

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 14 June 2023

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Mudd (Chair), J Clarke, Y Forsey, D Harvey, J Hughes, L Lacey and S Marshall

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Davies and Batrouni.

2 Declarations of Interest

None received.

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes from 10 May were accepted as a true record.

4 Director of Social Services Annual Report

The Leader introduced the Director of Social Services Annual report to Cabinet.

The Strategic Director, as the designated Director for Social Services, confirmed their statutory duty under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the amended Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, to produce an annual report to the Council.

In line with the above, the report set out the personal assessment of the Director of Social Services' performance of Social Services in delivering social care functions during the preceding 12 months.

At the time of the report, the guidance as to the format of the report was being considered in consultation with Welsh Government. The report covered the period of 2022/2023, and the Director incorporated a mixture of case studies and examples from staff to demonstrate the work of Social Services.

During this period, the restructured Senior Management team was embedded in the service. The delivery of social care during 2022/2023 was profoundly impacted by work to recover from the covid pandemic, followed by the cost-of-living issues.

Despite the significant issues and challenges of 2022/2023, the Director of Social Services was satisfied that the Council continued to comply with its statutory duties.

The Leader was pleased to note that despite the difficulties of 2022/2023, social services staff were able to look beyond the relentless demands and delivered innovation, continued development of services and excellence.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Hughes thanked the Corporate Director for Social Services for producing the report, along with all those that contributed including the Performance Scrutiny Committee – People, for their input. Councillor Hughes remarked that this had been the most challenging year for social care, with the repercussions of Covid, and demands on services increasing, whilst budget and workforce challenges were faced nationally. Despite this, Councillor Hughes felt that Newport remained innovative and committed to transforming services, whilst being focussed on prevention and inclusion and collaboration with partners, as well as the wellbeing of staff. Councillor Hughes ruminated that the key element of Social Services was to support residents at home for as long as they were able, which ranged from children staying home with their families to supporting adults to live independently and supporting hospital discharge. The demand for care and support against a backdrop of budget cuts meant that it was a difficult time for staff, third party and the voluntary sector dealing with national issues such as the cost-of-living crisis. Councillor Hughes highlighted that the report gave several examples of where Newport is leading the way and being recognised nationally for their outstanding contribution to social care. Councillor Hughes confirmed that the Council had gained Carer Accreditation and thanked Councillor Cockeram in his contribution towards this achievement. Councillor Hughes also referred to the Smart Hub in Newport Indoor Market as another example of innovation in using technology to support care and help to keep residents out of hospitals. Councillor Hughes also highlighted Oakland House, which gained national recognition for the outstanding work that they undertake and felt that the families and carers involved also deserved praise. Councillor Hughes also took the opportunity to thank the Leader and colleagues, especially Councillor Marshall, for their commitment to the social care agenda. Councillor Hughes felt that the strength of the service lay in the passion and commitment of the 870 staff, who are a great team and deserve thanks. Councillor Hughes confirmed that the priority of the Council's Corporate Plan was to look after staff, as few people understood the complexities of work in social care and the impact on staff and their families. Councillor Hughes remarked that Social Services have great partner agencies and a caring voluntary sector in the city. In these challenging times Councillor Hughes said that he was proud of the service and again thanked Sally-Ann Jenkins, Corporate Director for Social Services, and the leadership team for everything they had accomplished this year.
- Councillor Marshall also thanked the Corporate Director for Social Services for a comprehensive report. Councillor Marshall mentioned that the Council had an excellent dedicated team led by an effective Director. The Cabinet Member for Social Services highlighted a few points from his portfolio, which was supporting children to remain safely with their families, looking at preventative work undertaken as a local authority, effective partnerships, foster care, and the support of organisations such as Barnardo's and other partners. Councillor Marshall went on to say that the awards outlined in the report were a true testament to the department. Councillor Marshall remarked that although it had been a difficult 12 months, Social Services were taking a transformational approach to services and as undertaking exciting future projects using grant funding. Councillor Marshall cited projects such as the redevelopment of supervised family services of Cwtch, and the enhancement of rapid response as examples of radical reform.
- Leader thanked the Cabinet Members for Social Services for their stewardship and the report itself; she stated that this was incredibly informative, and the case studies worked well to outline the work being undertaken. The Leader considered that this report showed the true value of the efforts of the teams across Social Services. The Leader also mentioned the hard work of carers and the role they played across the city, as well as all volunteers for their valued contribution, particularly as it was Carer's Week. Overall, it was pleasing to note that despite challenges, staff looked beyond immediate demand and

continued to develop services. The Leader thanked the Corporate Director for her guidance and leadership.

Decision

Cabinet:

1. Noted the annual report of the Director of Social Services.
2. Commented on the content of the annual report of the Director of Social Services.

