

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 29 November 2021

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Evans (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, G Berry, Y Forsey and M Linton

In Attendance: Councillors Jane Mudd, Roger Jeavons, Jason Hughes, Beverly Owen (Chief Executive), Paul Jones (Strategic Director - Environment and Sustainability), Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez (Waste Recycling Strategy Manager), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Andrew Wathan (Chief Internal Auditor), Emma Johnson (Income Collection Manager), Richard Leake (Strategic Procurement Officer), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser), Samantha Schanzer (Governance Officer) and Louise A Thomas (Governance Officer)

1 Apologies

Councillors John Richards, Ibrahim Hayat, Martyn Kellaway, Mark Whitcutt and Tracey Brooks

2 Declaration of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 November 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on the 15th November 2021 were accepted as a true and accurate record, with the following correction:

Correction of the dates of the upcoming meetings in the Scrutiny Adviser report for the Annual Forward Work Programme wherein the dates are repeated.

4 2021/22 Service Plan Mid-Year Reviews

City Services

Invitees:

- Paul Jones – Strategic Director - Environment and Sustainability
- Councillor Roger Jeavons – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for City Services
- Silvia Gonzalez- Lopez – Service Manager Waste and Cleansing

The Strategic Director gave an overview of the report and noted that it had been a difficult year and that the effects of the pandemic were still affecting the service. It was highlighted that the increased covert surveillance on fly tipping, the upcoming installation of a new footbridge, and environmental improvements such as vehicle charging points and water fountains. The Strategic Director felt that the area was broadly on track and highlighted that the graph could be misleading due to the axis. It was noted the importance that this was dependant on Welsh Government hardship funding.

The Deputy Leader advised the sustaining the increase in the reduction of residual waste bin usage, booking times remaining at a minimum and no queuing on roads taking place. The Deputy Leader informed advised the Committee that they were awarded the HWRC Site of the Year Award. The increase in food waste had been announced at a previous Waste Savers meeting. It was also noted that the well-known “Road to Nowhere” was now renamed the “Road to Nature”.

The committee asked the following:

- What was the real rate achieved in recycling, not just collection rate?

The Strategic Director informed the Committee that the measurement required by Welsh Government was the “end use” and that the 67% was the net figure. The Service Manager for Waste and Cleansing informed committee that the numbers come from a complex report that accounts for and breaks down all information, and that the actual rate of recycled was the 67% reported.

- Is the service area confident that recyclables didn't end up in landfills or mis-recycled?
- The Service Manager for Waste and Cleansing noted that waste was only shipped within the country and was confident it was handled properly as they were subject to regulations. The Strategic Director advised there was potential for more detailed information to be included but was unsure whether this was the right report for that.
- What is the percentage of households that “do well” in recycling?

The Strategic Director noted that it was a high percentage, and that a lot of education awareness had been done. It was then highlighted that enforcement was an option if households refused. The Service Manager for Waste and Cleansing informed the Committee that there was no recent survey data due to Covid, but anecdotal data suggested high and sustained participation.

- Is adding more recyclable collectables being considered?

The Strategic Director noted that it was important to strike a balance as some non-recyclable/difficult to recycle materials should be discouraged.

- What was being done to collect recyclable materials from public areas?

The Strategic Director noted that they had a reasonable portfolio with businesses but were still waiting for business regulations to change. The Service Manager for Waste and Cleansing confirmed that plans were waiting for Welsh Government's approval from potentially April 2022.

- Do the service area think that all of us have a duty to promote recycling and sustainable living?

The Strategic Director agreed that especially as civil servants, they had a duty to promote recycling and sustainable living.

- How do you regulate venues who choose to waste food rather than recycle?

The Service Manager for Waste and Cleansing informed the Committee that the main issues would be addressed in the upcoming regulations.

- How can we achieve progression toward zero waste when so many products have unrecyclable materials?

The Strategic Director highlighted that the Council have no control over what materials are used, only national and Welsh Government having that power. The Council can only work within what they are empowered to do and highlighted the Climate Change Strategy included these concerns.

- Why had nothing been achieved regarding the development of a new Household Waste Recycling Facility?

The Strategic Director highlighted that these plans have taken a backseat due to Covid but would be being picked up, and noted that the impact of having that second site had already been seen. The Strategic Director agreed that more work needed to be done to continue improvement but felt that many core issues had been addressed.

- What was the number of staff missing?

