

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 19 November 2018

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Evans (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, G Berry, M Cornelious and J Richards

In Attendance: Councillor R Truman (Cabinet Member Licensing and Regulation)
Councillor D Mayer (Cabinet Member Community and Resources)

Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Alastair Hopkins (Senior Finance Business Partner), Emma Johnson, Robert Squance (Audit Manager), Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change), Rachael Davies (HR Manager), Shaun Powell (Newport Intelligence Hub Manager), Paul Flint (Performance and Research Business Partner) and Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser)

Apologies: Councillors J Clarke, K Critchley, D Fouweather and I Hayat

1 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

2 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 October 2018**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October were approved as a true and accurate record.

3 **Service Plan Mid-Year Reviews**

Law & Regulation

Attendees:

- Councillor Ray Truman – Cabinet Member for Licensing and Regulation
- Gareth Price – Head of Law and Regulation

The Strategic Director – Place sent her apologies that she was unable to attend for this item.

The Head of Law & Regulation presented the Mid-Year Service Plan Update to the Committee. The Head of Service advised that there had been a sustained level of performance within the Service Area within the first six months of the period. This was commendable for the service area, as it continued with its substantial workload despite the financial constraints.

The Sickness Absence Performance Indicator was Red, which was unfortunate but was managed in accordance with the procedures. It did put an increased pressure on the remaining team members. This was a common problem as there was no resilience in teams anymore, those PIs that had dipped was as a result of direct correlation, as mentioned before

however, the overall performance was good. The Head of Service praised staff for their continued level of professionalism to meet the required targets.

In terms of budget, there were no major risks identified, the current year's budget was back on track as of the end of October 2018. There was an overspend of £15K anticipated in September but this had decreased to £8K, which meant that the service area was meeting all the requirements imposed upon them. There were a number of service area pressures however identifying these allowed future savings for the year, therefore the Head of Service was confident the budget would remain on track.

The Cabinet Member for Licensing and Regulation thanked the Head of Service for his report and reiterated that the long term sickness was difficult to manage, however the work was still being completed to a high standard. Other milestones included the Public Space Protection Order in the City Centre and the Gating Order in Maesglas. There had been national recognition for the Dog Service, along with successful prosecutions of Houses in Multiple Occupation and landlords. Premises inspection and prosecutions relating to the underage serving of alcohol was also at a high standard despite reductions in resources.

Members asked the following:

- Members asked whether there was a common theme to the sickness, the Head of Service advised that it was not work related stress. The long term absences were due to serious illness. Work related sickness absences were few and far between and nothing needed to be addressed from a work point of view. The Policies in place covered how the absences were overseen with return to work forms and reasonable adjustments recommended by occupational health put in place, such as car parking spaces or phased return to work.

Members felt that provision of car parking spaces for staff returning to work with access difficulties was to be commended.

- A Member referred to the Executive Summary regarding tourism in the area; visitor economy had doubled since 2006. Whilst these were excellent figures, it was asked whether tourism was viewed as a priority given the cuts. The Head of Service informed the Committee that Tourism was important, however the Council tended to facilitate more events rather than invest in projects. There were budget cuts in tourism but the team in the events section were able to liaise with external organisers and provide their expertise. This was good news and bigger events were coming to Newport which would have an effect on footfall.
- Members asked was there a chance for organisations such as the Rotary Club to get involved with the Council to promote the City? The Committee was advised that there was a strategy in place to work with external stakeholders and tourism ambassadors in Caerleon. Community engagement was also a theme in the Corporate Plan and contact with external bodies that could help on a voluntary basis was welcomed.
- A Member asked how Law and Regulation would obtain the views of those affected via consultation. This depended on the nature of the consultation that they were dealing with, for example there had been a statutory consultation process for Public Space Protection Orders, the Budget Consultation with Staff and the Public and Scrutiny can be the vehicle for public engagement. Any other service change deliveries would mean consulting with the staff and users of that service, for example, the registration service had questionnaires left on reception for the members of the public to complete.
- A Member asked what the service area did to increase voter engagement in diverse communities and Houses of Multiple Occupation. The Head of Service advised that it was difficult, as the Council would not target Housing in Multiple Occupation specifically

but canvass annually with postal forms for electoral registration, followed up where there were not returns of the Electoral Registration Office forms, by canvassers who knock doors, which was effective. In addition, the Electoral Registration Officer had visited schools to and citizenship ceremonies to promote electoral registration.

