

# Minutes



## Cabinet

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Date: 16 November 2022

Time: 4.00 pm

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

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### 1 Apologies for Absence

None received.

### 2 Declarations of Interest

None received.

### 3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes from the meeting of 12 October were accepted as a true and accurate record.

### 4 NCC External Pressures - Cost of Living

The Leader introduced the first report to Cabinet colleagues. This report was Newport City Council's response to the external pressures impacting Council services.

The purpose of this report was to provide Cabinet with an update on the Council's response to the external factors are impacting services, communities, and businesses.

The last three years were extremely challenging for Newport Council and its partners, supporting its most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents through the pandemic and now the cost of living crisis. And also ensuring Newport's economy and businesses had the necessary support and resilience to withstand global and UK external pressures.

Last week, the Leader announced the financial challenge that Newport Council faced as a result of the continuing inflationary pressures and the budget gap of £33 million.

Like households, businesses and other local authorities in Wales and across the UK, Newport Council was seeing its own costs increase due to fuel and energy costs, increased demand for social care and increasing costs in the delivery of services and goods bought by the Council.

Since 2011, Newport Council has already implemented over £90m of savings and the Council had significantly reduced the size of the organisation, with this in mind, there were very few choices left to us.

More than three quarters of the Council's budget was funded by a grant from Welsh Government with only a quarter coming from the money raised through council tax.

This was a very substantial bill despite Newport maintaining one of the lowest rates in Wales for many years.

More than two thirds of the Council's budget was spent on schools, education and social care.

No Leader or Cabinet of a local authority wanted to have to make these challenging choices, but the current circumstances mean that a decision on how to reduce budget gap would need to be made.

Next month, Cabinet would receive a number of proposals for consideration before going out to public consultation for residents to have their say on the proposals.

Despite these challenging times, Council officers were continuing to support the vulnerable and disadvantaged residents and supporting businesses as best as they could through the cost of living crisis.

It could not however be left to the Council alone, and Newport's other public sector organisations, charities, not for profit and voluntary groups and religious groups would need to work together to help provide whatever support we could over the next six months.

Earlier this month, the Leader held a Cost of Living Summit with strategic and community leaders from across Newport to understand how we could work together to find ways in which we could share resources, buildings and other opportunities to support households over this winter period. As a result of this Summit we were working more closely with other organisations and community leaders to provide the necessary support.

A Cost of Living Event was also held at the Riverfront Theatre inviting Council and Partners services to provide advice, guidance and support to residents in Newport.

This event was amongst many other services and initiatives which the Council was leading on.

It was important to stress to residents that if they were struggling with the cost of living to contact their local Councillor, the Council or other organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau who could help and provide or signpost to the appropriate support.

Newport Council also supported the Welsh Government's Nation of Sanctuary and prided itself on our support for people who were displaced because of persecution, conflicts, and natural disasters.

Over the last five years many families were welcomed, such as those from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq through UK Government initiatives such as the Home Office dispersal scheme to settle and create a new life in Newport.

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

And more recently we welcomed Ukrainian families with many residents offering their homes to help provide a secure setting for themselves and their children.

Throughout these challenges, officers from across the Council continued to collaborate and work with other agencies to help people find suitable and secure accommodation in Newport and ensure that they had support they needed.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Davies mentioned that the Council focussed on what was happening in our schools under these difficult circumstances. Schools had responded to those pupils in need by using grant funding to appoint family liaison officers to pupils. Schools were becoming a wraparound service for pupils and families.
- Councillor Harvey agreed with the comments and wanted to remind residents that if they were in any need to contact a councillor who would help get in touch with the right people.
- Councillor Forsey mentioned that there were a number of advice sessions being held by colleagues for residents to drop in and get the right advice and support.
- Councillor Hughes added that the report highlighted that the help was there. If people could come forward, there was a lot of partnership work, food banks and churches for residents to seek help. It was important that people were able to access these services early.
- Councillor Clarke hoped that the residents understood that when their bills were going up, so was the Councils due to the current economic climate. On a positive note, the Council was not leaving people behind and were also providing support for Ukraine refugees.
- Councillor Batrouni wanted to assure the people of Newport that the Council would do the best it could with what we had under the circumstances.
- Councillor Lacey added that it was important to support each other as a community. Councillors, Partners and officers alike would be working very hard to support residents over the coming months.
- Leader also agreed with comments and added that we had to stand side by side and support our communities and officers.

**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.

**5 Annual Compliments, Comments and Complaints**

The Leader introduced the next item which was an update on Compliments, Comments and Complaints Management in line with the Policy we adopted in 2021.

The report provided an overview of how the council managed compliments, comments and complaints and the council's performance in 2021-2022, with an overview, broken down by service areas and complaint types as well as highlighting key trends and themes drawn from the data.

