

Minutes



Council

Date: 3 March 2021

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Cleverly, P Cockeram, D Davies, M Al-Nuaimi, C Evans, M Evans, C Ferris, J Guy, D Harvey, I Hayat, Councillor R Jeavons, M Kellaway, M Linton, D Mayer, R Mogford, Councillor J Mudd, M Rahman, J Richards, M Spencer, T Suller, H Thomas, K Thomas, C Townsend, Councillor R Truman, T Watkins, M Whitcutt, R White, K Whitehead, D Wilcox, D Williams, G Berry, J Clarke, Y Forsey, R Hayat, T Holyoake, P Hourahine, J Hughes, J Jordan, L Lacey, S Marshall, W Routley, H Townsend, J Watkins and A Morris

Apologies: Councillors D Fouweather, G Giles and V Dudley

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 26 January 2021.

Councillor M Evans noted that in his supplementary question to the Leader, it should read International Convention Centre not World Conference Centre.

Resolved: That the Minutes of 26 January 2021 were approved subject to the above.

2. Appointments

To consider the proposed appointments set out in the report

Councillor Harvey moved the appointments set out in the Report, as agreed by the Business Managers, subject to the additional appointments set out below.

Resolved: That the following appointments be agreed.

Internal Appointments

Committee / Appointment	No. of Vacancies / Replacements	Nominations Received
Planning Committee	1	Councillor Berry to be replaced by Councillor Spencer
Audit Committee	1	Councillor Lacey to be replaced by Councillor R Hayat
Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate	1	Councillor Critchley to be replaced by Councillor Linton
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)	1	Councillor Wilcox
Active Travel Champion		Councillor Forsey

Governing Body Appointments

Governing Body	No. of Vacancies / Re-appointments	Nominations Received
Newport High School	1	Councillor Cockeram
Kimberley Nursery	1	Remove Councillor Cockeram
Malpas Court Primary School	1	William Langsford
Monnow Primary School	1	Emma Ashmead
St Andrews Primary School	1	Kevin Howells
The John Frost School	1	Becky Sims
Lliswerry Primary School	1	Lashanth Vithiyatharan

External Appointments

Organisation	No. of Vacancies / Replacements	Nominations Received
Newport Transport Board	1	Councillor J Cleverly

In addition to the above appointments, Councillor Harvey informed Council of the need to agree a further dispensation for Councillor Critchley's continued absence, due to ill-health in accordance with section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972:

This was moved by Councillor Harvey and seconded by Councillor Routley.

Resolved:

To approve Councillor Critchley's continued absence on grounds of ill-health for a further period of 6 months.

3. **Police Issues**

Superintendent Mike Richards provided an update on current local policing priorities, before inviting questions from Members.

The Mayor invited the Leader to say a few words.

The Leader thanked Superintendent M Richards and his fellow officers for their partnership work around enforcement in relation to Covid Regulations, which had educated and informed people rather than penalised them. Officers had taken appropriate enforcement action however, where necessary, for those who had committed more serious and persistent breaches of the regulations.

The Leader appealed to colleagues in relation to an incident which was under investigation by the IPOC to refrain from raising queries in relation to this.

Finally, at local level, the Leader and Malpas ward colleagues met up with Paul Turner, who was a welcome addition to the policing team and was full of enthusiasm and good ideas.

Questions from Councillors:

Councillor Rahman had raised an issue with Inspector Cawley regarding lack of parking spaces around Harrow Road, Rugby Road and Bedford Road. Residents had used bins to reserve these spaces; City Services had been addressing this. It had however become physical, leading to fights and there was concern that it would escalate. Inspector Cawley suggested a community day; similar to one that took place before lockdown and Councillor

Rahman asked if Superintendent Richards would provide the community van along with resources from Maindee Police Station in order to facilitate this. The Superintendent would get in touch with Inspector Cawley.

Councillor Jeavons thanked the police for their intervention regarding antisocial behaviour in the Cromwell Road area and was looking forward to seeing more police presence in that area. The Superintendent would ensure appropriate resources would be in place.

Councillor Lacey referred to a recent incident where teenagers broke into Ringland Primary School and set fire to part of the play area, these actions were caught on CCTV. This followed a similar pattern to other fires started within the Ringland area previously. Councillor Lacey therefore asked if Inspector Cawley could look into this. The Superintendent was aware of this incident and would discuss this with Inspector Cawley and get in touch with the councillor regarding identifying the suspects.

Councillor Davies referred to door to door canvassing in January and asked was this acceptable under the Covid Level 4 lockdown arrangements. The Superintendent confirmed that door-to-door political canvassing was not permitted during the current lock-down restrictions and he would get in touch with Councillor Davies regarding this complaint.

