

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 22 March 2021

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Evans (Chair), G Berry, M Whitcutt, I Hayat, J Richards, C Ferris and M Linton

In Attendance: Paul Jones (Head of City Services), Matthew Cridland (Trading Standards Manager), Joanne Gossage (Green Services Manager) and Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser)

1 Apologies

Councillors M Al-Nuaimi, M Kellaway and M Linton

2 Declaration of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th January 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2021 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4 Enforcement of COVID Business Restrictions

Attendee:

- Matthew Cridland (Regulatory Services Manager – Commercial Standards)

The Regulatory Services Manager presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration. This included the Department's Summary of Outputs, which noted numbers of inspections, notices issued and total number of fixed penalty notices issued.

The Regulatory Services Manager reported that since the end of March 2020, Trading Standards and Licencing had provided businesses with advice on over 2,000 occasions, completed 3,000 inspections and assessed compliance on 4,000 occasions. 74 % of these inspections were compliant and 16 % became compliant whilst officers were at the premises, following advice. 10 % required further investigation. 45 premises improvement notices had been issued together with 7 closure notices and 3 licence reviews requested.

The Regulatory Services Manager explained the work carried out during the initial lockdown when many businesses were ordered to close and only essential businesses remained open to customers. Those allowed to stay open had to ensure everything was safe by controlling queues and numbers, ensuring social distancing and installing hygiene signs etc. The relevant teams contacted every single business on their database, making sure they knew what was required of them and a duty line was rapidly set up to provide advice. Patrols were also carried out to ensure compliance with the regulations. The sorts of issues that arose

were premises such as pubs where open beer gardens were being used, which the proprietor thought were safe, but which was, in fact, in breach of the current regulations. Also hairdressers and barbers operating in people's homes.

Whilst carrying out these checks, there was also an increase in scams and trading standard issues to deal with such as price hiking for goods and services, refunds for cancelled holidays being refused and unsafe personal protective equipment and hand sanitiser.

With the infection rate lessening in the Spring, staff carried out supermarket checks to ensure the signage, movement directions around the shops etc were adequate. All shop Managers were contacted and provided with advice so they knew what was expected of them in these respects. The Service area worked closely with the Police during the pandemic and also City Services Highways in order to organise outside dining areas in the City Centre to enable customers to access services in safety and in compliance with Covid-19 restrictions and regulations. Blatant disregard or non-compliance of the regulations by 2 licensed premises in the City Centre were rigorously investigated and licenses suspended.

The Regulatory Services Manager explained that they utilised the four E's approach towards enforcement, which were 'Engage, Explain, Encourage', and as a final resort, 'Enforce'. The figures quoted in the report showed that by engaging and encouraging, the compliance levels were high and the need for enforcement were then very low.

All staff had worked incredibly hard under these difficult circumstances. Legislation was changing on a weekly basis and the need to relay this information to businesses and individuals in a timely manner was paramount and the Regulatory Services Manager praised his staff, saying he believed their effort and dedication had made Newport a safer place to live and work during the pandemic.

The Chair thanked the Regulatory Services Manager for his informative report and on behalf of the Committee, requested that their appreciation be forwarded to all staff for their dedication and hard work during the pandemic.

Members asked the following:

- What was the likelihood of any fines being paid and how would this be enforced?

The Regulatory Services Manager reported that all fines would have to be paid but that they also tried to be responsible and fair. Payment was due within 28 days or it escalated to prosecution for non-payment. Some businesses that had struggled to pay the fines had made representations and these were taken into account and for example, a payment plan set up. As an Authority we would stand firm regarding fine payment, but aim to avoid prosecution for non- payment wherever possible.

- A member asked what type of businesses constituted the non-compliance figures?

The Regulatory Services Manager responded that there was a link to actual breakdowns included in the report. During the Autumn in particular, pubs and clubs were having issues with compliance and so receiving Improvement Notices. The Manager had attended site inspections with officers and acknowledged that it was difficult for Licensees. For example if people lied about numbers in their households, household bubbles etc. it was hard to challenge and contradict people. Similarly, the issues of mask wearing in supermarkets was challenging as staff were concerned they would be policing this requirement themselves. Following meetings with the Supermarket Managers, it was agreed that the staff would just remind somebody of the policy rather than challenge them for non-compliance. Legislation was now in

place as part of safe systems of work and masks were mandatory unless exempt on medical grounds.

- A member asked what the situation was whilst in the current lockdown

The Regulatory Services Manager reported that evaluation was ongoing and assistance and advice being given ready for reopening, The Compliance Officers would remain in post until June and possibly extended until September. Lockdown had allowed the opportunity to tackle other high-risk work such as illegal tobacco investigations and of course the normal day to day work had continued alongside.

