

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 4 November 2019

Time: 4.00 pm

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

In Attendance: Councillor J Mudd (Cabinet Member Regeneration and Housing)

Beverly Owen (Strategic Director - Place), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Owen James (Assistant Head of Finance - Technical and Development), Emma Johnson (Income Collection Manager), Richard Leake (Strategic Procurement Officer), Andrew Wathan (Chief Internal Auditor), Tracy McKim (Partnership Policy & Involvement Manager), Mark Bleazard (Information Development Manager), Rachael Davies (HR Manager), Shaun Powell (Newport Intelligence Hub Manager), Keir Duffin (Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing) and Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser)

Apologies: Councillors K Critchley, D Fouweather, I Hayat and D Williams

1 Declaration of Interests

None.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 September were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

3 Service Plan Mid-Year Reviews 2019-20

Finance:

Attendees:

- Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance)
- Owen James (Assistant Head of Finance)
- Richard Leake (Procurement Manager)
- Emma Johnson (Income Collection Manager)
- Andrew Wathan (Chief Internal Auditor)

The Head of Finance presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration, including a focus upon more self-service work internally and externally where possible and training and development where required.

Members asked the following:

- With regard to Action 1 on page 24 – *Complete Sufficient Audit Opinion Related Work* which showed: 16% Completed, and the comment “*a bit lower than expected, but this*

generally picks up in Q3 & Q4”, a Member asked why was this lower than expected, and how could it be guaranteed that it would pick up. The Chief Internal Auditor advised the Committee that resources had been used up in special investigations, however past performance showed that Quarters 3 and 4 had picked up. When asked if the team were confident it would pick up, it was advised that historically figures had picked up. A Member

- A Member asked about resource issues in the Service Area. Members were advised that these scores had been achieved with one member of staff. There had also been a vacancy, which HR colleagues had tried to fill, but so far had been unsuccessful, and it had been flagged as a potential concern. The Head of Service added that the department had bought in some help from a South West based internal Audit set up, which is a consortium of audit departments to form an internal audit organisation. This had filled in bits of resource capacity over the Autumn, which would help. There had been a short-term issue with a few members of the team having long-term sickness. When asked about back up, it was advised that the Team had tried agency staff in the past but its success had been hit and miss, while using resources from the partnership enabled some extra resource to be provided.
- A Member inquired about the outsourcing of some of the service. The Head of Service outlined the Council’s standard recruitment procedure and explained that the department needed an auditor that could start straight away. Agency staff needed to be trained and required lots of assistance, so outsourcing provided a quick solution to a short-term resourcing issue for the department.
- With regard to Objective 5, Action 1 on page 30 – *Develop New Procurement Strategy*, which showed 5% complete and comment *“not commenced due to other priorities”*, a Member asked what those priorities were, how far behind they were and who made the decision. The Procurement Manager advised that the strategy ran from 2016 – 2019, so the department needed to look at a new strategy for 2020 onwards. This had been started, and they were currently looking at things that needed to go into the new strategy. The department was confident that the new strategy would be in place by early 2020, which was within target date. This was not a major issue or risk for the Council. When asked if there had been any other issues such as staffing which had effected this Action, Members were advised that other things had been prioritised e.g. looking at budget savings. While the department would have liked to be a bit further forward with this measure, it would be met.
- A Member referred to Actions 1, 2 and 3 on Page 26, which were all showing as 0% complete and asked were these on course. The Income Collection Manager explained to the Committee that these actions had been on-going for a while, so it was unfair to be shown as 0%. As mentioned earlier, the ICT infrastructure issues the service area had need to be fixed, so things could not be progressed until those have been resolved. A complete new server was needed to keep the system secure and stable, which had been identified by SRS that it needed to be replaced. This was a big task for Revenue and Benefits, but was due to go live by the end of the month. When this had been done, the service area would be able to start digital services.
- A Member referred to the number of Actions and Measures that were Amber or Green and asked whether for those not set by Welsh Government, the Service Area was confident that the targets were robust and challenging enough. Members were advised that targets were reviewed every year and challenged by corporate colleagues. Some targets could be raised but some, such as invoices were nationally set. This year that action had been amber due to a push. Council Tax showed as Green at 97% but will not remain Green by the end of the year. The Head of Finance confirmed that the targets were robust.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

People and Business Change:

Attendees:

- Tracy McKim (Interim Head of People and Business Change)
- Rachael Davies (HR and OD Manager)
- Mark Bleazard (Digital Services Manager)
- Shaun Powell (Newport Intelligence Hub Manager)

Apologies were received on behalf of the Cabinet Member Community and Resources and the Head of People and Business Change.

