

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 17 October 2016

Time: 11.00 am

Present: Councillors D Wilcox (Chair), P Cockeram, G Giles, D Harvey, R Jeavons, J Richards, R Truman and M Whitcutt

In Attendance: Mr W Godfrey (Chief Executive); Mr M Nicholson (Strategic Director); Mr G D Price (Head of Law and Regulation) ; Mr M Rushworth (Head of Finance); Mr R Cornwall (Head of People & Business Change)

Apologies: Councillor R Poole

1 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest by cabinet members

2 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2016 were confirmed as a true record by the Cabinet

3 **WAO Corporate Assessment - Review of Progress and Corporate Assessment Follow-up Recommendations 2015-16**

Colleagues from the Wales Audit Office presented a report which set out the outcomes of the Review of progress in addressing the Corporate Assessment and Corporate Assessment Follow-up recommendations.

The Corporate Assessment in 2013 examined the council's capability to deliver its priorities and improved outcomes for citizens. In the Corporate Assessment Review 2014/15 the Wales Audit Office considered whether the council had made good progress in addressing the recommendations and proposals for improvement made since the full Corporate Assessment report was published.

The Cabinet was informed that the review of progress made in 2015/16 had reduced the number of recommendations to four and there were three proposals for improvement. Good collective leadership was recognised by WAO colleagues and good examples were reported. Quality of performance data was improving. Workforce planning was improving and a positive staff survey was recognised. More needed to be done for a strategic workforce plan. The value of Scrutiny was now being recognised and further work needed to be done. The value of independent involvement at Scrutiny was raised by Cabinet Members.

The WAO determined that 'The Council has made progress against all the recommendations made in our Corporate Assessment follow-up report, but some further work remains to ensure these are addressed fully'

The Leader stated that the report was positive, whilst at the same time recognising room for improvement. Cabinet Members stressed that they took the WAO reporting very seriously and sought to address issues raised in detail. The Council continued to strive to improve despite changes in demographics and ongoing austerity. The Leader stated that improvement was against the background of the Council spending £7.4m per year less than the Council 'Standard Spending Assessment' – the amount deemed as required to provide 'standard' level of services to its residents. Newport also has one of the lowest Council Tax rates in the UK.

Proposed accountability and monitoring arrangements for the implementation of recommendations and proposals for improvement were also set out in the report

Decisions:

- I. To accept the findings of the Auditor General in his Review of progress in addressing the Corporate Assessment and Corporate Assessment Follow-up recommendations
- II. To endorse the Statement of Response to the Recommendations
- III. To endorse the accountability and monitoring arrangements for the implementation of recommendations and proposals for improvement
- IV. To receive quarterly monitoring reports on the progress towards recommendations and proposals for improvement

4 WAO Financial Resilience Review

Colleagues from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) presented a report which stated that as part of the 2015/16 Performance Audit work-plan, the WAO had completed a review of all Welsh Local Authorities 'Financial Resilience' arrangements. This followed some of their concerns, across Wales, about the rigour and robustness of Council's Medium Term Financial Plans and ability to deliver on budgeted savings which culminated in their national report "The financial resilience of Councils in Wales" in April 2015.

The review focussed on: Financial planning arrangements; financial control arrangements, including delivery of savings; and financial governance arrangements

For each of the above areas, the WAO gave a risk rating following their review. The basis of the risk analysis was set out in the report to the Cabinet. The full report was presented to the Cabinet. The report highlighted on-going improvements made over the last few years and areas for improvement. In terms of the risk rating, all three areas mentioned above were assessed as 'Medium'.

The lack of a balanced medium term financial plan was highlighted by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources. It meant that the best rating on the financial planning area can only be a 'medium' score. The WAO report acknowledged that this is the position in most Welsh Local Authorities (and would also be the case across the UK) and the on-going lack of information on medium term funding support from Welsh Government was recognised as a significant barrier to balancing medium term plans

Cabinet Members were informed that the Head of Finance and his accountancy team had considered the report, its findings and recommendations and had developed an action plan of improvements. The action plan was set out in full in the report. Cabinet Members were informed that some of the actions were 'in progress' anyhow and now already implemented. The recommendations in the report were useful and helped in the development of the action plan.

