

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 12 October 2022

Time: 4.00 pm

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

1 Apologies for Absence

Deputy Leader, Councillor D Davies.

2 Declarations of Interest

None received.

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Leader reminded colleagues that September's Cabinet meeting was cancelled out of respect of the sad loss of Queen Elizabeth II. The Minutes of previous meeting, on 13 July 2022 were therefore confirmed as a true record.

4 July Revenue Budget Monitor

The Leader presented the report to Cabinet colleagues. This was the first revenue monitor presented to Cabinet this financial year, and explained the current forecast position of the Authority as at July 2022.

Against a net budget of £343million, the July revenue position currently forecasted an overspend of £3.1million, which represented around 1% variance against budget. This overspend was after the use of all revenue budget contingencies of £4.9 million included in the 2022/23 revenue budget, as agreed by Cabinet in February 2022.

As reflected in the 2022/23 budget report, and 2021/22 outturn report, this financial year presented the potential for more stability, relative to the last two years, with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic potentially set to ease. It was known however, that the Welsh Government Hardship Fund would end, therefore, any costs associated with recovery, and challenges experienced in achieving historical income levels would fall upon the Council.

Despite having established sizeable budget contingencies for the 2022/23 year to deal with legacy impacts relating to Covid, crucially, two new issues emerged since the budget was agreed:

- The provisional NJC and Teacher's pay offer for 2022/23 was higher than the provision allowed for (average +4% higher for NJC and +1% higher for Teachers)

- Inflationary increases over the last six months, which continued to increase, impacted on the Council's budget, for example fuel, and major external contracts such as school transport. Officers continued to manage these within existing resources, as best as practically possible.

As shown in the report and its appendices, coupled with the pay award impact, the current position was explained in the following way:

- There was significant overspending in some key demand areas and other emerging risks within service areas
- These were partially offset by savings against (i) revenue budget contingencies, made available to the Council (ii) the Council tax reduction scheme and (iii) other non-service budgets.

Some areas throughout the Authority were reporting significant overspends against specific activities. These overspends related to demand-led activity areas, such as Social Services, therefore there was an inherent risk of change should demand levels change from current forecasts during the remainder of the year.

The key areas contributing to the £3.1million forecast position included:

- (i) Increased demand across key social care areas including children's out of area and emergency placements. These two areas alone contributed an overspend of almost £2.9million to the overall service position.
- (ii) The National Employers agreed to a one-year final offer to the trade unions representing the NJC workforce. The average increase for Council staff was in the region of 8% compared to only 4% provision in the budget. Whilst this was yet to be agreed, it represented a forecast overspend of £2.4million for non-school based staff.
- (iii) Significant pressures were evident within Housing and Communities, in relation to homelessness. An overspend of £2.9million was forecast. The main issues were temporary and lack of suitable accommodation resulting in significant use of hotel and B&B options and the cap on Housing Benefit subsidy resulting in only a proportion of these costs being covered by the Department for Work and Pension (DWP).
- (iv) Education SEN transport was forecasting a £200k overspend due to higher operator costs due to inflation and £255k car parking income shortfall. The anticipated overspend in these areas of emerging risk was expected to be around £500k by the end of the financial year.
- (v) An anticipated shortfall against the delivery of 2021/22 and prior year savings of over £600k, largely due to delays in progressing the necessary actions, some of which was a result of the pandemic. Whilst the level of unachieved savings in relation to the current financial year was lower than in previous years, there remained a need to ensure that all savings were delivered, in full, as soon as possible and officers continued to take action to ensure these were delivered from the earliest opportunity.
- (vi) Underspending against both the core revenue contingency budget and the other temporary contingencies provided mitigation against service area overspending. The forecast underspend of £4.7million was shown against non-service budgets. In addition, there was a forecast underspend of £1.2million against the council tax reduction scheme budget.

The report highlighted that, overall, schools were anticipating a net overspend of £6.1million. As well as the impact of a higher pay offer compared to the budget increase provided,

schools were drawing down on reserves built up over the previous two years as they move to catch up and strengthen provision after the impacts of Covid.

In comparison to previous years, whilst no schools set a deficit budget, a number of schools were at risk of entering a deficit position once the impact of the pay awards was reflected in individual school forecasts.

