

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 18 November 2019

Time: 4.00 pm

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

In Attendance: Councillor R Truman - Cabinet Member Licensing and Regulation
Councillor R Jeavons – Cabinet member City Services
Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation), Paul Jones (Head of City Services)
and Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser)

Apologies: Councillors G Berry, K Critchley, D Fouweather and I Hayat

1 Declaration of Interests

None.

2 Service Plan Mid-Year Reviews 2019-20

Law and Regulation

Attendees:

- Cllr Ray Truman (Cabinet Member for Licensing and Regulation)
- Gareth Price (Head of Law and Regulation)

The Cabinet Member presented a brief overview to the Committee highlighting key areas for consideration. Members were advised that the last 4 months had been busy for the department. The Community Safety Wardens were spending more daylight hours in the city centre and wards, as their working hours had changed 3 months ago to work 1pm – 10pm, which gave more time to spend in the area. From 7th October to 6th November 2019, 77 fixed penalty notices had been issued for dog fouling, littering, dogs not being on leads and begging at cash points.

Trading Standards had been successful in prosecutions and closures of shops regarding the sale of illegal tobacco as well as counterfeit and dangerous goods sold online. This had been achieved with reduced resources and less staff. The Stray Dog Service had received two national RSPCA gold awards. The service was run by staff and volunteers and received funding from Partners. The Cabinet Member advised that Newport was the only authority in Wales that received gold awards, which was attributed to the staff in the Team.

Members asked the following:

- A Member queried Action 3.3 on page 21: “Registration Service – Review Discretionary Fees & Charges for the Registration Service”, for which the RAG Status was Green while it was only 10% complete, but had been running from 1st April 2018 and would end on 31st March 2019. The Head of Service advised the Committee that this was a misprint, it

should read 100%, but added that there were a number of objectives that did not lend themselves to percentage type reporting.

- A Member queried Action 4 on page 26: *“Maximise Use of Idox Web Forms – Environment and Community”*, for which the RAG status was Red and the commentary stated that the action had been delayed due to significant vacancies in the Environmental Health Housing Team. The Head of Service advised that there were significant vacancies across the board, but this Action had not been selected for the high-level business plan and did not affect anyone’s day job. Trading Standards had been short staffed and the Action had not been a priority. He added that this was the issue with turnover of staff especially in smaller teams. The service area was sustaining a good level of performance with diminishing resources and when staff do leave, it would reflect on performance. He clarified that the service area did not have a recruitment problem, it was a retention of staff issue.
- A Member enquired about progress upon the rolling out of card payment for customers. The Head of Service advised that some progress was being made.
- A Member referred to Objective 1, Action 2.2 for which the commentary ran from pages 18 to 20 ran was confusing and had unexplained abbreviations which made it difficult to read. The Head of Service accepted that too much narrative had been provided and he would address the issue of the use of abbreviations and apologised for any confusion.
- A Member queried the Performance Measure: *“Percentage of legal prosecutions issued within 20 working days”* on page 36, for which the Performance Status was Red. The Head of Service advised that late last year there had been a number of long-term sickness absences in small teams, but vacancies had been staffed. Performance was currently 100%, however due to the cumulative nature the Measure would not be Green by the year-end. However, when the new financial year began, they would be back on track.
- A Member referred to the overspend of £20k on budget at the end of Quarter 2 referred to in the Executive Summary on page 13 and asked would this be back on track by year-end. The Head of Service advised that since then the Service Area had an underspend of £70k from vacancy provision, but this was not sustainable as the posts would be filled, however the service area remained confident that it would come in under budget at year-end. A number of budget pressures were being managed in the service e.g. CCTV and overspend on registrars staff because of high demand.
- A Member referred to Objective 4, Action 5: *“Secure Purple Flag Accreditation”* on page 29, for which the RAG Status was Amber, and asked would this be completed within timescale. The Head of Service advised that the application would be submitted in January 2020. As a Partnership initiative there had been more consultation and it had been important for civil parking enforcement to be underway to analyse traffic movements before submitting the application. The outcome of the application should be advised in Spring 2020.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

City Services

Attendees:

- Cllr Roger Jeavons (Cabinet Member for City Services)
- Paul Jones (Head of City Services)

Apologies were offered to the Committee on behalf of the Strategic Director – Place.

The Cabinet Member presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration. The Service Area was £200k over budget at the Mid Year point and he clarified that the service area spanned a number of Cabinet Members' portfolios and there were some issues with cemetery fees. £1m a year was being spent on the Highway network. With regard to Civil Parking Enforcement, 10,500 tickets had been issued in Newport and a database of hotspots been created, with wardens patrolling across the city. Members were advised that following the approval of the Scrutiny Minutes upon the Draft Waste Strategy, a Cabinet Member Decision would be taken upon the Waste Strategy.

