

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 14 January 2019

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Evans (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, J Clarke, K Critchley, D Fouweather, J Richards and W Routley

In Attendance: Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser), 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), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance) and Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation)

Apologies: Councillors G Berry and I Hayat

1 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor C Evans (Chair) declared an interest as Ward Member and Community Councillor for Rogerstone in relation to Item 3, Budget Proposal (CS1920/10 – City Services – Introduce Parking Charges within Tredegar Park and Fourteen Locks) and also declared that he was an employee of Newsquest, but had no influence on what was written editorially.

2 **Minutes of the Meetings held on 19 November and 3 December 2018**

A Councillor referred to the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November on page 9 where Digitalisation of Services was mentioned, a comment upon the need for Member training had been omitted.

The Scrutiny Adviser clarified that the Member's comment regarding the requirement of IT Training for Members was included over the page, in the 3rd paragraph from the end of page 10 of the Minutes.

The minutes of the meetings held on 19 November and 3 December were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

3 **2019/20 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan**

Attendees:

- Paul Jones (Head of Streetscene and City Services)
- Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change)
- Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance)
- Keir Duffin (Head of Regeneration Investment and Housing)
- Alastair Hopkins (Senior Finance Business Partner)

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

CS1920/06 – Refuse Collection – Review of Charging for Waste Special Collections

The Head of Streetscene and City Services presented a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee. The Authority currently charged £6 per item and the proposal would change the price to a minimum charge of £20 for up to 3 items which would recover the full costs of the service. Other Councils' charges had been benchmarked and most Councils recovered their costs by charging an initial payment for 2 or 3 items of bulky waste collected. Based on the Council's current take up for the service it was expected that the Council would break even based upon the proposed charge of £20 for collecting up to 3 items.

Members asked the following:

- Was the Head of Streetscene and City Services in post the previous time this revised charge was proposed as a budget proposal. The Officer advised that he was not in post at the time. A Member explained that that this proposal was made 2 years ago but that as a result of consultation and comments made it was not implemented, partly due to fly tipping and the costs of a potential increase in fly tipping.
- A Member expressed concern that the introduction of a minimum charge for up to three items could increase fly tipping in Newport and make the problem worse. The Officer advised that the proposal was not asking for a minimum of 3 items to be collected, it is for a minimum charge of £20. The Officer agreed that fly tipping was a real problem however he did not accept that Newport was massively different from other authorities in this area.
- Members voiced concerns that when payments rose, some people fly tip and get away with it whilst those who follow the rules picked up the costs. Members asked if there were any plans to implement an enforcement regime to deal with people who fly tip. The Head of Streetscene and City Services sympathised and agreed that it was frustrating that there were a small number of people who fly tip, unfortunately a lot of the time items were dumped on private land. There were interactions with Newport City Homes to work together, and work was ongoing between the Waste and Street Cleansing Teams. Cameras had been installed in known hotspots and the possibility of more surveillance cameras was being explored, and was hoped that these would make an impact.
- Members were told that the team were looking into recycling bulky waste however some bulky waste could not be recycled.
- Members discussed CCTV and cameras, it was then advised that the Council needed to be smarter in known problem areas, and there needs to be an investment in advanced equipment to overcome fly tipping. The Officer agreed that a small number of areas need to be monitored more however the challenge is that some areas are private land.
- Members understood the need to cover costs but were concerned that the public would face this increased charge and items would be stored in gardens until they could afford £20 or had 3 items. It was suggested that a scheme could be brought forward where neighbourhoods could group together to collect 3 items at the same time and share the charge. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that he would take this comment back to discuss with the Team about how this could happen operationally.
- A Member suggested that Residents would be more accepting if crews could attend an area twice a week if one collection day was missed, they could have another day in the

week to have items collected. It was also queried if vans were always filled. Members were advised that broadly it worked by each zone having a designated collection day. The City was a more densely populated area than most, so in terms of making services cost effective, fees were benchmarked and Newport had been in the bottom quartile. In regards to vans always being filled, the Head of Service advised that demand broadly meets supply and that he would need to get the latest figures to share.