5 Annual Safeguarding Report

The next item presented by the Leader was the interim Annual Report for Safeguarding. This report was an evaluation of 2022/23 performance for the Local Authority by the Head of Corporate Safeguarding.

The Leader confirmed that this was an interim report due to changes in Welsh Government guidance and the synchronisation of the reporting cycle. A full report would be presented to Cabinet early next year, which will be added to the Work Programme.

Safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults remains the highest priority for Newport City Council.

The Corporate Safeguarding Policy set out the Council's duty and commitment to safeguard and promote the health, wellbeing and human rights of adults and children at risk.

This report therefore assesses the Council's proactive actions and responses to safeguarding.

The report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 2 June 2023. The Leader was pleased to report that there was a constructive and helpful discussion amongst the Committee members on the content of the report.

The report noted the challenges faced across the Council concerning safeguarding as pressures brought about by Covid and the restrictions of the pandemic are still having an impact.

The Safeguarding Hub for Children's Services continued to see an increase in referrals during this period. This reflected the issues arising in schools, early years, and youth settings, and for the Council's partner agencies. For the children and their families, an effective and robust safeguarding approach is vital and could be life changing. Referrals came mostly from the police and education/schools.

Despite the pressures, the outcome of the safeguarding self-assessment demonstrated a very high level of compliance with statutory requirements and a determination to continue to place the highest priority on safeguarding for all our citizens by all areas of the Council.

The Council continuously evaluates Corporate Safeguarding, ensuring that the governance and reporting structures were robust and fit for purpose under the premise that Safeguarding is everyone's business in Newport City Council.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Marshall complimented officers for compiling the report, which he felt served as a reminder of not only the Council's responsibility in protecting the vulnerable members of society, but also the responsibility of everyone in the Council. Councillor Marshall also felt that it was reassuring to see the concrete arrangements in place, supporting the

safeguarding hub and concerning the way that investigations were undertaken. Councillor Marshall also highlighted the mention of preventative and intervention measures which were effective and helped the Council to be proactive in addressing issues before they escalated. Councillor Marshall also reflected on work that was being undertaken on a Gwent Regional level; with the report focusing on the collaboration of partnerships and a joint action plan for corporate safeguarding through regular meetings. Councillor Marshall remarked that this is a difficult area to work in and thanked staff involved.

- Councillor Hughes reinforced Councillor Marshall's words that safeguarding was everyone's responsibility and thanked council staff for all their efforts. The Cabinet Member mentioned that Newport was still living in the shadow of covid as highlighted in the report. Councillor Hughes remarked that despite these challenges being faced, he was pleased that the safeguarding commitment remained robust.
- The Leader added that it was an important report and the challenges of ensuring that all staff and volunteers were accessing and engaged with training was noted along with the need to demonstrate the firm commitment in the leadership of the authority.

Decision

Cabinet received the Annual Safeguarding (Interim) report by the Head of Corporate Safeguarding.

6 2022/23 Treasury Management Year End Report

The Leader introduced the Council's treasury management activity for 2022/23 and confirmed that treasury activities during the year complied with the Treasury Strategy previously considered and set by Members.

The report also compared activity with the year-end position for 2021/22 and detailed the movement throughout 2022-23, along with the reasons for those movements. This is the second of two reports that Cabinet receives on treasury management during the year.

The report presented the following information:

- The treasury strategy previously agreed.
 - Details of borrowing and investment activity throughout the year
 - Wider economic considerations such as the pandemic and economic climate
 - An update to the International Treasury code on commercial investment funding
 - A medium to long term outlook for borrowing need.
- and
- concludes with an examination of activity against prudential indicators, confirming compliance.

The report also confirms that the Council invested in three covered bonds within the year 2022-23, totalling £10m, in line with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.

The report was presented to Governance and Audit Committee in May and was endorsed for onward consideration by Cabinet, and ultimately, the Council.

Key highlights include the level of borrowing, which was £138.6m as at 31 March 2023, and had decreased by £3.5m in comparison to 2021-22 outturn levels.

This decrease was in relation to several loans which were repaid in instalments over the life of the loan and, the redemption of a small Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) maturity loan at the end of September, which did not need to be re-financed.

The level of investments also decreased by £11m to £47.2m, as the Council used up such resourcing as a more cost-effective alternative to arranging new external borrowing. Within the report was a forward-looking indicator called the Liability Benchmark, which provided a graphical illustration of the Council's existing and future borrowing requirement. In future, this would be shared with Cabinet on a regular basis following recent changes in guidance. This was an important indicator as it demonstrated the impact that current decisions taken on capital expenditure have on the long-term net borrowing requirement.