Councillor Whitehead mentioned that the field adjacent to Rougemont School was being used by scramblers. With milder weather approaching, this could occur more frequently and disturb residents as well as disrupting school lessons. Councillor Whitehead suggested boulders be put at the entrance of the field to deter this antisocial behaviour. The Superintendent had seen an increase in this kind of behaviour since last weekend. Operation Harley, was put in place last year and officers would re-commit to this in the coming months.

Councillor Holyoake congratulated the police on work carried out recently to address street workers however drug dealers and street workers had been gathering during the lockdown period. The Superintendent thanked Councillors Holyoake and Hayat for their continued support and advised that if there were groups of people, Police could use their enforcement powers. This would be reinforced by the Superintendent.

Councillor M Evans queried when charges were referred to Crown Prosecution Service they could recommend lesser charges as an example, a charge of robbery and assault could be reduced to theft which could impact on the victims, public and the police. Was there anything that could be done as a council to change this to support victims of crime and ensure offenders receive the appropriate justice. The Superintendent agreed that the police did have to contact the CPS regarding reduced criminal charges. These cases were few however the Superintendent would be happy to continue the conversation outside of the meeting and consider any support that would be offered to the police.

Councillor Al-Nuaimi congratulated Superintendent Richards on his hard work during the past year. Councillor Al-Nuaimi raised concern that recent stop and search exercises last November and December saw a raise in statistics relating to the BAME community. The Superintendent was greatly involved in the stop and search programme and would arrange to meet with the councillor as the statistic quoted appeared high by comparison to police statistics.

Further questions from Councillor Al-Nuaimi would be forwarded to Superintendent Richards in writing.

4. Notice of Motion: M4 Relief Road

The Council considered the following motion, for which the necessary notice had been given. The motion was moved by Councillor M Evans and seconded by Councillor Routley.

This Council acknowledges the need for an M4 Relief Road around Newport and calls on the Welsh Government to issue a special directive ordering the implementation of an advisory referendum within the Newport Local Authority boundary area.

Councillor M Evans introduced the motion by advising councillors to consider asking the Welsh Government to implement a referendum. This would give the Welsh Parliament the opportunity to debate the benefits of engaging with the electorate on an issue that affected everyone across the city. Councillor M Evans mentioned that after a public enquiry, by the Independent Commission concluded that an M4 relief road should go ahead. The First Minister however took the decision not to debate this recommendation and therefore did not go ahead with the construction of the relief road.

The new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act asked councils to find new ways of engaging with the public.

Councillor M Evans mentioned that previous Leaders had supported the M4 relief road. A non-binding referendum would show the strength of feeling of the residents of Newport, one way or another. This would be more meaningful than a petition. It was hoped that this would lead the way for democracy in listening to the voice of Newportonians in a non-political way.

Councillor Routley formally seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak later in the debate.

The Mayor invited members to move an amendment.

In response, Councillor Mudd requested to move an amendment to the motion, which was seconded by Councillor Hughes.

Councillor H Townsend also indicated that she may wish to move a further amendment to the motion.

The Monitoring Officer explained that one amendment would be heard at a time, therefore the Leader was invited to speak first.

Before the Leader proceeded, Councillor C Evans asked for a point of order and sought clarification as to the proposed route. Councillor M Evans confirmed that it was the black route.

The Leader proceeded to speak to and move the following amendment:

Newport City Council has always acknowledged public opinion regarding an M4 Relief Road around Newport. We recognise that we must act today for a better tomorrow.

This Council asks the Welsh Government to carefully consider any calls for an advisory referendum or other public consultation within the Newport Local Authority boundary area-within the context of social, economic and environmental factors, which underpin the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Leader commented on the amendment advising that most councillors as well as the public had sat in traffic wishing that there was a better way to improve the infrastructure. There had been plenty of opportunities in the past to respond to the Welsh Government consultation on the M4 relief road proposals. In the meantime, Covid had changed everyone's lives, with no going back however we could change our lives for the better; the way we live and work, this had given us time to think. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced budget proposals today, encouraging ways of making savings, with investment in city deals and green technology. It was felt that £1.5bn on a road would not achieve this and it was hoped that central government would support a green recovery in South East Wales

by investing in rail infrastructure. If we were to be responsible for a financial recovery for Newport, a costly referendum was not the answer and we needed to invest wisely in infrastructure by building a Newport for everyone.

Comments from Councillors:

Councillor Whitehead considered that the first motion would have had more impact if all councils supported a referendum going forward to the Welsh Government. Councillor Whitehead agreed that there was a need for a relief road and that traffic congestion and variable speeds was an issue. He also supported the Leader's comments.