- Members enquired about the reorganisation of the Gwent Coroner's Service. It was explained that the Coroner was due to retire and the Council would be submitting proposals to the Ministry of Justice for the service to be operated from the Mansion House. The Coroner would remain independent of the Council, but support and recruitment of support staff would be provided by the Registration Service.
- Members asked whether there were any long term trends impacting on the service area. The Head of Service advised that there was a continuing trend of decreased resources and increased demand. An increase in new legislation also impacted upon the service area, as there were no additional resources for the resulting increase in work.
- Members welcomed the new Performance Update report layout and thanked the Scrutiny Team. The Scrutiny Adviser advised the Committee that the improvements had been delivered by colleagues in the Performance Team, following the feedback provided by Scrutiny Committees.

Finance

Attendees:

- Meirion Rushworth - Head of Finance
- Alastair Hopkins – Senior Finance Business Partner
- Rob Squance – Audit Manager (Social Services / Corporate)
- Emma Johnson – Income Collection Manager

The Head of Finance presented the Mid-Year Service Plan Update to the Committee. He advised that there was a small underspend, delivery of targets had been met this year and recruitment was ongoing. With regard to the Performance Indicators, there were only four Amber Indicators and they were 2% or less short of target.

With regard to the performance indicator: "**Management Information – return to Work within 7 calendar days %**", there had been instances of the completion of return to work interviews with staff not being done within 7 days of returning from a period of sickness absence, which resulted in the Quarter 2 result being 2% below the target, and Managers had been reminded.

The achievements over the last six months included producing the Council's Annual Accounts well within the deadline. The Head of Service was in talks with auditors about meeting the future year's targets. The audit assessments being undertaken this year were compliant, and the Head of Service praised the Audit Team.

The Head of Service advised that he was briefing the Cabinet Member upon the Welsh Government driven Draft Ethical Procurement Policy, with a view to the Policy being reported to Cabinet. The Council Tax and Income Collection Teams were also doing a good job in collecting outstanding payments from the public and were therefore on track.

Members asked the following:

- A Member asked for more detail upon the collection of Council Tax arrears. It was explained that staff were allocated to carry out this service with day to day administration and standard letters being sent out. There was a small team focussing on the problem

areas, working with the Magistrates Court and residents to pay their outstanding debts try to avoid getting into further arrears and provide solutions.

- A Member welcomed the innovation in the above response and asked how staff were involved in planning innovation and delivering it to improve the system. The Income Collection Manger advised that this was achieved through Clear Reviews with individual team members. The team involved were very collaborative but had to fit in with court timetables. It was a balancing act with staff having a degree of flexibility to deal with people in arrears in the most appropriate way and staff were completely involved in planning and achieving the best outcomes.
- Members asked for more detail upon the training sessions on financial management. The Head of Service advised that there had been initial training and he was confident that the vast majority within the services had been through the training, The training was now part of the Corporate training offer and the next session was fully booked.
- A Member enquired who the Chief Internal Auditor for the Council was. The Head of Service advised that Andrew Wathan was Chief Internal Auditor for Newport shared with Monmouthshire Council.
- A Member enquired what was the collection rate achieved for Council Tax year on year. Officers advised that a large proportion of arrears had been collected the previous year, and the percentage collection for that year had also been pretty steady, at just under 97%. Any outstanding arrears would be collected in the following year and each year, up to four or five years and in some rare cases and exceptional circumstances some arrears may eventually be written off by the Council. The collection was steady and 3.5% of £60M would not be collected, but would be over subsequent years.

A Member asked when planning the MTFP budget where did the Council tax non-collection figure come from. It was explained that the Council Tax Non collection amount was inbuilt in bad debt provision percentage.