- A Member queried whether the Service would break even. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that this would be reviewed the following year to ensure to the best of ability everything had been done.
- A Member suggested that consideration be given to a discount for those on low income / Universal Credit to partake in the service.
- It was queried how the proposal for the Council to stop giving refunds for cancelled collections would fit with Consumer Law. The Head of Service clarified that refunds would not be offered if a person booked a collection, the crew turned up and then the person changed their mind.
- With regard to the statements made under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act Five Ways of Working Section of the Business Case (Page 53) a Member made the following comments:
 - Integration - there was a blanket statement that fly tipping would be reduced, but it had not stated how.
 - Prevention / Involvement - It was not made clear how this proposal would address complaints (about fly tipping).
- A Member made the comment that that telling people that CCTV was operating in the area would probably deter fly tipping there.

CS1920/07 – Off street parking – Changes to Council Parking Charges

The Head of Streetscene and City Services presented a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which included an increase in tariffs for off-street parking, business parking and resident parking zones.

Members asked the following:

- A Member enquired what was the purpose of the charge currently levied for issuing parking permits. The Head of Streetscene and City Services clarified that it was to cover the costs of administration of permits, remarking of road markings and signage of residents parking bays. He explained that the increase of the charge to £30 was to offset the cost of delivering the function, which it previously had not.
- A Member advised that Residents were more concerned that the residents parking would be well enforced to enable them to park in the permitted area, especially those in the suburbs of the city centre. The timing was unfortunate as there may be a view that the increase in Resident's Parking Permit Charge was to cover cost of enforcement. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that the Council's charge was for admin, road markings and signage and the Council had yet to take over enforcement, it would happen in a few months' time and he was confident that this would improve dramatically.
- It was suggested that consideration should be given to the increased charge for Residents Parking not commencing until enforcement was properly in place. This

would give Residents confidence and value for money. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised this comment would be taken back.

- A Member queried the Business Case where it stated there was no impact on footfall in the city centre, as the proposal was protecting businesses and increasing charges for footfall, while there was only a small increase for businesses that was not proportionate. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that the advice given to the team was that it would not make an impact. Businesses were not impacting on their costs, if however they have a charge they have to pay for staff that would have an effect on their costs.
- A Member requested to see a breakdown of costs of administration before the increase for residents parking and spoke of the importance of being open and transparent with costs before the increase. He added that the proposal for residents parking asked people to pay more for something that could not yet be enforced, so that until enforcement is in place an increase should not be implemented. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised he would take this comment back for consideration and would look into the breakdown of costs.
- A Member commented that the proposal for a general increase in charges for off street parking was regrettable as the City Centre needed all the help it could get, with empty shops there was a need to encourage footfall. The Council pays VAT on income from off street parking and helps businesses, but was proposing to increase charges on those visiting the City Centre, which may be not negatively impact in the short term, but a long term approach was needed. The Head of Streetscene and City Services clarified that with all proposals the Council had to set a balanced budget.
- A Member asked whether compared to private sector parking in Newport, was the Council competitive. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that it varied as Friars Walk car park charges had increased and costs changed all the time.
- A Member asked whether there would be an investment in new technology in car park ticket machines in the City Centre. It was advised that there will be an upgrade on machines to allow debit card payments, and also looking for an App option for payment to be made via mobile phone in order to modernise the service.
- A comment was made that there was a really low number of 43 business spaces provided and the Council could be missing the potential to generate income e.g. hotels, well known businesses thinking of moving to city centre, etc. The Council could increase the number of business spaces offered and generate more income. After enforcement begins, some of the current car parking in no parking / no waiting zones in the City Centre should cease and Businesses may need more Business spaces. It was also suggested that free parking could be offered on Sundays to encourage footfall.

CS1920/08 – Customer Services – Reduction in Customer Services Operating Hours – Information Station only

The Head of Streetscene and City Services presented a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to reduce the operation of the Council's face to face customer services provision from 5 days to 4 days a week.

