

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 15 December 2021

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors Councillor J Mudd (Chair), J Hughes, Councillor R Jeavons, P Cockeram, D Harvey, D Mayer, Councillor R Truman and D Davies

1 Apologies for Absence

None received.

2 Declarations of Interest

None received.

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Deputy Leader referred to Item 3: Corporate Annual Report. page 6 last paragraph where Councillor Cockeram should have said was disappointed and not was 'a' disappointed. Item 5: Strategic Equality Plan, page 9 should read 'contact' tracing not 'contract' tracing.

The Minutes from 10 November were accepted as a true record subject to the above.

4 Treasury Management Report for the Period to 30 September 2021

The Leader presented the report, advising her Cabinet colleagues that this was a compliance report to confirm that Treasury activities in the first half of 2021-22 in line with the Treasury Strategy previously considered and set by Members. The report compared activity with the year-end position for 2020-21 to indicate the resulting causes.

The report presented the following information:

- A reminder of the treasury strategy agreed
- Details of borrowing and investment activity
- Information regarding wider economic considerations such as the pandemic and the economic climate
- An update in relation to the International Treasury code on commercial investment funding

The Report concluded with an examination of activity against performance, confirming compliance.

The report was presented to Governance and Audit Committee and was endorsed by them for onward consideration by Cabinet and ultimately Council.

As at 30 September 2021 the level of borrowing decreased by £9.1m on 2020-21 levels to £144m.

This decrease was in relation to:

- The repayment of a PWLB loan which matured in the first half of 2021/22. As at 30 September further borrowing to replenish this loan was not required. This might need to be covered by temporary borrowing before 31 March 2022.
- The Council had a number of loans which were Equal Instalments of Principal (EIP), which paid back principal over the life of the loan, and the interest associated with the loan went down as the principal outstanding reduced.
- The level of investments also increased by £4.1m to £28.9m, meaning a decrease in net borrowing of £13.3m during the first half of financial year to £115.1m.

Included within the investment figure is £13.9m held in the form of cash. This was circa £6m less than year-end but due to the continuing pandemic the Authority continued to keep higher levels of cash than normal that can be made available at very short notice to cover any unexpected calls on cash flow.

Currently there was not much demand for very short term borrowing within the market place, and in September rates on deposits below 14 days with the Debt Management Account Deposit Facility (DMADF) were still very low at 0.01%. The Authority had its investment with other local authorities of £15m with slightly better, but still low interest rates. It was anticipated that investments would reduce during 2021/22 as an alternative to borrowing until we reach the balance of £10m, which would remain invested for compliance with Markets in Financial Instruments and Derivatives Directive (MiFIDII).

As a result of this collective position, no new long-term borrowing was required to be taken out in the first half of the financial year.

it was however anticipated that the Council would need to undertake additional borrowing on a short term basis for the remainder of the year in order to cover normal day to day cash flow activity, although with current capital expenditure forecasts, it was expected that there would be no specific requirement to undertake long-term borrowing this financial year. External borrowing might still be considered to manage interest rate risks and the Council's longer term borrowing necessity.

The Authority measured and managed its exposures to treasury management risks using various indicators which could be found in Appendix B. The report confirmed the Council continued to comply with the Prudential Indicators set for 2021/22.

Decision:

That Cabinet noted the report on treasury management activities for the period to 30 September 2021 and provided comments to Council.

5 Corporate Risk Register

The Leader presented the report on the Council's Risk Management Policy and Corporate Risk Register, which enabled the administration and officers to effectively identify, manage and monitor those risks which could prevent the Council from achieving its objectives in the Corporate Plan (2017-22) and undertake its statutory duties as a local authority.

The Quarter two risk report would also be presented to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee in January (2022) to review the Council's risk management process and governance arrangements.

At the end of quarter two the Council had 46 risks recorded across the Council's eight service areas.

Those risks that were deemed to pose the most significant risk in the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and services were escalated to the Council's Corporate Risk Register for monitoring.

At the end of quarter two 18 risks were recorded in the Corporate Risk Register:

- Eleven Severe Risks (15 to 25);
- Five Major Risks (7 to 14);
- One Moderate Risks (4 to 6); and

- One Low Risk (1 to 3).

