

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 8 October 2018

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Evans (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, G Berry, J Clarke, M Cornelious, K Critchley and D Fouweather

In Attendance: Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change), Keir Duffin (Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing), Alastair Hopkins (Senior Finance Business Partner), Paul Jones (Head of Streetscene and City Services), Beverly Owen (Strategic Director (Place)), Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation) and Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser)

Apologies: Councillors I Hayat and J Richards

1 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

2 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 July 2018**

The minutes of the meeting held of 9 July were approved as a true and accurate record.

3 **Recommendations Monitoring - Budget Proposals 2018-19**

Attendees:

- Bev Owen – Strategic Director – Place
- Paul Jones – Head of City Services
- Alastair Hopkins – Senior Finance Business Partner

The Head of City Services presented an overview of the report providing an update on the recommendations made by the Committee on the Budget Proposals for 2018-19 at its meeting on 22 January 2018.

SS181902 – Closure of Public Conveniences

The Head of Service advised that a full years savings had been achieved. The public convenience in Caerleon had been reopened, which had been funded by the Caerleon Pavilion. There had been no evidence to show that the closures had had an impact on disabled users. Most toilets needed further work to be brought back to standard, whereas 3 toilets had been temporarily close due to antisocial behaviour. Correspondence with business regarding advertising alternative provision was carried out; however no positive responses had been received.

Members asked the following:

- Members felt that the reopening of one of the sites (Caerleon) while the remaining 5 facilities had been lost was unfair. Members also commented that within the report, the Officer's response to the Scrutiny's Comment 'Has the locality and distance to alternative facilities been advertised?' was weak. This response should have listed what the Council actually did to consult with local businesses. Consultation should have started earlier, and with those who would be effected the most. This was a lesson for the Council to take forward in this year's consultation on the budget round.

The Head of City Services advised the Committee that while consultation could have been completed earlier, the responses may not have been more positive. Actions from recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee in January had also been undertaken.

The Strategic Director advised that the Tourism Team had been active in consulting with local businesses, with further activity following the letters sent and there had been more response, however more communication was needed on how the community could themselves respond to long term provision in the area.

- Was there confidence that the savings would be achieved? The Committee was advised that the savings would be achieved and there was just an overlap in business rate rebate the cost of which was a few hundred pounds.

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

The Head of Service advised that this was delayed although recommendations from Scrutiny had been taken to look at working with Newport City Homes and other agencies. Conversations had been held all across City Services and were especially helpful with cleansing and water issues. The Newport City Council app would be released soon which would make accessing services online more easily along with amended web forms.

Members asked the following:

- Was work on the Council app on track, and how would people be encouraged to download the app? Members were advised that discussions were currently being held regarding how to get people to download the app. It was advised that the app would be cost neutral. It was also advised that the development team would be arranging a Member Briefing upon the app.
- Had telephone and face to face services been reduced yet, and what work had been taken? Members were told there been work undertaken by the CIT Panel such as surveys, but the Officer would have to check the specifics and circulate the information to Members of the Committee via the Scrutiny Officer.

SS181905 – Introduce parking charges within city parks

The Officers advised that this had been partially achieved, however due to staff sickness orders were unable to be completed in time. Pay machines have been installed and charging started a few weeks ago but it was difficult to judge as it was seasonal so a few more weeks were needed to judge. The Leisure & Environment Services Manager was collating data regarding car parking capacity for Tredegar Park and Fourteen Locks ready for the 2019/20 budget consultation.

Members asked the following:

- What physical changes would be made to the car parking in Belle Vue Park and when? Members were advised that there would be improvements to widen the car park and create more parking spaces, once Cadw had responded, and the work was planned to take place before the end of the financial year.
- Reference was made to part of the reasoning for this proposal being to deter people using the free parking all day for work when it was intended for park users throughout the day and the reasoning for charging for parking in Tredegar Park was questioned. It was advised that the original proposal on introducing parking charges within city parks in principal included Belle Vue Park as Phase 1, there had been no decision made about Tredegar Park. Phase 2 would continue to address funding the current costs of maintaining free parks and specific future proposals would be reported back to Scrutiny.
- Were the team proactively recover parking fines, and would fines be shown in the accounts? Members were advised that the figure would be shown in the accounts and there was currently a 95% recovery rate.
- Members commented that the Head of Service's introduction stated that data was being collated regarding car parking capacity for Tredegar Park and Fourteen Locks. This information had not been included in the Officer Response in Appendix 1 and Members stated that this information would have provided a more complete picture.
- Concerns were raised that car parking charges in Tredegar Park could put people off those taking part in sport. It was queried whether Tredegar Park had been included in the original proposal consultation. It was clarified that the decision to introduce charging for car parking in parks in principle had already been made, but any specific proposal would be reported to Scrutiny.
- Would fines be ring fenced to ensure fines were spent upon maintenance of the related park? It was clarified that income from charges and fines collected would be offset in the related Budget and be used towards the maintenance of the related park. A covenant on Belle Vue Park ensured that income from car parking there had to be spent upon Belle Vue Park.
- It was queried how much outlay would be required to bring the car parks up to a reasonable standard? It was advised that part of the data gathering was to understand how many cars could park there.