Overall, the current position on school balances represented a significant change from the concerns evident in previous financial years. The overall surplus position was projected to total £9.7million and appeared set to continue for at least the next financial year. It was, important, however, that there remained a focus on school budgets, to ensure that, as much as possible, a return to the previous position was avoided. This must be balanced with trying to avoid a situation whereby balances could be considered excessive and would, therefore be a key consideration when setting future revenue budgets and reviewing the medium-term financial plan.

As the first reported revenue monitor of the year, it was clearly subject to change as the year progressed and new issues and opportunities emerge. At this point, the issues that gave rise to individual significant overspending were known with certainty and the values attributed were realistic.

Clearly the position currently being reported was concerning and it was important that every effort was made to bring the position back towards a balanced position by the end of the year.

In an effort to achieve this, services would continue to robustly review their forecasts and identify ways to mitigate the overspends, such as by identifying in-year savings and managing any new pressures within existing resources as much as is practically possible.

As well as having a focus on the in-year position, it would be important for services to understand any longer-term impacts of the challenges being faced and identify strategies for minimising those impacts. This was because there was already a challenging outlook for the medium term and any further financial issues would only add to that challenge.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Marshall mentioned that social services figures were facing challenges. There was a long term project opening at Windmill Farm, which was recently visited by the Leader with the Minister that would assist in placement allocation. The Cabinet Member for Social Services also praised the work of staff at the Rosedale properties, again considering the challenges faced by the team.
- Councillor Batrouni as a new member praised work undertaken by the previous Cabinet prior to the local elections in May as well as helping the schools of Newport in coping with the pressures, with forward thinking. The employee pay deal was a significant cost to the council should it go ahead and the council recognised that the staff were also suffering under the cost of living crisis. Councillor Batrouni also voiced his concern with the homelessness situation. The Leader thanked the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation for his comments and added that the council wrote to the previous Prime Member for support with the cost of living crisis.
- Councillor Clarke support the Leader's presentation and agreed with Councillor Batrouni's comments, there were many challenges ahead for residents of Newport.
- Councillor Forsey voiced concern about the cuts being faced, which was a serious situation.

- Councillor Harvey agreed with the comments of Cabinet colleagues and referred to increased costs.
- Councillor Lacey also agreed with comments and wanted to highlight that the council was doing it's best to look after all residents within Newport.

Decision:

- That Cabinet -
- Noted the overall budget forecast position resulting from the issues included in this report and the potential for an overspend position to exist at the end of the financial year.
- Agreed that the Chief Executive and the Executive Board instigate specific measures to manage the overall forecasts within the core revenue budget, including revenue budget contingencies.
- Noted the risks identified throughout the report and in the Head of Finance comments, particularly in relation to the Teachers and NJC pay awards for 2022/23, homelessness and the lasting impacts of the pandemic.
- Noted the forecast movements in reserves.
- Noted the overall position in relation to schools, when compared to previous years, but also noted the risk that deficit positions could emerge in the future if good financial planning and management is not undertaken.

5 Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 1 - 2022/23

The Leader presented the report, which provided an overview of the updated capital budgets for this financial year and the remainder of the capital programme window, alongside the projected outturn position as at July of this year.

This represented the first capital monitoring report of the 2022/23 financial year.

The last report received by Cabinet for the Capital Budget was the 2021/22 outturn report, which identified the total capital budget heading into 2022/23. At that point in time, the total budget for this year was £117.4m, which represented a significant increase in levels of spend compared with previous years.

An exercise to review the anticipated profile of spend for each scheme was undertaken by officers over the summer, with the aim of ensuring that a more realistic starting budget was reported against during the year.

The culmination of this exercise was that a total of £51.8m was reprofiled into future years.

It was hoped that by undertaking this exercise, and reducing the 2022/23 budget, the levels of slippage reported throughout the year would be reduced, in comparison to previous years.

In addition to the reprofiling exercise, there were a number of additions and amendments made to the programme, most of which related to the addition of specific grant-funded schemes. These total £25.550m, detailed in Appendix A, impacted across multiple financial years, with £15.8m added to 2022/23 alone. Cabinet was asked to approve these additions to the programme.

The total net impact of these additions and revisions were to reduce the total budget for 2022/23 to £81.4m.

