

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 28 November 2022

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Cleverly (Chair), S Adan, J Harris, G Horton, M Howells, M Linton, B Perkins, C Reeks, J Reynolds and K Thomas

In Attendance: Councillor Yvonne Forsey (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity), Councillor Laura Lacey (Cabinet Member for infrastructure and Assets), Councillor Deb Harvey (Cabinet Member for Communities and Wellbeing), Paul Jones (Strategic Director for Environment and Sustainability), Tracey Brooks (Head of Regeneration and Economic Development), Matt Tribbeck (Regeneration and Place Manager), Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez (Head of Environment and Public Protection), Stephen Jarrett (Head of Infrastructure), David Walton (Head of Housing and Communities), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Advisor), Pamela Tasker (Governance Officer), Emily Mayger (Governance Officer)

1 Apologies

Councillor James Clarke.

2 Declaration of Interest

None however, Councillor Adan wished for it to be noted that he is employed by the DWP as there is mention to the DWP restart programme in the service plans.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 July 2022

The minutes of the previous meeting held 11th July 2022 were **accepted as a true and accurate record**.

Matters Arising: A Glossary of Acronyms was requested previously, and this will be followed up. Also, the committee wished for an update about the merging of Track and Trace with Caerphilly.

4 Council Service Plans 2022 - 2024

Regeneration and Economic Development

Invitees:

- Paul Jones – Strategic Director for Environment and Sustainability
- Tracey Brooks - Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
- Matthew Tribbeck - Regeneration and Place Manager

The Strategic Director noted that this was the first of the four new service areas with four new Heads of Service and also noted that they have been able to set the agenda for the next 5 years in line with current wellbeing objectives. The Strategic director noted that this was an opportunity to get feedback at the draft stage before these were formally approved. The Head of Service introduced the report and highlighted the new areas that are now covered under regeneration and Economic Development. The Head of service noted that the service plan was split into different sections such as the Transformation plan and gave some examples of what that covered. The Head of Service noted that in the main body of the service plan there were 4 objectives.

Members asked the following:

- A committee member asked for clarification about the IAC building.

The Head of Service informed the committee that the IAC building was the former sorting office building on Mill Street.

- Are all the projects still deliverable with the increasing costs such as fuel and labour, and there should be an action to review each before providing support?

The Head of Service responded that they go through fairly rigorous and detailed evaluations in terms of project management and so they are constantly monitoring and highlighted that there was a monitoring framework that is used for funding. The Head of Service added that they are also constantly looking at how they are able to embed Climate Change and Net Zero options within that as well.

- Are Officers able to take advantage of additional Football Association for Wales money for grassroots football following the World Cup?

The Head of Service advised they work closely with Newport Live to get the most out of funders and partners so as not to miss any opportunities.

- A committee member welcomed the consideration of a cultural strategy, and highlighted the Older Person Information day that was developed in the name of the 50+ forum and noted that it was the largest event of this description and a leader in Wales in 2019. The committee member highlighted that they are now faced with the challenge of finding an alternative venue for such large numbers of people and asked the officers how many employees had engaged with the job fair?

The Regeneration and Place Manager detailed that there had been 60 employers and partners and 400 job seekers. The Regeneration and Place Manager noted that a venue in the city centre that could host large numbers of people could be useful for events of this nature in future.

- Is there funding to restore commercial properties and is the Service Area looking to encourage commercial use or use the properties for residential purposes.

The Head of Service stated that there was a number of empty properties across the city but that they had taken the top ten approach on the most concerning ones. Many of the owners are absent and have no interest and the main issue they face is encouraging owners to use them. However the Head of Service added that they are working with partners and private operators who are willing to work together to bring them back to use.

The Regeneration and Place Manager added that there are properties that have been funded that look amazing but are still vacant due to many reasons such as the owner's expectations for rent. They were also looking at addressing grant conditions but that there was still Welsh Government funding for specific types of properties.

- A committee member asked about the National Technology Institute training facility that was being built and whether it has any affiliations with the university?

The Head of Service stated that it was part of the Levelling Up Part 2 funding and that as it was not competing with USW or Coleg Gwent they have been engaged with them through the development.

- A committee member asked about the levelling up fund from the Shared Prosperity Funding programme and queried what the allocation of £27 Million was for.

The Head of Service explained that the 27 million was the core spend initial allocation for the 3 years to cover the three areas listed Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. The Head of Service highlighted that they wouldn't be aware of the final amount until the regional investment plan had been approved and explained that the other 5.6 million was for Multiply, which focuses on Adult skills primarily in Maths.