Change in Direction of Risk Scores

In comparison to quarter one, 13 risks remained at the same risk score with four risks increasing and one risk score decreasing.

In the last quarter the Covid case rate had increased with the easing of restrictions. The success of the vaccination programme had alleviated the most severe of illnesses in hospital settings but high rates of infection have been impacting staffing levels and attendances across school settings.

There was now new uncertainty with the new Omicron variant and residents and the Council would have to remain vigilant over the winter period.

Adult Social Care in Newport continued to see increasing demand on its services and this was affecting the Council's ability to provide necessary service provision.

In Newport and Wales in general the Social Care sector was struggling to recruit and retain staff. There were significant numbers of job vacancies and all care providers were experiencing difficulty in attracting new entrants whilst existing staff were being attracted to other sectors through the offer of better rates of pay and immediate financial incentives.

The Council was involved in local, regional and national discussions to ensure service users received the care packages they needed and to address the issues of recruitment and vacancies.

Following COP26 there was more emphasis for nations to decarbonise and reduce their impact on the environment. The risk score increased to reflect a higher probability of global temperatures rising.

The Council committed to reducing its carbon emissions to net zero carbon by 2030 and the Council made a good start to meet this target. The Council would need to do more to make this a reality not only for the Council but across the City.

The Council drafted a clear plan for the next five years on the actions it needed to take to achieve this target. The Plan was out for consultation and would be launched early 2022.

In November Newport Council declared an ecological and climate emergency that recognised the need to protect Newport's local environments and reduce carbon emissions across the City. The motion would ensure that all future decisions and policies made by Newport Council would be integrated across all areas of Council activity and the Council would lead by example through partnership working.

In the last quarter there was a wide ranging economic impact that were affecting the delivery of services in Newport.

This was most notably seen in the vacancies for HGV drivers and social care staff.

Residents and businesses were also experiencing increases in the cost of goods and services with impacts on the supply of goods.

The Council completed a Self-Assessment of Safeguarding which identified good practice being undertaken across the organisation.

With this self-assessment the Council had a good understanding of where further improvement needed to be made and to maintain good practice.

This resulted in the overall risk score reducing to four.

Comments from Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Cockeram mentioned in part of the Leader's presentation, the pressure on Social Services in relation to staff vacancies and rates of pay. The Cabinet Member mentioned that as an example, he was at a Regional Partnership meeting yesterday where they decided that they could not wait for Government to make the necessary

arrangements to uplift the rates of pay, therefore the Regional Partnership Board discussed uplifting, as a region, domiciliary care pay. To uplift domiciliary care as a Region by £1M saw their pay rise to only a £1, therefore it would take a lot of money to bring their pay up to a living wage. It was not much money but as a region, it was felt that the £1.8M winter plan money should be provided to domiciliary care staff.

- Councillor Jeavons mentioned that the Ash Die Back had changed the landscape of the city over the coming months because of the danger to public and buildings. There would however be a replacement programme in place to replant trees.
- Councillor Hughes took the opportunity to remind the public that the draft climate change plan is out for public consultation until end of December 2021 and all details were on the Newport City Council Website and Social Media platforms.
- Councillor Davies wanted to advise colleagues where the Council was with Red Rag in relation to demand of ALN and SEN support and provision. The Council was still waiting for implementation guidance from WG under the new ALN Act. There were delays in light of the pandemic and concern was raised by officers and the Cabinet Member raised concern to the WLGAs as to what the priorities and provisions would be in relation to funding so that Education Services could move on and come out of the Red Rag Status. School Budgets were now in amber and the cabinet member was pleased to report that there were only three schools with deficit budgets and in talks with those schools to ensure that support and budget management is implemented.
- Councillor Harvey referred to the covid recovery cases increased day by day and wanted to assure the public that the Council was just all a phone call away to provide support.
- Councillor Mayer mentioned that cyber security was red as unfortunately people will still find a way to access data. The assets also showed red this was a massive thing we have to deal with and part of it was caused by new normal as the council try to rationalise how to operate the services.
- Councillor Truman also suggested that there was great uncertainty for forward planning because of new variant, but must plan ahead properly. Additionally, Brexit was also an issue, such as HGV drivers, economy, energy costs, employment costs but the council would meet those challenges.