The Strategic Director noted that they didn't have the latest numbers for City Services but issues recruiting was not only with direct employment as the area relies on seasonal workers. Shortages of HGV drivers and other specialists had impacted the area and would continue to. The Strategic Director highlighted the challenge this brought to frontline managers and the struggle of retaining staff.

The Deputy Leader noted that other companies were able to offer attractive incentives which impacted ease of recruiting. The Committee advised that government schemes should be promoted. The Strategic Director informed the committee that they were working on a lot of schemes, but a large issue was also staff retention.

- What were the plans for the Road to Nature site regarding keeping it clean and promoting flora and fauna?

The Strategic Director informed the Committee that there were community volunteers in area. The Service Manager for Waste and Cleansing reiterated that they were working closely with groups in the area and informed committee that they had secured funding to do an in-depth survey in the area of wildlife.

- Could clarity be provided on item 2 page 19 of the City Services review and when would it be started?

The Strategic Director advised that this related to the Housing Benefits Team and it was about an I.T. integration wherein their systems would be updated and modernised. This work had been put on hold due to work undertaken by that team, enforcing the importance of other work undertaken by the team and their prioritisation of these works. The item mentioned wasn't something directly effecting residents' use but was an optimisation of a service.

- Was take-up being monitored for electric vehicle charging points?

The Strategic Director confirmed that take-up was being monitored and they had figures, but it was difficult to get sensible figures due to the pandemic and be able to adjust them. Take-up in carparks was good and work was being expanded on rapid

chargers. The Strategic Director highlighted work being done for a taxi charging point, and informed committee of a test initiative for taxi drivers to see the viability of an electric vehicle. The service area would work on providing members with an update on the points raised.

- Was there any data on planting more trees?

The Strategic Director did not have this information at hand and would send it to committee members when available.

- Was it feasible to implement motion-sensor street lighting?

Members were advised that it was not viable from the information he has and that the full LED lighting was a big projects that had resulted in carbon saving and financial saving.

- What was the purpose of the Burns Delivery Unit and what had it achieved?

The Strategic Director clarified that the Burns Delivery Unit was tasked with implementing the recommendations from the report, which was set up in January and had started progressing with more detailed studies and investment plans. Both he and the Chief Executive attend meetings with them surrounding train station recommendations and enhanced forms of transport and active travel. The work is dependent on funding recognition from all governments, and that work in this sector can take time due to detailed design work required but felt optimistic of the change.

The Committee felt that Members should have been made more aware of this project and asked whether this was independent of the Cardiff City Capital region. Members were advised that the Burns' Unit was an independent body. The committee asked for a brief report regarding what the Strategic Director had said. The Strategic Director agreed to take that recommendation back.

Regeneration, Improvement and Housing

Invitees:

- **Councillor Jane Mudd – Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Investment**
- **Councillor Jason Hughes – Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development**
- **Beverly Owen – Chief Executive**

The Chief Executive firstly gave apologies for the Acting Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing so is ill, and then gave an overview of the report. The housing service area had been innovative in delivering temporary accommodation, highlighting the 20 units built in Charles Street. There had been some delays in rolling out neighbourhood hubs due to Covid, but were at the heart of the Council's work during the pandemic, highlighting the food parcels and other services provided throughout the pandemic. It was advised that a lot of regeneration initiatives like the market, Chartist Tower and the leisure project were being driven forward.

The Chief Executive Officer noted that the Council and its partners have awarded nearly 3000 grants totalling £6m to businesses during Covid, with over 1000 businesses offered support and advice. Performance had been delayed a little but had been picked up again since August. Members were advised that the Council was a key delivery partner within the React and Kickstart skills programmes and had about 60 placements within those schemes to help people get back into work. The Leader of the Council acknowledged the huge

success of some performances when considering the challenges and constraints of the pandemic.

The Leader of the Council highlighted that the regeneration projects were on track and progressing well, and felt that the first quarter of 2022 was promising. Pressures on the housing service were highlighted due to changes in Welsh Government policy changes and collaborative relationships with partners and agencies have strengthened. Work was also being done gathering new information regarding the private rented sector. The Leader of the Council then asked Members to raise awareness of a new video put together regarding grants for businesses. The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development noted the significant progresses made despite the pandemic, and highlighted that carbon reduction targets for 2022 had already been achieved. Members were then informed that there had been media recognition for work done and won a national award as an organisation.

The committee asked the following:

- Did Action 2 on page 26 of the agenda – ***“Develop a Strategic Development Plan for the Cardiff Capital Region”*** have too slow a timescale?