The report also reflected on lessons learned for the council and actions to deliver improvements.

This was presented to Governance and Audit Committee on 29 September where valuable feedback and comments were received.

Corporate compliments increased by 0.5% from 20/21, Social Services adult compliments increased by 66% from 20/21 and Social Services Children Compliments increased from 0 in 20/21 to 13 in 21/22.

Comments increased by 37% from 20/21 and these were being reviewed to ensure they were categorised correctly as some may require specific action.

Corporate stage 1 complaints increased 3.6% since 20/21 but there was a 20% reduction in complaints that were progressed to stage 2 demonstrating that more complaints are being resolved at the first stage.

Social Services stage 1 complaints increased by 36% since 20/21 but there was a 50% reduction in stage 2 complaints.

The reduction in complaints progressed to stage 2 corporately and for Social Service was positive.

It was recognised that work was required to gain further insight from customer feedback, especially complaints and the recent transition of the team to People Policy and Transformation should help with this.

The council worked closely with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales to incorporate best practice and recognised that customer feedback was to be actively encouraged and acted upon. The Ombudsman's annual letter was also attached to the report in the published pack.

The council was working to ensure that feedback was categorised appropriately to provide the most effective and efficient response. This and other actions identified in the report were designed to improve future performance and would result in a different look to the headline figures.

**Decision:**

Cabinet considered and agreed the contents of the report regarding the process and performance of the Council's corporate compliments, comments and complaints annual report 2021/22.

## 6 **Annual Safeguarding Report**

The Leader presented the next item which was the interim Annual Report for Safeguarding. This report was the Head of Corporate Safeguarding's evaluation of 2021/22 performance for the Local Authority.

This was an interim report because of changes in Welsh Government guidance. A full report would be presented to Cabinet early next year in line with the new guidance.

Safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults was absolutely of 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 assessed the Council's proactive actions and responses to safeguarding. The report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 30 of September 2022, there was a constructive and helpful discussion of the content of the report.

The report noted the challenges across the Council in respect of safeguarding because of the pressures brought about by Covid and the restrictions of the pandemic.

The Safeguarding Hub for Children's Services saw a 13.9% increase in referrals during 2021/22. This reflected the issues arising in schools, early years and youth settings and partner agencies. For the children and their families, an effective and robust safeguarding approach was vital and could be life changing.

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

It was pleasing to note that the new Welsh Government Guidance for Corporate Safeguarding (March 2022) includes Newport's Safeguarding Self-Assessment tool as a model of good practice. The guidance was published out of similar themes coming from external audit and encouraged standardising some of the performance data to enable measuring distance travelled to benchmark with other Local Authorities.

The challenges of ensuring all staff, volunteers and Members were accessing and engaged with training for all areas of safeguarding were noted in the report. This was an area which would continue to require a focus and keen prioritisation over the coming year.

The Council was working to ensure safeguarding was maintained in all areas of service and would in the coming year work with the revised Guidance for Corporate Safeguarding to ensure continued compliance.

#### Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Hughes mentioned that the most significant change was definition of adults at risk and it reminded us that safeguarding was everyone's business and that we were seen to be proactive. The Cabinet Member for Social Services also thanked the safeguarding team for working during incredibly challenging periods to maintain a safeguarding culture and high level of support.
- Councillor Davies supported Councillor Hughes comments and added that as corporate parents it was important that we take our responsibility in safeguarding seriously, this also extended to schools. Training was a statutory requirement and we all had a duty to the children in Newport.

#### **Decision:**

Cabinet received the Annual Safeguarding Report (interim) by the Head of Corporate Safeguarding.

## **7 Corporate Plan Annual Report 2021/22**

The Leader presented the Council's annual Corporate Well-being Self-Assessment Report (2021/22). This was the fifth and final Annual Report of the Council's Corporate Plan 2017-22. This reflected and self-assessed the achievements this Council made in 2021/22, where to improve our performance and as a look forward to the new five-year Corporate Plan that would also be presented today.

This was the first year which Newport City Council had to Self-Assess its governance and performance arrangements under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act.

The Leader welcomed the opportunity to present this report with the Chief Executive and her Executive team to the Council's Overview Scrutiny Management Committee in September. The report was also presented to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee for the first time as required by the Local Government Act.

Both recommendations were included in the report and considered as part of the draft Annual Report presented at this Cabinet meeting.

Looking back at 2021/22, the covid pandemic was still prevalent across our communities in Newport and restrictions were still in place which continued to disrupt many services.

As restrictions eased and we started to return back to normal routines, further pressures started to emerge as a result of inflation, the Ukraine conflict and managing backlog of work following the pandemic.