Decision:

Cabinet considered the contents of the Corporate Risk Register and continued monitoring these risks and the progress of actions being taken to address the risks identified in the report.

6 Audit Wales - Audit of Newport City Council Certificate of Compliance

The Leader presented the report, advising colleagues that Audit Wales was one of the Council's statutory external regulatory bodies that were required to audit the accounts of the Council and ensure the Council achieved value in the delivery of its services.

As part of the Local Governance Measure 2009, Audit Wales was required to issue a certificate of compliance to demonstrate that the Council was discharging its duties under the measure.

As a result of the Council publishing its Corporate Annual Report 2020/21 on its progress against its Corporate Plan and performance, Audit Wales published its Certificate of Compliance. Copies of the Certificate were included in the report for information in Welsh and English.

Decision:

Cabinet noted the positive outcome of the Certificate of Compliance in relation to meeting its statutory duty under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

7 New Normal Report

The Leader presented the report, advising that staff, Elected Members and the public had to adapt to the on-going pandemic and it was likely that the way we work would never return to the way it was before Covid-19 impacted us all. Staff and Elected Members would only be afforded the opportunity of making more use of the Civic Centre when it was safe to do so. Welsh Government, and now UK Government, guidance was clear, those who could work from home should do so.

Cabinet had previously received a report on the New Normal and was asked for further work to be undertaken. Today the follow up report asked to make a series of decisions in order to progress this work.

Strategic Recovery Aim 3 of our Covid Recovery Strategy agreed by Cabinet, focused on Sustaining a Safe, Healthy and Productive Workforce. Most staff continued to deliver face to face, front line services, protected by appropriate risk assessments and mitigations such as the use of PPE, lateral flow tests, adaptations to workplaces and appointment systems for services.

Around 1200 of staff and Elected Members, were asked to work from home in line with Welsh Government guidance and in order to protect them, their colleagues and the public and to slow the spread of the virus.

This report sets out the next stages of moving to a new, flexible operating model that enabled us to meet our Strategic Recovery Aims, supports the work towards the Modernised Council agenda within the Corporate Plan and gave an opportunity to bring more people in to the Civic Centre, which in turn helped reduce our carbon footprint and support the city centre.

Organisationally we were in a strong position to respond to the pandemic and implement flexible deployment of our staff due to investments we had made in technology over the previous years. Staff were also used to working agilely. In an occupancy assessment of the Civic Centre before the pandemic began, we had a maximum desk occupancy of just under 400 staff. This was significantly below the capacity of the building.

The report rightly highlighted the climate change impacts of commuting and the potential benefits associated with a flexible approach to working. This was also in line with the Welsh Government's Remote Working Wales approach, which focused on supporting town and city centres by providing space for public sector officers to work from town and city centre locations close to their homes.

The approach taken in development of the New Normal work was as follows:

- Democratic Function
- Technology
- Employment policies
- Civic Centre and public use

The Local Government and Elections Act required the council to make provision for hybrid Council and Committee meetings. This meant it would need to be able to hold a Council meeting with some Members in the Chamber and others accessing the meeting remotely. There was a need to broadcast these meetings.

Work was underway to install the technology to ensure we could operate this way and adapt to the way meetings were run in the future

Cabinet previously signed off a report to move its data centre from the Civic Centre, in collaboration with SRS partners. Due to previous investments the council was well placed to maximise the potential of remote working solutions for both staff and Members.

That left the utilisation of the Civic Centre and employment policies as the substantive points for a decision to be taken by Cabinet.

Newport staff were incredible throughout the pandemic. They have showed a real commitment to public service and the people of Newport. The Leader once again said a huge thankyou to all Council staff.

We have asked staff how they have adapted to working flexibly and there was a clear message that this was something staff value and would like to continue with. The report therefore asked that Cabinet consider a review of a number of policies: agile working policy; work/life balance policy; flexi time scheme and travel and subsistence policy. The car parking at the Civic Centre would also need to be reviewed.

