

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 10 July 2023

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors M Howells (Chair), J Cleverly, S Adan, J Harris, G Horton, M Linton, A Pimm, C Reeks and K Thomas

In Attendance: Paul Jones (Strategic Director - Environment and Sustainability), Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez (Waste Recycling Strategy Manager), Stephen Jarrett (Head of City Services), Jonathan Keen (Regulatory Services Manager Environment and Community) and Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser)

Apologies: Councillors J Reynolds

1 Apologies

None.

2 Declaration of Interest

Cllr Howells noted that he had a declaration of interest on a later topic that he would raise at the appropriate time.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 17th April 2023

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on the 17th April were agreed to be a true and accurate record.

4 End of Year Performance Reviews 2022-23

Environmental Health and Public Protection

Invitees:

- Councillor Yvonne Forsey Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Bio-diversity
- Paul Jones Strategic Director - Environment and Sustainability
- Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez Head of Environment and Public Protection

The Chair praised the officers for the improvement to the report and noted that it was clearer and more user friendly. The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Bio-Diversity gave a brief over view of the report and highlighted the relevant points to her portfolio. The Head of Environment and Public Protection then gave an overview of the report.

The following was discussed:

- The Chair asked about the completion status of certain actions related to work. The Head of Service explained that some actions had set end dates, but they may go beyond March 2024, and service plans will now be on a rolling basis.
- The Committee inquired about feedback or issues regarding the new 3 weekly bin collection. The Head of Service mentioned that progress on the bin collections was not covered in the report, and further time was needed to report back. Initial response to the change had been positive.
- The Committee raised a complaint about cardboard recycling and whether it affected bin collection. The Head of Service explained that bags were previously used for cardboard recycling, but residents could continue using bins as long as waste was sorted correctly. Any issues should be reported.
- The Committee asked about circulating waste and collection information to schools. The Strategic Director mentioned that engagement with schools had been ongoing for a long time.
- The Committee inquired about updating collection reminders on the council website. The Head of Service confirmed that this would be done, and paper calendars had already been distributed.
- The Committee questioned a policy on replacing cut-down trees. The Head of Service stated that there was already a tree replacement policy. The Strategic Director clarified that replacement might not be in the same spot, but they would try if viable. The Committee suggested publicizing the policy.
- The Committee asked about plans to upgrade parkland in Tredegar Park and which areas were under council control. The Strategic Director explained that the house was under the National Trust's guardianship, but the parkland was still under council control. Feedback could be provided to the National Trust if needed.
- The Committee requested an update on the development and approval of a new public space protection order. The Head of Service reported progress but mentioned some delays. They would provide a date to the committee.
- The Committee asked about the availability of public toilets. The Head of Service explained that Public Protection and the toilet strategy had been moved to housing, but work had been done on updating the strategy. The Strategic Director agreed to provide a written update on new initiatives.
- The Committee expressed the need for more public toilets in tourist areas. The Strategic Director acknowledged the need but cited cost and anti-social behavior as reasons for the council's decision not to support more public toilets.
- The Committee asked about resident engagement regarding play parks and the backlog of safety inspections. The Head of Service mentioned a regular safety audit inspection, funding for improvements, and an engagement plan with an officer. The Strategic Director explained that action was based on a replacement program and that they were working through different wards with a limited capacity.
- The Committee inquired about the progress of the 25% completion. The Strategic Director confirmed that work had started based on a priority list from the Safety inspection report. Investment aimed to address uneven distribution of section 106 money across the city.
- The Committee asked whether the £600k grants for EV charging covered all mentioned points or if more points would be added. The Head of Service clarified that

the grant mentioned was from the previous year, and they had applied for further funding to expand the network. They had brought a draft strategy to OMSC.