SS191901 – Composting at Docks Way

The Head of Service advised two members of staff had been employed, operation had commenced in July, materials were being shredded and health and safety processes had been developed.

SS181903 – Review of Back Officer Cemetery Operations and facilities in some parks

The Head of Service advised that there had been savings in electricity bills with the exception of Belle Vue Park.

Conclusions:

The Committee noted the Officer responses in relation to the recommendations made by the Committee at the 22 January meeting upon the 2018-19 Budget proposals and made the following comments:

SS181902 – Closure of Public Conveniences:

- Members discussed the previous engagement in detail in the meeting, and were concerned that issues had been identified previously relating to the Council not involving and engaging with affected people, nor at an early enough stage in the process. Members seek assurance that future proposals, including the proposals within 2019/20 Draft Budget, will involve those affected earlier, and learn from and improve upon past engagement.
- Members agreed that the number of businesses approached in Caerleon to ask if they would consider allowing their facilities to be used as an alternative, should have been evidenced within the report to provide a fuller picture of the scale of the exercise.

SS181905 – Introduce parking charges within city parks:

- More comprehensive detail should have been provided within the report in the Officer Update upon Scrutiny's Comments and Conclusions upon this 2018-19 Budget Proposal.
- Lessons should be learned from the consultation process upon charging with users of Belle Vue car parks when consulting upon future proposals for charging for car parking at Tredegar Park, Fourteen Locks and other sites. Belle Vue Car Park users should have been made aware of the positives that the charging would deter commuter all day parking and free up those spaces for park users and that there would be investment in improvements to the car park. Members seek assurance that future proposals, including the proposals within 2019/20 Draft Budget, will involve those affected earlier, and learn from and improve upon past engagement.
- The Committee welcomes the confirmation provided at this meeting that future car parking proposals in other Parks will be reported to Scrutiny pre-decision, and that the lessons should be learned from past engagement for any future proposals.
- In relation to any future proposal relating to Tredegar Park, Members were concerned of the potential impact of charging for car parking may have on young people use the facilities at Tredegar Park, and that this may have the adverse effect of deterring participation in healthy activities. In line with the Wellbeing of Future Generation Act, the Committee ask that this is considered as part of the Fairness and Equalities Impact Assessment for this proposal.
- Members discussed the ring fencing of car parking income for each park and seek confirmation and assurance of this from the Officers following the meeting.
- The update that the improvements to Belle Vue Car Park would be in place by the end of the financial year was welcomed.

4 All Wales Performance Analysis 2017-18 - Year End Summary

Attendees:

- Bev Owen – Strategic Director - Place
- Rhys Cornwall – Head of People and Business Change
- Keir Duffin – Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing
- Paul Jones – Head of Streetscene and City Services
- Gareth Price – Head of Law and Regulations

The Head of People and Business Change presented an overview of the report to the Committee and reminded Members that all the Performance Indicators for the Year-End had

been reported to the Committee in July. He explained that the Local Authority submitted data to Data Cymru and benchmarked 26 performance measures across Wales. There were two differences this year: the Council rather than Data Cymru had undertaken the benchmarking this year, and the Social Services Well-being Act (Wales) had resulted in indicators being deemed invalid and removed so there was a limited amount of public accountability measures. The report showed a small number of indicators comparing relative performance against the rest of Authorities in Wales. This year the All Wales SSA (Standard Spending Assessments) data has also been added to show Newport's funding position compared to other authorities.

Members asked the following:

- Members made comment that it was disconcerting that the number of indicators had decreased. It was advised that the comparative data was a small sample so it was difficult to make an assessment. It was advised that the Data Unit were in constant conversations about what measures should be stopped and what should continue.
- It was queried whether the ranking on page 30 of the report; 21st position in Wales 2015/16 and 16th in 2017/18 was comparable. It was clarified that it not comparable, as there had been a change in public accountability measures. Local authorities would be ranked in different ways depending on what measure was chosen. It is difficult to make any judgement without related performance with 18 measures that were not the same as the previous year.

PAM/013: Percentage of empty private sector properties brought back into use during the year through direct action by the local authority

- Concern was raised about empty properties and it was asked what progress had been achieved. Members were advised that during the second half of this financial year we will be looking to bring forward a number of proposals for empty homes to make a positive impact. The Chair reminded the Committee there would be a Scrutiny briefing to be held regarding Housing which would include Empty Properties.
- Who sets the targets, and were Officers able to raise the target? Members were advised that the Performance Management Strategy sets out criteria for setting the target, is it; better than last year? Better than the Welsh average? Will it take you to the next quartile? The last measure was new so there was no history. The Service Plan includes targets and come to Scrutiny in performance reports.
- It was questioned whether the target for this measures should be higher than 2%? It was explained that there was no direct correlation between the number of empty private sector properties and homelessness levels. The Council looks to provide housing solutions. It was also advised that some local authorities will class sending out a letter as taking action whereas in Newport this isn't the case.
- It was queried whether this indicator included empty and derelict homes that are managed by Housing Associations, how long before they bring them back to use and also who sets the targets? Comment was made that more properties should be brought back into use. Members were advised that Council looks for continuous improvement, the performance target should go up this year.

