

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 22 July 2024

Time: 2.00 pm

Present: Councillors M Howells (Chair), A Pimm, M Pimm, G Horton, A Screen, K Thomas, C Reeks and J Cleverly

In Attendance: Councillor Yvonne Forsey (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity), Councillor Saeed Adan- Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Councillor Rhian Howells (Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Assets), Paul Jones (Strategic Director – Environment and Sustainability), Tracey Brooks (Head of Regeneration and Economic Development), Matt Tribbeck (Regeneration and Place Manager), Alistair Shankland (Strategic Economic Development Manager), Steve Davies (Senior Strategy Manager), Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez (Head of Environment and Public Protection), David Walton (Head of Housing and Communities), Katharine Majer (Deputy Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser), Emily Mayger (Governance Officer) and Taylor Strange (Governance Officer)

1 Apologies

Councillors Bright and Linton

2 Declaration of Interest

Councillor Chris Reeks declared an interest for various strategies involved in the Environment and Public Protection report.

Councillor Kate Thomas declared an interest due to work within the private housing sector.

Councillor Matthew Pimm declared an interest for recent work within the community for Shared Prosperity Fund.

3 End of Year Performance Reviews 2023-24

Regeneration and Economic Development

Invitees:

- Paul Jones – Strategic Director – Environment and Sustainability
- Councillor Saeed Adan- Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
- Tracey Brooks – Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
- Matt Tribbeck – Regeneration and Place Manager
- Alistair Shankland – Strategic Economic Development Manager

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development gave an overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee asked about the engagement with businesses for the "What's On" website feature. The Committee were advised that various contributors are involved in the website and recently QR codes have been installed on barriers around licensed premises in the city centre which link to the website. Businesses are encouraged to make use of these. The website has received over 4000 hits, and the Regeneration and Place Manager agreed to provide updated numbers to the Committee.
- Concerns were raised regarding the regeneration around the Transporter Bridge area and the potential for additional amenities. The Committee were informed about challenges due to the bridge's location next to Newport Docks, but the presence of Coronation Park nearby was noted positively. Suggestions for further development, including installing boat ties and engagement with local businesses and community groups, were discussed.
- The Committee asked for clarification on the completion dates and financial implications of the Transporter Bridge Visitor Centre. The Committee were advised that the Visitor Centre is expected to open for schools and organised visits in January 2025, but the overall project had faced challenges. The handover is planned for November 2024, with no financial implications.
- The Committee asked about the progress of the Placemaking Plan. The Committee were advised that the plan is still developing, having completed Stage 1, with Stage 2 focusing on engagement. The Committee were advised that the plan is expected to be presented before the Cabinet in October 2024.
- Concerns were raised regarding Service Area Risks, particularly with regards to the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP), Transport Bridge (TB), Leisure Centre (LC), and Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), especially with funding ending on March 30 2025.
- The Committee queried about the Newport Ship funding and its location. The Committee were advised that ongoing work is being done to determine options for relocating the ship, with a feasibility project to follow once options are identified.
- Concerns were raised about the promotion and advertising of parks on the website, noting a perceived bias towards Tredegar Park over Beechwood Park. The Committee were advised that the Parks Team should address these issues to ensure better advertising and representation of all parks.
- The Committee commented that reports, especially regarding project timelines like the Leisure Centre, sometimes do not provide a clear picture. The Committee were advised that reports should be reviewed for clarity before being presented. For the Leisure Centre, the contract is out to tender, aiming for an 18-month completion goal.
- The Committee sought clarity on why the old Leisure Centre had to be demolished before the new one could be built. The Committee were advised that this was a funding condition, as detailed in a public Cabinet report.
- Concerns were raised about the level of public engagement, comparing the 550 responses to the plan with the 2400 responses to the Burns consultation. The Committee were advised that interest varies by topic, with the Placemaking Plan receiving 700 responses in four days.
- The Committee enquired about the progress of the former IAC Mill Street building, which has seen no progress. The Committee were advised that there is active

engagement with the owner, but the pandemic has caused delays. The possibility of using the building for homelessness was positively received.