- The Committee asked about the expectations for year 2 of the special projects fund. The Head of Service explained that progress had been limited due to delays from central government, and it was a 3-year project.
- The Committee asked about recycling regulations for schools and whether the council paid for their collection. The Head of Service mentioned a change in legislation in April 2024 and confirmed that schools were included. The Strategic Director highlighted the incentive for schools to recycle to save their budgets.
- The Committee inquired about the marketing of the improved compliance support framework. The Head of Service offered to provide further details and report back.
- The Committee asked about the rollout of call blocker units to vulnerable residents. The Head of Service clarified that the units were implemented in response to specific scams or issues and could not be extended to all residents due to resource limitations.
- The Committee asked whether EV chargers required council permission for installation in private residences. The Strategic Director stated that planning permission was not typically required, except for terraced houses, and alternatives were being explored.
- The Committee asked about the weight of electric recycling trucks. The Strategic Director mentioned that all refuse trucks weighed 26 or 22 tonnes, while electric ones weighed 26 tonnes and could carry approximately 10 tonnes.
- The Committee inquired about the cost of installing council electric charging points. The Strategic Director explained that equipment costs were a few thousand, but additional costs varied depending on the provider and ensuring up-to-date connections. Grid connection sometimes limited installation locations.
- The Committee mentioned other councils using lampposts for charging and asked if it was feasible for Newport. The Strategic Director noted that most of Newport's lighting stock was unmetered, making it complicated to add charging functions. Risks were associated with providing an unmetered supply to the public. Rapid charging and evolving technologies were being explored.
- The committee expressed concerns about whether the council was able to keep up with the changes happening in their area. The Strategic Director acknowledged that the council had been making efforts to keep up with these changes, but noted that anything installed at this point would likely be out of date within five years.
- The committee also enquired about whether the council was future-proofing their work on electric vehicle (EV) chargers. The Strategic Director stated that they were attempting to do so by installing a mix of charging infrastructure.
- The Chair asked if the Council was ensuring that there was a price cap on any outsourced charger maintenance. The Strategic Director explained that there were agreements in place to ensure a cap on maintenance costs. However, they also acknowledged that electricity prices may vary.
- The Chair requested clarification on the term "blue infrastructure." The Head of Service informed the committee that it referred to waterways.
- The Chair questioned how the council had ended up with an under spend in the fourth quarter after overspending throughout the year. The Head of Service explained

that throughout the year, they had to work with forecasts, which are not always accurate. Additionally, the budgets had changed over the course of the year, and the Welsh Government had provided last-minute grants.

The Chair thanked the officers for attending.

Infrastructure

Invitees:

- Councillor Laura Lacey - Cabinet Member for Infrastructure & Assets
- Paul Jones - Director for Environment & Sustainability
- Stephen Jarrett – The Head of Infrastructure.

The Cabinet Member gave a brief overview of the report and some of the challenges they have faced over the year. The Head of Service gave a brief overview of what was included in the report and service plan and added some additional challenges the area had faced.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee enquired about additional pressures arising from the 20-mph implementation plan and funding from the Welsh Government. The Head of Service acknowledged the funding but highlighted staff retention issues due to the use of temporary staff. The Strategic Director noted the issues with the use of temporary staff.
- The Committee questioned the removal of the temporary crossing point on Ruskin Avenue and requested further work on it. The Head of Service explained the necessity of removing the deteriorated crossing point and ongoing evaluation of its functionality. The Committee expressed concerns over confusion caused by the temporary crossing and requested better information if it is installed.
- The Committee enquired about the 0% completion of the cycle active travel network plan and its timeline. The Head of Service acknowledged the delay, citing the need for a new active travel map and expressing the council's desire to catch up.
- The Committee raised the topic of the traffic-free area around schools' pilot and requested additional information. The Head of Service explained the pilot with three schools and plans for expansion based on feasibility and funding. The Cabinet Member encouraged school that would be interested to enquire. The Chair requested an evaluation report of the pilot to be shared with schools.
- The Committee asked about the poor condition of roads and its impact on data reporting. The Head of Service described the data gathering exercise and noted increased damage, but assured that roads were kept in an acceptable condition. The Strategic Director noted that the non-subjective Highway Asset Management Plan was due to be done which would provide guidance for the council on how to invest in the roads.
- The Chair mentioned talk of providing additional resources for highways and asked the officers about their awareness of this. The Head of Service advised of a small quantity of funding from the Welsh Government and awaited further developments.
- The Committee enquired about the government's plan for unadopted roads and the cost analysis of bringing them under council supervision. The Head of Service mentioned their bid and anticipated results, while the Strategic Director estimated the cost at £12 million.