The Leader of the Council clarified that the Strategic Development plan was not a business a plan or strategy for Cardiff Capitol Region and was actually about the 10 Local Authority's creating a plan for land use. This was one responsibility conferred on the region by the Corporate Joint Committee and timelines were where they should be. Members then asked whether there were only two live projects at the moment. The Leader of the Council advised that there were a number of projects underway including the Zipwire attraction, a Strategic Housing fund and distribution of funding allocation across 11 sites across the Cardiff Capitol Region for housing to address viability gap.

- What were the elements that construct the plan detailed on Action 1 on page 21 - ***“Support the completion the Welsh Government supported Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) Pilot to develop a decarbonisation action plan for the City of Newport in collaboration with NCC Policy & Partnership team and external stakeholders”*** and was this a wider Newport plan?

The Chief Executive clarified that Welsh Government were driving through a number of local area energy plans and that Newport was the pilot for this. Since the Leader of the Council had declared the Climate and Ecological Crisis at Council, the Climate Change plan to go for consultation as well as work being done with One Newport partnership. It was then noted that there were good baselines of information. The Chief Executive highlighted that as the new structure settles, there would be a more cohesive approach to the energy and sustainability work done across the Council.

- The committee asked what did they hope to achieve by 2035 and 2050 and what is meant by decarbonisation?

The Chief Executive Officer concurred that it was a large undertaking but felt that what should be done was reflection on the role of the Council and confronting the new climate reality. Members then asked whether the Chief Executive felt that an all-member seminar would be beneficial. The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development informed the Committee that they were in some consultation and were looking at training for all councillors regarding the environmental agenda. The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development noted that the 2030 agenda specifically looked at becoming carbon neutral within the Council, and the 2050 is for carbon neutral across the city.

- Were there any events planned?

The Chief Executive advised that events form a key part of any city's future growth and they were in dialogue with Welsh Government and the events unit to slowly develop a programme of events.

- What were the developments for helping homeless people and where could they go for help and information?

The Leader of the Council highlighted that this was one of the successful areas and outcomes during the pandemic as they had placed 1000 households into temporary accommodation, had taken on a further 40 units of temporary accommodation equating to 140 beds, had a total of 350 bed spaces in temporary accommodation, had block bookings in Bed and Breakfast accommodations, were a part of Welsh Government schemes and were working towards carbon neutral modular housing in the Hill Street carpark. The Leader of the Council assured the Committee that there were outreach facilities for homeless residents that were there to offer help and support.

- How environmentally friendly would new leisure centre be?

The Strategic Director advised the Committee that there would be high levels of insulation, a green roof, enhanced active travel and cycle connectivity and the energy team were working on a decarbonisation approach.

- Could hours be extended for support to be available for the homeless?

The Leader of the Council recognised that there were fundamental issues with the structure of society that also has impacts on the lives of these people and assured the Committee that what they could do, they would.

- Could a cycling event be introduced within the city to promote active travel?

The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development informed the Committee that there were plans to expand the cycle offering throughout the city, and could take this request back to the team to look into.

- Are properties being surveyed and are up to standard for private renters?

The Leader of the Council assured the Committee that accommodation in the private rented sector is subject to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System which offers protection for tenants, and when working on this, the housing needs team work closely with environmental health team.

- When are we expecting repair works on the Transporter Bridge to be completed?

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that the contract had been put back out to tender as there was a collapse of contractors and that it would be beneficial to come back once they are concluded.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and Cabinet Members for Sustainable Development for their attendance.

Finance

Invitees:

- **Meirion Rushworth – Head of Finance**

- **Robert Green – Assistant Head of Finance**
- **Emma Johnson – Income Collection Manager**
- **Andrew Wathan – Chief Internal Auditor**
- **Richard Leake – Service Manager Procurement and Payments**

The Head of Finance Services provided an overview of the report and highlighted the two objectives with more issues than preferable; the procurements objective was a failed test, whereas the council tax objective was a long term problem. The Head of Finance Services was confident getting to end of the council tax objective but noted it was taking longer than thought. All other objectives were on target and that performance was good overall. The Head of Finance Services highlighted that council tax would always be red and came with an issue about understanding the performance indicator's purpose.

The Head of Finance felt that even though the pandemic has potentially caused an issue, the area hadn't experienced a large issue locally and noted that the revenues team work proactively and sympathetically and signpost residents to relevant services.