- The Committee discussed challenges in achieving certain goals when the Council does not own the land. It was suggested that there should be a mechanism for the Council to buy back land from developers who do not develop it, to address issues of land being an eyesore. The feasibility of consulting with local MPs or implementing a law for such buybacks was raised.
- The Committee noted that 22 events were supported or led by the Council but questioned if the target was realistic. The Committee were advised that the target was ambitious. The idea of leading or facilitating events, rather than just supporting them, was also mentioned for future consideration.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions

- The Committee requested to receive a comprehensive update on the website's "What's On" performance, specifically focusing on the number of visits or interactions it has received since the last update. This should include metrics on user engagement and any feedback received to improve the website's functionality and content relevance.
- For the Transporter Bridge and Visitor Centre Objective, The Committee recommended to clearly separate the objectives and timelines for the Transporter Bridge and Visitor Centre projects. This separation will aid in better tracking, communication, and management of each project's specific completion dates, ensuring stakeholders are accurately informed of progress and any potential delays.
- The Committee wished to ensure that project timelines, especially for significant projects like the leisure centre, are clearly communicated in reports. This includes providing detailed updates on tender processes, negotiations, and realistic completion timelines to set accurate expectations and facilitate proper planning. It was also requested to implement a structured process for regular updates on key projects, particularly those in tender or negotiation phases. This could involve periodic briefings or updates to the committee to keep all stakeholders informed on progress and any changes to timelines or expectations, ensuring transparency throughout the project lifecycle
- The Committee wished to enhance community engagement and resource accessibility, particularly for parks and recreational areas. This could involve engaging with local schools to involve children in resource creation, leveraging parks for community consultations, and enhancing online platforms for better information dissemination. This approach aims to foster community involvement, especially among children, and utilise local parks for broader community engagement activities.
- The Committee asked to receive a comprehensive business plan for the leisure centre that outlines the project's scope, objectives, and expected outcomes. This plan should detail the integration of the leisure centre within the broader community infrastructure, highlighting its benefits, potential challenges, and strategies for community engagement and sustainability. Ensuring transparency and accessibility of this business plan to councillors and the public will foster a shared understanding and support for the project's vision and execution.

Infrastructure

Invitees:

- Paul Jones – Strategic Director – Environment and Sustainability

- Steve Davies – Senior Strategy Manager
- Councillor Rhian Howells – Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Assets

The Strategic Director gave an overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee expressed concern about the decrease in bi-monthly check-ins, noting a drop from 61% to 47%. There were worries about staff morale and well-being. The Strategic Director advised that everyone is on the iTrent system, but it doesn't suit frontline services well. Efforts were being made to improve the situation, acknowledging the system's limitations for certain roles.
- The Committee noted the challenges in recruiting staff and the possibility of budget pressures due to the need to offer market supplements to attract candidates. The Strategic Director explained that market supplements might be a more cost-effective solution compared to the high costs of not filling positions or resorting to consultancy or agency staff.
- The Committee enquired about management plans to address sickness days lost. The Strategic Director explained that the HR team would work with Heads of Service on individual cases, including long-term sickness, to see what progress could be made. The importance of HR involvement was emphasised by the Chair.
- The Committee enquired about the increase in bus passenger journeys since the pandemic. The Strategic Director advised that while there's been an improvement, the numbers haven't returned to pre-pandemic levels, particularly noting that concessions have seen a lower rate of return to travel.
- The Committee discussed the importance of including benches or perching seats at bus stops, especially for older people who significantly contribute to bus usage. Concerns around antisocial behaviour were highlighted, but it was noted that replacements in the last two years have included benches.
- The Committee asked for clarification on speed limits. The Strategic Director clarified that the Welsh Government's guidance on speed limits was not being reversed but they are providing more clarity on exceptions. The default speed limit remains, and the Council will reassess roads based on new guidance. The Committee raised an issue with the difficulty of providing feedback on speed limits on the website, particularly when submitting feedback for multiple roads.
- The Committee discussed the use of 20mph signs and the process for residents to request a street to be 20mph. It was advised that there would be an assessment of each road, and expectation management was emphasised, advising that there would not be a huge number of roads changing back. The Strategic Director noted that legislation prevented councils from signposting default speed limits, unless entering or leaving the zone.
- The Committee enquired about bike training for older people and the possibility of rolling out safe cycling courses in the city. The Committee were advised that communication on this matter was going well. The Committee then suggested information was added to the Newport City Council website.
- The Committee discussed the Active Travel Network and the bid submitted for 24-25 schemes. The Committee enquired about the schemes and what changes were expected. The Strategic Director agreed to provide this information to the Committee.

