

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Date: 8 November 2023

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors E Stowell-Corten (Chair), B Davies, P Drewett, F Hussain, M Pimm, A Screen and K Whitehead

In Attendance: Councillor Laura Lacey (Cabinet Member for Infrastructure), Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director – Transformation and Corporate Centre, Newport City Council), Tracy McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation), Lyndon Watkins (Managing Director for Newport Norse), Mark McSweeney (Director – Professional and Contract Services, Newport Norse), Sarah Davies (Head of Asset Management and Valuation, Newport Norse), Janice Dent (Policy and Partnership Manager), Helen Gordon (Senior Policy and Partnership Officer, Dr Carl Williams – Local Policing Area Commander, Chief Superintendent – Gwent Police (Co-Chair), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser) and Simon Richards (Governance Officer)

Apologies: Councillors C Baker-Westhead, J Jones and A Morris

1 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

2 **Minutes of the previous meetings held on 4th October 2023 and 10th October 2023**

The Minutes of the previous meetings held on 4th and 10th October 2023 were held as a true record.

3 **Norse Joint Venture Partnership - Strategy and Performance Review**

Invitees:

- Rhys Cornwall – Strategic Director – Transformation and Corporate Centre, Newport City Council
- Tracy McKim – Head of People, Policy and Transformation
- Lyndon Watkins – Managing Director for Newport Norse
- Mark McSweeney – Director – Professional and Contract Services, Newport Norse
- Sarah Davies – Head of Asset Management and Valuation, Newport Norse
- Councillor Laura Lacey – Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

The Managing Director for Newport Norse gave an overview of the report.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee enquired about the number of full-time employees employed from Newport versus the Cardiff Capital Region and whether these had been double counted. The Director – Professional and Contract Services, Newport Norse informed the Committee that they have 147 employees from Newport and 199 from the Cardiff Capital Region. The Committee requested clarification of these figures.
- The Committee noted the impressive increase of turnover in the last year and queried how it affects large projects like Bassaleg School. The Managing Director for Newport Norse informed the Committee that only professional services are provided for Bassaleg School, which helped the turnover, but it is not the main driver for turnover. The Managing Director also noted that they have had projects where they have acted as the main contractor, which produced larger turnover.
- The Committee noted that the rebate received by Newport City Council (NCC) was around £700,000 and asked how it compared to the rebate received by Norse. The Managing Director explained that under the old model, Norse Group received the first £156,000 and the residual was split 50:50. Under the contract extension, NCC now receives the first £156,000, and Norse Group and NCC split the residual 50:50, which is approximately £800,000.
- The Committee highlighted that the breakdown of diversity and equality data previously requested was not included in the report. The Managing Director apologized and assured the Committee that this data can be included in the report going forward. The Managing Director also informed the Committee that their current workforce is around 300-320 and is predominantly female. They also noted that over the last year, most new hires had been female, however the company was not as diverse with regards to other characteristics.
- The Committee requested to see data on the gender pay gap as it was discussed in the previous Committee last year. The Managing Director informed the Committee that this information was captured approximately 2-3 years ago; however, they were unsure what data was included due to there being two different companies within the group at that time. The Managing Director agreed to check this information and provide to the Committee.
- The Committee highlighted the positive aspect that staff were getting paid the Real Living Wage as specified by the Living Wage Foundation. The Managing Director informed the Committee that it was a condition of the original contract set out with Newport City Council and noted that if the pay was benchmarked, it would be higher than similar Local Authorities.
- The Committee asked how feedback is captured. The Managing Director informed the Committee that this was done in two ways. Firstly, when operational staff undertake work, they have a feedback mechanism on their handheld devices that capture client feedback immediately, followed up with a survey. There is also an annual survey that takes place within schools and other Council premises. The Managing Director assured the Committee that all complaints are investigated by a member of staff who is independent from the operation, and an action plan is put in place if required..
- The Committee were pleased to hear that paper-based feedback forms were also provided as it reached residents who were not online but still use Norse services. The Managing Director informed the Committee that reward and recognition ceremonies were held quarterly, and colleagues were presented with certificates and a voucher for good feedback. They also noted that they try to match up with visits from the Chief Operating Officer, which helped keep morale high and encouraged staff to do good work.