As an employer with a responsibility to collectively bargain with recognised trade unions on terms and conditions for the workforce, any proposed employment policy change would be fully consulted upon prior to adoption at the Council's Employment Partnership Forum. Newport City Council strived to work in social partnership with its trade union representatives and it was anticipated that a review of the above policies would be undertaken jointly with the trade unions.

With regard to the Civic Centre, Cabinet was asked to consider a recommendation to focus its use of the building on the East Wing. This part of the building was more able to accommodate large numbers of staff and ensured that the central core of the Civic was still available for the democratic functions of the Council.

This would create opportunities to use the remaining parts of the building for third party usage. The Leader previously mentioned Remote Working Wales and it was intended, if Cabinet agreed, to provide a Public Access Hub at the Civic Centre for other public sector workers to utilise. We could also develop our ideas around a Cultural Hub for the city.

What was presented was a low cost option – both in terms of cash and carbon impact. It would seek to utilise current floor plans and furniture and also enabled the Council to be open to further opportunities in the future.

It should also create an environment where more individuals would be present in the Civic Centre each day (staff, Members, other public sector workers, the community and voluntary sector) and this in turn should support the city centre.

The following was therefore put to Cabinet:

1. Accept a new operating model, in principle and pending consultation with Trade Unions and staff that built on experiences of operating during Covid.
 - a. Consult on the introduction of a Homeworking policy and the inclusion of homeworking as a flexible working option in the Work/Life Balance policy.
 - b. Review the Flexi Time scheme and the appropriateness of this going forward.
 - c. Develop a review of the Travel and Subsistence policy to reflect increased homeworking and associated travel for business purposes
 - d. A review of the parking provision at the Civic Centre will be required to effectively prioritise key groups
2. To meet our Strategic Recovery aims and to manage the interim position dealing with Covid 19 and implementing the New Normal
 - a. Agree to designate the East Wing as the primary area of occupation of the Civic Centre.
 - b. Zone the East Wing by Directorate so that staff would be able to work together in their professional groups when in the building.
 - c. Develop technological solutions to support this (booking system, etc).

The alternative option presented was to return to the pre Covid occupancy of the building and staff policies.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Mayer mentioned that the new ways of working was forced upon the Council because of the pandemic, but that staff responded well within the first week of the lockdown. Remote working had previously been pushed back in the past but had now worked really well, under the

circumstances, it could also be seen as a cost saving exercise. Contact centre easier to be contacted under new arrangements and increased workload and service to the public. This was for the benefit for the staff and the public. The flexible working meant that staff could better use their time, but staff needed to be careful to get the work life balance right.

- Councillor Davies echoed the comments of the Leader and Cabinet Member and was pleased to see 710 responses to the survey, which received some realistic responses at an outcome of the consultation process as well as responses from the union representatives which was important as an ongoing response to these arrangements. As part of the survey, staff would be able to access hubs which would be put in place by the WG to help with work life balance. This was a positive report and an excellent model, with a positive outcome.
- Councillor Truman mentioned that Newport stayed open for the public. The hubs were fantastic as well as the help the council received, including partnerships set up during pandemic. Covid could be around for a number of years, this new model meant that the Council was adapting to work with it, therefore the Cabinet Member welcomed the report.
- Councillor Harvey referred to the statistics in the report where 8% respondents had not enjoyed working from home but 68% did and 76% felt they had more flexibility in their working hours. There was 18% of staff that looked forward to a return to work but 40% preferred to work from home. This new way of working was taking on board what the staff wanted to do, which meant that the Council was a fair and encompassing employer. This report was therefore a way of repaying staff for their hard work.
- Councillor Cockeram mentioned that the new way of working would also cut down on travel and referred to the WG meetings before the pandemic, where councillors and officers travelled as far as North or Mid Wales, with over two hours travel time. The Cabinet Member also advised that the Council must also consider the mental health of employees and this report covered both aspects.
- Councillor Hughes also echoed comments of colleagues and thanked staff for their effort during the pandemic as well as mentioning the carefully considered approach to this report, such as working with scrutiny, undertaking staff survey and consultation with partners considering a hybrid model. The Work life balance and flexibility was put in place for staff would also open up opportunities for people to work for council. How the Community hub could be developed was also an exciting prospect and looking the Cabinet Member was looking forward to seeing how it progressed.