To highlight some of the important points, this indicator showed that between 2023 and 2025, the gross need to borrow increased, but the calculated need for actual/real borrowing increased more sharply. This was because the Capital Programme commitments added to the need to borrow but, at the same time, the internal borrowing capacity was predicted to reduce as reserves were utilised and investment levels reduced.

During the same window, actual borrowing held reduced as loans were repaid. The combination of this, and the sharp increase in the need to borrow, meant that actual new borrowing in the region of £50m could be required by the end of 2025.

The Council's underlying long term need to borrow, coupled with the need to refinance existing loans, meant the Council could be exposed to a higher level of interest rate than experienced over recent years. Because of this, the Council would continue to defer the need to take out long-term borrowing for as long as possible. It was hoped that, by adopting this approach, interest rates may have reduced from their current levels by the time new borrowing was required, reducing to some extent the impact upon the revenue budget of undertaking new borrowing. Any decision regarding undertaking additional long-term borrowing will be made in line with advice from the Council's treasury advisors and only where there was a clear financial benefit and need to do so.

The final aspect to outline was Prudential Indicators. The Authority measured and managed its exposure to treasury management risks using various indicators which could be found in Appendix A. The report confirmed that the Council complied with the Prudential Indicators set for 2022/23.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Hughes thanked the finance and budget staff for their work during a period of many challenges.
- The Leader echoed Councillor Hughes' comments and thanked the team for their financial management.

Decision

To note the report on treasury management activities for the period 2022-23 and provide comments to Council.

7 NCC External Pressures - Cost of Living

This report provided members with an update on the main external pressures facing the council, businesses, residents, and communities over the previous month.

The cost-of-living crisis continued, with rising interest rates announced by the Bank of England at the end of May and the Office for National Statistics reporting a continued rise in food and non-alcoholic drinks prices for April.

In Newport, there were high pressures on housing and homelessness services in the city, caused by a range of factors including the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on household

finances, high rents within the private rented sectors, and challenges in developing new housing projects.

The Leader of the Council and Chair of OneNewport, continued to advocate for partnership working as being vital in supporting residents and businesses.

The Leader was delighted to welcome businesses to Newport very recently as part of the place making programme, to consider some of the challenges faced.

The report provided another opportunity for Cabinet Colleagues to urge residents who may be experiencing difficulties to contact the council for information and signposting on the advice and support available; this can be done in person, by phone or by visiting support and advice pages on the Council's website.

The report provided information on how officers and partners were working directly with communities to facilitate and promote local and national support.

Officers are working closely with the Department of Work and Pensions in promoting accurate information to families and individuals including awareness of the Cost-of-Living Stakeholder toolkit.

Following the Cost-of-Living event at the Riverfront, the Council is working with partners to discuss how this could be held in wider areas across the city and there is a dedicated email address for residents to email any queries and be signposted to the best organisation for support.

In addition, Multiply Funding was confirmed, through the Shared Prosperity Fund to support residents to improve their levels of numeracy, focusing on financial inclusion.

The Council is also recruiting a specific team within the housing service to help prevent homelessness and to ensure that people had the financial skills and resilience to move away from homelessness in the long term.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Harvey said she had attended a strategic planning meeting earlier that day in relation to homelessness and the cost-of-living crisis and wanted to thank staff involved for how hard they work. Councillor Harvey also thanked the Leader for her support.
- The Leader thanked Councillor Harvey for her working driving forward this agenda within the authority.
- Councillor Marshall thanked community connectors and staff within the council who were able to help those who had concerns and worries about the future. Councillor Marshall added that those who were in difficulty, should seek the guidance and support of the Council and not be afraid to reach out to council staff for support and information.
- Councillor Clarke referred to the increase in mortgage rates and data from the Bank of England, which suggested homeowners had an average increase of £500 in last 12 months to their monthly bills, and there was also an increase in the use of food banks. Councillor Clarke reiterated the comments of his colleagues advising that those struggling to cope should contact the Council for support.
- Councillor Hughes mentioned that Peter Hill was retiring as manager of Raven House and acknowledged his work as volunteer then manager. Councillor Hughes remarked that Raven House Trust is one of the largest food charities in Newport, and that this was an example of how volunteering could lead to employment with a high level of personal

satisfaction. Councillor Hughes wished Peter all the best in his retirement and wished Peter's successor the very best in continuing the important work.

Decision

Cabinet considered the contents of the report on the Council's activity to respond to the external factors on Newport's communities, businesses, and council services.

8 OneNewport Summary Document (for information/awareness)

The One Newport Summary Document was included for Cabinet's awareness.

The Summary also featured the discussion on the Pillgwenlly Master Plan.

9 Work Programme

This was the regular monthly report on the work programme, the Safeguarding report will be added to the programme.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed the Work Programme.