It was clarified that targets were put forward and assessed to make sure they are challenging. The department was always looking for continuous improvements and took this performance indicator very seriously. It was also advised by the Strategic Director that they would like to see the target increase but it involved numerous departments. There had been a lot of work taken place over the last few months, and suggestion of discussion across Wales and action plans addressing performance indicators.

PAM/016: Number of visits to public libraries during the year per 1,000 population

- What was the Council doing to proactively encourage people to visit the libraries? Opportunities such as putting out cook books at the food fair and self-improvement books at job fairs were suggested. Members were advised that there are nearly 500,000 visits being made to the libraries per year. Members were advised that the key things would be co-location and sharing skills. There were a range of different services that could share services such as Flying Start - reading with parent and child programmes. There had been a significant improvement of library visits made with neighbourhood hubs which allow services to engage with the public.
- Increasing visitor numbers into libraries to borrow books was a challenge due to the digital world, but it could also provide opportunities. Example was given that Newport LIVE reach out to other organisations which was something that could be utilised in a library setting. It was agreed that engagement needs to be increased, and information on how Libraries engage would be sent through to Members, including more detail on the variety of methods used.
- Members were disappointed that the resources available for the reference library had reduced, as there had previously been a whole floor providing family history research facilities. It was asked whether there were any plans to improve or expand this service? Members were advised that there should be a significant improvement from the offer made on 1 February 2018 with Ringland library being used for the pilot.

PAM/017: Number of visits to local authority sport and leisure facilities during the year where the visitor will be participating in physical activity per 1,000 population

- Comment was made that this performance measure was unfair to the Council due to the competitive offer from private fitness venues and the effect of this on the scores for the Council against this measure.

Members asked if fitness classes held in schools and other Council venues were included in the final numbers. Members were advised that figures from schools and Newport LIVE venues were counted within the final figures, but that the Council was very restricted in the way it could count towards the measure. Other authorities had moved to hub type activities which increased participation and resulted in higher scores for this measure compared to Newport.

Members were then advised a five year master plan for the city was being developed alongside Newport LIVE, when this is agreed, additional targets could be reflected within the Master plan.

PAM/020: Percentage of principal A road that are in overall poor condition

- Could the Committee have a role in developing strategies or putting points forward? The Scrutiny Adviser told the Members that it is open to the Committee if it wishes to add to the Highways Asset Management Plan to its Forward Work Programme, following the Briefing received on 24 September and listed in its Forward Work Programme Report.

Conclusions

The Committee noted the Public Accountability Measures – Wales Analysis 2017-18 and made the following comments:

- ***“PAM/013: Percentage of empty private sector properties brought back into use during the year through direct action by the local authority”*** - Concern was expressed that the target setting for this measure was not ambitious enough at 2%.

- **“PAM/017: Number of visits to local authority sport and leisure facilities during the year where the visitor will be participating in physical activity per 1,000 population”**
- It is unfair that private sector gyms and facilities are increasing and impacting upon local authority provision but are not counted in this measure, plus it was unclear whether exercise classes held in school facilities and community facilities are included.
- With regard to general target setting, Members requested that a more transparent target setting process should be developed and, that this new process be considered by Scrutiny before it is implemented.

5 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

a) Forward Work Programme Update

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme Update to the Committee and outlined the reports for the next two meetings. It was explained that the Performance Update Mid Year 2018-19 would be split across two meetings to enable sufficient time for the Members to scrutinise each of the five service areas within its portfolio.

The Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that the Condition of the Highway Network presentation would be circulated to Members of the Committee. If the Committee wished to be consulted upon the Highways Asset Management Plan subsequently, it may wish to add it to its Forward Work Programme (FWP) for early 2018.

A Performance Briefing would be held arranged before the November meeting when the Service Plan Mid-Year Performance Updates are scheduled to be considered by the Committee.

A Housing Briefing would be arranged in December, following which the Committee could consider whether it wished to add an aspect of Housing in its Forward Work Programme as a report to Committee; request for more information, or; a Policy Review Group.

b) Action Sheet

The Scrutiny Advisor presented the Action Sheet, and advised that that the first 3 items had been actioned and information circulated to Members accordingly and that

Item 4 – a request for the latest monthly breakdown from SRS regarding system and equipment failures would be provided shortly and remain on the Action Sheet until Members received the information.

c) Information Reports

There were no Information Reports to bring to the Committee’s attention.

d) Scrutiny Letters

The Scrutiny Adviser explained the use of Scrutiny Letters, which would formalise the forwarding of comments from the Committee be a formalised letter sent to a Cabinet Member to send comments. Letters would be appended here for Members information when received.

The meeting terminated at 5.43 pm