- A Member enquired about the impact of Council Tax across the term of the Medium Term Financial Plan. The Head of Service advised that the City was growing so the Council Tax base grew by 1.5% each year because of additional housing, however the Council lost Revenue Support Grant so did not benefit from the rise. In addition, collecting council tax was difficult in Cities because of more transient population.
- A Member asked whether Finance would be collaborating in the near future and asked for assurance of the use of best practice in the service. The Head of Service advised that the Council shared the services of Chief Internal Auditor with Monmouthshire Council and had some discussions regarding the potential for Cardiff City Region Audit but progress was slow.

The Head of Service advised that collaboration on Transactional Services could be developed in the future with Gwent Senior Finance mangers and that the G9 which was the Chiefs of the 5 Gwent Local Authorities, Health, Police, etc. had just reformed after a short break and a conversation could be started there. Newport was hoping to use the forum to discuss the potential for collaborative working.

People & Business Change

Attendees:

- Councillor David Mayer – Cabinet Member for Community and Resources
- Rhys Cornwall – Head of People and Business Change
- Rachael Davies – HR Manager

- Shaun Powell – Newport Intelligence Hub Manager
- Paul Flint – Performance and Research Business Partner

The Head of People & Business Change presented the Mid-Year Service Plan Update to the Committee and was pleased that the Committee liked the new format of the Performance Updates developed with Scrutiny and the Performance Team. There was a list of improvements within the service area. There were eight Red Performance Indicators which were expected to be Green by end of year, which included PREVENT training and Welsh Language Training, which had further courses programmed in Quarters 3 and 4.

The budget to date showed an underspend and the savings for the year had been achieved, within which was the removal or re-allocation of some resources. The Corporate Plan had included a commitment to set up the Newport Intelligence Hub, to provide one version of data. Funding had been provided for a Serious Organised Crime Co-ordinator to be located at the Civic Centre this year.

The Service Area was also working towards the digitalisation of services, with a plan to go paperless. Clear review was new electronic staff management performance system and online expenses claims, which also did not require paper. The outcome of a digitalised Newport would free up resources and make savings as set out in the Corporate Plan.

From a Human Resource perspective there was a drive to train staff and a recent Management in Action Training Programme had been provided for Managers, which intended to upskill and retain employees. An apprenticeship programme was in place to attract young people into the Council. Civil contingencies had moved from Streetscene to Human Resources with two extra staff delivering the service.

Additionally, as part of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal the Council had been successful with a bid for local fibre network across all public buildings within Newport, there was £11M invested in this project which was a two year programme and this would be a game changer for Newport.

Lastly the Head of Service advised that despite being relatively new in post, the Performance and Research Business Partner was already developing and improving performance management.

Members asked the following:

- Members again were pleased with the layout of the new Performance Update and the Head of Service thanked Policy and Performance for their hard work.
- Members referred to the Action: Creating a healthy workforce and asked whether this would be an ongoing action. The Head of Service assured the Committee that Human Resources were doing everything they could to make sure that measures were being met. Part of the improved offer in the workforce was Care First, which gave staff access to additional support without going through Occupational health. Other examples included: the Staff Choir; Yoga lessons; a Staff Reward Scheme in place and the launch of a new Values Award. The streamlining of processes and enabling return to work in a way that met staff's needs also contributed toward this Action.
- Members enquired about the financial wellbeing tool that was available to the workforce referred to in the update on the Creating a Healthy Workforce Action. The Head of Service explained that the financial wellbeing tool provided staff with advice and guidance on responsible lending, savings and effective money management, to avoid pay day loans. Advice and resources were confidential, signposts would also be put in place to Newport Credit Union and a finance product would be available. In time, it was planned to sensitively and anonymously report some positive outcomes.