Councillor C Evans had asked questions pre Covid trying to promote a green agenda, of which making Newport a Bee friendly city and installing electric car charging points had been adopted by the Council. The black route was a concern and would greatly impact on the environment and eco-system. More people had been working from home, since the pandemic, with a view of making this a permanent move, therefore positive changes were taking place. The legacy for Newport was a greener future.

Councillor Hughes stated that the cost associate with the M4 relief road was estimate by some as £2bn and the implications of the cost was the pivotal reason why the relief road was rejected by Welsh Government. The A55 project in North Wales was also placed on hold for financial and environmental reasons. Newport Wetlands was a key part of the M4 black route. The solution would be to improve public transport and rail. It was hoped that Newport would be at the forefront of green recovery. The amendment would allow the council to work with the Welsh Government.

Councillor Mudd thanked colleagues for contributing to the debate and concluded that this was not the first time that M4 relief road had been debated but first time since Covid. In light of the recent Local Government and Election (Wales) Act, Wales was most democratic country in UK and Europe and there was a real opportunity to engage with Local Government and a legacy for Newport as well as a greener city with sustainable transport.

Councillor Routley spoke against the amendment and suggested that the black route would only take up 2% of the land in Newport without affecting the Wetlands. There were issues with the microphone being muted, which Councillor Routley requested that the Monitoring Officer investigate.

The Monitoring Officer clarified the points of order raised and advised that as the speeches had been taken out of sequence Councillor Mudd could therefore reply to Councillor Routley.

Councillor Mudd reiterated that we had to be fiscally responsible and that the amendment made it clear to colleagues that we must act today for a better tomorrow. Newport City Council and Welsh Government had committed to sustainable transport and was part of Western Gateway and Capital City Region and therefore commended this motion to the Council.

Councillor M Evans was disappointed with the amendment and reminded colleagues that 8% of the area within the black route would be untouched. Newport residents needed jobs and the economy to prosper, cars were becoming more environmentally friendly and that taxis and coaches were also using the M4. Everyone 's lives effected by the accidents and congestion around the Brynglas Tunnels and it would be an opportunity for Newport residents to have their say. Councillor M Evans was therefore not accepting this amendment.

Councillor Harvey, Mogford, Wilcox, C Evans and J Guy moved that a recorded vote be taken on the proposed amendment.

Councillor C Townshend raised a point of clarification about whether the amendment was in addition to, or in substitution of, the original motion before Council. The Leader confirmed that the amendment was intended to replace the original motion in its entirety

The following vote was recorded:

Councillor Name		For	Against	Abstain
Al-Nuaimi, Miqdad		1		
Berry, Graham		1		
Clarke, James		1		
Cleverly, Jan				
Cockeram, Paul		1		
Cornelious, Margaret	Absent			
Critchley, Ken	Absent			
Davies, Deb		1		
Dudley, Val	Apols			
Evans, Chris		1		
Evans, Matthew			1	
Ferris, Charles			1	
Forsey, Yvonne		1		
Fouweather, David	Apols			
Giles, Gail	Apols			
Guy, John		1		
Harvey, Debbie		1		
Hayat, Ibrahim		1		
Hayat, Rehmaan		1		
Holyoake, Tracey		1		
Hourahine, Phil		1		
Hughes, Jason		1		
Jeavons, Roger		1		
Jordan, Jason		1		
Kellaway, Martyn				
Lacey, Laura		1		
Linton, Malcolm		1		
Marshall, Stephen		1		
Mayer, David		1		
Mogford, Ray			1	
Morris, Allan				1
Mudd, Jane		1		
Rahman, Majid		1		
Richards, John		1		
Routley, William			1	
Spencer, Mark		1		
Suller, Tom			1	
Thomas, Herbie		1		
Thomas, Kate		1		
Townsend, Carmel				1
Townsend, Holly				1
Truman, Ray		1		

Watkins, Joan			1	
Watkins, Trevor				
Whitcutt, Mark		1		
White, Richard			1	
Whitehead, Kevin		1		
Wilcox, Debbie		1		
Williams, David			1	
		30	8	3

30 members were For the amendment, 8 were Against and there were 3 Abstentions. Therefore, the amendment was duly carried. The Monitoring Officer advised that the original motion would now fall and the amendment would become the substantive motion, unless any further amendments were moved at this stage.

Councillor H Townsend had indicated that she had intended to move a further amendment to the original motion but declared that she no longer wished to do so.

Therefore, a further vote was then taken on the first amendment, as the substantive motion. No recorded vote was called for and, therefore, members were invited to indicate whether any of them wished to change their vote.

No member indicated that they wished to change their vote from the previous recorded vote on the amendment. Therefore, the substantive motion was duly carried by a majority vote.

Resolved:

That -

Newport City Council has always acknowledged public opinion regarding an M4 Relief Road around Newport. We recognise that we must act today for a better tomorrow.