5 Active Travel

Attendees:

- Joanne Gossage (Service Manager- Environment & Leisure)
- Leah Young (Active travel Projects Officer)
- Luke Stacey – Access Development and Public Rights of Way Officer
- Paul Jones – Head of City Services

The Service Manager and Team members gave the Committee an overview of the Active Travel Plan, highlighting the key areas for consideration. The main Act placed a number of duties on the local authority to facilitate active travel. This was mainly by creating, upgrading, mapping and promoting the routes and the activity overall in order to be able to identify the schemes that the Council wanted to take forward.

The Committee were shown a short animation film that explained the work conducted by the department, and gave a basic overview of Active Travel proposals. As part of the Welsh government's Active Travel Act, the Department had been working hard to improve the walking and cycling routes around the city with minimal disruptions once completed. Not only would the routes be better, safer and more accessible for all, but also would speed up travel time. By building active travel into everyday journeys, it would improve physical health, support mental wellbeing, help the environment and enhance the local community and the economy.

The Department had investigated the feasibility and accessibility of routes. There had been a number of consultation events over the last five years. The first of these was in 2015 when the existing route network was identified and the second was in 2017, where the integrated network map of the proposed routes had been identified. As a result of these consultations, the public had suggested where they wanted routes and then the feasibility of those suggested routes was investigated. Slides were shown to identify existing travel routes and suggested integrated cycle networks. Since 2015 some routes had been completed and the map would be updated as part of the forthcoming Network Map Review.

As part of the Welsh Government Active Travel consultation, Newport City Council had engaged with partners, public, people with protected characteristics and children to encourage more people to walk and cycle. In the initial stage (February / March 2021) feedback was sought from all stakeholders and public on the barriers that kept people from walking and cycling in their area. A first draft of the Active Travel Network Map for Newport would be prepared based on this feedback. The approved Active Travel Network Map would then go into statutory consultation with Welsh Government in Autumn 2021 and the final ATNM be handed over to Welsh Government by 31/12/2021.

A short video was shown promoting public engagement for the projects, existing routes and what improvements could be made. The Committee were advised of the amount of visitors, contributions, comments and agreements made.

Members asked the following:

- A member commented positively on the lighting along Coed Melyn footpath and queried the provision of additional waste bins for dog waste.

The Service Manager replied that the key standout feature of that path at the moment had been the installation of the lighting and obviously in the winter months commuting in the early hours of the late hours, it was inevitably going to be a bit dark and so providing lighting was a really important way of encouraging users to use those paths. They also had to be considerate of nocturnal ecology of that area. Lighting needed to be low level, bright enough to light the path, but not spread the light to the surrounding area or affect bats, badgers and other nocturnal creatures. The Head of City Services stated that all waste bins were suitable for mixed waste, including dog waste and that maybe there was some merit in promoting and reinforcing this information to the public.

- A member asked how we were currently performing in terms of responses to the consultation and how the public could get involved in responding.

The Team responded that to date they had received 2,383 visitors to the website, and the total contribution of 2,167 comments. In comparison, in 2000 there had been only 69 comments. The responses were also geographically spaced, evidence that the people who were using the active routes that had been implemented in those areas were keen to use active travel as a different mode of transport, such as the Rogerstone ward. There was a dedicated Active Travel page on the Council website and the consultation was being pushed on social media channels, the Youth Council and more engagement was being made with schools. Once the data received had been analysed, the first draft of the network map would be produced and then sent back out for public consultation.

- A member commented that it was important to promote extensively the routes, footpaths and open spaces throughout the City so people could utilise them and promote active travel. He suggested possibly promotion by guided tours around these areas as the amount of work that had gone into these schemes warranted use by as many people as possible.

The Project Officer commented that whilst we had been working hard to increase the number of walking and cycling routes across the city, we knew there was more we needed to do to improve the infrastructure. This was where the public consultation became effective. We needed as many people as possible to have their say - local residents, employers and schools, walking and cycling groups and community groups. This would enable us to know what new routes could be added, which would enable more journeys on bike or on foot. The more responses we received, the better the needs of the whole community would be reflected.

The Chairman thanked the Team for their presentation and congratulated them on their work carried out to date.

Attendees:

- Neil Barnett (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 7 June 2021 at 4pm, the agenda items;

- 2021-22 Service Plan End of Year Review for:
 - Law and Regulation
 - People and Business Change
- Draft 2021-22 Annual Forward Work Programme

Monday 21 June 2021 at 4pm, the agenda items;

- 2021-22 Service Plan End of Year Review for:
 - City Services
 - Finance
 - Regeneration Investment and Housing

The meeting terminated at 5.45 pm