- The Committee asked whether apprenticeships were done through the Job Centre. The Managing Director informed the Committee that regular sessions were carried out with the Job Centre and schools to get the very best people. They also highlighted a scheme where Norse staff attended pupil forums in schools and targeted students currently struggling with their GCSEs to carry out work experience 1-2 days a week, with a view to providing an apprenticeship at the end. This scheme had proved to be very successful.
- The Committee asked what apprenticeships are available. The Director for Professional and Contract Services informed the Committee that they offer apprenticeships in Electrical and Mechanical teams and currently have 4 apprenticeships running. The Managing Director also highlighted that they have an office apprentice and recruit using different schemes, not just relying on the apprenticeship scheme. They noted that one of the limitations on the scheme is placing the apprentice with someone who has the time to tutor them.
- The Committee noted that in the report, turnover is approximately £25 million and asked how much inflation had impacted that turnover. The Managing Director explained that inflation in construction was around 10%, which has had a significant impact. They also mentioned that there had been a fluctuation in inflation and demand for building materials. The Managing Director noted that while inflation was a factor, the majority of the turnover is from actual work as the demand from schools had increased.
- The Committee asked how many full-time and part-time staff are currently in post. The Managing Director explained that they currently have around 320 staff, with around 150 of those being part-time. The Committee also asked whether staff have had pay increases in line with inflation, and the Director for Professional and Contract Services explained that employees get a pay rise agreed and backdated the same as Council employees.
- The Committee stated that Newport City Council used to manage their own assets and the assets of other Local Authorities before it was tendered out to Newport Norse. The Managing Director stated that the partnership with Newport City Council had been a Joint Venture since 2014. They manage the assets on behalf of Newport City Council and provide services to other Local Authorities where a profit is made, which comes back into the Joint Venture. The Managing Director explained that if you look at £1.5 million profit on a £25 million turnover, it is about 6%, with 3% going back to Newport City Council, which is lower than any normal commercial arrangement.
- The Committee enquired how Newport Norse's environmental practices align with Newport City Council's ambitions and environmental practices as they could not find any net-zero policies in the report. The Director of Professional and Contract Services explained that they were audited on their environmental standard and were ISO accredited. They highlighted that most of the subcontractors they employ were small businesses in the locality. The Managing Director also noted that they were gradually changing their fleet of vans as leases came to an end, but there was currently up to an 18-month waiting period for electric vans. They noted that regular Joint Venture meetings take place with Norse colleagues, and climate change is on the agenda, with Norse colleagues involved in Newport City Council's climate change workstreams.
- The Committee asked whether any schools or Council buildings had been impacted by Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). The Director of Professional and Contract Services informed the Committee that their local building surveying team were able to survey the entire school estate and react quickly. Only one school

was found to have RAAC which was outside of the parameters set by the Welsh Government and the school reopened last week. The Managing Director assured the Committee that risk was low level as RAAC is normally found in roof structures, however it wasn't on this occasion and was supported by steel supports. The Managing Director emphasised that a lot more work was being undertaken to future-proof schools.

- The Committee asked whether liaisons have taken place with school governors. The Director of Professional and Contract Services informed the Committee that an annual Governors' presentation took place last month. Regular meetings also took place with headteachers, however, due to action short of strike, these had been suspended recently. The Committee queried whether these presentations have been given to governing bodies rather than individual schools governors. The Director explained that they did not typically attend individual school governors' meetings, but would be happy to do so if invited.
- The Committee asked for examples of the £5000 gifts in kind noted in the report. The Managing Director explained that the Group had a scheme where if their staff are involved in community organisations, there are sponsorships given out at times. The Director of Professional and Contract Services explained that the £5000 in the report is related specifically to the Bassaleg School construction contract. The Managing Director also stated that donations are made to St David's Hospice, and they support staff taking part in an annual bike ride along with other sponsorship events.
- The Committee noted that the report mentioned the number of volunteering hours provided to support local community projects and asked whether this is based on the employee's rate of pay. The Managing Director explained that there are a number of projects they have done, and there is sometimes a gap between the aspirations of the end-user and what the funds will allow, so they have allowed staff volunteer hours. The Committee noted that it would be useful to see examples of the volunteer work undertaken as last year the importance of community work was mentioned, but the information provided was vague.
- The Committee asked how many people have been employed from the locality to carry out the St Andrew's School and Transporter Bridge projects. The Director of Professional and Contract Services advised that the KPIs on that will be included in next year's report as they ongoing projects. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation informed Committee that Norse have regularly attended Cabinet Meetings.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions

- The Committee noted that diversity and equality data that was requested during the previous committee meeting is currently missing from the report. The Committee requested to receive additional equality data, including information on age, ethnicity and workforce composition within the organisation.
- The Committee was pleased to learn that the partnership offers paper-based feedback options for service users, recognising that some individuals prefer this method over online feedback or are unable to use online resources. Members also appreciated Norse's provision of award and recognition events for staff, which contribute to maintaining high morale.

- Members sought clarification regarding the National TOM's Wales reference **NTW1 - the number of direct employees (FTE) hired or retained within the NCC Boundary**. While it was stated that 80% of employees were Newport residents, Members discussed that the figure would actually be less than half (147 out of 346), approximately 43%. Members also requested an updated print version reflecting the correct amount.
- Members noted that the report's information on community work was vague. They requested specific examples of community work undertaken and instances where staff have engaged in volunteer work.

4 Safer Newport Draft Strategic Needs Assessment 2023

Invitees:

- Rhys Cornwall – Strategic Director – Transformation and Corporate
- Janice Dent – Policy and Partnership Manager
- Helen Gordon – Senior Policy and Partnership Officer
- Rhian Tilley – Partnership Officer
- Dr Carl Williams – Local Policing Area Commander, Chief Superintendent – Gwent Police (Co-Chair)

The Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate gave an overview of the report. The Policy and Partnership Manager presented the report to the Committee. The Senior Policy and Partnership Officer highlighted the important points within the report.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee appreciated the positive aspect of the draft report regarding Community Cohesion, acknowledging that it is a work in progress.
- The Committee expressed concern about the omission of rural areas, particularly Newport East and Newport West, in the report. The Policy and Partnership Manager assured the Committee that efforts had been made to engage with residents in rural areas and gather relevant information. They also mentioned meeting with the Community Council Liaison Committee. The Strategic Director emphasised the significance of the report reaching the Scrutiny Committee, highlighting that it is important to consider the impact on residents rather than solely comparing crime levels between the city centre and rural areas.
- The Committee commended the report's comprehensiveness and the use of graphs to present feedback in a more visual and understandable format. The Policy and Partnership Manager explained that extensive research was conducted on other Strategic Needs Reports to determine the best way to present data.
- The Committee enquired about whether the issues raised by residents in their feedback have been addressed. The Strategic Director explained that there are currently six priority areas in the ongoing work, and responsiveness to emerging themes is crucial. Feedback will be incorporated into the current work being undertaken, and there is a close working relationship between Gwent Police and Newport City Council.