This Council asks the Welsh Government to carefully consider any calls for an advisory referendum or other public consultation within the Newport Local Authority boundary area within the context of social, economic and environmental factors which underpin the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

5. Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22

The Leader presented the report to Council.

The Capital and Treasury Management Strategies were presented to Audit Committee and their comments are included within the report. Cabinet endorsed the strategies at its latest meeting, and Council were required to approve the strategies including the borrowing limits and prudential and treasury management indicators included within.

This report included both the Capital and Treasury Management Strategies which, at their core (i) confirm the capital programme, as part of the Capital Strategy and (ii) the various borrowing limits and other indicators which governed the management of the Councils borrowing & investing activities, as part of the Treasury Management Strategy.

Both these strategies were a requirement of CIPFA's Prudential Code which sets out the requirement for them and ensured, within the frameworks which these document set, that capital expenditure plans were:

- **Affordable** - capital spend and programmes were within sustainable limits and can be accommodated within current and forecast future funding levels.

- **Prudent** – Councils needed to set borrowing limits -called ‘operational’ and ‘authorised limits’ which reflected the Councils plan for affordable capital plans and their financing costs. On investing activities, Councils needed to consider the balance between security, liquidity and yield which reflected their own risk appetite but which prioritised security and liquidity over yield.
- **Sustainable** – Council’s capital plans and the revenue cost of financing the current and future forecast borrowing/debt taken out for that needed to be sustainable in terms of the Councils overall finances and its impact on that.

Whilst Cabinet made decisions relating to what capital projects and spend to make, it was the full Council that approves the ‘borrowing limits’ that these were kept within. Many projects are funded from capital grants, capital receipts and specific reserves which did not impact on borrowing levels, but where borrowing was required, the programme was required to be set within those limits.

This was an important area of overall financial management governance in that borrowing levels, once taken up, lock in the Council to a long term liability for revenue costs in relation to the provision of the repayment of those loans (MRP costs) and external loan interest costs – together known as ‘capital financing costs’,

Capital programme

The Council’s capital programme went to 2024/25 (this was the original capital 5 year programme to 2022/23 which was extended by 2 years for projects whose completion spanned beyond the 5 years). It was a significant capital programme and included £211.4m of already approved projects and alongside new investments such as the borrowing for Cardiff City Capital Region spend at £17.3m, £19.7m for the new leisure scheme and £4.5m for further uncommitted borrowing for future projects – brings a total investment of £252.9m for the programme ending 2024/25.

This was a large investment for the City’s key infrastructure. Key projects include:

- Our new leisure scheme in the city centre -£19.7m. This would also pave the way for the new Coleg Gwent College. Both would bring much needed footfall and vibrancy to the city centre
- Investment in the refurbishment and restoration of the City’s Transporter Bridge –nearly £13m
- A significant expansion, modernisation and maintenance of our school buildings, making up the majority of our £101m investment in this programme in education and schools
- Over £25m of funding for the Cardiff City Capital Region, which was enabling a huge level of economic development across our region which would benefit Newport and the wider region.
- Over £7m in our city centre and regeneration projects, including further funding in our revenue budget to continue and expand on that as we ‘build better’ from the past 12 months.

Capital Expenditure funded by debt increases the need to undertake external borrowing. A further driver for the need to undertake external borrowing was the capacity to be ‘internally borrowed’ reducing as earmarked reserves were utilised, which in turn needed to be replaced with external borrowing. This was the case particularly for this Council which had a high level of ‘internal borrowing’; which is now reducing over the medium-long term. The Council was therefore committed and had a requirement to be a net borrower for the long term.

For the remaining three years of the current capital programme until 2024/25, the level of borrowing to facilitate the current capital programme was substantial with external borrowing

increasing from an estimated £164m at the end of this financial year to £234m in 2024/25, an increase of over £70m. The total committed requirement for external borrowing was forecast to be c£284m. These were shown in table 2 of the report.

The commitment to increase external borrowing led to increasing capital financing costs as shown in table 3 of the report, and show a significant increase in capital financing costs from 2020/21. These costs were included in the Council's MTFP. Costs would continue to increase into the medium to long term. Compared to comparative authorities, the percentage of the capital financing costs as a proportion to the Councils total net revenue was high. We have fully funded the capital financing costs required to complete this current capital programme and this was a key issue around showing affordability. As the Council's net budget was increasing significantly too, the proportion of the Councils net budget allocated to this remains broadly the same as now and the issue of potentially lower or low growth in funding was not a new risk and exists today. Therefore, from a sustainability viewpoint, the relative high cost of this budget was a challenge and was a risk but no higher or new than it is today.

Council was requested to approve the capital strategy and the borrowing limits within.