- The Committee enquired about the design of bus shelters, specifically why some on Nash Road faced outwards while others faced inwards. It was advised that the location and position of shelters depended on constraints of the land and the presence of utilities in the area.
- The Committee sought an update on the three new railway stations planned for the city. The Committee were advised that work with the Burns Commission and discussions with the UK government are ongoing, with a hopeful outlook forward. For specific proposals, it was suggested to email the Head of Service for further information.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions

- The Committee requested the implementation of a more flexible and accessible check-in system tailored for staff working outside the office environment. This system should accommodate the unique challenges faced by frontline staff, ensuring regular and effective communication between them and their managers. It was noted that consideration should be given to alternative methods of recording check-ins that do not rely solely on computer-based systems, potentially incorporating mobile or other accessible technologies to facilitate this process.
- The Committee noted issues with the website feedback system on exceptions to the 20mph speed limit to allow users to provide feedback on multiple roads in a single submission and asked for this issue to be looked into. This could involve technical adjustments to the website interface and functionality. Additionally, it was requested to ensure clear communication and guidance on how users can effectively use the system for their feedback.
- The Committee requested if safe cycling courses specially designed for adults could be developed and rolled out within the city. These courses should focus on enhancing cycling skills, road safety awareness, and confidence-building for older cyclists. Additionally, ensure that the details of these courses, including schedules, locations, and how to enrol, are effectively communicated through the city's official website and other relevant communication channels to reach the target audience efficiently.
- The Committee would like further information on the 2024-25 schemes for the Active Travel Network.

Environment and Public Protection

Invitees:

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

The Head of Environment and Public Protection gave an overview of the report

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee discussed the need for more plots in cemeteries due to Newport's growing population. The Head of Service advised of a project linked to provision, aiming to maximise space and explore options for additional space.
- The Committee raised concerns about the policy of removing benches without consultation. The Head of Service clarified that the current policy, established in 2008 and reviewed in 2012, allows only Council-approved models to be installed for safety. Benches over 35 years old that didn't comply were allowed to stay under certain

conditions. The Committee suggested that it would have been helpful if ward Councillors had been briefed before implementing the bench removal policy. The Committee requested that in future such changes were communicated to Members.

- The Committee proposed encouraging a voluntary group to help with bereavement issues by using the unused house at Christchurch Cemetery as a visitor centre. The Head of Service explained the building's condition was not good after the previous tenant left, and the cost of refurbishing it is significant. Additionally, there are protected bats in the building, complicating its use.
- The Committee queried recycling for flats. The Head of Service confirmed plans to start working specifically with flats, acknowledging that their needs differ from other areas. The Strategic Director advised of ongoing work with Newport City Homes (NCH) on this initiative.
- The Committee queried about engaging landlords to increase recycling in private rentals and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). They were advised that direct engagement is the first step, focusing on the resident's responsibility for waste generation. Efforts are being made to work with housing colleagues to explore enforcement options, acknowledging the challenges due to the nature of tenancies.
- Concern was raised about the transition for businesses regarding waste collection and the service provided by Wastesavers. The Committee were advised that the transition has been challenging for all parties involved, including businesses and waste collection companies. Efforts were made to prepare and communicate with businesses as much as possible, but confusion with collection days and service adjustments were noted as initial challenges.
- The Committee asked about the recycling of soft plastics from businesses. The Committee were advised that current challenges include the transportation and sorting of soft plastics, making it difficult to offer this service to businesses at this time.
- Concern was raised about the removal of bins and increased littering, especially around Newport Retail Park. The Committee were advised that the transition period has seen confusion and adjustments, but improvements are expected over time.
- The Committee expressed appreciation for the commercial waste team's efforts, highlighting the high cost of compliance for small businesses. The Committee were advised that recycling collection is priced at half the cost of residual waste management to encourage recycling among businesses.
- The Committee expressed concern about the lack of training facilities for local football teams within the city, highlighting it as a priority area for development, and noting the unfortunate necessity of sending people out of the area for training. The Head of Service mentioned a broader strategy in place, considering the needs of clubs and the work done last year on asset transfer. They acknowledged the complexity of club use of facilities and the supportive role of the Parks Team towards clubs.
- The Committee enquired about any scheduled works for Tredegar Park and whether these would be reviewed by scrutiny. The Strategic Director indicated that an announcement regarding this would be made soon.
- The Committee asked for data on graffiti incidents before and after the installation of graffiti walls. The Head of Service responded that they currently do not have specific figures but would gather this information to send to the Committee.

- Concerns were raised about check-ins being under target. The Head of Service acknowledged that the figures at the start of the year were not satisfactory and attributed this to the close working nature of the teams, which might not always formalise check-ins through the system.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions

- The Committee recommended explore the development of play areas and facilities specifically designed for teenagers across the city. This initiative should consider the interests and activities popular among teenagers to ensure the facilities are well-utilised and meet the community's needs.
- The Committee praised the work of the Commercial Waste Team, Fly Tipping Team, Environment Health and Trading Standards Team and wished for their praise to be relayed to the teams.
- Whilst discussing the Sports and Recreation Strategy, the Committee advised that priority should be made to develop high-quality, accessible sports facilities within the city to support local teams effectively and prevent them from seeking training opportunities elsewhere.
- The Committee acknowledged the positive impact of the Graffiti Wall initiative and request specific figures detailing the change in graffiti occurrences before and after the installation of the walls to assess the initiative's effectiveness.
- The Committee requested for a specific email address or contact point within the Council for individuals interested in applying or enquiring about the Eco Flex scheme.

