

Unison response to budget proposals

We are as usual saddened by any budget proposal that suggests cuts to staffing and services within Newport City Council. We appreciate the pressure that Westminster has placed on all councils in with reductions to funding

We understand this year's settlement far exceeds expectations and in fact is one of the largest in Wales. We appreciate this is a one year settlement and so in anticipation of future pressures mitigations are necessary. We believe these mitigations can be achieved through genuine efficiency savings and the proposed cuts are neither necessary nor welcomed.

The suggested cuts to Children and Families Services raise concerns around the volume of work and the pressure that places on those individuals who will have an increased workload. We appreciate the expertise and commitment of all those staff within the council who work above and beyond their limits in the short and long term to cover vacant posts and sickness. This cannot be sustained long term and will lead to a drop in quality of work and an increase in short and long term absence.

The cut to the number of Education Welfare Officers and the reduction of the rest of the team to term time only will significantly impact on this team's ability to fulfil their statutory role. This will impact on schools, families and the Education Welfare Officers themselves. There is a potential for family's to 'fall through the cracks' and then will need additional support at a later stage which will in fact cost a great deal more than any savings made. There is also the danger of the loss of knowledge and skills from the EWO's who may have no interest in continuing to work on a term time contract and who may challenge that this is a significant change to their contract and they are at risk of redundancy.

The proposal around car parking in Faulkner Road has elicited the greatest response and anger from members. We have been inundated with member referrals describing the detrimental impact this proposal will have on them, if implemented. Some of the referrals are from members

who are not drivers but are concerned around the impact on colleagues and how it will affect day to day business within the Civic.

By allowing only 50 designated bays for NCC staff there will be a disproportionate effect on staff. Those who have caring needs or children who need to be dropped at school will not be able to join in the fracas for the 50 parking spaces for the hundreds of staff within the civic. With a predominately female workforce, this will be considered a gender issue and impact on equality assessment.

The financial impact of paying six pounds per day for five days a week for forty six weeks a year is £1380 pound a year to come to work. Consider that in the context of almost a decade of below inflation pay rises for Local Government workers and now imagine that impact on staff and how it will make them feel.

For the majority of staff, driving to work is not a luxury but the only way to fit in everything they need to do while juggling a busy work/life balance.

The staff being asked to do more with less also then have to face managing busy diaries and wondering how they will find time to do everything they have to do and find a parking space close to the civic which is not going to cost them.

The timing has not been lost on our members. Newport takes on responsibility for illegal parking within the city builds a team of enforcement officers (who do a difficult job very well) and then creates a revenue stream of £41,000 by taxing their own workers.

There is an argument that this proposal is unfair when other employees will continue to benefit from free parking at Telford depot, Brynglas day centre, schools, Malpas court, flying start locations, waste site, Park Square etc.

The financial gain will be insignificant in comparison to the negative effects this will have. Staff simply cannot afford to pay six pounds a day to come to work so they will park on the streets surrounding the Civic. This will make the parking on those streets more difficult and will damage the reputation of the Council with the residents.

This will have a significant impact on the staff within the Civic and it will damage the relationship between the Council and employees. There will be a loss of productivity caused by travel time to and from cars parked

further away from the Civic. Increased stresses on staff and I can guarantee lateness to meetings will become an issue as will arranging meetings as people will be reluctant to give up parking spaces or to pay for two tickets in a day.

And while this happens councillors will continue to use the car park directly opposite the main entrance for free. This is a staff group that have gone through significant changes in the last ten years and have continued to work to the highest standards under massive pressure caused by the Austerity cuts of a tory government. Please do not let a Labour Council decision be the straw that breaks the staff's already low morale. We are aware that a neighbouring authority shares the elected member's car park with front line staff. Only during full council meetings are staff requested to not use the car park. We see no reason that this initiative can't be shared at NCC.

The financial burden to our members is unfair and we anticipate the level of staff well-being will reduce impacting on productivity and attendance.

We ask that the council reconsider this proposal and look at long term solutions to this complex problem which will only become more difficult than it already is.

As a Union we would be remiss if we did not also highlight the continued workplace stress staff find themselves working under. Due to the cuts staff groups have shrunk and workloads increased. Staff have shown resilience and flexibility within their roles and responsibilities but you can only stretch an elastic band to a certain size and only for a finite amount of time before the cracks appear. This is evidenced by the increased calls and casework we are dealing with.

As a Unison branch we will always challenge any cuts to services, job losses and changes to terms and conditions of our members. We appreciate the challenges the council find themselves in and acknowledge that Newport City Council have to set a legal budget within guidelines.

Peter Garland

Branch Secretary Newport City Unison Branch.