- A Committee Member asked the Officers to clarify what funding was secured to date from 2019 in reference to targeted regeneration and investment funding.

The Regeneration Manager noted that since 2019 there had been a high level secured for projects from Welsh Government and the Heritage fund and noted that they had also received additional funding for recyclable loans that had been allocated over that period.

- How are Officers planning on coordinating the Living Wage with businesses?

The Regeneration and Place Manager stated that they were setting an example through the service board with the erosion of lower-level wages and changes to the salary structure as well as helping people gain more qualifications. The Head of Service acknowledged that it would be a challenge however that is not a reason to not try and that they would be taking steps to get as many businesses on board as possible. The Head of Service added that they would be having ambassadors to show to the benefits of the living wage as well as why it is the right thing to do and so they will be looking at partnership working to get that support.

- A committee member wished for clarification about an apparent discrepancy in the numbers in the number of businesses supported through the provision of advice and guidance as the figure is much larger than the target and added that if it is correct why is the target remaining so low.

The Head of Service stated that the numbers were correct. The Regeneration and Place Manager stated that this was a reflection of the huge number of enquiries that they had received during covid for discretionary grants for people who are self-employed and small businesses. The Regeneration and Place Manager noted that they had had an exponential growth in the number requirements and help they had given alongside also signposting to help elsewhere and wished to credit the officers for their work.

The Head of Service added that the figures has been significantly skewed as people were engaging to gain access to the Welsh government funding whereas usually the number of business would be around 350 to 400 and so the target reflects that number.

- A committee member questioned why there weren't more increases in targets from this year to the next.

The Head of Service stated that they are not looking to increase the targets as they were looking to reassess after a year due to the cost-of-living crisis and recession. A

committee member noted that the target should be raised so that there are the resources in place when they are needed as the full implications of the cost-of-living crisis on the future are unknown. The Strategic Director stated that this could be feedback as one of the Committee's recommendations.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance.

Environment & Public Protection

Invitees:

- Yvonne Forsey – Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity
- Paul Jones – Strategic Director for Environment and Sustainability
- Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez – Head of Environment and Public Protection

The Head of Service introduced the report and noted that due to the restructure the service plans had changed however there were some of the previous actions included. The Head of service stated what the service plan covers and wished to highlight two larger projects cemetery feasibility and park and play area improvements. The Head of Service noted that there were a few actions around staff improvements and training. The Head of Service explained that there were 5 main objectives that aligned with the main service areas but stated that climate change features within all of the objectives in some way. The Head of Service highlighted some of the key performance measures and stated that some were previously existing, while others were statutory requirements. The Head of Service informed the Committee that they had increased many targets however some of the ones around the Public Protection had not been.

Members asked the following:

- A committee member queried whether there were capable officers to enforce HHSRS with the new Rent in Wales Act which would come in in January and whether they would be able represent Newport Council in court.

The Head of Service informed the committee that they work with the Housing department to preform inspections on properties and engage with landlords but explained that the change in legislation would simplify the requirements and recommendations for both landlords and tenants, however, the way they intervene or engage may need to change. The Strategic Director noted that this was something that could be brought back as it is quite technical, they would need to look at the detail.

- A Committee member brought up the high number of HMO properties and queried whether inspections has started again after lockdown as they would like assurance that more thought is being put into it.

The Head of Service expressed that they had started again but as many officers had been diverted there had been a huge backlog and was unsure of how long it would take to be cleared but that it was a priority.

- A Committee member asked whether Rent Smart Wales was being used appropriately to report landlords and added that many reports of fly tipping appeared to be from rented properties.

The Head of Service informed the Committee that they had planned to do a review of the scheme to assess how it can be used more effectively but noted that they are struggling with many vacant posts. The Head of Service added that there had been a multitude of factors that had put pressure on the service and that it would be a collective effort from different departments.

- A Committee member noted that the Environmental Health Team had been brilliant especially with sensitive cases and queried why the environmental health team was not kept during covid.

The Strategic Director noted that officers were diverted away due to the need for specifically trained officers at the time and that there was a backlog in many areas and agreed there was a lot of work needed.

- A committee member queried if it would be possible to have officers go to HMO and educate tenants on refuse.

The Head of Service noted that in regard to fly tipping work and engagement had been done with Registered Social Landlords however that it would be more difficult with private landlords as the tenants change so often it would be a constant battle. The Head of Service did highlight that they had produced some easily understandable leaflets which they hoped may help engagement.

- A committee member requested the change of the word illegal to describe new properties entering the market.

The Head of Service agreed that the choice of language was poor, and they would revise this.