- In the Service Area's Finance Analysis, Members asked for an explanation of the statement: *"The September position continues to show a **robustly managed budget**, with a current projected underspend of £156k"*. The Head of Service advised that this was due to staff leaving and savings being made. The People and Business Change Service Area was made up of four elements managed by: the Human Resources Manager; Newport Intelligence Hub Manager; Digital Services Manager, and; Policy Partnerships and Involvement Manager. These elements had been restructured to be more resilient, with a fifth element which was Business Improvement.
- A Member referred to *".. a review being undertaken by GGT Associates on IT provision, due to report back in October"* within the Service Area's Finance Analysis and asked for some detail and whether the timescale was on track. The Head of Service advised that that the review of IT provision was being undertaken by the company that reviewed the move to SRS. They had been brought back to review IT provision and there was a need to free up some resources to deliver some digitalisation of services, e.g. the Committee Rooms within the Civic Centre were to be refitted with modern technology and tablets were being issued to Members. Further reduced costs would include replacing mobile phones to make savings by purchasing affordable mobile devices. It was confirmed that the report had been received on target and would be reported to Cabinet.
- A Member asked for more details upon the Action: *"To develop, support and implement commercial opportunities across the Council, maximising the use of its assets and expertise to generate significant income streams including options for collaborative working."* (Objective 4 page 56 refers.) Members were advised that the Head of Finance had developed a draft Commercialisation Strategy and was looking at opportunities. There was currently a draft based on what other Local Authorities had done, such as utilisation of assets, leasing buildings over provision of residential care. The Head of Services advised that Intelligence Hub brings in an income of 30 to 70k a year for street naming and numbering, and there was scope to develop these services to the public in the Hub.
- A Member asked what issues were facing this service area. The Head of Service advised that his service area's main service delivery was to staff in this Council, with each area under huge pressure they supported solutions. The main issues for the service areas were:
 - Restructuring Service Areas to deliver the right service for the next 5 to 10 years and be more resilient;
 - IT- the use of data and digital transference was more important and would become critical in next three years. The Council had transferred the worse funded IT service in Wales and needs to make the case for funding for what is needed.

A Member commented that some Members would require IT training. The Cabinet Member advised that if Members needed training it would be provided.

The Cabinet Member for Community and Resources informed the Committee, as an aside, that he attended the Software Academy Launch at the Information Station and had a brief tour, which was fascinating. This was the first cohort from Cardiff University to commence training at the Information Station.

Conclusions - Comments to the Cabinet

The Committee noted the Mid-Year Review and agreed to forward the Minutes to the Cabinet as a Summary of the issues raised and made the following comments to the Cabinet:

- The Committee was pleased with the new Performance Update layout. It was well structured, easy to read and digest and promoted focussed questioning. The professional back up assisted with co-ordination at Committee meetings. Members recognised that there had been a lot of work done to get the reports to the standard they were today.
- Members advised that whilst it was beneficial being informed of the current status, it would be helpful to clearly see the next steps of the service plans and looking ahead to the end of year and subsequent years, the format of Performance Updates would need further development to clearly demonstrate the status of actions and their scheduled deadlines for each year of the Service Plan.
- The Committee suggested that the development of the Performance Update format for future year's meetings could involve a Workshop / Training for Members of the Committee.
- Overall the Committee was happy with what had been presented but requested that there was a need to give consideration on how to report next time with a clear expression of timescales for Actions. The information from the Finance Service Area was vague and the Committee seeks more detailed reassurance on areas where they could move forward in the next Performance Update and beyond, in particular to provide a clearer understanding of: Collaboration and the Draft Commercialisation Strategy, as the information provided was minimal.
- Future Updates should also include information on public engagement carried out by Service Areas.

4 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 and the Briefings to be arranged.

She advised that following the Briefing upon the Condition of the Highway Network held in September, the presentation had been circulated to all Members of the Committee.

The Committee agreed that the Housing Briefing that had been scheduled to be arranged in December be arranged for January 2019 but not until after the 14 January Committee meeting, when the Committee would be considering the Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Proposals for 2019-20.

b) Action Sheet

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Action Sheet and advised the Committee that as indicated in the table, two items had been actioned and the information circulated to Members of the Committee accordingly and the outstanding three items would be chased and 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

There were no scrutiny letters to report to the Committee.

This page is intentionally left blank