The Interim Head of People and Business Change presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration. The service area supported the Council in Digital, Human Resources and Organisational Development, Policy Partnership, Health and Safety and Business Change and was projected to come in just under budget. There had been a number of objectives ranging from cultural change around the Corporate Plan, support and driving improvement around corporate risk, support for the Public Service Board and Partnership Plan, complying with equalities duties and welsh language.

This year had seen a number a major project impacts across the council. A new i-Trent and HR system had been brought in, which enabled managers to self-service and work in a more modern way. The Newport Intelligence Hub brought together lots of information and intelligence to support projects and corporate plan outcomes. Performance and risk framework was being redeveloped. A lot of work had been done with the Partnership Board and planning for Brexit had been a large piece of work. There had also lots of grant funding, WLGA and Welsh Government funding. The Service area was also responsible for Digital Strategy and provided client services for SRS.

Members asked the following:

- A Member referred to Action 7 on Page 39 “*Enhance the City’s Digital Infrastructure including Local Full Fibre Network roll out as part of Cardiff City Region City Deal*”, which showed 0% completed, and asked why hadn’t this progressed. Members were advised that this had been rethought nationally and some outcomes may benefit rural areas more, but Newport is less rural so might not benefit as much. There were challenges around the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) working with stakeholders and Welsh Government to collaborate and the project would be managed by the Cardiff Capital Region. When asked when might a decision be made by DCMS, it was advised that realistically because of lead times of work it would be unlikely to see completion by the end of the year.
- A member referred to the number of Actions showed as green and asked whether the service area targets were robust. Members were advised that some of the goals which had not yet been completed had quite complex sub-tasks below them. Some areas showed as green but were 30% achieved. These would catch up by the end of the year but were not too easy.
- A Member queried the number of abbreviations in the report and requested that future reports include full wording at least once followed by the abbreviation.
- A Member enquired about free Wi-Fi. It was advised that there is free Wi-Fi provided in the Civic Centre and public buildings and also in Friars Walk.
- It was requested that future reports include comment upon “Risk to success” to assist Members to focus scrutiny.

- Member referred to Objective 3, Action 1 on page 45: “Develop effective succession planning practices” and asked could they have reassurance that the target would be met, as growing the Council’s staff was a good solution in place of outsourcing. Members were assured that this action was important to the Council and that small steps had begun such as career pathways. This allowed staff to shadow different service areas or sections in the council if they would like to progress and should be ready shortly. The service area needed to give more effective guidance to management to better understand the skills of the workforce. They are confident that this would be done by the end of the financial year. There had been an internal investment in planning practices. A new graduate system started in September 2019 and the service area was in its third year of the apprenticeship programme.
- A Member enquired whether there was a danger that the Cardiff Capitol Region was preventing things that need to be completed. Members were advised some of the bigger programmes could not have been completed by the Council alone, however working with wider partners could slow things down and can sometimes be difficult. When asked if the service area thought that working with the Cardiff City Region was effective, Members were advised that their only experience had been the Digital Project, and there was a strong relation with the Digital side.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

Regeneration Investment and Housing:

Attendees:

- Cllr Jane Mudd (Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing)
- Bev Owen (Strategic Director - Place)
- Keir Duffin (Head of Regeneration Investment and Housing)

The Cabinet Member presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration. Context was provided upon the potential position the service area may be in by the end of year. Highlights were given of the adopted City Centre Master Plan and the Economic Growth Strategy and the Delivery Plan currently being developed, and how the Council worked in partnerships was crucial for delivery. There had been successful external funding for projects. Further highlights were given of the work taking place at the former Hornblower pub which had almost been completed.