The Leader invited the Chief Executive to say a few words on the report.

The Chief Executive advised Cabinet that given context of report it would be remiss of her not to provide comments on the report and seeing how it would be implemented in the forthcoming years. The comments from Cabinet colleagues reflected that the report had taken into account comments from colleagues from all over the organisation. The Chief Executive was aware that one size would not fit all and as the new normal work evolved, the council would change and adapt to ensure the model was right for the organisation, and all of our colleagues that worked across Newport. The Chief Executive was appreciative of the hard work of colleagues and the project board for putting the report together which was not an easy task. It also considered the wellbeing of staff to ensure that this model was fit for purpose for the Council. The Chief Executive still welcomed views of the staff and mentioned that the report still had a little way to go and still a work in progress, especially in light of the new Omicron variant. The Chief Executive thanked all staff for their hard work and support on this and commended the proposal for Cabinet.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed to the recommendations within the report and allow the Director of Transformation and Corporate Services to consult with relevant Trade Union representatives and staff on changes to terms and conditions of employment.

The Leader presented the report to colleagues the Director of Social Services Annual Report 2020/2021. This was completed by Chris Humphrey. Chris undertook the role of Acting Director of Social Services from December 2019 – October 2021. This report reflected the period when Chris stepped up into the role under the most exceptional of circumstances. The Leader thanked Chris for her outstanding work during her time as Director.

The report reflected on the unprecedented period of demand and delivery for Social Services across Children's and Adults Social Care. In May 2021 Care Inspectorate Wales undertook an Assurance Check which looked back at the period of 2020/2021. In their check they noted "We found support was underpinned by a relationship of openness and honesty about the options available for people who need care and support and carers who need support".

Children's services were experiencing unprecedented demand and increase in referrals while in adult services they were working under significant pressure. The findings identified a culture of improvement and mutual support and a recognition of positive leadership. It was noted that while staff were exhausted with complex high volume case work morale was generally good.

Across Adults and Children's Social Care delivery of services continued with all levels of provision being maintained despite the impact of the pandemic. From Community Connectors, and children's preventative services to advocacy, home care, and family support through to statutory interventions in family justice and provision of foster care and residential homes care and support was offered to citizens directly. Staff continued with face to face service delivery as well as seeking out innovative solutions in order to address the restrictions of the pandemic.

In Adult Services a new outreach service was developed and the Service's hospital discharge processes were successfully embedded into the new Grange Hospital that opened in September 2020. The Hospital and Reablement teams were present at hospital sites throughout.

In Children's Services the introduction of the Rapid Response team and the delivery of 'Baby and Me' supported families to be able to safely care for their children within the family home.

Working in partnership across the public sector and with our communities was key to being able to continue to deliver positive and robust services. At all levels of Social Services officers and Members continue to represent NCC in regional and National fora including the Safeguarding Boards, Regional Partnership Board, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children regional group and a plethora of partnership groups formed specifically to address the demands of the pandemic and ensure services could be delivered effectively across all agencies.

While 2020/2021 brought enormous pressures across Social Services the report outlines the extraordinary ways in which staff continued to care for and protect our most vulnerable citizens. Going forward into 2021/2022 will bring significant challenges but will undoubtedly create opportunities to continue to improve services.

The Leader invited Councillor Cockeram, Cabinet Member for Social Services to say a few words on the Annual Report.

Councillor Cockeram added a couple of points, firstly mentioning that he concurred with the Leader's comments about Chris Humphrey and the excellent job she did during the pandemic and the continued service delivery by Social Services during the pandemic. There were big challenges faced by Social Services, including safeguarding. Having the Police and the health sector in the Safeguarding Hub was a big improvement. This was a pilot scheme in Newport was now being rolled out across Wales after its success. In addition to this, with schools being in lockdown and not knowing what was happening to children could also be an issue.

