

Minutes



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

Date: 25th October 2022

Time: 10am

Venue: Hybrid Meeting

Present: Councillors P Hourahine (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, M Evans, L James, C Baker-Westhead, B Davies, G Horton

Cllr J Mudd (Leader), B Owen (Chief Executive Officer), R Cornwall (Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate), P Jones (Strategic Director for Environment and Sustainability), S Jenkins (Strategic Director for Social Services), T McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation), P Flint (Performance and Business Research Partner)

S Schanzer (Scrutiny Advisor), L Thomas (Governance Support Officer), E Mayger (Governance Support Officer).

1. Apologies

Cllr P Bright.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

A member voiced concern that his comments on attendance at fortnightly meetings with the police had been amended and sought clarification on who to raise this with. He wished it to be on record that his comment was specifically a reference to making sure members of the white community were represented in community engagement, and requested that the minutes be amended to state this.

- The Scrutiny Advisor advised that the minutes were not a verbatim record and only meant to capture the main comments and questions regarding reports, and that the recording was publicly available as a verbatim record.
- The Chair confirmed it would be raised again with the Chief Executive.

It was determined that the minutes of the meeting held on 30th September would be agreed at the next meeting alongside the minutes of the current meeting.

4. Draft Annual Corporate Wellbeing Self Assessment Report 2021-22

The Leader introduced the report. The Chief Executive Officer and Strategic Directors gave overviews of their service areas and highlighted challenges and achievements.

Questions:

A committee member felt that the report should provide more detailed information to Newport residents on the benefits of partnership schemes such as the Cardiff Capital Regions and Western Gateway partnership. The committee member asked what was being done to be more pro-active in making the City Centre more attractive to both investors and citizens.

- The Leader informed committee that the report was an overview of performance at a high level, and this is reflected in the level of detail included. However, the Leader informed committee that there are a number of ways that information is communicated to residents, including promotional material, and a resident's newsletter which members could also sign up to which provided updates.
- The Leader highlighted that Officers are committed to achieving improvement in the City Centre and whilst discussions were still ongoing, large strategic plans are complex, involving many stakeholders, and needed to progress sequentially. The Leader informed committee that due to the commercially sensitive nature of these discussions, further information is not available at present.

The committee queried why the latest air quality progress figures were not included in the report.

- The Strategic Director of Environment and Sustainability confirmed there was a lag whilst the figures were validated by Welsh Government but this feedback would be followed up, and the most up to date figures provided to the committee.

The committee was pleased to see the figures for the number of Active Travel journeys and asked how this was measured, and if there was any opportunity for residents to provide feedback that shapes the programme of improvements to networks.

- The Strategic Director of Environment and Sustainability explained the usage was measured by technology placed in situ in locations across the city infrastructure. The technology can detect and track numbers of users, and also identify whether users are walking or using bikes. The Strategic Director informed the committee that the Integrated Transport Network maps were available for residents to comment on routes and route plans.
- The Leader highlighted the success of the route across Gaer Fort which was an outcome following feedback from residents, and a prime example of successful resident engagement and participation.

A committee member felt that there was too much information included within the report. The committee member noted that targets needed to be shown in the report, as this will help to demonstrate progress made. The committee member also asked how many of the 20 commitments were complete and how many were ongoing, as they felt it was difficult to assess

this without including the measures in the report. The committee member asked what the Heritage Discovery Centre was.

- The Chief Executive Officer explained that the visitor centre at the Transporter Bridge would be the Heritage Discovery Centre once complete. The Chief Executive Officer agreed that this could be amended to be clearer, including the hub and spoke model that will feature the Discovery Centre as the central focus..
- The Chief Executive Officer explained that most commitments were complete and any outstanding would be carried forward.

The committee queried the status of the City Campus.

- The Chief Executive stated that progress was being made and that timescales were linked to complex dependent factors such as planning approvals, funding from Welsh Government , signing of leases, so timelines would be clearer when some of these steps had been concluded.

The committee noted that the target regarding empty homes being brought back into use was very low but had been exceeded. The committee highlighted that percentage given to show this didn't provide context and requested specific data be included. The committee queried what specific impact the pandemic had on households at risk of homelessness and how they were supported.

- The Leader informed committee that legislation had changed very rapidly during the pandemic, and that Newport City Council had been successful in providing emergency accommodation to some of the most vulnerable people in Newport at that time. The Leader highlighted the impact of lockdown on tensions within homes increasing hidden homeless. The Leader informed committee that there was significant increase across Wales in private sector landlords issuing eviction notices when the embargo on evictions ended earlier this year. The Leader added that the prospect of complying with new legislation and the increase in property prices meant many private landlords were selling their properties, impacting access to this type of accommodation for Newport City Council. The Leader acknowledged the work done by staff in supporting families throughout this challenging period.
- The Leader highlighted that an empty property could not be assumed to meet housing needs and that the council is limited in what can be done to compel private owners to bring their properties back into use. The Leader noted that some measures had been put in place such as increased Council Tax, and through making funding available to private owners to regenerate properties in some circumstances. The Leader also noted that the council worked with registered social landlords to tackle this issue..

The committee thanked the Officers for attending.

Comments and recommendations:

- The committee acknowledged the challenges and appreciated the hard work of staff.

- The committee felt that more information regarding partnership work could be included within the report to emphasise the benefits these partnerships bring to Newport City Council.
- Whilst there were conflicting opinions of committee members regarding whether the report contained too much or too little information, overall the committee felt that more data to contextualise any percentages given would be helpful.
- The committee felt that further clarity was needed within the report regarding the number of additional dwellings created as a result of bringing empty homes back into use.
- The committee felt that references to the Heritage Discovery Site could be clarified.
- The committee asked for further information to be circulated to committee on the following:
 - The most up to date Annual Air Quality Monitoring Report
 - Local action groups involved with schools
 - The 38 local businesses who received grant funding.
 - The money reserved for regeneration projects.

5. Scrutiny Annual Report 21-22 – Verbal Update

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager provided a verbal update on the Scrutiny Annual Report 2021-22.

The committee agreed to have the report distributed to them via email and to make comments and recommendations directly to the report author.

6. Conclusion of the committee reports

The committee wished for comments and recommendations to be recorded at the end of the relevant agenda item rather than at the end of the minutes.

7. Scrutiny Adviser Reports

The Scrutiny Advisor presented the Action Sheet and the Forward Work Programme.

8. Date of the Next Meeting

2nd December 2022 at 10am.