Members asked the following:

- A Member congratulated the team for the work that they had done which was appreciated.
- A Member asked about the number of Red Performance Measures on pages 73 and 74 and the reasons. The Cabinet Member referred to PAM/019 % of all Planning Appeals Dismissed explained that where the Planning Committee raised queries and had gone against the Planning Officer’s recommendations and rejected planning applications, the applicant then appealed the decision, which then went to the Planning Inspectorate to determine and can overturn decisions. If a decision was overturned, then this performance indicator is Red. Members were advised that another planning appeal had that day been overturned in the favour of the applicant. Every time this happened, the Council incurred a cost. The Cabinet Member then suggested that the Planning Committee could benefit from a workshop session.
- A Member referred to Objective 6 Action 1 on page 72: “*Begin to use zero emission vehicles and active travel to deliver services*” and asked if there was any update upon the no formal policy and forward plan in place. Members were advised that a Carbon Management Plan was being finalised and the wider process was in the final phase of being developed. They had started off with one officer and now there was an energy

team with two more Officers employed. The picture was changing and there had been a big advancement.

- A Member referred to the good work taking place to regenerate the City Centre which could sometimes be overlooked because of the number of empty shops in the city centre. It was added that although a national problem, as Newport was compact it could be more noticeable and asked could landlords be influenced to reduce rents. Members were advised that this action is on the horizon as Welsh Government were committed to looking at absentee landlords. At a local level, the Business Support Team could offer advice for grant funding, signpost to other sources and provide business start-ups, which could assist. The Council could give grant funding for helping with rent or fittings, and for those businesses looking to expand, such as taking on additional staff or getting new equipment. It is a difficult and challenging time however, some of our businesses are independent and grow and events like the Chartist Uprising Festival increased visitors and footfall to the shops.
- Members discussed the identification of Newport as an area for physical growth by Welsh Government and the consultation that would close on 15th November 2019. Members were advised that reports of other Local Authorities views in the media were their own interpretation.
- A Member congratulated the Cabinet Member and her team upon their successes, said that they should make sure successes are communicated and made known, and asked were these successes expected to continue. The Cabinet Member advised yes, and referred to their open meeting with the Business Improvement District at which the Head of Service had presented. The Cabinet Member represented the Council on this Board and met regularly. Some schemes that the BID are able to support complimented the Authority's and they had one of the best events programmes taking place in the city centre.
- A Member referred to Action "*Maximise new housing units from empty properties*" on page 70 and Action "*% of Empty Private Properties Brought Back into Use*" showing as nothing being achieved, and asked how robustly are these performance measures being looked at, and would the target be achieved. Members were advised that the service area was The Cabinet Member advised that Members may recall the revision of Empty Homes and there was a 15-point action plan to help support and deliver this performance measure. The service area was looking to exceed this target. The Head of Service directed the Members to page 75, PAM /045, "Number of new homes created as a result of bring empty residential properties back into use." It was advised that Newport are second in Wales at delivering this, and both targets needed to be considered to understand the larger discussion.
- Members were pleased to see a Green Plan come together for the zero emissions and asked was work being done to balance out growth vs green agenda and overall well-being of Newport. Members were reminded of the Wellbeing of Future Generations legislation, which overarched everything and advised that one of the things Welsh Government had in place is the Carbon Reduction Strategy. In the report, WG undertook a review on affordable housing, and discovered a high level of carbon emissions came from residential properties. This is an area the Council is working towards. The Head of Service added that in the growth agenda they had a five-year housing plan, unlike many areas. All the regeneration undertaken required green excellence and the City Regeneration Projects, would be looking to reuse existing buildings rather than build more.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet

The Committee noted the performance within the Finance, People and Business Change, and Regeneration Investment and Housing Service Plan Mid-Year Reviews and made the following comments to the Cabinet:

General:

- The Committee welcomed the improvement made to the presentation of data and the report layout in response to previous comments made, which made it easier to focus scrutiny upon performance.
- The Committee flagged the need for consistent understanding by Officers of the key and what makes performance: Red; Amber, or; Green and requested some explanation of reasons to be provided in the commentary in future reports.
- The Committee requested that future reports include full wording at least once followed by the abbreviation.
- The Committee requested more detail be included regarding the Service Area Risks in future reports.
- The Committee requested that future reports include comment upon “Risk to success” to assist Members to focus their scrutiny.
- The Committee stressed the importance of succession planning for Service Areas.

4 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

Attendee:

- Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser)

a) Forward Work Programme Update

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next two Committee meetings:

Monday 18 November 2019:
2019-20 Service Plan Mid-Year Reviews:
- Law and Regulation
- City Services

Monday 13 January 2020:
2020-21 Draft Budget Proposals

b) Action Sheet

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Action Sheet and advised the Committee of the Actions from the Minutes held on 2 September 2019, as listed on Page 85.

The meeting terminated at 5.55 pm