

Report

Cabinet



Part 1

Date: 12 April 2023

Subject Newport City Council response to external pressures impacting Council services

Purpose To present an update to Cabinet on Newport City Council's response to external factors impacting on delivery of Council services.

Author Policy and Partnership Manager

Ward All

Summary This report provides an update on the main external pressures faced by our residents, communities, and services during this month. As with previous reports, this is provided in the context of increased demand on the council and our staff through increased demand and own increased costs.

Collaboration and partnership working is key to supporting our citizens and therefore this report provides information on how this way of working is enabling a greater access for our residents to support, advice and guidance.

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

Action by Executive Board and Corporate Management Team

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Executive Board
- Corporate Management Team

Signed

Background

This monthly report provides an update to Cabinet members of the key pressures being faced by our residents, business, and the council and how this is impacting on the services provided, along with a summary update of additional initiatives undertaken during March 2023.

As with the previous month's report, the Cost-of-Living crisis continues to be the biggest pressure impacting locally and nationally and we continue to work with our partners to support our residents and communities wherever possible.

Council tax bills have recently been issued to city residents generating a significant number of enquiries many of which are linked to the on-going cost of living pressures many households are facing. Cost of Living remains the main pressure to residents of the city.

This month also saw The Bank of England has raising interest rates to 4.25 per cent from 4 per cent and we are yet to see the impact of this on our residents.

Cost of Living Crisis

The Council's Cost-of-Living officer Task and Finish Group provides a forum for the sharing of information on how our residents are being affected and how we can work in partnership to mitigate some of the impact on our residents. In addition, it enables representation on national events such as those facilitated by the Welsh Local Government Association, sharing ideas on greater cross-service coordination and accessibility to the support available to Newport residents.

Following the success of the previous Cost of Living event in the Riverfront last year, and follow up event is being planned for April 26th, again at the Riverfront. This event will be promoted via NCC usual communication networks and will involve a myriad of partners and organisations offering advice and support on managing their finances.

The group are keen to follow this up with more localised events in the East and West of the city to promote accessibility and inclusiveness. This planning will also consider the needs of the more rural areas of the city and how they can be supported with access to information and advice.

A survey has also been undertaken with our Involve Newport Citizens' Panel. Involve Newport is a panel of Newport residents who give their views on a range of topics about local services and life in Newport through regular surveys. The panel currently has around 700 members and is an excellent way of hearing directly from residents in our communities how the cost-of-living crisis has impacted on them, their families, and the quality of their day to day lives.

The survey asked residents several questions relating to the current cost of living issues and how it has affected them. We also asked for feedback on what has helped them so far and what more could be done to support residents to manage the issues and challenges they were facing. The results of this survey have just been received and collated. An analysis of this data and feedback will be provided for next month's report.

Newport schools continue to support our children, young people, and their families during this time, and are working hard to ensure the inclusion and participation of children from low-income families is embedded practice across all settings. As part of this commitment all schools have received a presentation provided by Children in Wales called The Price of Pupil Poverty: Taking a Whole School Approach to Improving the Wellbeing of Children from Low Income and Disadvantaged Backgrounds. They have also received a policy template to complete and share with their school community.

Other initiatives supported this month include a 'moving on event' at the Riverfront providing career support and guidance for students from secondary schools, and the planning of the allocation of a £39 voucher per child entitled to Free School Meals to cover the Easter fortnight break.

National Support

Last month's report provided information on the UK wide Energy Bills Support Scheme – Alternative Funding. Application is via a national website, with NCC officers assessing and processing payments for Newport residents. Since the scheme opened at the beginning of March 2023 approximately 200 applications have been received and are being processed.

National Non-Domestic rate bills will shortly be issued, which will show the rateable values following the revaluation carried out by the Valuation Office Agency. Around 25% of ratepayers will see their bills decrease and a similar number will have increased bills compared to 2022-23. The Welsh Government's transitional Relief scheme will limit the increase payable by individual business and the Newport City Centre Rate Relief scheme will further reduce the amount that city centre business will have to pay.

