

Report

Cabinet

Part 1

Date: 15 November 2023

Subject **Newport City Council response to external pressures impacting Council Services**

Purpose To present an update to Cabinet on the external pressures impacting on the delivery of Council services, and a summary of Newport City Council's response.

Author Policy and Partnership Manager

Ward All Wards

Summary This monthly report provides an update on the external pressures facing the council which include the cost-of-living crisis and increases in Covid-19 sickness absences.

As with previous months, 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:

- Head of Prevention and Inclusion
- Head of Housing and Communities
- Deputy Head of Education
- Head of Finance
- Head of Law and Standards
- Head of People, Policy, and Transformation

Signed

Background

This report provides Cabinet members with a monthly update on the key pressures facing Newport communities, businesses, and council services along with information on how the Council is collaborating with our partners and communities to support those in need across the city.

Recent [survey results](#) from the Office of National Statistics demonstrate the cost-of-living crisis continues to impact upon citizens across the UK, with 52% of adults saying their overall cost of living had increased compared with a month ago, and 67% of adults reporting spending less on non-essentials because of the rising cost of living. However, this was down from 79% during a similar period one year ago.

A recent [YouGov poll](#) found that 36% of people aged 65+ in Great Britain described their financial situation as being worse than a year ago, with a further 14% saying it continues to be as bad as last year.

In addition, the latest [Index of Private Housing Rental Prices](#) shows private rental prices paid by tenants in Wales, increased by 6.9% in the 12 months leading up to September 2023. This was the highest of all the countries in Great Britain and up from 6.5% in the 12 months to August 2023.

Following last month's update on Covid-19 related sickness, officers are monitoring increase in cases, which are reported corporately, so to understand and where possible manage any disruption to service delivery. Although across the Council sickness levels due to COVID19 indicate no significant current disruption to service delivery, we are seeing impacts especially in schools and across social service delivery.

Cost of Living Crisis

As mentioned in last month's report, a survey was shared widely to gather a broader view and feedback from a wider cohort of communities in Newport on how they are managing the cost-of-living crisis, and how organisations could improve on what is available to support families and individuals. 570 responses were received from all wards across the city, providing a rich and mixed overview.

Key findings from this survey found –

- Just below 80% reported to be very anxious/worried about the increase in energy prices and cost of living crisis.
- 79% reported there was not enough information available to support them in managing the cost-of-living crisis.
- Just over half 56% felt they were able to access the information that was available.
- Help with food and energy costs were the top themes reported.
- Additional cost of living payments were identified as positive sources of help and support; however respondents went on to say more is needed.
- In terms of what would help people to manage, respondents reported improved wages, lower rent, and affordable accommodation as well as lower food costs amongst various other suggestions.

NCC and Partner Support

Advice, guidance, and support events have been supported by NCC officers and partners during October with further events planned in November. Examples of activities and support offered during this month include –

- Older Persons event held 2 Oct at Riverfront. 180 people attended.
- Supermarket and shopping vouchers distributed via the Carers Support Fund.
- Newport Live memberships allocated to carers to support wellbeing.
- To support families who may not access or be aware of other services and support available, officers from our education teams and other council services are encouraging and supporting schools to host education anti-poverty roadshows as part of their open evenings/parental consultations.
- Monthly drop-in sessions at Maindee Primary School to provide advice & information to anyone experiencing housing difficulties or are at risk of homelessness.

- Half term activity sessions including lunches organised with spaces for up to 170 children and young people.
- Housing Advice Service daily drop-in sessions at the Museum and Central Library.
- Cost Of Living dedicated email address, signposting flyer, and directory available and promoted as means of support for all residents.

The formal launch of the [Building a Fairer Gwent](#) report by the Institute of Health Equity on 31 October ignited the regional commitment to address health inequality across communities with NCC's Officer Anti-Poverty Steering Group providing oversight and evaluation of implementation and outcomes within Newport.

National Support

The UK Government has confirmed the next means tested cost of living payment of up to £300 will be processed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) between 31 October and 19 November. It is [estimated 23,100 households in Newport](#) will be eligible for this payment. The announcement also confirms eligible pensioner households will also receive a further £300 payment later this year as an addition to the Winter Fuel Payment.

On 24 October, the [Living Wage Foundation](#) announced a 10% increase in the Living Wage to £12. It is estimated this will benefit over 22,800 workers in Wales working for 550 Living Wage-accredited employers. The Council's commitment to working towards Newport becoming a living wage city helping people out of poverty and provide opportunities to retrain, learn new skills and find long-term work is one of the priorities within our [Corporate Plan](#).

Other initiatives include:

- Warm Home discount providing eligible households with one-off discount of £150 on electricity bills reopened in October.
- Ofgem Price cap dropping from £2,074 to £1,923 for dual fuel households.
- Winter Fuel Payment of £300 for eligible individuals
- Warm Wales 3-month discount on water bills for working families whose total household income is less than £50,000 (not available for those on a water meter or Help U Scheme)

Homelessness and Financial Resilience

Pressures on housing and homelessness services in the city continue to be a concern, with the lead reason for homelessness continuing to be due to loss of rented accommodation followed by parent/relative/ friend no longer willing to accommodate.

The number of households in temporary accommodation continue to rise due to the lack of affordable settled accommodation for move on. The lack of suitable temporary and supported housing is also impacting on the ability to support those sleeping rough in the city.

Ukrainian Support Scheme

Our officers are working with our partners and Welsh Government and have made significant progress in moving on Ukrainian guests from their Initial Accommodation provided by Welsh Government at a local hotel. As part of the Welsh Government task force, this is focused on finding housing solutions for those currently living at the hotel.

Home Office Streamlined Asylum Process and 7-day notice.

To date, Newport has not seen the anticipated increase in decision making by the Home Office highlighted in last month's report. Officers continue to liaise with the Home Office to seek accurate and timely information on decisions made as this could cause a significant pressure on services if the expected decisions and potential homelessness presentations occur between now and the end of this year. A cross services officer group are meeting regularly to monitor the situation and prepare for any increase in demand.

Risks

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
Homelessness and housing concerns across the city.	4	4	See this Report on the Council's response to these issues	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 examples of support which is available to citizens who are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. 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 finances, both in the short term and across the medium-term. Evidence of this can be seen via the financial pressures upon the Housing & Communities budget, driven by the high levels of homelessness in the city.

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

The cost-of-living crisis continues to impact on our residents and this report provides information on how we are working collaboratively to help mitigate where possible. In-line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, officers and partners are working to ensure short term support is provided alongside a focus on long term resilience.

The council is continuing to consider 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 Generation (Wales) Act**

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 our external public, private, third sector, voluntary, and housing sectors.

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.

- **Equality Act 2010**

Consideration of protected characteristics as detailed within the Equality Act has informed the activities and support provided.

- **Socio-economic Duty**

The support provided is fully congruent with the requirements of the socio-economic duty.

- **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011**

All information is provided bilingually.

Consultation

Not applicable

Background Papers

Monthly reports to Cabinet.

Dated: 01 November 2023