In a change to previous years, Cabinet were not being asked to approve slippage at this stage of the year. Instead, slippage would be identified in each monitoring report and only in the final report of the year would we be asked to approve a total amount to be transferred to

future years. The intention was to give greater clarity and accountability, as reports would be against a fixed budget, rather than one that moved on a quarterly basis.

Against the revised budget of £81.4m in 2022/23, the outturn expenditure totalling £80.9m was projected.

This variance was comprised of £433k of slippage and £106k of “true” net underspends and overspends.

This level of slippage being reported was considerably lower than in previous years, because of the reprofiling exercise described earlier.

There were no major items of slippage to outline at this stage, however a number of schemes requiring close monitoring were highlighted for our information. These included the Transporter Bridge and Leisure Centre, where the risk of further delays could result in slippage being identified later in the year.

The report also outlines the current position in relation to the available capital headroom.

Having been updated for a recent new commitment and an equivalent increase in resources, the total headroom still stood at £2.354m and comprised of the following:

- £57k borrowing headroom.
- £258k uncommitted capital expenditure reserve
- £2.039m of uncommitted capital receipts

The balance of headroom available took account of commitments already reflected within the Capital Programme, as well as two provisional commitments in relation to the Council’s share of the demolition costs for Newport Centre and additional funding to take the overall Band B funding envelope to £90m, the latter being detailed within the report.

This overall amount of headroom, which steadily reduced over recent years, would need to be carefully managed and monitored to ensure that it could be utilised when needed for the most critical issues prior to the new capital programme coming into existence in 2023/24.

This need for careful monitoring and prioritisation of resources was heightened considering the challenges currently being faced in relation to rising construction industry costs and the competing priorities for capital resources.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Batrouni considered that it was important to recognise what the Council was still investing money on areas such as £37M on education and £15M on regeneration and was therefore still considering capital projects that delivered better services to residents. The Leader agreed with Councillor Batrouni’s comments.
- The Leader reiterated that under both the financial items discussed, there were teams of officers working very hard to maintain prudent financial management across the whole of the authority as well as doing their best to work under extreme external pressures. With this in mind, the Leader wanted to thank officers for their contribution. The Leader also mentioned to the Chief Executive that the Cabinet valued the contribution that officers made.

Decision:

That Cabinet -

1. Approved the additions to the Capital Programme requested in the report (Appendix A).

2. Noted the predicated capital expenditure outturn position for 2022/23.
3. Note the available remaining capital resources ('headroom') and the earmarked usage of that resourcing.

6 **Corporate Risk Register Update (Quarter 1)**

The next item the Leader presented was an update of the Council's Corporate Risk Register for the end of Quarter one (1 April 2022 to 30 June 2022).

Cabinet members were asked to consider the contents of this report and continued the monitoring of these risks and the actions being taken to address the risks identified.

The Council's Risk Management Policy and Corporate Risk Register enabled this administration and officers to effectively identify, manage and monitor those risks which could prevent us from achieving our strategic priorities and to undertake our statutory duties as a local authority.

The Quarter One Risk Report would also be presented to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee at the end of September 2022 to review the Council's risk management process and governance arrangements.

At the end of quarter one the Council had 44 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 three 16 risks were recorded in the Corporate Risk Register.

- Eight Severe Risks (15 to 25);
- Eight Major Risks (seven to 14);

In comparison to quarter four, there were no new and/or escalated risks and no risks were closed.

Fourteen risks remained at the same score as quarter 4 2021/22.

One risk score increased and one risk score decreased in the Corporate Risk Register.

There was a change in Direction of Risk Score.

Balancing the Council's Medium-Term Budget (Risk score increased from nine to 12) - The Medium-Term Financial Plan was recently updated for the first time since the 2022/23 revenue budget was set.

Due to the current inflationary crisis, it was evident that cost pressures would increase substantially in comparison with the original assumptions.

Costs such as pay, energy and commissioned services were all forecasted to increase in price significantly. In addition, services identified pressures in a number of areas, especially those connected with demand and capacity within services.

The funding assumptions remained largely unchanged and, therefore, there was the potential for a significant budget gap.

This budget gap would be very challenging to address, especially in light of the level of

savings that have already been identified and achieved in previous years.