Treasury Management Strategy

This deals with plans for the Councils borrowing and investing activities

On borrowing, the capacity to be internally borrowed would reduce over the medium to long term. In 2021/22 the Council was expected to undertake external borrowing both for the refinancing of maturing loans and to fund increasing capital spend in the existing capital programme; it would remain as much 'internally borrowed' as is possible and increase actual external borrowing only when needed to manage its cash requirements. However, the Council may, where it felt necessary to mitigate the risk of interest rate rises, undertake borrowing early to secure interest rates within agreed revenue budgets. This would be done in line with advice from our Treasury Advisors.

On investing, the Authority's objective when investing money was to strike an appropriate balance between risk and return, minimising the risk of incurring losses from defaults and the risk of receiving unsuitably low investment income. Given the increasing risk and very low returns from short-term unsecured bank investments, the Authority aimed to diversify into higher yielding asset classes during 2021/22, and this was delayed due to the current economic climate as a result of the pandemic. This was especially the case for the estimated £10 million that was available for longer-term investment. All of the Authority's surplus cash was currently invested in short-term unsecured bank deposits and local authorities. The strategy to diversify into higher yield asset classes would be implemented in the coming year.

Again the Council was requested to approve the Treasury Management strategy, including the investment strategy, treasury management indicators and limits and the Minimum Revenue Provision policy included within the strategy.

Cllr Jeavons seconded the report.

Comments from Councillors:

Councillor Al-Nuaimi referred to the seven-year capital programme and sought clarification on the cost of borrowing for Cardiff City Capital Region pending money from central government and what money would fund projects within Newport. Councillor Al-Nuaimi was advised to put any questions in writing to Head of Finance.

Councillor Truman fully supported the proposals as forward thinking and they dealt with all the main issues, including housing and leisure facilities and was a boost to the city centre economy, this included the City Centre regeneration projects. Councillor Truman also

supported the funding for social services and the empty property fund. The Transporter Bridge refurbishment was also a welcomed.

Councillor Hourahine took on board what Councillor Truman said and added that the Regeneration of the city centre would be beneficial for younger residents. Newport City Council was a forward looking authority. The regeneration would produce high quality high paid jobs for young people safeguarding their future, Councillor Hourahine therefore welcomed the report.

Resolved:

That Council -

- Approved the Capital Strategy (Appendix 2), including the current capital programme within it (shown separately in Appendix 1) and the borrowing requirements/limits needed to deliver the current capital programme.
- Approved the Treasury Management Strategy and Treasury Management Indicators, the Investment Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) for 2021/22. (Appendix 3)

As part of the above:

- Noted the increased debt and corresponding revenue cost of this in delivering the current capital programme, and the implications of this over both the short and medium-long term in terms of affordability, prudence and sustainability.
 - Noted the Head of Finance recommendation to Council, that borrowing needs to be limited to that included in the current capital programme and the recommended prudential indicators on borrowing limits do this
 - Beyond the current capital programme period, there are potential financial challenges around on-going affordability and sustainability but these will need to be reviewed closer to the start of the new programme within the context of funding levels and the Councils budget position.
- Noted comments made by Audit Committee on 28 January 2021 (paragraph 5 & 6).

6. **Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Final Proposals**

The Leader presented the report to Council. Following recommendation by my Cabinet, the Council needed to review and make a decision on the level of council tax and the resulting total net revenue budget for 2021/22.

The Cabinet met on the 22nd February 2021 and finalised detailed budget recommendations. This report set out the recommended overall 2021/22 budget, resulting service cash limits, council tax increase and the council's general reserve and contingencies. An increase in council tax of 3.7% (to £1,242.20 per annum at Band D) for Newport City Council was recommended. A 3.7% increase on council tax was an increase of 66 pence per week, 76 pence per week and 85 pence per week for Band B, C and D properties respectively.

Turning to the budget first, the Leader stated that, although Council was not here to agree the detail of that, as Cabinet were responsible on where and what resources were spent, it was important to mention a few key points:

1. It represented the culmination of about six months hard work, from agreeing the budget assumptions to form the basis of our planning to finalising detailed proposals last week, after a period of consultation on our draft budget which we announced in early January. We've done this under difficult conditions, working remotely and with the significant uncertainty of

developing budgets in the current challenging times. Many elected members had taken a part in this, from Cabinet members, to those who sat on Scrutiny committees, fairness Commission and many school governors. The Leader thanked everyone who had played a part in this and Council officers who have worked tirelessly on this whilst also dealing with supporting the city and residents through the last 12 months.

2. The Council's funding was increasing significantly next year and this provided some choices and the opportunity to invest in key services, including prepare the Council and the City for the challenges of 'recovering' from the last 12 months. Whilst the Revenue Support Grant accounts for about 76% of our overall funding, Council tax was still an important element. Funding, with a 3.7% Council Tax would increase by just over £15m.