The Council had 380 looked after children, with 256 of those in foster care. Foster carers were looking after the majority of the children and the Cabinet Member wanted to thank them for their hard work. The Council had also seen 26 successful adoptions during the lockdown. One of the areas where the Cabinet Member was pleased was the Children's Services residential homes which was also a big success and minister wrote a letter to thank the Council for this service.

There were 840 referrals from the new hospital in Llanfrechfca and 475 were discharged, which meant they prevented 60% of these going to hospital. There was also a new Dementia Reablement Service which was doing well.

The Cabinet Member thanked the Regional Partnership Board for their funding, on which the Local Authorities relied upon. The report also went to scrutiny and received positive comments. There was an underspend but we were currently not in the real world because of the impact of covid.

The Cabinet Member thanked the staff who had been exemplary but were also tired and there was a general issue with staffing across Wales. The Cabinet Member felt that a regional report was needed on how to increase staffing and request that Coleg Gwent and other colleges to provide bursaries to encourage people to enter the profession and work for the council. Finally, the Cabinet Member considered that overall this was a positive report.

The Leader also invited the Corporate Director for Social Services, Sally Jenkins to say a few words. The Corporate Director reiterated thanks to Chris Humphrey, as well as thanking staff as the pressure on them was huge. Staff were tired and morale was low but the positive messages and also with a commitment for staff to continue to work for Newport by retaining students was a tribute to the support offered to them from the Council. The report covered the year of 2021 but it felt that we had rolled straight over into another period of real challenge for 2022.

Finally, the Corporate Director took the opportunity to thank the Cabinet Member for Social Services along with other elected members for their support whilst Social Services continued to deliver their services. In light of the Omicron variant, there was concern about how staff would continue to work, however this would be monitored and Social Services would do everything to ensure the best service with the support offered.

The Leader thanked the Corporate Director for her tremendous contribution and invited comments from Cabinet Members.

Councillor Hughes also added that as a social worker, felt it was warming to hear staff being thanked considering the working conditions. It was nice to hear the praise for social workers under these challenging circumstances.

Decision:

Cabinet received the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services for 2020/21.

9 Covid Update Report

The Leader mentioned to her colleagues that in the last couple of weeks, there was the emergence of the Omicron variant in Wales and across the United Kingdom.

The number of positive cases for the new variant was lower than those in England and Scotland but it was only a matter of time before we saw further increases and cases being reported in Newport.

This period was a time for many people in Newport to get together with friends, work colleagues and families to celebrate over this festive period. Especially after the very tough year that we have had. It was also important to remember that restrictions remained in place: wearing face coverings in shops, public transport and other public venues, maintaining social distancing, and covid passes when socialising in venues across Newport.

Consideration should be given to those who were vulnerable in Newport and more at risk to Covid. The health and social care system was being stretched further and further as we were seeing more demand on these services.

The message over this festive period was for people to think sensibly about their actions and of other when socialising with friends and family; taking regular covid testing, and self-isolating if tested positive for covid.

Finally, it was also important for people to take up the booster when they received their letter from the NHS or, for those who were not vaccinated, to do so as protected you and others around you.

The Council front line services were continuing to operate and where possible staff were continuing to work from home in line with the Welsh Government's advice. This also continued for elected members in the Council with democratic functions continuing to be undertaken virtually.

The New Normal Cabinet Report presented today outlined the future approach that the Council would deliver to modernise services built on the benefits that have been shown through Council services and staff working flexibly in the last two years.

In November, the Welsh Government announced a £51 million support package for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents across Wales with each eligible household able to claim £100 to support winter fuel payments. Letters were sent to all households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction on how to apply online but also through other methods if they did not have access to a computer or digital device. It was important for households eligible to take up this offer and to also share this message with their neighbours, families and friends who may also be eligible.

Throughout the Autumn term, Education services and schools continued to operate as normal despite the challenges faced by schools with Covid cases. Education Services and schools were collaborating, monitoring attendance and following Welsh Government guidance ensuring the most vulnerable pupils and parents were supported and encouraged to attend.