Members asked the following:

- A Member referring to Recommended Option 3 on page 62 where it stated:
“Engagement with other service areas and partners is required to understand the

impact of the change for them” asked whether there was a guarantee and solution in place that this would not be rushed, not just a tick box exercise and would be done correctly and stressed the importance of getting this right. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that when the proposal was written it was in the future tense, some engagement had happened and some was ongoing. In essence the proposal asked for groups to condense their services to 4 days. For some services that should not be a problem but there would still be need for services to vulnerable groups, which may have the option to visit the Civic Centre on the proposed closing day for the Information Station

- It was asked how Customers would be redirected. The Head of Service advised that customers would be redirected to the Civic Centre via signs on the door of the Information Station.
- A Member referred to the Risk table on page 63 which already identified Risk: Probability and Impact on users which already identified a high impact upon Services for vulnerable customers e.g. homelessness and benefits assistance. The Head of Service advised that unfortunately it was a reduction of services. In terms of looking at contact and what is the worst option, it was felt that while condensing the services into 4 days of use was not perfect, it was better than reducing people on the phones. Looking at the profile of demand, there was a surge in numbers in the morning, which reduced and then a surge later in the afternoon. The risk was that people may need to wait a little longer.
- A Member asked why go ahead with the proposal to close the Information Station one day a week given the risks identified and it would be better to wait on the phone rather than the most vulnerable face to face visitors having to walk to the Civic Centre on the closed day. He added that not everyone has access to computers or phones and prefer a human interface. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that there were already complaints about wait times and the direction of travel was toward online services and Apps, and although they were not for everyone, they were more cost effective.
- With regard to the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act Five Ways of Working – Collaboration, a Member suggested collaborating with Newport City Homes in the city centre, Newport LIVE or the Library rather than reducing a service. The Officer advised that they did talk to partners, and this could be something to look into for the future.

CS1920/10 – Introduce Parking Charges within Tredegar Park and Fourteen Locks

The Head of Streetscene and City Services presented a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to introduce parking charges within Tredegar Park and Fourteen Locks, following on from the proposal in last year’s Budget to charge for car parking in city parks in principal and specifically in Belle Vue Park. He advised it was worth noting that the charges in parks proposed were less than the charges discussed earlier in the meeting starting at £1 for 2 hours and that this was proposed to be held for a long period.

Members asked the following:

- A Member asked for the figures on use since parking had been implemented in Belle Vue Park in September 2018. The Head of Streetscene and City Services that in line with the budget per month it was approximately £2,200.

- A Member commented that the work was still awaited to complete the car parking works at Belle Vue Park.
- A Member expressed concern that Tredegar Park was used as inexpensive recreation for people and that the introduction of charges could potentially impact upon ceasing healthy activity and charging those who can least afford it.
- A Member referring to Recommended Option 1 which stated: “there may be a requirement to look at a ‘free’ hour option, asked when would this be decided. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that this had been written in the past, looked at and considered and the general conclusion was there would be quite a lot of turnover which would not make it viable.
- A Member asked what had consultation with service users of Tredegar Park and Fourteen Locks shown, for example local sports teams might decide to not use the facilities or dog walkers may decide not to visit the park. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that they were consulted last year when the overarching proposals were agreed, one consultation event was held last week, Service Managers would be meeting representatives of groups of both of the parks in the coming week and comments will be taken on board.
- Comment was made that each park are different areas and what may suit one group would not be applicable to another. The Head of Streetscene and City Services clarified that discussions would be taking place with groups between now and February.
- A Member stressed the need for consultation to be sensitive to individual sites as each was very different and asked whether there a meaningful consultation and would there be any concessions to user groups. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that all points and opinions were considered and clarified that concessions for user groups were included in the base model including for voluntary groups e.g. the café in Belle Vue Park had a couple of allocated spaces. He clarified that the assumption was based upon only 50% usage of the car park.
- A Member queried whether the consultation was happening late and whether the Head of Service was happy progress had been made. Members were advised that consultation was discussed last year, which was the process that the Council had set.
- A Member commented that it was great that people were coming forward which showed that consultation was happening. Last year the Committee fed back that all parks were different, and had different uses. He queried whether this year’s engagement was meaningful, and when it had happened. The Head of Streetscene and City Service advised that Officers had spoken to residents on Thursday and Friday last week, and that conversations were still ongoing, and discussions with the Canal Trust, volunteer groups, Café owner and all parties would be undertaken.
- A Member raised the potential issue that the Canal Trust and volunteers may not be able to use the car park which could lead them to park on the road on Brunel Avenue, so residents of Brunel Avenue should be involved in discussions. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that it was something which was being considered, but people are legally allowed to park there.
- A Member referring to Charities putting on events 2 to 3 times a year asked would they look to not charging for car parking on event days. The Head of Streetscene and City Services advised that not charging charity events was in the original proposal. It was

clarified that two spaces had been offered to in Belle Vue Café, however staff would need to pay for their own parking.