- Is a date proposed from Welsh Government for the zero-waste policy and whether there were performance indicators for this?

The Strategic Director informed the committee that the overall target was 2050 however that there were incremental targets that move upwards over the years in between.

- What was being done to engage local businesses about recycling and waste?

The Head of Service stated that this was something they were looking to push and they had tried to do some engagement with the city centre which didn't progress as much as was wished. The Head of Service added that they had been in talks with Welsh Government about segregating business waste but that there had been delays and that they would be developing these strategies over the next year.

- A committee member asked what monitoring was being done on the back log of cases for trading standards.

The Head of Service noted that they added this to the plan so it was able to be scrutinised and had properly monitored.

- A committee member asked about the placement of the electrical vehicle chargers.

It was advised that not all chargers are owned by Newport, but they were all publicly available. The Strategic Director added that they had included all the ones that anyone can access.

- A committee member asked whether the Environmental Health team inspects the properties that the Housing Team use for temporary accommodation.

The Head of Service stated that there was ongoing work to coordinate with teams to look at these properties.

- Are there plans to introduce electrical vehicles for Hackney Carriages and if so, should that be put out for consultation?

The Head of Service stated that they had looked at taking part in a trial which has been extended. The Strategic Director noted that the Cardiff Capitol Region had been given the chance to experience it and then used the feedback all across Wales.

- Does the Council possess any land that could be used as Solar Farms for income?

The Head of Service informed the committee that Solar Farms were being considered however, that as many areas will have conflicting needs, they will need to understand what assets are available and what the best use for them would be. They are looking at developing a Solar farm for the electric waste vehicles. The committee member stated that if there were already targets then it should be included in the service plan.

- Members queried Ash Tree Die Back and noted that there didn't seem to be anything to reflect what was being worked on.

The Strategic Director informed the committee that the main risk would be financial and so this has been addressed by putting money aside, and they would not be replacing all the cut down trees with the same species. The Head of Service noted that more detailed actions regarding this would be added to the annual plan which would also come to Scrutiny. The Strategic Director added that if land owners aren't acting on this then they can remove the trees and counter charge them.

- A committee member queried whether repeat offenders of fly tipping should be penalised and questioned whether the council could work with local businesses as CCTV can only be installed in specific areas.

The Head of Service informed the committee that there were multiple factors that affect where you can place CCTV and that it is also a complex issue. They go ahead with enforcement when they are able but that they require robust evidence which can be complex. CCTV works well for vehicles but not so much for individuals. The Strategic Director stated that there had been an increase in the number of prosecutions but that the burden of proof is very high for each individual case.

The Head of Service added that had gotten multiple prosecutions but the Judge had then reduced the fine they had set. The Strategic Director stated that they had large amounts of CCTV for these purposes and that they had been successful in some cases.

- A committee member asked about making the collection scheme for large waste more affordable for people who don't have cars or who are on a lower wage.

The Cabinet Member noted that the large fly tipping would be done by people with cars in any case and added that it is not possible to make it any cheaper than it is currently. The Strategic Director also noted that the fees are already set in the annual budget.

The Committee thanked the Officers for attending.

Infrastructure

Invitees:

- Laura Lacey – Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Assets
- Paul Jones – Strategic Director for Environment and Sustainability
- Stephen Jarret – Head of Infrastructure

The Cabinet Member thanked the officers and presented the 4 main objectives and added that the plan works closely with the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity.

The Head of Service gave a brief introduction of the service plan and gave examples of what service area covered including what had been added after the restructure and noted some of the areas and projects that are outlined in the report.

The Head of Service noted that some of the performance measures are new and some were already existing ones.

Members asked the following:

- A committee member asked for clarification on what was meant in by effective deterrent in tackling illegal parking.

The Head of Service explained that illegal parking is causing issues and disruptions and the aim is to provide and encourage alternative methods into the city centre as well as ensuring that if people are using cars to not park irresponsibly.

- A committee member asked about providing free school bus passes to all pupils.

The Head of Service stated that there was a policy and criteria for free bus passes and that although there could be positives it would be at a significant cost and operational issue. There had also been a shortage of bus drivers across Wales and that they were working with Newport Transport on this issue however as the service provider they are in charge of hiring. The Head of service also noted that some issues such as only needing drivers in peak times as well as the significant increase in buses that would be needed due to the dense population of Newport. It was hoped that many pupils would walk or cycle as an alternative.

- A committee member noted that it was positive to see the investment in electric bikes.

The Head of Service stated that there is a staff salary sacrifice scheme and that they would speak to PR about the promotion of this as well as looking at ways of facilitating it in a different service plan.