Covid-19 Pandemic (Risk score decreased from 16 to 12) - While Covid was still a risk and monitored through the Council's strategic GOLD group, the overall impact on services had reduced.

At the end of Quarter 1 the risk reduced to reflect this however, the impact on staff absences was still monitored.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

Councillor Batrouni referred to the cyber security risk as outlined in the report as red. This was a UK concern and the Council was therefore trying to mitigate the risks. There was an external review being undertaken by Audit Wales an internal procedures were being addressed, working closely with the IT Shared Resource Services (SRS). The Leader agreed with these comments and was assured that the officers were doing everything to mitigate these risks.

Decision:

Cabinet considered the contents of the quarter one update of the Corporate Risk Register.

7 Corporate Plan

The Leader presented the report on the development of the Council's Corporate Plan 2022-27.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act required Newport Council to publish a Corporate Plan which set out how the Council would carry out sustainable development to improve Wales' economic, social, environment and cultural well-being and its seven Well-being Goals.

The previous Corporate Plan 2017-22 set out the Council's commitment to build on success and build a better Newport. The last two and half years of this Plan's delivery had taken place against the backdrop of two major global events, the Covid pandemic and more recently the cost of living crisis.

Despite these challenges, Newport Council, and its partners continued to deliver change and deliver service improvements. Further details would be presented to this Cabinet next month as part of the Council's annual report.

Over the next five to 20 years, Newport was expected to see significant change and we must consider the opportunities that would improve the well-being of the city, provide economic growth and support cohesive and safe communities.

There would also be many challenges and changes that Newport would have to prepare for and adapt to such as climate change, sustainability of services, technological change and the ongoing need to provide necessary services for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

In the development of this Plan, Newport Council considered priorities at National (Welsh Government), Regional (Cardiff Capital Region) and local levels (our Cabinet Manifesto Aims).

Over the next five years Newport Council's four Well-being Objectives would focus on the following:

1. *Newport is a thriving and growing city that offers excellent education and aspires to provide opportunities for all.*
2. *A city that seeks to protect and enhance our environment whilst reducing our carbon footprint and preparing for a sustainable and digital future.*
3. *Newport is a supportive city where communities and care are at the heart of what we do.*
4. *Newport City Council is an inclusive organisation that places social value, fairness and sustainability at its core.*

In September the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee scrutinised these draft Well-being Objectives.

This Cabinet welcomed the positive feedback from the Committee on the objectives and would consider their recommendations before the final version of the Plan was presented at Cabinet and Council in November.

Residents were also asked their views on the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives and their importance in the delivery of services. The results have shown over 70% of residents considered the four objectives to be either very important or important to Newport.

A final version of the Corporate Plan would be presented to Cabinet and Council in November before being published in Welsh and English to residents.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Lacey considered that this was a progressive and well thought out document and wanted to assure residents that this was not just a tick box exercise. These were the objectives that the Council lived by. The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Assets who was also the LGBTQ+ Champion referred to wellbeing objective number three, where Newport was a supportive city and community and care was at its heart. This was evident over the past two years. In the last year there was the Afghan resettlement scheme, as well opening the doors to Ukrainian refugees. Councillor Lacey was also personally involved in the recent Pride in the 'Port event which was a huge success and therefore supported the document.
- Councillor Batrouni thanked the Leader for the co productive plan with the Cabinet meeting regularly to have honest and frank discussion. The Council was meeting the four objectives which were outlined in the report and was aware the challenges that Newport residents faced. There was a Strategic Equality group meeting earlier that day where the officer engagement was amazing and this was emphasized by the Connected Communities Manager who gave a detailed brief to the group.
- Councillor Clarke added that this was a fair inclusive and listening Council as mentioned within the report and was therefore fully behind this report and fully supported it.
- Councillor Harvey agreed with colleagues and felt that Newport's values was the most important point within the report. Everyone that worked for Newport City Council put their citizens first, highlighting the invaluable work carried out over the past two years. The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing praised all Council staff add that everyone did their bit no matter how small. Councillor Harvey also thanked the former Deputy Leader, Roger Jeavons and The Leader, Councillor Jane Mudd for their work during lockdown.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed to the key principles of the draft Corporate Plan and its ongoing development in preparation for consideration by Cabinet and Council in November.