3. The Cabinet were still making savings because the proposed investments were more than the available budget and therefore savings were needed. The draft budget proposals on savings showed we were on the 'right track'. Most of the savings would have little to no impact on services and were delegated to Heads of Service to implement. Of those we consulted on, only two proposals received negative feedback from residents. The Leader said that she would listen and she had by deleting the one saving that was not liked (charging at HWRC) and by reducing the Council Tax increase substantially from that consulted on.

4. The budget investment prioritises 'people' in our city and invests in 'place'.

- £4.9m would fund the cost increases in our schools, including new and expanding schools. We have kept back the pay increase element and would distribute when we knew what that was, up to the level we made provision for. Our intention was to at least pay for the cost increases in our overall schools budget.
- £2.5m in our social care services on a number of areas – emergency placements for vulnerable children, helping our adults with learning difficulties live independent lives and provision for increased costs from our care providers due to Covid / Brexit issues and ensure they were there to provide the best care as possible.
- £4m in our city services and regeneration, investment and housing services. This covered a range of issues but would provide capacity to deal with empty homes, economic development and projects to further regenerate and support the city centre. These were crucial now as we looked beyond the challenges of the last 12 months.
- £2.1m for the funding of the Councils capital programme. This was providing capacity to implement a very significant capital programme to benefit our schools, key cultural infrastructure, a new leisure centre in the city would also unlock college campus and city centre regeneration projects.
- nearly £1m for providing capacity to co-ordinate and implement capacity in our functions would take forward the city's aspiration on sustainable development, highways and de-carbonisation initiatives, developing our workforce planning and capacity, provision to develop and implement a plan and initiatives to further increased pride in our city, finding ways to support local communities within it and connect our communities and wider city.

The leader stated that it was a responsible budget and focussed on recovery as well as key services which supported the vulnerable residents and young.

In terms of Council Tax, that was the decision for council here today. As the Leader announced last week, cabinet had recommended a reduced 3.7% increase. The Leader made the following points here:

- it was significantly reduced on the 5% consulted on and also below the base assumption on the Councils medium term financial plan
- Newport's Tax level was one of the lowest in Wales and UK for comparable Councils (Unitary/County's) and the increase here maintained that. The rate was not 'out of kilter' to other increases across Wales. It was going to be substantially below increases in England here rates above 5% were not uncommon
- Our relative low level of Council Tax was not without its challenges, especially as a growing city with relative high deprivation levels. We could not allow this to slip back even further as that was not sustainable nor responsible. The level here provided for a 'balanced' position.

This is a good budget which focussed on a responsible recovery as we looked forward and put the Council at the heart in supporting our city as we moved ahead from the challenges of the last 12 months.

Cllr Jeavons seconded the report.

Comments from Councillors:

Councillor Jeavons thanked everyone for their hard work and contribution toward the budget. Along with the removal of car parking charges for certain sites within the city which were removed by the cabinet earlier in the budget cycle, removal of savings proposal STR2122/02 - Charges for non-household waste accounting to £20K was welcomed.

The saving of non-domestic waste for users of the HWRC site (which received over 60,000 visits since the booking system was introduced) was showing again that we had listened to the budget responses.

This along with the increase in waste enforcement within this budget, would help in the illegal action of fly-tipping.

Councillor Jeavons urged all litter picking groups to adhere to safe working practices in conjunction with the councils booking policy, and asked that the public check when having items removed from their property, that the people removing the waste had the correct paperwork/licenses in place.

Councillor Jeavons was very pleased to see an increase in the winter maintenance budget helping to keep amongst others, safety levels on our highways to a premium. Each grit run costed a lot of money, and were very rarely seen by the public whilst indoors during the inclement weather.

Councillor M Evans referred the increase in cost of Band D council tax from 2009/10 to 2021 £1,242 which saw an increase of £500. It was felt that previous savings suggestions put forward had been and that council tax should not have been increased under the current financial climate. He also mentioned that £6M was given towards the Welsh Budget with a settlement of 5.6% Councillor M Evans did however welcome some of the proposals, such as parking charges and addressing fly tipping. Due to Covid and the reduction in provision of services such as the closure of the Information Station, the budget was not therefore supported by his conservative colleagues.

Councillor Truman considered that this was a difficult budget which officers and members spent a long time producing. The challenges had also been addressed coming out of Covid. Councillor Truman therefore supported the report.

Councillor Davies Council supported the report and advised that there was financial protection for residents to support them if they were not able to afford council tax. The Welsh Government also supported the council and residents.