- The Committee noted that residents have expressed concerns about the time it takes to resolve issues. The Strategic Director clarified that the time required to address issues depends on the nature of the problem. Legal processes must be followed for issues related to premises. The Committee acknowledged the difficulty in conveying this to residents. The Policy and Partnership Manager mentioned the contextual safeguarding approach, which involved considering wider determinants and risk factors and exploring alternative interventions beyond making arrests to change behaviours.
- The Committee suggested that ward councillors provide feedback and solutions to address problem areas specific to their wards. The Strategic Director agreed that engagement with ward councillors is a good idea, and the data can be analysed to create an action plan.
- The Committee discussed the increase in modern-day slavery shown in the report and its possible causes. The Strategic Director explained that several factors contribute to this issue, including Newport's transient population, location as an asylum dispersal area, additional resources dedicated to combating modern-day slavery, and an increase in reporting. Understanding the reasons behind the increase is important, rather than focusing solely on figures.
- The Committee noted that Newport is a unique city in Wales and proposed finding other cities in the UK with similar characteristics to assess whether the issues faced by Newport were unique or common. The Strategic Director informed the Committee that such comparisons had been made, and Newport is not experiencing anything that is not a national issue. Strategies had been shared with cities of similar size and facing similar challenges. The Local Policing Area Commander mentioned the work done to promote the importance of reporting and the analysis of demographics and strategies of other forces with a similar makeup. They cited Cleveland as an example of an area that has been examined for comparable crime types and effective interventions.
- The Committee highlighted the presence of anti-social behaviour in both the city centre and estates and expressed the view that engagement, particularly through social media, was crucial. The Strategic Director assured the Committee that addressing anti-social behaviour was a top priority, and cost analysis was being conducted to determine the most effective approach. Efforts were being made to minimise the loss of police officers from the city centre through triaging measures during peak nighttime hours.
- The Committee raised concerns about reaching communities with language barriers during consultations. The Senior Policy and Partnership Officer explained that bilingual surveys had been conducted, but there has been limited outreach in languages other than English and Welsh. However, the consultation process could be adapted to include other languages as well.
- The Committee discussed the emerging theme of e-bikes and e-scooters being misused on active travel routes and the challenges faced by the Police and Newport City Council in addressing this issue. The Chair informed the Committee that there was currently no imminent legislation specifically addressing this issue. The Local Policing Area Commander highlighted the difficulty of dealing with this issue, not only in Newport but in other areas as well. The Police had seized over 100 e-bikes and scooters in Gwent this year and worked with various partners to prevent misuse. The Committee suggested that clear legislation and education on the legality and purchase of e-bikes and scooters would be helpful. The Policy and Partnership

Manager noted ongoing efforts to educate the public on the legality of these vehicles and to provide guidance to parents regarding their purchase.

- The Committee emphasised that not all users of e-bikes and scooters were criminals. They mentioned that as 70% of Newport is rural, it is important to provide areas for young people to use these bikes. The Committee suggested that proceeds of crime could be used for this purpose.
- The Committee proposed using empty properties in the city centre as triage centres on busy days. The Strategic Director mentioned the existence of a Safer City Centre Group, which was considering this idea. Funding from the Home Office has facilitated the establishment of staff and resources for this purpose, and information would be circulated. However, some preparatory work needed to be done before setting up the triage centre. The Policy and Partnership Manager offered to attend ward meetings if required.

The Committee thanked officers for attending.

Conclusions

- Members praised the comprehensive report, particularly the helpfulness of the feedback graphs included in the draft. They appreciated the use of graphs over figures, as it improved visibility and ease of understanding.
- Members highlighted the absence of mention of rural areas within the draft report and noted that the types of antisocial behaviour in rural communities can differ from what is observed within the city centre. Members would like to see more inclusion of rural areas in the final version of the report.
- The Committee requested to receive the Police report that was conducted about the Cleveland-area city, which offers a comparison to Newport.
- The Committee requested to receive the latest version of the Safer Newport report.
- The Committee observed that the consultation was currently available only in English and Welsh. Members requested the translation of the consultation into additional languages, such as Urdu and Arabic. They also enquired about the plans to engage with harder-to-reach populations in Newport and requested that further consideration be given to meaningful engagement with those communities.
- Members discussed the anonymous reporting of anti-social behaviour by residents and expressed interest in receiving figures on the number of anonymous reports received by Police.

5 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

Invitee:

- Neil Barnett – Scrutiny Adviser

a) Forward Work Programme Update

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next two committee meetings:

Wednesday 6th December, the agenda item;

- Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

Wednesday 7th February 2024, the agenda items;

- Area Planning Board (Substance Misuse)
- Sencom Regional Support Services for Schools

Councillor Pimm gave his apologies for the December meeting.

a) Action Sheet

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the action sheet to the Committee. It was advised that Flood Risk Strategy was being renewed in February 2024 and would be discussed at the Performance Scrutiny Committee – Place and Corporate. The Scrutiny and Governance Team would look to arrange training for all Member in relation to flood risk in the city.

The meeting terminated at 7.03 pm