- Member also asked for clarification of whether fees would be charged at night time, and if there would be enforcement at night time to combat anti-social activity. In terms of night time charges, the Head of Service did not believe there would be charges at night and advised that anti-social activity could be reported and addressed.
- A Member referred to the statement: “income generation would be used to support the annual costs associated with static ranger provision and overall park budget” on page 73 of the report, and asked for clarification on whether all income generated would be ring fenced for use on each park., The Head of Streetscene and City Services clarified that income generated would go into the Countryside and Parks budget, and that Belle Vue had a covenant which states not allowed profit from the park.

PSB1920/02 – Partnership – Reduction in Voluntary Sector Grants

The Head of People and Business Change presented a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee to reduce Voluntary Sector Grants including withdrawing grants to Citizens Advice Bureau, Shop Mobility, Alzheimer’s Society, GAVO and the recently collapsed SEWREC.

Members asked the following:

- A Member voiced concern at the possibility that the Council may have to pick up some of the services that the previously funded voluntary groups could no longer provide. This coupled with the proposal to reduce the services in the Information Station could have an adverse impact upon service users.
- A Member expressed concern that the Citizens Advice Bureau fulfils a meaningful role for citizens, and a reduction in funding could damage the success of defending cases and impact upon customers’ lives and reduce their living affairs.
- The Head of People and Business Change advised that CAB and Shopmobility both received a grant. He explained that CAB provided telephone advice and delivered a unique service outside of Council statutory services. If that provision was removed, users of that service would go elsewhere and the Council was not the legal provider for that support. He also explained that Shopmobility provide a service of mobility scooters to public free of charge and the Council had no capacity to pick this up as a business model. Both have had conversations with the Authority, the big risk is the CAB Service; however the service was not within the remit of the Authority.
- A Member suggested that Shop Mobility, could generate income from increasing charges for using their equipment.
- A Member commented that the report did not give enough information about the services being impacted upon. CAB services were invaluable, would have been useful to have more details to take a view, so currently have difficulty in supporting Option 2 proposal to remove funding. The Head of People and Business Change advised that the report was a secondary report and the original report had contained more detail. There had also been was an internal audit report looking into voluntary sector grants, and there had not been a procurement process for it. He clarified that Option 2 could mean still making a saving but procuring a service. This would be dependent on providers; so could be the provider the Council currently has, while the current situation had those companies on our service agreement.

- A Member referred to WFGA long term impacts upon people who have low income and vulnerable and asked whether we could signpost Shop Mobility to Newport Now to discuss any funding that is available, or possibly introduce Shopmobility to the other city centre providers like Kingsway or Friars Walk.

NS1920/05 – Additional 2.95% increase in Council Tax resulting on total increase of 6.95%

The Head of Finance presented a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee. It was advised that this is decision for the Council, and would be debated by Members at the Council Meeting on 26 February 2019.

Members asked the following:

- Members suggested that it may be clearer for residents if the 2.95% was hypothecated to Social Services or Education. The Head of Finance advised that this would be fed back, however the funds could not be hypothecated in Wales.
- Members commented that an increase of 6.95% sounded high, plus the changes to Community Councils, Fire and Police Precepts was a lot higher than the past ten years. It was questioned whether other Local Authorities and in England were doing this, and whether there was a cap. The Head of Finance advised that County Councils in England had been rising by 6.95% or 6%, more flexibility had allowed them to get to that level, and had been for the last couple of years. He explained that the demand on services outstripped the funding available and the debate was around balancing Council Tax and savings. He also advised that Newport had the 2nd lowest council tax area in Wales, and one of the lowest in the UK.
- The Head of Finance explained that all across the UK the councils' budgets were being spent on less of the population and going towards education and social care. Even in those areas the money was going to the most needy, Special Education Needs and looked after children. Those are a very small number in the social care area. It was then advised that the budget was increasingly being focussed on the high need individuals. Council Tax was going up generally more than inflation. It's UK wide, although it did not make things any easier.
- Concern was expressed that high increases can cause resentment. The Head of Finance explained that it was important that people understood why this was happening and he hoped it was clear in the report that cost and demand increases have been up significantly.
- A Member commented that this was an emotive subject and the Council must produce a balanced budget. The increase was unfortunate, the points made were sympathised with and the proposal would be debated at Council.

