

Performance Scrutiny Committee Place and Corporate 22 Jan 2018

at 4pm

Conclusions and Comments:

Comments to Cabinet on following Proposals:

Note: The Head of Service was unable to attend the Scrutiny Committee due to an emergency. The Committee understood this, and wished to thank the Officers within Street Scene who had to cover the meeting at very short notice.

As these Officers were not the owners of the business cases, there were naturally some questions from Members that they were not able to answer. This is reflected in the comments as the Committee felt unable to draw conclusions on the achievability, impact and risk of some of the proposals, as the information within the business cases was not sufficient.

SS181902 - Closure of Public Conveniences

The Committee had concerns that the Business Case was not complete as:

- The impact of this proposal upon disabled people was not sufficiently mitigated in the Business Case.
- The Business Case did not contain information regarding usage or consultation with users, particularly those with access issues such as disabled or elderly users.
- How near and the location of alternative facilities needed to be identified and signposted and Members suggested this could be done via Maindee Unlimited /other businesses / Business Improvement District partners.
- There was no evidence in the Business Case of what potential solutions other Cities or neighbouring local authorities have used to address similar issues to those identified in the business case, and the rationalisation and identification of alternative provision in the community.
- With the recent City Summit in mind, this proposal was not conducive with the growth and development of Newport and attracting visitors, as it was the view of the Committee that this proposal would have a negative impact on the image of the city.
- Need to develop Business Cases to fully explain the impact on citizens, and what consultation has taken place. It would be beneficial to engage earlier in the development of proposals in future to ensure meaningful involvement when developing the proposals.

WS181904 - Reducing telephone and face to face services within Customer Services

The Committee had concerns about:

- The Loss of 0.88 FTE face to face contact and the impact on users as a result.
- Issues regarding moving people online from face to face or telephone contact including:
 - Computer literacy / those unable to access computers ;
 - The difficulty of navigating the Council website;
 - The City free WiFi is inconsistent and crashes a lot.

In order to mitigate the impact upon citizens, the Committee suggested the exploration of:

- Live chats and ring back service as offered by other call centres;
- Assistance in libraries for citizens to access computers, and;
- The potential for sharing call centre resources with a partner e.g. Newport City Homes.

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SS181905 - Introduce parking charges within city parks

The Committee welcomed the investment in Belle Vue Car park, but had concerns that the Business Case was weak due to the lack of evidence of consultation with users particularly on the pricing structure. Furthermore, the current business operator located in the park had not received the correct information.

The Committee recommended that:

- More detailed consultation and communication with existing regular users be undertaken urgently before introduction and particularly on pricing strategy, eg. for event customers, Bowls Team tournaments, etc.
- The rollout of this proposal to other parks be removed from this proposal and when necessary, should be the subject of future separate fully costed and consulted upon business cases / proposals.
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SS181901 - Composting at Docks Way

The Committee welcomed this proposal to make a saving and bring the service in house.

SS181903 - Review of Back Office Cemetery Operations and facilities in some parks

The Committee noted that there is information that is not included within the Business Case, namely:

- The impact on citizens is not accurately reflected - under the new arrangements an enquiry by a member of the public making about burial records for the City's cemeteries would be dealt with centrally via telephone or an appointment in the Civic Centre. This would present a change to the current provision, and as such would have an impact on citizens, not being able to access the burial records at the respective cemetery that the relevant grave is located.
- Within the summary in the Business Case, it is indicated that the proposal includes the closure of the toilet facilities in the Cemetery. However, this is not referenced in the 'Impact upon Citizens' nor the 'Risk / Mitigation' sections. Closure of the public toilets in the cemeteries would impact upon citizens and this impact should be explained within the Business case.
- There is no mention of the 36% increase in fees to £15 for 30 minutes for an administrative research of burial records which is included in Street Scene Fees and Charges schedule later in the report.

NS181901 - Council Tax - Increase Council Tax by a further 1% from current assumption of 4% to total of 5%

While the Committee realised the challenges faced by the Council and that the Council Tax had been frozen for a number of years, it was concerned about the impact on citizens to pay the increased Council Tax.

The Committee recognised the issues and noted that this proposal would be debated at Council.

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Comments to Cabinet on any of following Fees and Charges:

Regeneration Investment and Housing:

The Committee stressed that proper communication and consultation with the service of facilities users / fee payers upon proposed fee and charges increases is necessary to feed into the annual review of fees and charges.

Streetscene and City Services:

The Committee welcomed:

- No charge for the interment of a child up to the age of eighteen (from sixteen previously) and recommended that this is publicised;
- the freeze on car parking charges to encourage visitors.

The Committee clarified that the 36 % increase of the charge for an administrative research of burial records to £15 is for 30 minutes. (This wasn't mentioned in the Business Case for the which includes the centralisation of burial records above.)

The Committee was surprised at the under occupancy of allotments, given their rise in popularity in other areas and suggested promotion to younger demographics via social media to increase uptake and revenue.

Corporate Services:

The Committee had concerns that between this year and last year, the pay award was 2% but costs were increasing an average of 4%.

The Committee suggested the promotion of the house naming in order to maximise the opportunity of the building boom, to increase this income stream.

Comments upon the Budget process or public engagement to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee:

Public Engagement

- Concerns about the levels of consultation with citizens / service users and poor evidence of this within business cases.
- Overall engagement and consultation for the 2018-19 Budget was poor with one Community Engagement Event planned in the Market in the daytime compared with a number of events in previous years. Members referred to past engagement when they had circulated hundreds of forms to constituents and respondents and Officers had attended Ward Meetings.
- The engagement was not as good as in previous years, but recognised it could be partly as a result of budget fatigue.
- It was difficult to find the budget consultation online and there was a long form to complete which wasn't easy to use and off-putting, while constituents would prefer a short form to comment on a single or few issues.
- A Member commented that sending a twitter link to constituents required searching back a number of days to find a budget # and that other social media could be used more to engage.

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- The Council website wasn't easy to navigate for citizens wishing to engage and that it needed a redesign to provide easier access to engagement.

Budget Process

- A Member commented that the lack of information demonstrating the budget modelling process didn't provide a justifiable explanation of the 4% starting point for fees and charges and examples of how this was reviewed and adjusted for individual fees and charges.

Note: Due an emergency, the Head of Streetscene was not able to attend the Scrutiny Committee. The Strategic Director – Place was also not able to attend.

The Committee appreciated that emergencies happen and Officers had been asked to attend at short notice, however stressed the importance of the appropriate Strategic Director, Head of Service or relevant Officer(s) knowledgeable about each proposal / business case attending Scrutiny to answer Members questions about each, before the Committee can conclude.

This impacted upon the Committees ability to draw conclusions on these proposals. If the Business Cases were more complete and robust in particular regarding impacts, risk and mitigation and sufficient consultation activity included, this would be less of an issue. The information that is contained within the business cases should contain sufficient information to ensure meaningful engagement with the public.