Many of these pressures continued to impact the delivery of our services over the next five years and it would be important for us all to learn the lessons of the last couple of years, taking the opportunities to improve our services and preventing as best we can the impacts of these external pressures on our communities.

Despite all of these challenges, officers from across the Council, our partners in Newport and community leaders continued to go above and beyond for the people, and businesses of Newport.

Looking back at the last financial year, many of our major city centre projects came to fruition with the opening of the Indoor Market, Chartist Tower and the Market Arcade.

We also announced our next major project to develop the Knowledge Quarter, creating a brand-new leisure centre alongside a new campus for Coleg Gwent. Not only would these provide opportunities for local jobs, but it would help continue the improvement of the City Centre, changing the way which we use our spaces for retail, leisure and community involvement.

The Annual Report recognised the work of our school community and our Education services to ensure our future generations had the best opportunity to maximise their potential and support the continuing growth of the city.

The Council was also fully aware that our future generations needed to live in a city that enhanced and protected our environment which was why we declared last year an ecological and climate change emergency and launched a Climate Change Plan to become net carbon zero by 2030.

Finally, this report also highlighted the challenges faced which would need to be considered over the next five years.

The pressures that social services were facing was not unique to Newport, and despite the hard work of staff, carers and families there would be very challenging times over the next five years to ensure that we had a sustainable service to safeguard our most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents.

In concluding, the report identified 14 recommendations where we could strengthen our governance and performance arrangements.

It was important as Cabinet Members to ensure we supported and promoted the excellent work that our service areas were delivering and to challenge where we could improve on our performance.

Following approval of this report it would be published in Welsh and English on the Council's website and as per the Local Government Act requirements, be shared with the three regulatory Bodies (Audit Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn).

#### Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Davies, wanted to celebrate the opening of the Ysgol Gymraeg Nant Gwenlli recently. Additionally, IT equipment in Newport was recognised as the best in Wales, during lockdown and now in schools. An example of this was when Councillor Davies recently attended a pupil parliament where pupils worked on their individual laptops. Attendance however was a massive challenge and this was where learning opportunities

was life changing, the Cabinet Member wanted to thank educational welfare officers for their hard work.

- Councillor Harvey, agreed with the Deputy Leader's comments that work with schools was ongoing. Councillor Harvey thanked staff for their incredibly hard work including Flying Start and family intervention. Funding £270K across communities was available during the pandemic and the staff in education did an amazing job under the circumstances and therefore supported the Plan.
- Councillor Hughes was pleased that the hard work of social care staff was recognised during the pandemic as well as the work of domiciliary care staff.
- Councillor Forsey added that the Council had made a good start on zero carbon. In addition, the air quality monitoring progress had seen improvements due to the use of electric vehicles, including council Electric Vehicles.

**Decision:**

Cabinet endorsed the Annual Report 2021/22 for publication and to be submitted to Welsh Government and the three regulatory bodies.

## 8 **Corporate Plan Final Report 2022/2027**

The Leader introduced the next report for Cabinet to agree the Council's next five-year Corporate Plan and recommend it to Full Council for adoption.

Newport Council was required as part of the Well-being of Future Generations Act to carry out sustainable development to improve Wales' economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. It also had a duty to fulfil its statutory and non-statutory roles to support citizens, businesses and stakeholders.

This Plan prioritised the Council's long-term strategic focus and meets the requirements of the Well-being Act.

The development of the Council's new Corporate Plan (2022-27) was undertaken between senior officers and the Council's Cabinet Members through a series of workshops.

This Plan considered the short and long term opportunities and risks to the Council, its residents, economy and environment.

In the development of the Plan, residents were consulted the Well-being Objective themes which was positively received.

Over the next five years Newport Council's mission statement would be working to deliver an *'Ambitious, Fairer, Greener Newport for everyone.'*

To support this goal, there would be four Well-being Objectives supported by strategic priorities:

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

As outlined at the start of this Cabinet meeting, the next couple of years was going to be very challenging as we balanced the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan whilst delivering strategic priorities.

This would require the Council to take innovative and transformative decisions and it must be recognised that the achievement of these objectives could not be delivered by Newport City Council alone which was why we would ensure key principles were followed throughout the delivery of the Corporate Plan:

**Fair and Inclusive** – We will work to create fairer opportunities, reduce inequalities in our communities, and encourage a sense of belonging.

**Empowering** – We will work with and support communities, groups and partners to thrive.

**A listening council** – The views of communities, service users and partners will shape the services we deliver and the places you live in.

**Citizen Focussed** – Everyone who works and represents Newport City Council will put the citizen first, focusing on our core organisational values.

The Corporate Plan would also be underpinned by key programmes and projects that aimed to improve the economy and communities of Newport and the delivery of Council services.