The Chair thanked the Officers for attending.

Conclusions:

Comments to the Cabinet on the following proposals:

- a) The Committee noted the budget proposals relevant to the Place and Corporate Directorates and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.
- b) The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet on the Proposals within the Place and Corporate Directorate:

CS1920/06 – Refuse Collection – Review of Charging for Waste Special Collections

- The Committee felt that ways of making the Service more efficient and cost effective without increasing charges could be explored.
- The Committee expressed concern that the proposal to increase the minimum charge to £20 for up to three items may result in an increase in fly tipping.
- The Committee was concerned about the impact of the charge upon low income families and that consideration should be given to a discount.
- There was a need for greater monitoring and enforcement of fly tipping alongside this proposal and investment in cameras / CCTV and publicity about cameras to better prevent fly tipping.
- More detail and explanation is needed in the Business Case e.g. the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act Five Ways of Working Section of the Business Case: Integration – makes a statement that fly tipping would be reduced, but it does not provide any details to substantiate how.

CS1920/07 – Off street parking – Changes to Council Parking Charges

- The Committee requested a breakdown of the administration costs of the service from the Head of Streetscene and City Services before a decision upon the proposal to increase the charge for Residents Parking.
- The Committee recommended that the increased resident parking permit charge should not be introduced until parking enforcement is in place.
- The Committee proposed the increase of the number of business parking spaces be explored, which could increase revenue and could reduce illegal business parking.

CS1920/08 – Customer Services – Reduction in Customer Services Operating Hours – Information Station only

- The Committee expressed concern about the closure of the Information Station for a whole day and effect that this would have upon the most vulnerable service users.
- Having regard to the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act Five Ways of Working – Collaboration, the Committee recommended exploring collaboration with Newport City Homes and other partners on the provision of joint city centre customer services thereby reducing and sharing costs rather than closing services.

CS1920/10 – Introduce Parking Charges within Tredegar Park and Fourteen Locks

- The Committee stressed the need for consultation and engagement to be sensitive and focussed on the individual sites and their uses, as each park was different in nature, in different locations and had different user groups e.g. water park, sporting activities, historic, and what is suitable for one may not be applicable to the others.

PSB1920/02 – Partnership – Reduction in Voluntary Sector Grants

- The Committee commented that the Business Case for this proposal did not contain sufficient information about which organisations the removal of grants would effect and the services being impacted upon.
- The Committee took assurance that Recommended Option 2 - to commission a service to deliver against a contract set to the corporate priorities would fund successful organisations up to 2021/22.
- The Committee recommended signposting Shop Mobility to Newport Now and other city centre providers e.g. Kingsway and Friars Walk to discuss any alternative funding available for the Shopmobility service.

NS1920/05 – Additional 2.95% increase in Council Tax resulting on total increase of 6.95%

- The Committee noted that this proposal would be debated at Council.

4 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

Attendee:

- Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser)

a) **Forward Work Programme Update**

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and advised the Committee upon the proposed topics for the next two committee meetings, as follows:

- Monday 18th February 2019:
Change from a Committee meeting to the outstanding Committee Briefing upon Housing from the Committee's Forward Work Programme to be held in February 2019.
- Monday 8th April 2019:
Draft Highway Asset Management Plan (following the presentation requested by the Committee upon the Quality of Road Network delivered on 24 September 2018, the Committee were asked if they wished to be consulted upon the Draft Highways Asset Management Plan).

The Committee **agreed** the topics, as above.

b) Action Sheet

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Action Sheet and advised the Committee that as indicated in the table, all items had been actioned and the information circulated to Members of the Committee accordingly and the Housing Briefing had been discussed as part of the report upon the Forward Work Programme update in a) above and scheduled accordingly.

c) Information Reports

The Scrutiny Adviser informed the Committee that there were no Information Reports to bring to the Committee's attention.

d) Scrutiny Letters

The Scrutiny Adviser informed the Committee that there were no Scrutiny letters to report to the Committee.

The meeting terminated at 6.45 pm