The Leader presented the report to Cabinet. This was the Council's Annual Report on the progress against its Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24.

Under the Equality Act (2010) the Council was required to report annually on the progress it made against the strategic equality objectives contained within its Strategic Equality Plan.

Newport Council's Equality Objectives were developed in partnership with key internal and external stakeholders and were subject to extensive community engagement. The involvement of grassroots communities ensured that whilst our Plan delivered a strategic vision for equality in Newport, it also ensured tangible outcomes for communities on the ground.

The Strategic Equalities Plan Annual Report 21/22 was reviewed by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in September and their comments were included in the Cabinet Report.

The impact of the pandemic continued to present challenges in delivering against some areas of work in 2021/22, however Newport's equalities work continued to be flexible, responding to emerging challenges, particularly around access to information, education and addressing hate crime week.

The Leader thanked the Police for their fantastic support in relation to Hate Crime.

The Leader was appointed as WLGA Spokesperson for Equalities, Migration and Anti-Poverty.

Significant dates, including LGBT+ History Month, Ramadan, Holocaust Memorial Day, Pride Month, Refugee Week, Windrush Day, Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month, Black History Month and Hate Crime Awareness Week, were recognised and promoted across the city. As well as lighting the Civic Tower to celebrate this.

Fairness and Equality Impact Assessments including the Socio-economic Duty against policy/decision making were ongoing and this was demonstrated against a range of decisions. Our good practice here was recently cited in a national Audit Wales report.

£415,000 of funding was distributed to 79 community projects, overseen by a representative community steering group, working closely with Newport's Fairness Commission.

Staff networks for disabled, LGBTQ+ and ethnic minority staff continued to provide a platform for staff from under-represented groups to influence our workplace policy, service delivery and strategic decision making

Significant support provided to EU citizens in Newport ensured eligible residents could submit late applications to the EU Settlement Scheme post deadline.

Equality, Hate Crime and EUSS awareness sessions delivered to senior customer service staff.

During the year over 2,665 people were supported by all floating support schemes to access and maintain their accommodation, including adults with learning disabilities and refugees

In terms of workforce data, the council's ethnic minority representation remained similar this year despite a slight increase in staff numbers, and our gender pay gap reduced for this period.

The council still had work to do to improve the representation of minority ethnic staff at all levels of the organisation, and this will be a focus for our work during 2022/23.

Pride in the Port was an inclusive occasion.

The Leader paid former thank to former Cabinet Member Mark Whitcutt and Malpas Ward colleague Councillor David Mayer for their tremendous efforts.

The Leader invited the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation to comment.

Councillor Batrouni added that this report was a summary of the work that was undertaken during the second year of our Strategic Equality Plan. It set out the Council's commitment to a workplace culture and approach to service delivery that valued inclusion and diversity.

We would continue to progress this work over the next 12 months. The Annual Report set clear priorities for the next period based on a review of our workforce data and progress against our Equality Objectives.

The Council's Strategic Equalities member and officer Group would continue to support the delivery of our Strategic Equality Plan and ensured that we are innovative in our approach and effectively involve key stakeholders.

The Scrutiny Committee comments were noted around the collection of data and in-depth information and the Committee was praised on their hard work in relation to this report.

Councillor Batrouni referred to Complaints, Compliments and Comments where captured data would be improved going forward.

The Leader thanked Councillor Batrouni for the work undertaken in his role as Cabinet Member.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Forsey highlighted objective four; everyone in Newport was made to feel welcome and integration supported by local communities. Hate speech was on the rise and this was tackled by providing training on hate crime to ensure that people were aware of the consequences of their comments.
- Councillor Hughes there was a strong commitment to the Equality Act which united the city and made it a safer place for all residents and not just some of the residents. This crossed the whole spectrum and the Cabinet for Social Services was proud that we were working with community and officers. Cabinet was wholly committed to supporting this and the hard work was reflected in community groups. Councillor Hughes shared his thanks with Councillor Lacey and referred to her contribution at the Pride in the 'Port event, which provided a safe environment.
- Councillor Harvey had attended the Strategic Equality Group earlier today, which was really refreshing. Councillor Harvey praised the work of Dan Harvey, the Connected Communities Manager.
- Cllr Lacey welcomed the thanks of colleagues and wanted to pass on her thanks to the Pride in the 'Port Group as well as those officers taking in refugees and volunteering at vaccine centres.