Each one of the Council's service areas would develop a service plan that would outline their own strategic priorities to support the delivery of Newport City Council's Corporate Plan and continuous improvement of Council services.

To ensure the delivery of these plans, the Service Plans would be monitored throughout the five years and be reported to the Council's Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet and Council.

#### Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Davies said that the report was an important body of work and shared in the Leader's thanks for the hard work of officers. The Plan focused on work with partners in the public sector, which was the only way to assure support for residents of Newport in light of the economic climate.
- Councillor Clarke added we must be positive to move this forward and that it was key to achieve these goals and it was hoped the residents of Newport understood the importance of the principles of the report.
- Councillor Batrouni emphasised the word ambitious in Corporate Plan's title. This was an ambitious plan and the Council should be proud of this. The Council would support all the endeavours of its residents and the council. The Plan also showed that the council did re-evaluate its services.
- The Leader added that three years ago, she committed to the Council and residents that she would listen. With this in mind, the Leader was very proud to see before Cabinet a corporate plan that made a commitment to Newport City Council being a listening council. The Leader also thanked the officers that had provided the report.

#### **Decision:**

Cabinet agreed the Corporate Plan and recommended it to go to Full Council for adoption.

## 9 **Cost Sharing Agreement with Coleg Gwent**

The Leader presented to report to Cabinet colleagues who were aware of plans to develop a new, modern and energy efficient leisure and well-being centre next to the USW Campus on

Usk Way and in turn dispose of the existing Newport Centre site to Coleg Gwent for their new city centre campus. Plans were progressing well and planning permission for both sites has been granted. The next step in this ambitious project is to start arranging for the demolition of the Newport Centre and finalise the transfer of the site to Coleg Gwent. These transformational developments are critical to the delivery of our economic growth ambitions and Corporate Plan commitments.

As a reflection of the Council's excellent working partnership with Coleg Gwent on this project and the commitment of both parties to deliver a Newport Knowledge Quarter in the City centre, Coleg Gwent agreed to share the costs associated with the demolition of the building. Cabinet colleagues might recall that the demolition of the Newport Centre was part of the Welsh Government conditions of funding for the new leisure and well-being centre. Whilst it was previously envisaged that the capital receipt for the land would have covered the cost of demolition, we were well aware that project costs were subject to unprecedented inflation and it was expected that there would be additional costs over and above the value of the site. It was possible that demolition costs alone could be approximately £1.2m but this would only be confirmed once the contract for demolition was formally tendered. This tendering exercise was expected to be completed by the end of December and it was important that both the Council and Coleg Gwent had formal approval for the cost sharing before contracts were let. There would also be agreement to share project costs of around £213,000 incurred to date as part of the process for securing planning permission, undertaking technical surveys and general project costs.

This report was requesting that any costs over the agreed cost of the site were shared on a 50/50 basis between the Council and Coleg Gwent. The Council would need to fund the entirety of the demolition costs up front, due to time constraints. Coleg Gwent would seek to reimburse their share of costs above the land value price once the demolition works were completed, with the £870,000 land receipt paid once the lease was granted. The Coleg Gwent Board already agreed in principle to the cost sharing and was expected to be ratified at their next Board meeting.

The report also asked that Cabinet authorised officers to include all required land within the disposal agreement to Coleg Gwent as may be considered necessary or expedient for the purposes of the development.

As already mentioned, the responsibility for demolishing the building rested with the Council. There was no obligation on Coleg Gwent to share costs over and above the valuation of the site and as with all projects, there were associated risks. There was a possibility that tenders would come back at a higher cost than estimated and Coleg Gwent were yet to secure funding for their new campus development. The Council and Coleg Gwent remained committed to delivering the best facilities for residents and we needed to continue making positive steps to bring these projects to life.

#### Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Davies referred back to the Corporate Plan and the first welcoming objectives, which this project was at the heart of, and it therefore increased so many opportunities for the residents, including employment and access to excellent leisure facilities. Councillor Davies therefore supported the report.
- Councillor Harvey added that this was an ambitious plan. It did however show that the Council was listening to residents and that a state-of-the-art centre was needed for future generations.

#### **Decision:**

That Cabinet

- 1) Agreed to the proposed costs sharing arrangement in relation to all demolition costs, commit the capital funding provision required and authorise the relevant officers to enter into an agreement for lease with Coleg Gwent and proceed with the necessary demolition work on this basis.
- 2) Authorised officers to include such additional land within the disposal to Coleg Gwent as may be considered necessary or expedient for the purposes of the development and the surrounding public realm, and to make any such necessary stopping up orders as may be required to facilitate this.

## 10 **Work Programme**

This was the regular monthly report on the work programme.

Please move acceptance of the updated programme.

### **Decision:**

Cabinet agreed the Work Programme.