- A committee member asked the Head of Service to explain the Hostile Vehicle Mitigation Scheme.

The Head of Service stated that the scheme was about making the city centre more secure. The city centre is currently barriered, and that they are focused on keeping them fit for purpose.

- What is the process of adoption of new roads with new housing developments.

The Head of Service stated that the Council is not obligated to adopt new roads and that it was only possible if developers have built them to the correct standards. They have to also be aware if Welsh Water have adopted the road as if they may have need to do invasive work. Not all developers wish for their roads to be adopted and place blame back with the Council.

- A committee member asked for clarification about traffic enforcement on bus lanes.

It was explained that they would be continuing to enforce the current traffic regulation order and using the tech to facilitate this.

- A committee member asked for clarification of the criteria to appear in the transportation plan.

The Head of Service noted that the Transformation Plan consisted of the more significant projects/interventions. The Strategic Director added that the Transformation plan service is covered by departments across the Council.

- Query was made about the completion date of the city-wide bike scheme.

The Head of Service stated that the date was the intention when the plan was first drafted and that they were working hard with partners but that the date would be amended.

- Query was made about the pavement parking regulation and whether this would be City wide. It was also noted that in some cases pavement parking had been done to allow space for emergency vehicles.

The Strategic Director stated that this had come from Welsh Government which they will be enforcing to prioritise pedestrians. A committee member noted that there is an issue with pavement parking during school pick up and drop off times which would block the access of emergency vehicles. The Strategic Director stated that they had some powers of enforcement with this however as it happens over such a large area at specific times it is hard. The Head of Service added that they were waiting on guidance on how it will be implemented.

- A committee member asked about digital timetables at bus stops and noted that the target date had already passed.

The Head of Service stated that they were working with Newport Transport to provide digital information in shelters.

- A severe risk listed in the report was the lack of investment in highways. Members asked how this was intended to be addressed.

The Strategic Director noted that there is a gap with the current funding from HAMP but that was scrutinised separately. The Head of Service stated that this was a global issue with the investment and that it was important to keep the highway in serviceable condition.

- Who is responsible for the business continuity and how often it is was tested as well as whether it is audited internally or externally?

The Head of Service informed the committee that the service managers cover this but will be assisted by Civil Contingency. The Head of Service noted that how this had been audited was something that can be looked into further.

The Committee thanked the Officers for attending.

Housing and Communities

Invitees:

- Paul Jones - Strategic Director for Environment and Sustainability
- David Walton – The Head of Housing and Communities

The Head of Service introduced the report and listed the main areas and objectives of the service plan, and wished to highlight the housing section and stated that there was a focus on developing an overarching infrastructure that links into a clear corporate plan. The Head of Service noted the Housing Support Programme Plan and what this included and stated that there was a large focus on Prevention. The other side of the proposed plan is around Housing Supply and explained the Social Housing Prospectus.

The Head of Service noted that the performance measures were static and that increases were not expected due to strategic and development work that was needed. The Head of Service also noted that the service area was new and that this year would be used to take stock and get strategies in place. There were some new Objectives particularly around homelessness relief and temporary accommodation due to the impact on the families and the financial impact on the Council. The Head of Service lastly noted that there are some TBC on the risk register as this is still being finalised which would then be added to the corporate risk register.

Members asked the following:

- A committee member wished to welcome the new Head of Service and asked for clarification on the housing sector programme and asked how they were reviewing the slowdown of the development programme across the RSL due to the increase in bill costs, increase labour costs and the loss of some developers from the region?

The Head of Service noted that there was a high pressure on RSLs to deliver and that there was monitoring and reviews in place as well as working with the RSL regarding pots of Capital Fund. The Head of Service added that there was various funding for the delivery of projects and that there is strategic engagement and formal monitoring metrics.

- How could the Council become the strategic leader across via partner working in community development work as the third sector businesses would have better links to the community.

The Head of Service noted that they draw on the expertise of the third sector and note that they were working with GAVO to develop a partnership and make use of the links they have to help deliver a grant programme. There were events planned to offer a holistic approach as well as a strategic event with faith based third sector leaders as they are able to reach into communities in a way that the Council cannot.

- A committee member wished to highlight the lack of temporary accommodation, what could be done to reduce the Bed and Breakfast spend as well as avoiding families going into unsuitable accommodation. The committee member noted that this had been alluded to by the Head of Service but wished for it to be within the action plan.

