

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 27 November 2023

Time: 2.00 pm

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

In Attendance: Councillor Yvonne Forsey (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity), Paul Jones (Strategic Director – Environment and Sustainability), David Walton (Head of Housing and Communities), Matthew Cridland (Service Manager – Public Protection Manager), Stephen Jarrett (Head of Infrastructure), Katharine Majer (Deputy Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser) and Taylor Strange (Governance Officer).

1 Apologies

Councillors C. Reeks and J. Reynolds, Cabinet Members J Clarke (Strategic Housing, Planning and Regulation) and L. Lacey (Infrastructure and Assets), Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez (Head of Environment and Public Protection)

2 Declaration of Interest

The Chair noted his interest in the Housing and Communities Service Plan due to his employment in this field.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th September 2023

The Minutes of the previous meeting were held as a true and accurate record.

4 2023/24 Service Plan Mid-Year Reports

Housing and Communities

Invitees:

- Paul Jones – Strategic Director – Environment and Sustainability
- David Walton – Head of Housing and Communities

The Strategic Director and Head of Housing and Communities gave an overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee asked about the number of refugees taken in by Newport. The Head of Housing and Communities explained that Newport is a dispersal area for asylum seekers as determined by the Home Office, and the recent changes in asylum

This document is available in welsh / Mae's ffurflen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

decision-making could create additional pressure. However, it was difficult to provide comparative figures due to limited data.

- The Committee enquired about the number of people on the homelessness temporary housing waiting list. The Head of Housing and Communities estimated the figure to be around 470 but agreed to provide the exact number later.
- The Committee requested an update on the progress of bringing empty properties back into use. The Head of Housing and Communities reported an improvement in performance, particularly in privately-owned properties, and expressed confidence in meeting the target for this year. Collaboration with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and the utilisation of funding programmes like the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) were highlighted.
- The Committee sought information on alternative arrangements for rough sleepers who were previously housed in Newport Leisure Centre. The Head of Housing and Communities stated that the arrangements were being finalised and would be shared soon.
- The Committee asked about targeting landlords with new tax premiums mentioned in the report. The Head of Housing and Communities agreed to provide further information to the Committee.
- The Committee enquired about the progress of the housing bidding scheme. The Head of Housing and Communities emphasised that all individuals on the housing list were being considered for all types of social housing. The supply of properties currently exceeds demand, and the focus is on prioritising those with the highest need through collaborative efforts with the Council's partners.
- The Committee questioned the process for individuals in social housing to move into a smaller property. The Head of Housing and Communities explained that the department works with RSL partners to accommodate these requests, and individual Members could discuss specific cases with officers outside the Committee.
- The Committee asked about the government policy obligating local authorities to rehouse individuals previously ineligible for housing assistance. The Head of Housing and Communities clarified that the focus was on people experiencing homelessness and highlighted the additional costs associated with providing suitable accommodation and housing benefit subsidy. While additional funding had been provided, it did not fully cover the increased costs.
- The Committee questioned the effectiveness of support services in helping individuals transition out of homelessness. The Head of Housing and Communities highlighted ongoing efforts to improve services and address underlying issues through collaboration with partner organisations.
- The Committee acknowledged the progress made by the Rough Sleepers Task Force and asked if it was due to new initiatives. The Head of Housing and Communities stated that the task force focused on understanding and supporting individuals' journeys in and out of homelessness, which takes time but has shown positive outcomes for individuals previously struggling with housing stability.
- The Committee noted the potential increase in rough sleepers due to benefit cuts. The Head of Housing and Communities acknowledged that benefit cuts could be a contributing factor.

- The Committee suggested marking the completion of the multi-agency task force as a completed action, which the Head of Housing and Communities agreed with.
- The Committee inquired about the progress of Houses with Multiple Occupancy (HMO) inspections following pandemic-related issues. The Head of Housing and Communities confirmed that inspections were back on target, and all staff were working both in the office and within the community.
- The Committee asked if the public were consulted on the curriculum for adult learning facilities. The Head of Housing and Communities mentioned that public and learner input was taken into account while also highlighting other teams working on creating training for service users.
- The Committee asked about the possibility of more public toilets in the city whilst querying about the Local Toilet Strategy. The Strategic Director explained that although it was a legal requirement to have the strategy, it did not necessarily mean more public toilets would be created.
- The Committee noted a 130% increase in demand for temporary accommodation and asked for the period this covered. The Strategic Director confirmed that it was since the start of the pandemic.
- The Committee raised concerns about a £1 million overspend and questioned why it occurred despite prior knowledge. The Strategic Director acknowledged the issue and efforts to reduce costs, citing common challenges faced by local authorities and changes within the service area. The Committee also asked about the budget increase compared to the previous year, which the Strategic Director confirmed.
- The Committee queried the risk level for the housing support grant. The Head of Housing and Communities explained that the risk was related to the ability to commission sufficient services of an adequate quality.
- The Committee noted the completion of the on-call service but raised concerns about it being based on temporary posts. The Head of Housing and Communities stated that this would be addressed in the staff restructure.
- The Committee asked about the £5.6 million from the transitional accommodation grant. The Head of Housing and Communities clarified that the funds were used for purchasing or refurbishing housing stock and the resettlement scheme.
- The Committee requested publicising the affiliation of the Salvation Army with homelessness support to Members. The Strategic Director agreed to provide a briefing on Severe Weather Emergency Protocols (SWEP) and the Salvation Army.