Rates of pupil attendance during the Autumn Term were monitored closely by schools, the Education Welfare Service and Welsh Government. This highlighted lower than expected rates of attendance for September and October 2021.

	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Special Schools
September / October 2021	91.6%	88.2%	87.6%

Whilst there was no expectation on schools to set attendance targets or report attendance data for national purposes, it was essential that schools keep an accurate record of pupil attendance for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Schools have been asked to set their own internal targets for attendance and share these with the Education Welfare Service to help direct the work of the Education Welfare Officers. Monthly attendance data for each school is collected, analysed and tracked against the previous academic year. This data was then circulated to all schools on a monthly basis. It was essential that pupils maintain the habit of attending school regularly and punctually. The Welsh Government expected schools to engage pupils who were not attending on a regular basis and establish contact with their families. It was recognised that parents may need additional reassurances that schools were safe places for their children to attend. Where schools were unsuccessful engaging parents, or where continued absences were unauthorised, schools may refer the pupil and their family to the Education Welfare Service for follow up.

In November 2021, Education Welfare Officers attended 75 school meetings and received 93 referrals in relation to the persistent absence of individual pupils. An attendance referral was followed up either by phone or email contact with a parent or by a home visit. In November 2021, Education Welfare Officers completed 189 home visits. In 109 of these, Education Welfare Officers engaged with parents and pupils to discuss the reasons for non-attendance with the main reasons given for persistent absence this academic year to date being:

- Covid 19 positive cases
- Covid 19 self-isolation
- Covid 19 anxiety
- Other illnesses
- Mental health issues related to the child or their family
- Family holiday during term time

Major developments in the City Centre such as the new hotel and Market Arcade are on schedule to open in the New Year and would provide new opportunities for the city and residents following a very challenging time for businesses.

The Council was pleased to accept the award for the most outstanding organisation at the national Environmental awards last month. This award recognised the progress the Council made towards its goal of being net zero carbon neutral by 2030.

Alongside this award, the Council passed a motion declaring an ecological and climate emergency for the City of Newport. This recognised the work the Council, its partners, residents and businesses had to do to decarbonise. This was why it was important for people to contribute towards our consultation on our Climate Change Plan that would be launched next year.

The Council was also pleased to see the completion of the Active Travel route in Lliswerry improving cycle and pedestrian access in the area.

Partnership working between the Council, the Police and other partners helped to steer young people away from criminality and anti-social behaviour offering alternative activities and safeguarding support.

This month the Council launched its new Participatory Budget alongside Aneurin Bevan Health Board to support local groups and initiatives to improve their areas and support the communities that lived in those areas. This approach empowered residents to decide on which projects would receive the funding to deliver their projects and provide opportunities for communities to improve the lives and experiences of those around them.

Comments from Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Davies wanted focus on the strategic recovery in relation to the attendance levels in schools and the continued approach was a supportive one for families as attendance was low. Schools were the hubs of local communities and schools were providing family support workers through grant funding to support these families as we moved through crisis. This was also putting pressure on staff and the Cabinet Member commended staff for their hard work and focus they had on school children. All the educational staff, including officers, teachers, education welfare worked deserved the coming Christmas break and would be ready and focussed for the new term, and what faced them as a result of the new variant.
- Councillor Truman reiterated the need to be careful during Christmas around loved ones and listen to advice from the health experts. In addition, the NHS had worked very hard and should be commended. The booster roll out programme was doing really well in Wales, with the NHS staff rising to the challenge.
- Councillor Harvey echoed and supported her colleagues' comments. The Cabinet Member advised members that she was vulnerable as well as family and they were all isolating to have the one day together. Putting a mask on and regularly sanitising hands to meet family was very important. Education Services were phenomenal adding that the extra work carried out as a result of the pandemic by all Council employees was not on their Job Descriptions before this happened and they rose to the occasion. Councillor Harvey also agreed with Councillor Truman on his comments regarding the NHS. Councillor Harvey finally gave special thanks to Councillor S Marshall who was giving boosters to people with the Welsh Ambulance and encouraged everyone to receive their booster.

Decision:

Cabinet considered and noted the contents of the report and for Cabinet / Cabinet Members to receive updates from officers as part of their portfolio.