Decision:

Cabinet approved the attached final monitoring report and published it on the Council's website, in accordance with statutory deadlines

9 **Climate Change Plan Annual Report**

The Leader was very pleased to present the introductory annual report for our Climate Change Plan.

As a globally responsible organisation, we declared an ecological and climate emergency last November and stated we would develop a clear Climate Change Organisational plan, in consultation with our citizens, for the next five years that would set out the actions we need to take to achieve this.

In March, of this year we as a Cabinet agreed our Climate Change Plan for the next five years. This plan set out how we as an organisation would reduce council carbon emissions to net zero carbon by 2030 and review the services the council provided to ensure they support the city's journey to both net zero carbon and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

The plan would from 2022-27, and this introductory report set out where we were at the start of the plan and also detailed some of the important projects that were already taking place.

The plan was a key document for the Council and was now guiding our direction of travel as an organisation in tackling the climate and nature emergency and their impacts.

The Leader welcomed the positive report and I looked forward to seeing how this work progressed in the future.

The Leader may wish to ask the Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Biodiversity to comment.

Councillor Forsey added, that a substantial reduction was already made in our carbon emissions, exceeding targets set out in our Carbon Management Plan. Councillor Forsey looked forward to further reductions as we continue to retrofit our council buildings, and further increase our electric fleet vehicles.

There was however still much more that needed to be done as an organisation to mitigate and adapt to the nature and climate emergency and our Climate Change Plan set us on the right path for this journey to ensure we act on behalf of current and future generations. As Cabinet Member with responsibility for climate change and biodiversity Councillor Forsey was pleased to see this positive introductory report and would be monitoring progress of the plan closely and requesting regular progress updates to ensure that we continued to proceed at the pace that would be required.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

Councillor Hughes mentioned that Newport had made an obligation to climate change for future generations. Councillor Hughes went on to thank Councillor Forsey and staff for their hard effort.

Decision:

Cabinet reviewed progress and approved the attached Introductory Annual Report.

10 **Gwent Regional Partnership Board - Market Stability Report**

The Leader presented the report on the Market Stability, which was a statutory document that Welsh Government required each statutory partner to produce on a three yearly cyclical basis. A regional overview report must also be published on the same timescale. Local

authorities were required under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 to work in partnership with health boards to produce a regional MSR.

The MSR sets out the extent to which the commissioned services are stable within the region based on local footprints to support people in need of care and support.

The six commissioning organisations in Gwent currently commission 106 care homes and 109 domiciliary care providers for older adults across the region.

Care Homes

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were few concerns with regards to care home vacancies and the financial viability of providers. Most providers required at least 90% occupancy to remain financially viable. Care home bed vacancies were monitored on a weekly basis at local and regional levels. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the provision of care and support in Gwent.

Domiciliary Care

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and staffing shortages, domiciliary care services were currently at critical levels and at times unable to fully meet demand. Staff continued to leave the sector due to poor pay, terms and conditions and costs of employment (such as driving and registration). In recent months this situation was further exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis and particularly the rising cost of fuel. Staff shortages increased delayed transfers of care from local hospitals, creating bottlenecks across the wider system.

There was currently an increase in individuals requiring care at home and there was a concern this would continue following the COVID-19 pandemic. Also of concern was the number of packages of care that were returned to commissioners, over 70 providers returning more than 950 weekly hours per week. This caused commissioners to prioritise the most vulnerable citizens with complex needs.

The Partnership approach with care homes and domiciliary care agencies that was established during the pandemic helped build a positive working relationship with providers to support them to continue to deliver good quality, responsive services during a critical time. It also provided a useful platform to engage providers in messages about infection prevention and control measures and to consider business continuity issues. Seminars continued to be held monthly and were much valued by LA's, ABUHB and service providers alike.

Children's Services

Children's services were currently insufficient to meet the needs of the region in terms of residential services and foster placements. Demand for foster services currently outstripped supply and it was often difficult to source the right type of placement. The lack of appropriate residential services resulted in children being placed out of county and Gwent LA's were now focussing on increasing capacity through in-house and external developments and investing in preventative services.

