

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 13 April 2015

Time: 11.00 am

Present: Councillors R Bright (Chair), P Cockeram, K Critchley, D Davies, G Giles, R Poole, J Richards, R Truman, M Whitcutt and D Wilcox

In attendance: Mr W Godfrey (Chief Executive) Ms S Davies and Mr M Nicholson (Corporate Directors)

1 Apologies

No apologies were submitted

2 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at this stage

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2015 were confirmed as a true record

4 Welsh Government White Paper "Power to Local People"

On 3rd February 2015 the Welsh Government published the Power to Local People White Paper for consultation with a closing date of April 28th.

The White Paper is a very detailed document which sets out the Welsh Government's vision for the future of local government in Wales, with an underlying principle of giving 'power to local people' through policies of participative democracy whereby communities can better engage and participate in decision making, service development and delivery.

The proposals were focused on a range of themes that were identified in the report to Cabinet. The White Paper and accompanying documents can be found at the following link:

<http://gov.wales/consultations/localgovernment/power-to-local-people/?status=open&lang=en>

The Cabinet was informed that the White Paper includes a wide ranging set of proposals which include some firm policy recommendations and less developed points for consideration which may or may not be taken forward in Welsh Government's future programme of reform.

A large number of the proposals related to corporate governance arrangements and internal process such as performance and improvement, audit and regulation. Welsh Government's

intention appears to be to drive greater consistency and standardise what is considered to be best practice across Wales.

The Welsh Local Government Association highlights a number of highly controversial points about political representation raised by Welsh Government.

Most notably these included:

- A reduction in full-time Cabinet roles and the introduction of part-time deputy Cabinet Member roles
- A reduction in the number of Councillors in Wales in line with the rest of the UK
- Term limits for Leaders (2 terms), Cabinet Members (2 terms) and Councillors (5 terms)
- Five year fixed elections cycles and consideration of elections phased in thirds
- A review to reduce the level of remuneration for Leaders, Councillors and Cabinet Members
- Consideration of a power of recall for Councillors in line with proposals for MPs
- Similar term limits and salary control proposals are raised for Chief Executives and senior officers

As to the response from the City Council, the Chair of the Cabinet had agreed this would be a matter for the full Council as it affects all members.

The Cabinet broadly supported the concept of reform of local government but matters of detail needed to be carefully considered. Cabinet Members considered the WLGA response as outlined in the report was broadly consistent with the view of Newport City Council.

There were some concerns about the online questionnaire and the need for a sophisticated analysis of responses. It was agreed that the Cabinet would ask who designed the questionnaire and the academic validity of the response. Cabinet Members considered the questionnaire did not give residents the opportunity to provide a view on how current arrangements work. There is a lack of free text space in the questionnaire.

Detailed responses to the specific points were set out in the report identifying which proposals were supported and which were not. This response was generally supported by the Cabinet and recommended for consideration by the Council.

Decisions

- I. To recommend that the Council endorses the proposed response set out in the Cabinet report.
- II. To ask an independent expert to comment on the questionnaire

5 Improvement Plan 2015/16

The purpose of the Improvement Plan is to enable the authority to evidence that it has discharged its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement (Local Government Measure 2009). In order to clearly demonstrate that the Council is fulfilling this duty, eight discrete priority areas have been identified in which measurable improvement should be demonstrated during 2015/16.

The eight Improvement Objectives (which relate directly to the priorities of the Corporate Plan) were selected by Cabinet in January 2015 after consideration of consultation responses.

Scrutiny meetings were held in February to enable Members' to input into the Improvement Plan 15/16. Feedback from Scrutiny is provided below.

The eight Improvement Objectives 2015/16 are linked according to themes identified in the report as:

- A Caring City
- A Learning & Working City
- A greener and healthier city
- A safer city

The proposals had been subject to public consultation and carefully considered by the Scrutiny Committees and the views of the Scrutiny Committees were set out in full in the report and considered by Cabinet.

It was confirmed that the criteria used for setting targets were: Never to be in the fourth quartile; Never to be below Welsh average; and improvement year on year. It was important for Cabinet members to monitor progress on the objectives.

Decision

To recommend adoption of the Improvement Plan 2015/16 by the Council

6 Risk Update

As part of its governance arrangements the Council has a risk management strategy and a corporate risk register is monitored twice a year. Through the Corporate Assessment these documents were recognised by the Wales Audit Office although the conclusions of the Corporate Assessment were that risk management arrangements within the organisation are in need of improvement.

The Risk Management Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in September 2014. It was updated to reflect a revised approach to risk management and improved processes for identifying and escalating risk.

Potential benefits of an improved risk management approach are improved decision making, avoidance of shocks and the ability to mitigate threats and take advantage of opportunities.

The Cabinet was provided with the latest update of the Corporate Risk Register. There are eight risks identified in the register, 1 high risks and 7 medium risks.

Members were informed that since the last update assessments of 4 risks remain unchanged, 1 risk had increased and 3 risks had reduced.

Cabinet Members were concerned about the impact of diminishing resources on the ability to meet the requirements set down by the regulators and the need to ensure that resources were directed at services to residents.

Decisions

To request a further update at the June 2015 meeting

7 Review of the Commercial Estate

The Cabinet was informed that the Council's Commercial Estate requires defining to enable the Local Authority to review and maximise the commercial value and efficiency of its assets.

Cabinet was informed that given the financial challenge that the Council currently faces, and will continue to face for the foreseeable future, it is important that the Council assets are used in the most efficient way. Lack of attention to asset management can result in money being wasted and services failing to meet user needs. Property should be viewed as a strategic resource and challenged as to how well it contributes to the core objectives. To this end a review of the management of the estate was proposed.

The Cabinet Member for Human Resources and Assets moved an amendment to the original recommendation "That Cabinet requires that there is an urgent detailed review by Newport Norse of their management of the Estate in order to achieve the best commercial viability and completed in six months (with the expectation that it will be sooner than this)."

The Cabinet Member for Human Resources also expected to be provided with regular detailed briefings as work progresses

Decisions

That Cabinet requires that there is an urgent detailed review by Newport Norse of their management of the Estate in order to achieve the best commercial viability and completed in six months (with the expectation that it will be sooner than this).

8 Discretionary Housing Payments Policy

A report was withdrawn to allow further discussion with the appropriate Cabinet Member. Cabinet Members did not wish to delay a decision, however, and therefore agreed to delegate the final decision on the adoption of the proposals to the Chair of the Cabinet.

Decisions

To delegate the final decision on the proposals to the Chair of the Cabinet

9 Trading Standards Services - Collaborative Delivery Arrangements

Cabinet considered a report on 23 October 2013 about proposals for a Gwent Trading Standards Project. Cabinet at that time approved participation in the proposed Project, subject to a viable business case.

Members were informed that the Business Case had been developed on the basis of a number of assumptions which had not been fulfilled. Therefore the proposals to establish a Gwent Trading Standards Service in accordance with the Business Case were no longer recommended.

Decisions

Not to proceed with the establishment of a Gwent Trading Standards Service for the reasons explained in the report