- The Committee asked about control of speed cameras under the new 20mph speed limits. The Head of Service explained the partnership with GoSafe and addressed concerns raised by residents about the cameras being a money-making scheme.

The Chair thanked the officers for attending.

Housing and Communities

Invitees:

- Councillor James Clarke - Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Regulation & Housing
- Paul Jones - Director for Environment & Sustainability
- David Walton – The Head of Housing & Communities
- Jonathon Keen – The Housing Supply and Regulation Service Manager

The Chair stated that he had a declaration of interest within this item and so informed the committee that Councillor Janet Cleverly was to act as chair for the Housing and Communities report. The Cabinet Member gave a brief introduction to the report before handing over the Head of Service who gave an overview of the report including some positive highlights and shared issues.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee enquired about how the Council was addressing the situation of children in temporary accommodation and the Head of Service highlighted initiatives to help people leave temporary accommodation, including joining the Welsh Government Local Leasing scheme.
- The Committee asked if there was assistance needed in bringing issues to Rent Smart Wales, and the Head of Service explained the role and powers of Rent Smart Wales, as well as the primary regulatory powers of the local authority.
- The Committee questioned why Newport had not implemented a premium tax on long-term empty homes to address homelessness, and the Head of Service mentioned that they were exploring various options.
- The Committee expressed concern about the number of empty properties in the social renting sector and suggested using them to house people in temporary accommodation. The Head of Service emphasised the priority of utilising empty properties and regular meetings with RSLs.
- The Committee raised concerns about the Airbnb market and asked if the Council could assist with issues related to upkeep and recycling. The Head of Service mentioned working with environmental health and the importance of private rented landlords' engagement.
- The Committee sought clarification on overspending in temporary accommodation and asked if there was a metric available for RSLs. The Head of Service confirmed overspending and highlighted the pressures, while the Strategic Director mentioned that the information could be supplied but not as a separate performance measure.
- The Committee expressed gratitude for the team's work and mentioned a specific incident where the library hub assisted a resident.
- The Committee asked about the specific pressures in Newport contributing to the acute situation, and the Head of Service mentioned consistent housing challenges across Wales and additional pressures due to Newport's fast growth.

- The Committee enquired about the Council's work with housing grants for social partners, and the Head of Service mentioned the four RSL partners they collaborate with.
- The Committee asked if the Warm Spaces initiative would continue into the winter of 23/24. The Head of Service stated that it would depend on community support and funding confirmation from the Welsh Government.
- The Committee asked about loan uptake, funding amount, and promotion for increasing housing availability. The Head of Service expressed future focus on this area and mentioned existing work aligning with these goals. Further information would be available by October/November 2023.
- The Committee emphasised the need to bring service areas together to address challenges in Newport and asked how the Council could prioritise communities struggling with homelessness. The Cabinet Member highlighted the importance of top-level involvement, transformation of service areas, prevention, and long-term solutions.
- The Committee enquired about the availability of units from the Royal Foundations partnership. The Head of Service highlighted the importance of partnership working, managing expectations, and addressing all aspects of homelessness beyond housing.
- The Committee asked about the RSL report and rental housing numbers previously shared. The Head of Service committed to bringing the information back to the committee.
- The Committee noted the reduction in Percentage Quality Indicators achieved by the library service and asked for an explanation. The Head of Service clarified that it was a reduction in standards, not a reflection of their performance.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance.