Decisions:

To approve the action Plan to address some of the key findings

5 Year-end Performance Analysis for 2015/16

The Leader of the Council introduced a report informing Cabinet that each year analysis of our performance measures is undertaken. The report showed:

- 55% of measures have performed better than target.
- 52.5% of our service plan measures have performed better than last year.
- 40% of our service plan measures have performed better than Wales's average.

A report prepared by the Head of People & Business Change stated that Newport had continued to improve performance in national measures despite a backdrop of budget cuts and limited resources.

The improvements reflected significant efforts made in service areas within the Council. It was important to note that these comparator figures do not take into consideration the potential impacts of financial position, population demographics or service demands. As mentioned earlier in the meeting, Newport Council has historically low levels of spending. Currently, we spend £7.4m per year less than the Council 'Standard Spending Assessment' (SSA)

The Leader of the Council stated that Cabinet Members and Heads of Service would be asked to address areas where our assessment shows that improvement has slowed. The Leader stated that the aim of the Council and Cabinet remains to provide the best possible affordable services to the people of Newport and Cabinet Members and officers will strive to continue on our path of improvement in coming years.

Performance management arrangements had been improved with regular monitoring by the Cabinet and Cabinet Members as well at officer level. The Authority had made its targets more difficult to achieve in an effort to push the organisation into improving services. Most indicators in the bottom quartile were improving. In terms of comparators, not all authorities were using consistent methods of measuring.

Decisions:

To note the contents of the report

6 5 Year Welsh Language Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources introduced a report informing the Cabinet that the Council is required to produce, and publish on the website, a five-year strategy that sets out proposals to promote the Welsh language and to facilitate the use of the Welsh language more widely in the area.

A draft strategy was presented to the Cabinet. The Cabinet Member stated that the strategy will be further developed through consultation with partners and the community before being finalised and reported to Council. He informed Cabinet that the aim of the strategy is to 'promote the Welsh language and facilitate the use of the Welsh language.

The Cabinet Member stated that the proposed five – year target was to increase the number of Newport pupils in Welsh medium education from 892 in 2016/17, to 1,250 or more in 2022/23. This represented a growth from 3.9% of the school age population to 5%. The

target was based on filling the reception classes of the three Welsh medium primary schools to their capacity for the next 5 years.

The Cabinet Member informed his colleagues that the strategy is required to include a target relating to Welsh speakers in Newport. He said the target focuses on the number of children attending Welsh medium education, as this is measurable and because we believe that we can influence this.

Consultation would also take place on how to develop people's opportunities to use Welsh throughout their lives although this is likely to take longer than 5 years.

The strategy also considers language transfer in families, Welsh for the workplace and other aspects of planning. In this strategy we reference the Welsh Government's aim in their draft strategy '1 Million Welsh Speakers by 2050'.. The strategy development also coincides with the development of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan for Newport which will be out to consultation shortly.

One of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act's seven wellbeing goals is 'A Wales of vibrant cultures and thriving Welsh language.' The Cabinet Member said that the strategy contributes to the council's Future Generations work and will be considered in forming the Council's Wellbeing Objectives for March 2017.

The cabinet member explained that during the consultation period we will be engaging with people across Newport, with our partners, other organisations and Members. The final Strategy will be taken to full Council for approval. Progress will be monitored through the annual reports, with full review at the end of the strategy term.

Decisions:

To approve the draft strategy for consultation purposes and receive a further report following the consultation process

7 Work Programme

The Corporate Assessment suggested to the Council that it should consider strengthening committee work programming arrangements to ensure they are timely, meaningful, informative, and transparent, balanced, monitored, and joined up.

In response to that suggestion, Cabinet had previously agreed that the Head of Democratic Services will regularly ask Chief Officers to update the Cabinet work programme and an update will be reported to Cabinet each month.

An updated work programme suggested by Chief Officers was discussed. This was, of course, a working document and will be subject to change.

Decision:

To adopt the suggested programme and provide an update at the next meeting

8 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Decision:

To exclude the press and public during consideration of the following item on the grounds that its consideration involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in

schedule 12 A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

9 **City Centre Regeneration Update**

Cabinet Members received a presentation which provided an update on progress in relation to the regeneration of the city centre

Decisions:

- I. To agree proposed actions as required
- II. To receive a further update and to consider outstanding issues at a future meeting

The meeting terminated at 1:10 pm