10 **Brexit Update Report**

The Leader advised that it was nearly a year since the UK formally left the European Union and the single market. Throughout the year the Council continued to see widespread impacts not only from leaving the EU but also due to the global impacts of Covid as economies have

seen increased demands and supplies have been disrupted. These impacts were also being experienced here in Newport as we were seeing vacancies across all sectors but most predominantly in construction, manufacturing, accommodation and food service activities. Supplies in food and goods had been disrupted and were being seen on the shelves of supermarkets. Major projects also saw increases in the price of materials and labour which were then impacting on the delivery and cost of projects. Finally, the cost of energy (electric and gas) and fuel had now increased which would see households on standard and pre-payment tariffs see an increase in the energy costs. For low-income households in Newport this would have a significant impact and would put further pressure on those vulnerable households.

As reported in the Covid Cabinet Report the Council launched the Welsh Governments Winter Fuel support to help eligible households to apply for £100 towards their electric and gas heating over the winter period.

In November, Newport was awarded £2.8m to distribute to seven external organisations to deliver economic and employment opportunities for communities throughout Newport. The Council met with the organisations to help them get set up and progress the delivery of the projects over the next eight months.

For the City's EU/EAA citizens it was over six months since the deadline passed. For a significant proportion of residents in the City they would have received either full Settled Status or Pre-settled status. But the Council was aware that there were residents still awaiting a decision.

Cabinet wanted to reiterate its support for EU/EAA citizens living and working in Newport and that they all had a part to play in making Newport a great city to live and work in. Therefore the Leader encouraged anyone who was still awaiting a decision or having difficulties to conclude their application to contact the Council and other organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau.

Newport Council was continuing to work with community groups and third sector organisations to ensure EU citizens have access to the services and support they need.

The Council was continuing to lead a city-wide food project network to assess demand and expected demand over the winter period.

The Council was also reviewing resources and capacity to respond to emerging need and are working with GAVO to make arrangements to support further food poverty work in the City.

The Leader added that the socio-economic duty required the council to tackle inequality during decision making as public bodies. Inflation rose to 5.1% and working households were at risk. The Council had provided free public transport across the city for the month of December to help residents. In order to strengthen and support communities as part of the socio-economic duty, the Leader announced that as a city council, it would be increasing the funding available for food banks across the city by £100K to address the challenges and prevent the people of Newport having to make a decision on whether to heat or eat during this winter period.

Comments from Cabinet Members:

- Councillor D Harvey reiterated in as previously that if anyone was facing financial difficulty to get in touch with Newport City Council.
- Councillor Jeavons added that fuel had raised to £1.43 and the increase in raw fuel, national insurance increase and inflation increase had impacted on this. This needed to

be addressed and people were paying £100s extra, which was too much and could not let people fall into a state of poverty.

- Councillor Davies echoed the comments of her colleagues and the stark reality that some people faced that could not afford a Christmas meal this year as well as needing financial support. Nearly a 100 people in a weeks had asked for help. It was a frightening fact that those people were struggling. The Cabinet Member was pleased that there was additional financial support for food banks, as we were facing unprecedented times and Newport City Council wanted to look after residents.
- Councillor Cockeram agreed that it was positive news that money was being given towards food bank. Newport City Council had been affected by Brexit. Labour costs and material cost up by 17% this would make a dent in the budget over the next year or two.
- Councillor Hughes mentioned that it was sad that people were relying on food banks and welcomed the support from Newport City Council.

The Leader thanked those who supported food banks and the distribution of parcels across Newport. The Leader had recently joined members of her local church to provide food parcels and was humbled to see people coming together to ensure families most in need could have a positive experience at Christmas although it was deeply saddening that volunteers had to do this.

Decision:

Cabinet considered and noted the contents of the report and for Cabinet / Cabinet Members to receive updates from officers as part of their portfolio.

11 Work Programme

The Leader advised colleagues on their regular monthly report on the work programme.

Please move acceptance of the updated programme.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed the Cabinet Work Programme.

12 Live Event

The meeting terminated at Time Not Specified