Members asked the following:

- Is the number of arrears displayed on page 20 of the Finance report at 17.6% collected or current?

Income Collection Manager informed committee that it was the percentage of outstanding arrears in March 2021 that had been collected at the time the report was written.

- Members asked whether the percentage of people in current arrears was in the report.

The Income Collection Manager informed committee that this wasn't the case and it would be reported as a percentage of the actual amount being collected as opposed to number of households. The Committee then asked for clarification on what the actual percentage of the total was. The Income Collection Manager noted that the actual end of year percentage was 95.4%. The Head of Finance highlighted that the amount of actual collected of due council tax, and then noted that the actual targets were never achieved in the year itself, but in future years those arrears were collected, and the target is achieved as a minimum.

- How was the Breathing Space initiative going?

The Income Collection Manager noted that it had been a slow start when introduced in May but had picked up. 50 requests in total had been received since then. The Income Collection Manager felt that it was disappointing as they have had limited effect and they were in discussions with the Citizens Advice Bureau and they're not actively using the breathing space and preferred an informal route. It was advised that this initiative created a lot of emails and behind-the-scenes bureaucracy and when looking at the data, no successful arrangements had been made but the 50 cases had 400-500 emails. The Income Collection Manager felt that the system needed improvement and refinement.

The Committee asked whether there was a way to feed this back. The Income Collection Manager informed committee that it was a national initiative that wasn't open to consultation, but professional organisations in related areas were passing on information to the appropriate government departments for refinement purposes. The Income Collection Manager expressed that it was a good initiative in principle but was a lot of work for those with complex debts. The Head of Finance noted that there may

be other creditors where this formal route is helpful tool and that the revenues team work sympathetically and professionally and so don't always need to revert to formal system.

- Whether the training referred to on page 78 of the report be delivered in a more timely manner.

The Chief Internal Officer noted that this hadn't been able to be a priority due to the pandemic, but training had been drafted and was awaiting testing and review. The Chief Internal Officer informed committee that this training programme would be updated, finalised, and rolled out to members before the end of March 2022.

- Members queried whether businesses paid Council Tax and how was the Council involved in the collection of businesses rates/council tax.

The Head of Finance advised that businesses paid business rates which was not council income and was passed to Welsh Government. Members then asked whether business rate collection came back within the support grant. The Head of Finance noted that the Council are paid a small admin fee to collect the business rates and Welsh Government used it for funding the mechanism but there was no direct link between what is collected as to what is given back in grant.

- Has face-to-face contact been maintained?

The Income Collection Manager informed committee that these services are now provided at the Riverfront by the Customer Contact Centre.

Conclusions - Comments to the Cabinet

The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet:

City Services

- The Committee firstly wished to thank the Cabinet Member and Head of Service for their attendance and wanted it to be known that all the officers and staff have every right to be proud of their work and ensuring that the services provided have been of good quality throughout the pandemic. The Committee also praised the quality of the report.
- The Committee would like to request for the data on tree planting to be provided.
- The Committee proposed for an All Member Seminar to be set up in respect of the Burns Report and the Delivery group in respect of the 58 recommendations made by Burns.
- When the data is available, Members would also like to request for an update report on the take up of the "try before you buy" taxi scheme.

Regeneration Investment and Housing

- The Committee again wished to thank the Leader, Chief Executive and Cabinet Member for their attendance and wanted it to be known that all the officers and staff have every right to be proud of their work and ensuring that the services provided have been of good quality throughout the pandemic. The Committee were also happy with the quality in the report.

- The Committee queried about the possibility of having an All Member Seminar booked to discuss the Local Area Energy Plan.
- Members were pleased to hear about plans to create an event calendar for the city. It was queried about the possibility of having a cycling event to be held during one Sunday in the Summer to help promote Active Travel.
- Members requested clarification on what the “non-legal powers to stimulate action and improvements from owners” are in the commentary on page 29 of the agenda.

Finance

- The Committee wanted to give thanks to the Head of Service and his team for attending the meeting, and requested for their thanks to be relayed to the entire Finance team for their ongoing hard work during the pandemic. Members were pleased with the information contained within the report and had no further comments or recommendations to give to the service area.

5 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

Invitee:

- 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 13th November 2021 at 4pm, the agenda items;

- Economic Growth Strategy and Economic Recovery Plan – Recommendations Monitoring

Monday 24th January 2022 at 4pm, the agenda items;

- 2022-23 Draft Budget Proposals

The meeting terminated at 6.50 pm