A careful balance would need to be struck between ensuring that the right level of services for looked after children were commissioned close to home and to reduce reliance on high profit organisations often far away from people's homes.

Mental health and learning disability services

There was a renewed opportunity for the regional team and commissioning organisations to work closely to develop a framework for action and to take forward several key commissioning related activities to further support people at local and regional levels.

The areas summarised above would be picked up and considered as part of the area planning process and where at all possible mitigating measures would be taken to minimise any associate risks.

The MSR was developed alongside our local and regional Population Needs Assessment to ensure targeted action plans.

The report would be discussed across all Members of the Regional Partnership Board and once agreed a priority action plan would be developed.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Hughes mentioned that as a former social worker, the challenges faced were unprecedented and the impact on staff should not be underestimated by the Council or Cabinet. The Cabinet Member for Social Services that said that he proud of social care staff and their positive impact and contribution to the residents of Newport. Councillor Hughes listened to a gathering of Newport City Council social workers earlier that day where they discussed their successes in the prevention inclusion teams, youth justice teams to name a few and the strong partnerships with other agencies. Reassurances therefore from staff was that they would respond as they always had done in the past when faced with challenges.
- The Leader agreed with Councillor Hughes' comments highlighting the work of officers going above and beyond in their duty.
- Councillor Batrouni made reference to Newport's population change, which was the fastest growing area in Wales. It was double that of Cardiff and growth of over 90s highlighted that Newport was an ageing city. Consideration should therefore be given on how to structure the services going forward.

Decision:

That Cabinet -

- As required under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) accepted and agreed the Market Stability Report for the local authority area.
- Newport City Council continued to engage with Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and support the development of the regional Area Plan, where actions would be identified setting out how priorities would be addressed.

11 NCC External Pressures Report

The Leader presented the report to colleagues which was a standing item. Over the last two years, there was several global economic impacts resulting from the Covid pandemic, and the ongoing Ukrainian conflict which affected global supply of food, energy (gas and electric) and fuel.

The rise in the cost of living was not only impacting households but also impacting businesses in Newport who were facing difficult decisions to meet these costs.

It was important for those who were struggling to contact the Council who could provide advice and support individuals with their bills.

Recently, the Council established a task and finish group to deliver a co-ordinated response to the cost of living crisis in Newport, and develop long term solutions in partnership with third sector organisations to support vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

Newport Council was supporting the Welsh Government's initiatives in the administration of a Council Tax Relief to households in bands A to D.

In addition to the funds made available to properties, Newport City Council would receive a further £1,249,653 which was to be distributed to residents by way of a discretionary scheme.

In the bid to tackle food poverty and alleviate financial pressures placed upon families during these uncertain times, Newport City Council were offering Free School Meals to all pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 who were in local authority maintained schools from September 2022.

The Council was also offering the Pupil Development Grant to help towards the cost of school uniforms and equipment.

Working in partnership with GAVO, Newport City Council launched the Community Food Organisation Grant of £100k. Organisations could claim up to £5k to support ongoing costs associated with the rise in demand on their services.

This report also highlighted how the cost of living crisis was impacting the Council's finances.

Newport City Council continued to welcome Ukrainian families into the city who were displaced by the ongoing Ukrainian conflict, supporting them in finding safe and secure refuge.

Newport welcomed many Ukrainian families into Newport and helped them to settle into the city providing access to schools, healthcare and other services.

Due to the increase in people seeking asylum as a result of global issues, the Home Office announced a 'Full Dispersal' approach which required all Local Authorities to become asylum dispersal areas.

Newport City Council would work alongside the Strategic Migration Partnership to consider the impact of these plans on Newport.

In addition to this scheme, changes were imposed upon the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). In August the Home Office announced the expansion of the scheme for all Local Authorities, which resulted in further pressure on placements for children across Newport.

The Council's Teams and Services continued to work above and beyond to collaborate and work together to ensure individuals and families were fully supported and advice is readily available.

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.

12 OneNewport - Summary of Business

Cabinet noted the summary of business.

13 Work Programme

This was the regular monthly report on the work programme.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed the Work Programme.