needed to be developed in other areas such as LGBTQ+ communities and the Council website, which would see improvements in the near future.
- Councillor Clarke echoed the comments of his colleagues and also referred to the health and safety and public protection aspect, seizing of tobacco, assets, vapes and investigation into underage sales, was ongoing and there were positive stories in the report.

The Leader thanked colleagues for their comments and officers for the progress they made over the past year.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed the annual Corporate Plan self-assessment report and recommended that the report to be presented at full Council.

7 **Strategic Equality Plan Report**

The Leader introduced the Council's Annual Report on the progress against its Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 (SEP).

As colleagues recalled, under the Equality Act (2010), the Council was required to annually report on the progress it made against the strategic equality objectives within the Strategic Equality Plan, alongside staff equalities data.

The Equality Objectives were developed in partnership with key internal and external stakeholders and subject to extensive community engagement. The involvement of grassroots communities ensured that whilst the Plan delivered a strategic vision for equality in Newport, it also ensured tangible outcomes for our communities.

The SEP Annual Report 2022-2023 was reviewed by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 9 October and their comments were included within the report.

Turning to the report itself, the Annual Report related to the third year of delivery against the Council's Strategic Equality Objectives.

The Leader drew attention to the summary of achievements table [pages 282 – 284] which highlighted progress against each of the objectives, such as:

1. The use of participatory budgeting which allocated funding to 44 local community projects during this financial year alone.
2. The promotion, support, and celebration of diversity across the city during significant dates, including Eid al-Fitr, Black History Wales (365), UN Anti-Racism Day and, of course, Pride in the Port, Newport's very own community Pride Event, which was going from strength to strength and was a real example of how communities came together to celebrate diversity and unity.

The Leader was passionate about equity, inclusion and diversity and it was encouraging to see the progress being made including the closure of the gender pay gap amongst officers, with gender equality also evident within members of the Cabinet.

The report concluded with staff equality data analysis and information on the continued commitment to working towards a workforce that reflected the diverse communities across the city.

This was a key objective within the new Strategic Equalities Plan and People Plan (both to be published in 2024) and was embedded within the Corporate Plan.

The Leader invited the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation to say a few words.

This report was a summary of the work undertaken during the penultimate year of the Strategic Equality Plan. It set out the Council's commitment to a workplace culture and approach to service delivery that valued inclusion and diversity.

Thanked the hard work of officers and recognised the ongoing work around customer services and complaints.

The key highlights were shared with Cabinet:

- The roll out of anti-racism training to members and officers as part of the Council's commitment to the All-Wales Anti-Racism Action Plan.
- The dedication and passion of staff networks to ensure the Council was inclusive and supportive.

This work would continue to progress over the next 12 months. The Annual Report set clear priorities for the next period based on a review of the workforce data and progress against Equality Objectives.

As Chair of the Council's Strategic Equalities member and officer group the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation continued to support the delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan and ensure that the Council was innovative in its approach and effectively involving key stakeholders.

Decision:

That Cabinet approved the attached final monitoring report and published it on the Council's website, in accordance with statutory deadlines.

8 NCC External Pressures - Cost of Living

The Leader presented the final report, which provided an update on the external pressures facing the Council, this month's update included the cost-of-living crisis, housing and homelessness pressures and a potential increase in rates of COVID-19.

Links to national research illustrated how the cost-of-living crisis and the effects of the pandemic were impacting residents, schools, and employers across the whole of Wales.

Locally, officers and partners were accessing, facilitating, and promoting local and national schemes and funding to plan the financial support available as the winter months drew near.

Officers were also working closely with health colleagues during the upcoming winter months to help mitigate the impact of general winter pressures on the NHS and social care services whilst monitoring and responding to concerns over the increasing rates of COVID-19.

The Leader of the Council and Chair of OneNewport, continued to advocate for partnership working as being vital for supporting residents and businesses and the report contained information on how collaborative working enabled access to support, advice and guidance to those experiencing difficulties during this time.

The Leader took this opportunity to urge residents experiencing difficulties to please contact the Council for information and signposting on the advice and support available; this could be done in person, by phone or by visiting the support and advice pages on the website.

Turning to the report, the Leader was pleased to share that the additional cost-of-living advisors funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund were now in post and started building on existing partnerships to build a citywide cost-of-living offer.

To be able to challenge and address the inequality of poverty across the city in a sustainable way, a strategic officer group was tasked with looking at poverty in its widest sense and to support the recommendations highlighted in the recent Building a Fairer Gwent report by the Institute of Health Equity.

Challenges and pressures on housing and homelessness across Newport were detailed within the report, alongside information on how these were being addressed through different initiatives.

With the introduction of the Streamlined Asylum Process (SAP) by the Home Office; a cross-service officer group was meeting to assess the potential impact of this on existing significant homelessness system and service pressures.

In relation to education, Newport Education Welfare Service continued to work closely with all schools in Newport to support the improvement in rates of learner attendance and re-set a more positive school attendance culture across the city.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Harvey mentioned that residents were still needing services and food banks. Families were struggling to pay for essential items. Councillor Harvey echoed the Leader's comments to reach out to the Council to get help for signposting to the relevant officers.
- Councillor Batrouni referred to services led by Councillor Clarke and the team and paid testament to their hard work, meeting challenges with dignity and grace as well as facing immense pressure under the current climate.
- Councillor Clarke thanked Councillor Batrouni for his kind words and agreed that times were challenging. All the officers involved were trying their best to support residents. Councillor Clarke added that with the strength of colleagues and the Leader everyone was doing their best to deal with this. Councillor Clarke also reiterated Councillor Harvey's comments that Councillors and Council officers were just a phone call away.
- The Leader highlighted that the significant majority of staff lived in Newport, and they were also facing challenges.
- Councillor Davies referred to women struggling in families who were unable to afford period products which the Welsh Government were funding, lack of these products also led to non-attendance at schools.
- Councillor Hughes also mentioned the religious communities that provided to foodbanks and thanked them for their help.

Decision:

Cabinet considered the contents of the report on the Council's activity to respond to the external factors on Newport's communities, businesses, and Council services.

9 **Work Programme**

This was the regular monthly report on the work programme.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed the Work Programme.