The Committee thanked officers for attending.

Environment and Public Protection

Invitees:

- Councillor Yvonne Forsey – Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity
- Paul Jones – Strategic Director – Environment and Sustainability
- Matthew Cridland – Service Manager – Public Protection Manager

The Strategic Director and Public Protection Manager gave an overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee asked about issues related to Ash Die Back disease. The Strategic Director explained that the initial fall of ash trees can cause damage to people or property. The Council is responsible for maintaining trees on public land and could be held liable if rules are not followed. It was also highlighted that most ash trees in Newport had to be removed.
- The Committee enquired about an increase in anti-social behaviour due to streetlights turning off at midnight. The Public Protection Manager noted that they would follow up on this.
- The Committee expressed concerns about the progress of the Sports and Recreational Strategy, particularly regarding the Leisure Centre. The Strategic Director clarified that the Leisure Centre project was separate from the Sports Strategy and provided an update on its progress. The Committee noted that the assessment was behind schedule, and the Strategic Director attributed it to workload rather than specific issues.
- The Committee asked if there had been an increase in fly-tipping following the change to 3-weekly bin collections. The Strategic Director noted that there was no evidence of an increase in fly-tipping so far and highlighted that it is typically commercial waste that gets fly-tipped.
- The Committee asked if a license is required to dispose of waste. The Strategic Director confirmed that a license is required and emphasised the responsibility of the waste owner to verify the legitimacy of the person disposing of the waste. The Committee also expressed interest in knowing which private waste carriers use Council facilities, to which the Strategic Director noted that this information could be provided but may not provide a clear picture of the situation.
- The Committee enquired about advice for businesses regarding proper recycling procedures. The Strategic Director informed the Committee that businesses have a requirement to recycle and can utilise the Council's commercial waste service or other private companies. Larger food waste bins are typically provided to businesses compared to domestic households.
- The Committee questioned the strategies in place to tackle fly-tipping. The Strategic Director highlighted that Newport has enforced penalties for fly-tipping and emphasised the challenges of taking fly-tippers to court due to leniency in Magistrate Courts. The Public Service Protection Manager noted that fly-tippers are investigated by Trading Standards and as rogue traders, highlighting inter-department cooperation.
- The Committee asked if Wastesavers is the main company for businesses to go to regarding new workplace waste management regulations. The Strategic Director mentioned that they are working on creating a simplified pathway for businesses to find the right company, although the capacity and needs are uncertain at the moment. The Council has prepared by having extra capacity and is working with enforcement agents to improve waste management.
- The Committee asked if temporary cameras are used to monitor fly-tipping. The Strategic Director confirmed that this practice does occur, not only for monitoring fly-tipping but also for other crimes. However, there are stringent regulations in place, and the implementation of covert surveillance poses challenges.
- The Committee noted that there was no budget showing in the Capital Forecast graph. The Strategic Director acknowledged that the graph was unclear but assured

the Committee that spending was in line and advised they would provide clarity to the Committee regarding this matter.

- The Committee highlighted a low completion rate (20%) for the Community Assets Transfer of Sporting Goods with a completion date of March 2024. The Strategic Director noted that progress had since picked up but would require further clarification from the team.
- The Committee discussed Action 7 on page 59, which showed 0% progress and was due to be completed in March 2024. The Public Service Protection Manager explained that the metric covers free advice, which is the target, but does not generate additional revenue, leading to a contrasting issue between the colour marker and the percentage completed.
- The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity advised of the provisions for accessible play equipment in parks and highlighted their importance.
- The Committee commented on a lack of attendance in park consultations at drop-in events. The Strategic Director informed the Committee that overall numbers, not necessarily at drop-in events, had been good.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Infrastructure

Invitees:

- Paul Jones – Strategic Director – Environment and Sustainability
- Stephen Jarrett – Head of Infrastructure

The Strategic Director and Head of Infrastructure gave an overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee enquired about the shelter size of a particular bus stop. The Head of Infrastructure noted that it may require a bespoke bus stop and agreed to update the Committee on this matter.
- The Committee asked about including the Bassaleg Bridge project in the Service Plan. The Strategic Director explained that items on the Service Plan do not guarantee immediate focus but suggested it could be included in the End of Year Review.
- The Committee enquired about the monitoring of 20mph zones. The Head of Infrastructure explained that areas are monitored before and after the implementation of the speed limit change, and the Council has enforcement powers to ensure compliance.
- The Committee asked about Traffic-Free Streets and which schools would have them. The Strategic Director advised that notices are distributed, but covering all schools simultaneously is challenging due to limited resources. Efforts are made to address traffic issues at schools, and other schools are invited to participate based on suitability.
- The Committee raised concerns about school staff monitoring traffic and stopping cars. The Strategic Director highlighted that, in one specific case, staff had received proper training to carry out the task lawfully and safely.