Conclusions

Environment and Public Protection

- The Committee were pleased to hear that the Council has a policy where replant two trees for each tree being replaced, and request for this policy to be more promoted and publicised.
- Members requested more information about the Maesglas Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) and for information to be provided by the Public Protection Manager on the timescale and the progress of the order.
- Members requested for more information about the Improved Compliance Support Framework and how it has been marketed to businesses.
- Page 38- Reference 11 – “**Raise awareness and enforce the minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties**”, The Committee requested to know what was the outcome of the other Landlords who were not compliant, how did Rent Smart Wales link in with this and what are the links with other service areas.

Infrastructure

- Members requested that an evaluation report on the Traffic Free Streets for Schools be shared with schools to encourage suitable schools to sign up.

- Members noted the poor signage on the SDR, particularly the proximity of the 50mph and 30mph signs. They questioned whether it needed to be reviewed, given that the 50mph sign had not been removed since the pedestrian crossing was taken out and it was located after the roundabout.
- Members asked the Head of Infrastructure to specify the completion date for the Digital Bus Signage, which had been ordered but not installed. They requested that the report be amended to reflect the correct completion dates, highlighting that the risk should be categorised as Red rather than Green.
- Members emphasised the significance of seating in bus stops for older people who used them. Although advised by officers that the seating could be a risk for vandalism, Members noted that the digital bus signs could be equally be seen to be a risk for vandalism. Members also made comment that a lack of seating in bus shelters could be seen as a barrier to active travel if people were reluctant to travel on buses.
- The Committee asked for a plan to address the poor condition of roads and improve the road network, especially as increased traffic and other issues affected them. The Committee confirmed the presentation of the Highways Asset Management Plan to members in February 2024, but Members requested additional data to be sent to the Committee before that.

Housing and Communities

- Members requested figures for social housing properties brought back into use.
- Page 97, Performance Measure – ***“The percentage of empty private properties brought back into use”***, Committee requested if they could have data and figures for the social landlord properties.
- Members requested performance statistics from the Registered Social Landlords (RSL) to be shared with Committee, such as how many properties have been long term unoccupied for 28 days or more. It was also advised that the Scrutiny Adviser would re-send the RSL briefing report that was discussed at the Performance Scrutiny Committee – People meeting held on 14th March 2023 to the Committee.
- Members requested information on the RSL stock, including the proportion of properties available for rent that are considered affordable. They also sought a clear definition of what "affordable" means.
- Members made comment that that the number of people on the Common Housing Register in Newport was around 10,000. They then asked for the percentage of people who are on the common housing register in other neighbouring local authorities, such as Torfaen.
- Members requested an update from the Warm Spaces Meeting planned for Thursday 13th July 2023.
- Members asked for information about the 300% premium increase on rent imposed by some local authorities in Wales. Specifically, they enquired about other authorities that implemented this increase and whether it reduced the number of empty homes. In addition, Members also requested data on local authorities that do not raise council taxes on vacant homes since Newport was one of four authorities with this policy

5 **Draft Annual Forward Work Programme 2023-24**

Invitee:

- Neil Barnett – Scrutiny Adviser

The Scrutiny Adviser introduced the Draft 2023-24 Annual Forward Work Programme to the Committee, and detailed the reports coming in the next calendar year. The Draft Annual Forward Work Programme had been produced following a review with Heads of Service, and includes statutory reports that come to the Committee annually.

Actions:

1. The Committee **approved** the Annual Forward Work Programme, the start time for Committee meetings and the proposed schedule of meetings, which included the topics being discussed at the next two meetings:

Monday 24th July 2023, the agenda item;

- End of Year Performance Reviews 2022-23

Monday 11th September 2023, the agenda item;

- Replacement Local Development Plan Preferred Strategy

6 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Invitee:

- Neil Barnett – Scrutiny Adviser

a) Action Sheet

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the action sheet to the Committee and advised that as indicated in the table, all actions are up to date bar one on the contribution to the Community Safety Warden service by Registered Social Landlords and noted that as soon as a response has been received it will be forwarded to the committee.

7 **Recording**

The meeting terminated at 6.47 pm