Warm Centres

NCC's Warm Centre project delivered in partnership with GAVO, and 20 community-based organisations delivered 149 sessions between December and February supporting almost 1200 attendees. GAVO continue to manage our grants program to community organisations, and we are hopeful that the funding will be fully utilized by the end of the financial year. A review will be held in the Spring with all partners to capture learning and best practice and to plan for any future provision.

Ukrainian Refugee Support

Newport has a long history of welcoming people seeking sanctuary and will continue to offer a place of safety for those fleeing conflict and persecution.

There are currently 118 people living with 56 sponsors in Newport and 40 households living in one Newport hotel, 3 households in living in Housing Justice Cymru interim accommodation, and a further 12 households living in another hotel under the Welsh Government Super Sponsor Scheme. This super sponsor scheme in the second hotel is due to end in the coming months and the council is working hard to secure new sponsors and properties in the private rented sector.

Linked to the above, there are currently 50 Ukrainian learners attending schools across the city; 24 being educated within the primary sector and 26 at secondary level. These include two 'Hubs', one based in Milton Primary and the second in Llanwern High which have remained quite static with pupil numbers.

Risks

Newport Council will be reviewing the Council's Corporate and service area risks as part of the new Corporate Plan.

Risk Title / Description	Risk Impact score of Risk if it occurs* (1-5)	Risk Probability of risk occurring (1-5)	Risk Mitigation Action(s) What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect?	Risk Owner Officer(s) responsible for dealing with the risk?
Cost of Living impact on Council services	4	4	See this report on the Council's response to the cost-of-living crisis.	Corporate Management Team
Supporting refugees to settle in Newport.	4	2	See this Report on the Council's response to re-settlement programmes.	Corporate Management Team, Head of Housing and Communities, Director of Social Services

* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Corporate Plan
Strategic Equalities Plan

Options Available and considered

1. To consider and note the contents of the report on the Council's response.
2. To request further information or reject the contents of the report

Preferred Option and Why

1. To consider and note the contents of the report on the Council's response.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

The report highlights the various factors which are putting pressure on Council services to help and respond, with the report highlighting the support which is available. Whilst a significant amount of this specific support is funded from UK Government and Welsh Government, certain factors are having an impact on the Council's in-year financial position and affecting the medium-term financial outlook.

Especially in the context of an extremely challenging medium-term horizon, budget managers and Heads of Service will be expected to continue to monitor the impact of the external factors included in this report, especially in areas where grant funding ends, and work with Finance colleagues to escalate any material financial implications and report them where relevant. This will need to also include plans to mitigate any issues, as far as is possible.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no legal issues arising from the report. Any specific legal implications will be addressed as part of the Council's operational responses to the key issues identified in the report.

Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation

This reports updates members on the impact of external pressures on our residents, staff and communities and provides a summary of the initiatives supported this month.

These pressures have an inequitable impact on our most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents, and it is therefore any support we can provide to mitigate the impact is of value. The results of the survey will help us to better understand how this is affecting our citizens, and support evidence-based interventions.

The council is considering HR implications for our workforce and working with all service areas closely during this period.

Scrutiny Committees

Not applicable as this an information only report and no decision is required from the Council.

Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment:

Not applicable as this is an information only report and no decision is required.

Wellbeing of Future Generations

Long Term – The short term actions the Council is taking now is considering the longer-term impacts which the cost of living is having on communities and businesses in Newport. Newport Council alongside partners are providing financial and non-financial support to help households and businesses.
Collaborative – Newport Council is working collaboratively across the organisation and also our external partners from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, schools, Welsh Government and other local partners to support cost of living support.

Integration – The actions that the Council and is taking supports the Council's organisational priorities for community cohesion, early intervention, and prevention. This also supports the Welsh Government's priority for Wales being a nation of sanctuary.

Involvement – We are involving communities and residents who are providing vital front-line support and helping vulnerable / disadvantage households, and refugees. The Council is also providing regular updates and communications to those impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

Prevention - The short term actions the Council is taking now is considering the longer-term impacts which the cost of living is having on communities and businesses in Newport. Newport Council alongside partners are providing financial and non-financial support to help households and businesses.

Consultation

Not Applicable

Background Papers

Monthly reports to Cabinet.

Dated: 4 April 2023