Councillor Harvey highlighted savings within various service areas and added that officers had gone above and beyond to prepare the report, supporting schools and grant funding for businesses. Councillor Harvey supported the budget going forward.

Councillor Whitehead considered that there were a lot of good actions that came from the budget report. He did however oppose the rise in council tax on behalf of residents and had considered moving an amended budget with a reduced council tax increase, but he had decided against this.

Councillor Rahman highlighted the investments, such as for small business, schools, green recovery within Newport when facing cuts in the previous years. In addition to this, the proposed new Leisure Centre. Councillor Rahman also understood that there were many families struggling and advised that support was available, from the Council and urged residents to get in touch.

Councillor Routley opposed the council tax increase and considered it would affect those struggling. He also mentioned that there was no additional revenue for the Bridge Achievement centre.

Councillor C Townsend observed that there were good elements within the budget but felt it did not go far enough with street cleaning and fly tipping. The planning process also needed strengthening through enforcement and the appeals process.

Councillor Cockeram considered that this was one of the best budgets in recent years in light of continuous cuts being made year on year, he also echoed comments regarding the regeneration of the city centre.

Councillor C Evans mentioned that the budget was considered at Performance Scrutiny Committee and suggestions were put forward in relation to the tax increase. He also mentioned that a neighbouring council's budget had made quite severe cuts. Councillor Evans advised that the Income Collection Manager had information for residents furloughed during lockdown regarding payment protection and advised that residents reach out to Newport City Council if they had financial difficulties to discuss how they could be given support.

Councillor Hourahine suggested that all colleagues take part in the consultation process and give an alternative budget if they would prefer a different outcome.

Councillor J Watkins agreed that there were good points in the budget, such as increased funding in social services and apprenticeships for younger people. Voluntary groups would also benefit from the budget. Councillor Watkins however opposed the council tax increase in light of Covid.

Councillor Morris requested a closure motion however the Leader asked the Mayor if she was able to conclude the discussion.

The Leader therefore concluded that it was a good budget with plenty of debate. The budget prioritised people and invested in place and set out the foundation for a green recovery and with a lower council tax which was important at this time.

It was noted that Councillors Williams and Mogford were unable to rejoin the meeting to cast their vote at this time.

Resolved:

That Council -

Revenue budget and council tax 21/22 (section 2-8)

1. Noted that an extensive consultation exercise has been completed on the 2021/22 budget proposals.
2. Noted the Head of Finance's recommendations that minimum General Fund balances be maintained at a level of at least £6.5million, the confirmation of the robustness of the overall budget underlying the proposals, subject to the key issues highlighted in section 7, and the adequacy of the general reserves in the context of other earmarked reserves and a general revenue budget contingency of £1.5million.
3. Approve a council tax increase for Newport City Council of 3.7%, a Band D tax of £1,242.20; and resulting overall revenue budget shown in appendix 1.
4. Approved the formal council tax resolution, included in appendix 3 which incorporates The Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and Community Council precepts.

Medium term financial plan (section 5)

1. Noted the MTFP and the financial uncertainty facing Local Government over the medium term.
2. Noted Cabinets approval of the implementation of the four-year plan, including all budget investments and saving options, as summarised within the medium term financial plan (appendix 4). In light of point 5 above it should be noted that financial projections are subject to on-going review and updating.

Noted and approved the councils reserves strategy and invest to save protocol. Estimated reserve balances as at 31 March can be found within appendix 5a.

7. Questions to the Leader of the Council

The Leader announced the following before proceeding with Questions.

- Last week, as well as finalising the budget, the cabinet gave the go-ahead to one of the most exciting projects the council would have embarked on in recent years.

A multi-million pound new leisure and well-being centre on a key riverfront site in the city centre would also pave the way for a 21st century city centre campus for Coleg Gwent.

Together, they would mean an investment of more than £100 million in the city centre bringing with them increased footfall and vibrancy. It would cost the council around £4 million, which seemed a small price to pay for what promised to be such a transformation in this part of the city centre; providing first class leisure facilities for residents and an enhanced learning environment in a fantastic new campus for our young people.

We were in challenging times but we could not stand still or stop striving to improve people's lives. These developments would bring huge benefits for so many people and we looked forward to more engagement with residents as the proposals develop and progress. Our consultation responses had shown these plans have won the backing of so many people in the city.

- The council was consulting with residents, businesses and community groups on our active travel network map, to help shape the future of active travel in Newport. We

wanted to know where people would like to see new walking and cycling routes developed as well as what could be done to improve existing routes

The leader urged everyone who hasn't already taken part to get involved as this was an important piece of work for the city and future generations, with a greener, more environmentally friendly and, above all, safer city.

- The Leader congratulated the planning and regeneration teams who were nominated for a prestigious award for their work on the innovative Central View housing scheme in Commercial Street.