The Head of Service agreed that this should be addressed in the service plan and stated that they believe it's imperative to not just rely on social housing and RSLs. There are opportunities of Social investment and looking at engagement with private landlords and supporting them for example looking at expanding the private sector leasing scheme. The Head of Service noted that there was work needed with the other Heads of Service to look at aligning the service areas, and also noted the need for a corporate housing strategy that could involve more departments.

- A committee member wished thank the Head of Service for his time and to note that many valuable resources such as community centres had been lost and that a more joined up approach such as partnerships is valuable.
- A Committee member asked for some elaboration about the initiatives used to support an effective private rented sector.

The Head of Service noted that there were a couple of areas that need focus on such as advice for private tenants. The team are under a large amount of pressure but that they are going to employ a large homelessness prevention team funded by grant money which will be able to offer advice to private tenants on rights, contracts and Rent Smart Wales etc. It was also noted that they wished to be proactive and to supply training on the basic knowledge and skills for tenants as well as when and how to seek help. They

would provide advice for Landlords whilst also being clear what the expectations are from them.

- A committee member noted that although the Head of Service explained why the targets had not been set higher that it was their belief that the service is going to need to expand and the department should be prepared for this.

The Head of Services noted that they would look at some of the structures as well as additional Welsh Government Funding may aid in standing still and prepare for more challenging numbers.

- A committee member noted the number of vulnerable properties in private ownership which is owned by people pressed to pay for repairs and noted that there were regulations that prevent houses from optimizing their habitability which meant that more housing stock is being lost to being uninhabitable.

The Committee thanked the Officers for attending.

Conclusions

Regeneration and Economic Development Service Plan 2022-2024

- The Committee wished to give their thanks to Officers for attending. The Committee were happy with what was presented within the draft Service Plan. The Committee made comment about performance measure “*Number of businesses supported through the provision of advice and guidance*”. Members felt as if the performances measure target could be raised significantly, perhaps twice the amount or higher. Members also wished to ensure that there is enough resources in place to support.

Environment & Public Protection Service Plan 2022-2024

- The Committee wished to give their thanks to Officers for attending. The Committee were happy with what was presented within the draft Service Plan.
- The Committee wished for further clarification about when a complaint comes through about officer training and enforcement with the new Rent in Wales act that is due to come in in January.
- In Objective 4, reference 11 – “*New illegal properties entering the market being monitored*”, the Committee wished for a replacement of the use of the word illegal to describe properties to something else such as unregistered.
- The Committee wished to introduce a target rather than a time estimate when clearing the backlog in Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing work that had been caused by the pandemic.
- Similarly, the Committee also felt that there should be a target when clearing through the backlog in HMO inspections that was caused by the pandemic.

Infrastructure Service Plan 2022-2024

- The Committee wished to give their thanks to Officers for attending. The Committee were happy with what was presented within the draft Service Plan.
- Members noted that they would like further clarification about the Council investment in the Bike Scheme and Salary Sacrifice Scheme.

- The committee wished for further clarification on whether the Business Contingency Plan was to be internally or externally audited.

Hosing and Communities Service Plan 2022-2024

- The Committee wished to give their thanks to Officers for attending. The Committee were happy with what was presented within the draft Service Plan.
- The Committee suggested that the department should look at the current targets and to consider when they will be in high demand so that they can be adequately prepared for this.
- Members voiced concern that from interactions with the Housing teams that they are already overstretched and under resourced. Given it's a brand new service area, Members would expect to see a review of the structure and resources, ensuring we have people in the right posts with the right skills to tackle the housing crisis, which will only get worse with rising rents and mortgages and landlord exiting the rental market.
- Members made comment that we are currently using high levels of Bed and Breakfast accommodation which is particularly expensive and unsuitable for families. Members requested a further look into the lack of temporary accommodation and reducing the spend to Bed and Breakfasts, as well as reducing time spent in inappropriate accommodation. A member suggested that a task and finish group be set up to consider and explore all options such as bringing empty properties back into use, purchasing private empty properties and/or re-purposing them for use as temporary accommodation. Options could also be explored for partnerships with social services, ABUHB, and other 3rd sector agencies. The group could also consider other options for moving to a rapid re-housing approach in line with the WG policy.

5 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

Invitee:

- Neil Barnett – Scrutiny Adviser

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 5th December 2022 at 4pm, the agenda items;

- Council Service Plans 2022 – 2024
 - o People, Policy and Transformation
 - o Law and Standards
 - o Finance

Monday 23rd January 2023 at 2pm, the agenda items;

- 2023-24 Draft Budget Proposals

The Scrutiny advisor noted that the outstanding actions would be followed up.

The meeting terminated at 7.10 pm