Transport links had improved and were showing as Amber. The Cabinet Member sits on the Cardiff Capital Region Transport Board. Work upon on risk analysis had identified Newport favourably, however as this is a regional approach, Newport did not control all variables. He also advised that on Page 54, the Performance Measure for: "*% of Municipal Waste recycled at the HWRC*" should read 69.4%.

The Head of Service advised that there had been a number of large projects underway in the first six months of this financial year. These included: the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement; the successful move to smaller Refuse bins, and; 11,000 bulbs had been changed in street lighting in the LED programme, which had reduced the carbon impact and created a budget saving.

The service area had a number of vacancies due to operational turnover that it had struggled to fill, due to their specialist technical nature of the posts. He advised that the Performance Measure: "*Customer Contact Centre average wait time – Council tax*" for which the Performance Status was Red was not within the Cabinet Member for City Services portfolio and was due to the limited resources to respond to the level of demand.

Members asked the following:

- A Member referred to the Performance Measure: % of Municipal Waste recycled at the HWRC" Mid-Year figure of 69.4% and asked for clarification whether Newport was the best performing city in the UK for recycling. The Head of Service advised that if this rate was maintained for the remainder of the year then Newport could be the best performing city in the UK for recycling.
- A Member referred to the decision upon the M4 Relief Road and asked what had been done regarding Objective 4, Action 3: "Drive forward the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Transport" on page 48. Members were advised that this was a corporate objective, and Newport alongside 10 authorities drew down funding, which would be seen across the region in track enhancements and the new Llanwern railway station in Newport, through the South Wales Metro scheme. Information upon the Scheme is available via a website and the Head of Service would provide a link to be circulated to Members of the Committee. He also referred to a separate future phase of the scheme, which included the Ebbw Vale link.
- A Member referred to the use of abbreviations in the report and requested that future reports include full wording at least once, followed by the abbreviations.
- A Member enquired about the timescale for the Ebbw Vale rail connection. It was advised that it is currently in phase 2 in the Metro project, its original date was 2021. Members agreed that this link would be good for potential staff to travel commuting to Newport.
- A Member enquired about payment of Civil Enforcement Parking fines and the number of challenges received. The Head of Service advised that in the first month there had been no payments, followed by spates of payments beginning soon after. There had been 74 challenges but no emerging pattern to the challenges received and the budget model had predicted an expected 10%, which this was well within and would improve over time.

- A Member enquired about the number of callers to the Contact Centre who hang up their call. The Head of Service advised that figures are published online every 3 months, but the issue regarding using this as a performance indicator was differentiating why a call had ended, for example automated messages include information to redirect callers online or to other options, so their reason for calling could have had been resolved.
- A Member praised the Service Area for their work and asked if there would be a review of the Civil Parking Enforcement. Members were advised that there were a few issues to resolve before reviewing, but the Council needed to carry out an annual review. A Member asked whether more traffic management could be needed. The Head of Service replied that there could be some required, but people had changed their parking habits because of challenges made and there were also time limited parking spaces in the city.
- A Member queried Objective 2, Action 3: "*Improve trade waste services*", on page 45, the commentary for which stated "Action commencing in Quarter 4, 2019/20". The Head of Service advised that these plans were written over a number of years and awaiting Welsh Government consultation upon changes in regulation. The changes are expected to be known on 13th December 2019, following which this Action could progress.
- A Member asked about 58% progress upon the Interventions Newport will seek to influence listed in Objective 4, Action 3 "*Drive forward the Cardiff Capital Regional City Deal Transport*" on page 48. The Head of Service advised of the 1st and 2nd phases of the Metro projects within which Llanwern was a priority additional station. Other stations such as Caerleon and Celtic Springs scored lower on the Welsh Government assessment. The information can be provided to Members as previously stated above.
- A Member asked whether the regional working was creating a bottleneck for projects. The Head of Service advised he did not believe that, and while the Regional Board decides on the projects overall, each of the ten Local Authorities had a representative upon the Regional Board to convey their views upon the issues.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet

The Committee noted the performance within the Law and Regulation and City Services Service Plan Mid-Year Reviews and made the following comments to the Cabinet:

General:

- The Committee welcomed the improvement made to the presentation and report layout in response to previous comments.
- The Committee requested that in future reports any excessive narrative in the commentary boxes be streamlined to avoid confusion and full wording used once followed by related abbreviation, as is the convention.
- The Committee requested that future reports include a comment upon Service Areas Budget positions including any budget risks, in the Head of Service Summary.
- The Committee requested whether the time between the end of the period reporting and scrutinising the information could be reduced e.g. Quarter 2 data up to end September, was scrutinised on 18th November.

The meeting terminated at 17:10