The council was a finalist in the prestigious Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) awards for planning excellence 2021. It was shortlisted in the excellence in planning to deliver homes small schemes category. We were one of only two Welsh council to make the final of the awards which attracted entrants from all over the UK in the public and private sector.

Central View was a high quality housing scheme for over-55s in Commercial Street which was developed using funding from housing association Pobl Group, the Council and Welsh Government. We would find out next month if the entry was chosen as the winner but in such a high quality field from across the country, just being nominated was a huge honour and worthy of recognition.

- Later this month we would reach an unwelcome milestone, on 23 March it would be a year since the first lockdown was announced because of the Covid 19 pandemic, with few of us thinking that we would still be living under restrictions 12 months later.

It was a difficult year for so many people for so many reasons. We were so grateful to those in the emergency services, council staff, shop workers, delivery drivers and so many more, who continued to work on the front line throughout the pandemic.

Many lives had been impacted particularly those who had lost a loved one to Covid 19. Many of us here, if not all of us, would have lost a friend or relative or would know someone who has.

The council was contacted by a resident who was part of a group of families who were all in this sad position. The Leader was moved by her request that we light up one of our public buildings in remembrance on the anniversary. The Leader was pleased that we would be able to do that on 23 March. Along with other buildings in Wales, the Civic Centre clock tower would be lit up in yellow as a mark of respect.

The group was also asking the public to remember the thousands of Welsh lives that were lost in a number of ways such as putting a yellow heart or some daffodils in their window. It would be a time for pause and reflection.

The Leader concluded that sadly, we had not seen the end of coronavirus and people were still suffering and urged everyone to continue being careful, to abide by the restrictions to protect themselves and others to try and prevent more people experiencing the pain of those families.

Leader's Questions

- Councillor M Evans:

Referred to the UK investment in rail electrification in 2014 by Transport Minister Edwina Hart, which included a footbridge over the train station, feasibility studies had taken place to support this. In 2019, funding for the footbridge and

commencement of building was to start in next financial year, along with funding from Welsh Government subject to an application to WG. Were the constant delays therefore acceptable and who was responsible.

The Leader advised that the foot bridge formed part of the active travel intervention and would be installed. Active travel formed part of a sustainable solution to an M4 relief road. Recommendation from the South East Wales Transport Commission report in terms of Newport such as investment in railway stations, road infrastructure, highways and public transport. A number of these projects would be ongoing very soon. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with WG and Transport for Wales which would be undertaken through the delivery unit and the footbridge was an important part of the project. Also proposals to look at access and egress of railway station. The bridge was therefore on track to be implemented.

Supplementary:

Councillor M Evans reiterated that the foot bridge had still not been built after 10 years and referred to the poor state of the subway needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Who was responsible for this and would there be more feasibility studies and could the Leader give a commitment as to when would it be completed.

The Leader advised that this was part of broader intervention however the electrification system acted to delay this because of the overhead cables. Contractors had been appointed on this project and pre construction work had commenced. There had been a slight delay due to Covid as with most construction projects. In addition, railway lines could only be closed twice a year and therefore the railway would need be closed to build the footbridge.

As a point of clarification Councillor M Evans asked had the WG funding been approved. The Leader advised that she would provide a written response to Councillor M Evans.

▪ Councillor Whitehead:

Litter picking in Bettws was due to take place and it had been noted that during the pandemic there were challenges in relation to this in some wards. Could the Leader reassure that positive action would be taken towards fly tipping and that offenders were being actively pursued along with updates via social media to public regarding prosecution. Secondly during Scrutiny Committees, discussion on a citywide forum regarding litter picking had been addressed and it was hoped that the Leader and officers would come on board with this and provide funding. This would be a good project to adopt and push forward with a positive impact towards education and attitudes.

The Leader, along with Malpas ward colleagues also litter picked with residents and schools and agreed there was a hot spot for fly tipping recognised this, particularly in the dingles of Bettws and Malpas. Extra investment would enable Newport City Council to get an extra van and crew members to collect on a seven-day week basis. Unfortunately, prior to Covid a volunteer day was organised to support litter picking and advice and guidance. There was an issue around accessing land and land ownership such as the Sainsbury's site which was private site and there was issues around insurance. Information would be shared with all the groups to make sure that this could be addressed. Another aspect was the location of the litter was an issue and staff could therefore not be sent out to collect litter on highways without closing the roads. Collaboration would be key to collecting litter and support for groups in place to advise where to collect from. We were committed to investing and supporting groups along with the citywide forum. We were also committed to

enforcement and there had been a record number of fines and ongoing prosecutions around particular sites that were problematic. Ongoing actions as alluded to by the Superintendent earlier were being addressed.

The meeting terminated at 7.45 pm