Housing and Communities

Invitees:

- Paul Jones – Strategic Director – Environment and Sustainability
- Councillor Saeed Adan – Cabinet Member
- David Walton – Head of Housing and Communities

The Head of Housing and Communities (HoHC) gave an overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following questions:

- The Committee noted the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) and Wider Social Housing Grant and enquired about additional grants. The Committee were advised that Social Housing grants do not cover the full price, with TACP grants focused on refurbishment. TACP grants were awarded in mid-July 2024, and the Social Housing grant work is progressing well.
- The Committee asked about the trauma-informed approach to housing. It was noted that staff have received training, and additional personnel have been recruited due to the recent restructure.
- The Committee asked whether the Housing Team connects clients to services like Flying Start. The Committee were advised that they collaborate closely with the Prevention and Inclusion Team, which is aware of the challenges faced by children lacking permanent accommodation.

- The Committee sought clarification on the continuation of the holiday food initiative. The Committee were advised that the initiative is still active.
- The Committee queried the merger between Melin and NCH and its impact on the Council. The Committee also asked if the goal of building 500 homes was achievable. The Cabinet Member (CM) noted ongoing discussions were being held, with the new leadership expected to bring a fresh perspective that could enhance outcomes.
- Concerns were raised regarding the trend towards constructing homes for open market rent instead of social rent. The CM reaffirmed a commitment to collaborate with new management to address this imbalance and increase social housing units.
- The Committee enquired about the publication date for the Local Toilet Strategy. The Committee were advised that it is expected to be completed by September 2024.
- The Committee noted there were a number of vulnerable adults in the city centre and asked whether housing these vulnerable adults was a process or coincidence. The CM explained that the facilities that help vulnerable adults were typically located within the city centre as well as the temporary accommodation, The HoHC highlighted a great focus was achieving the right level of support in the housing.
- The Committee asked for an update on the Sanctuary Plan and noted that the report states a 50% completion with an end date of completion for 30th September 2024. The HoHC noted it was in development, there was a lot of work taking place, including ongoing monthly work groups with partner organisations. The Committee were advised that the end date of completion may need to be reviewed.
- The Committee highlighted concerns about interventions occurring only after homelessness. The HoHC noted that the recent restructure has shifted focus towards early intervention, with an emphasis on maintaining continuity by assigning the same staff to homelessness cases.
- The Committee congratulated the team on the lower-than-average sickness days. The Committee raised the issue in the level of bimonthly check ins. The HoHC noted some issues related to the type of staff positions being similar to previous service areas in the way they function, but agreed they need to be more disciplined around the check ins.
- The Committee noted various schemes with the Welsh Government and asked how the Cabinet Member could facilitate progress. The CM indicated that a plan is in place and offered to provide further details in writing to the Chair.
- The Committee asked if the public were aware they could go to the Council for grants. The CM agreed that better communication on this issue needed to occur.
- The Committee asked whether the Prevent Program had the same objectives as before. The HoHC confirmed they have remained unchanged.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions

- The Committee expressed interest in seeing the updates and changes being made to the Local Toilet Strategy, which was noted to be overdue for an update since the end of May 2024.

- The Committee asked that regular updates are provided regarding the status, challenges, and milestones of Welsh Government schemes.
- The Committee felt more information could be provided to residents to make them aware of the grants available through the Council related to empty dwellings. Potential ways of engagement include social media campaigns, use of local newspaper advertising and community outreach programmes. The Committee requested that ward members be provided with key messages regarding grants to enable them to effectively communicate with residents and assist in spreading awareness. The Committee also requested that the Council website has a dedicated section for housing grants, clearly outlining the types of grants available, eligibility criteria, application process and contact information for further assistance. The link to the page should be prominently displayed on the website home page.
- The Committee requested to receive updates on the City of Sanctuary Strategy.

4 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Invitees:

- Neil Barnett – Scrutiny Adviser

a) Actions Arising

The Committee were advised of Actions Arising.

b) Draft Annual Forward Work Programme Update

The Committee were advised of the draft Annual Forward Work Programme. The Committee accepted the dates and agenda items.

c) Outcomes Monitoring

The Committee were advised of the up-to-date outcomes.

5 **Minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 19th February 2024**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 19th February 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The meeting terminated at 5.52 pm