- The Committee enquired about the criteria for determining 20mph or 30mph speed limits. The Head of Infrastructure explained that requests from residents to exempt roads from the 20mph limit were reviewed but refused after following the criteria set by Welsh Government. The Strategic Director assured the Committee that roads with a change in speed would be appropriately signposted.
- The Committee questioned why Malpas Road has a 40mph speed limit despite meeting the criteria for a reduction to 20mph. The Head of Infrastructure explained that Malpas Road was not within the scope of the speed limit change because it already had a 40mph limit.
- The Committee expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of benches and seating at bus stops. The Strategic Director explained that seating is often removed or not implemented due to antisocial behaviour.
- The Committee sought guidance on dealing with issues where bus stops have low visibility due to parked cars. The Head of Infrastructure requested specific details from the Committee outside of the meeting.
- The Committee asked about the expected outcomes of the Burns Report consultation. The Strategic Director mentioned that a timeline could be provided and explained that each project would need to go through a funding process, with support from the Welsh and UK governments.
- The Strategic Director noted that bringing all unadopted roads up to standard would cost £12 million, which is not viable considering the current financial position.
- The Committee commented on the completion rate of the Moving Traffic Contraventions and Bus Lane Enforcement project. The Head of Infrastructure clarified that the project had picked up pace since the report was produced and was now designated as "green."
- The Committee raised concerns about the time taken to replace bus stops. The Strategic Director acknowledged delays but expressed confidence in resolving the issue by the end of the year.
- The Committee questioned how bus lanes are monitored. The Head of Infrastructure highlighted the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras.
- The Committee enquired whether all bus lanes that have designated times for other traffic to use them will have those times removed. The Head of Infrastructure advised that driving in bus lanes is an issue being considered as part of the Moving Traffic Offences powers they are considering.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions

Housing and Communities

- The Committee requested to be informed of the specific figure regarding the number of individuals on the temporary accommodation list.
- The Committee sought clarification on the council tax premium and whether the Council has the authority to impose it on registered social landlords.
- The Committee requested a map showing the locations of Council-owned public toilets within Newport.

- The Committee requested details about the Homelessness Outreach Service, which has been retendered to the Salvation Army, to be sent to Members. They also requested an all-Member briefing on the service.
- The Committee would like to be kept up to date with arrangements for the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol provision.

Environment and Public Protection

- The Committee sought information on whether there has been a rise in anti-social behaviour since the street lights have been switched off at midnight. Members requested the available data from the Police to provide more precise insights on this matter.
- The Committee took note of the revenue forecast mentioned on page 43 of the report but observed that there is no accompanying capital forecast. Members of the committee are seeking clarity on this to better understand the current position.
- Referring to reference 5 on page 48, it states, ***"Undertake Community Asset Transfers (CAT) of sports pitches where clubs and organizations can demonstrate suitability for managing the transferred land or facility, following the adopted CAT policy."*** The expected completion date for this measure is March 2024. The Committee would like to determine whether this measure should be categorised as green or amber.
- Members of the committee have expressed their interest in receiving data on whether fly-tipping has increased with the implementation of 3-weekly refuse collections. Additionally, they have highlighted the importance of seeking to understand if people are choosing to pay private firms to dispose of their waste in order to provide a full picture of any available data.

Infrastructure

- The Committee requested that updates on the work on Bassaleg Bridge could be included in the End of Year report.
- The Committee wished to be kept up to date about the recommended improvements suggested by the Burns Delivery Board, alongside the timeline for the proposed works.
- The Committee wished to note their disappointment in the removal of bus shelters in certain areas, due to antisocial behaviour. They wished to receive clarity on the decision taken as it did not appear to be a city-wide policy, with some areas retaining shelters.

5 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

Invitees:

- 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 11th December 2023, the agenda item;

- 2023/24 Service Plan Mid-Year Reports
 - o Finance
 - o Law and Standards
 - o People, Policy and Transformation
 - o Regeneration and Economic Development

Monday 15th January 2024, the agenda item;

- 2024-25 Draft Budget Proposals and Medium Term Financial Plan

It was advised that the date for the Draft Budget Proposals would be finalised soon, and the Committee would be sent a calendar invitation for the meeting.

Councillor Cleverly gave her apologies for the December meeting.

a) Action Sheet

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the action sheet to the Committee and advised all actions were up to date.

The meeting terminated at 6.36 pm