

# Report

## Cabinet

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### Part 1

Date: 6 March 2024

**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 pressures on housing and homelessness services across Newport.

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 informs Cabinet members about the main challenges that Newport communities, businesses, and council services are facing, as well as how the Council is collaborating with our partners and communities to help those who need it across the city.

Those who qualified for the Cost-of-Living payment from the Department of Work and pensions received their last payment during this period.

According to the latest [Public Opinions and Social trends report](#) released on 16 February 2024 by the Office for National Statistics, survey results showed that 46% of adults said their cost of living had gone up in the past month, 53% said their cost of living had stayed the same in the past month, and 1% said it had gone down.

The most common reasons given for increased cost of living were increases in the price of food shopping, the price of gas and electricity bills, and fuel. As part of the survey around 43% of adults who pay energy bills reported having a lot or some difficulty paying for them.

The survey also showed that around 39% of adults who pay rent or mortgage payments reported having a lot or some difficulty paying for them.

### NCC and Partner Cost of Living Support

The cost-of-living crisis continues to impact upon our residents, staff, and businesses. Officers across NCC continue to collaborate with internal and external partners to provide advice, guidance, and support.

Examples of activities and support offered during this period included:

- February Half Term activities at Ringland, Maesglas, Pill, Riverfront and Bettws with over nine hundred children and young people attended.
- Co-facilitated and supported six partnership 'Think Wise – Live Wise' drop in events during February providing cost of living related information and guidance on topics such as budgeting, managing utility bills and rent advice. These sessions are hosted over three early evenings a week, in different areas across the city, and members of the public can attend any venue.
- Provision of washing detergent and conditioner for clothes to ease the pressure of buying these products from weekly food budgets particularly for those in receipt of food parcels or attending sessions in the community.
- Provision of personal hygiene products to young people and their families living in household deficit.
- Dissemination of shopping vouchers for two hundred families identified as experiencing severe hardship by social services teams.
- Distributed feminine products via Welsh Government Proud Period funding directly to peoples' homes.

NCC and partnership support planned for February and March includes the below.

- Ten further City wide 'Think Wise – Live Wise' drop in events planned during March and April.
- Provision of cleaning and personal care packs to those in most need.
- Family Wellbeing Sessions in four areas.
- Distribution of carers support fund shopping vouchers.
- Easter Family Fun Days across five areas.
- Easter Doctor Bike sessions to help families and children understand how to save money by using their bicycles, how to repair them, and engage with a Bike Safety Company who can train and update with the safety use.
- Save the Children Grant funded sessions in Alway.

- Distribution of excess tinned food as a bolt on to existing Fayre Share provision across two areas, benefiting 160 families.
- Distribution of Riverfront Film and Cineworld screening tickets for weekends in March leading up to Easter., benefiting approximately eight hundred families.

### Warm Spaces

Shared Prosperity Funding has been secured to support the delivery of Warm Spaces during Winter 23/24 and 24/25. The funding will provide small grants directly to community organisations and will be overseen by GAVO, building on the successful scheme implemented last year. To date, twenty-six applications have been made to the fund with twenty-five funding awards totalling £55k. This funding has enabled 157 sessions to be run and there have been a total of 3023 attendances at these sessions.

### Education

Supporting pupils and their families during this period is a continued focus within our education department and schools with educational achievement being one of the routes into employment and out of poverty.

Projects in schools include

- The Foundation of Community Engagement, with thirty-six schools and settings in Newport working with the organisation towards the Heart of the Community Award which focuses on engaging families to improve health, attainment, achievement, and access to employment.
- The One Million Mentors Scheme aimed at raising aspirations for learners to access further and higher education or training. Interim impact report outlines that 63% of Mentees are from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 'Welcome to Newport Education' event hosted by the Gwent Education for Multilingual Learners Service for school-aged children in temporary accommodation to provide advice and guidance and support communication being housing officers and schools.
- Free musical instrument lessons, external qualifications, loan instruments and activities via Gwent Music Service for all FSM pupils. Forty-six pupils in Newport have benefitted from this offer this academic year.

### 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 council has taken on more units of temporary accommodation (TA) to meet the additional demand. This has placed further pressure on the housing budget because DWP regulations relating to TA cap the amount of money that councils reclaim in fulfilling its statutory duties.

### Ukrainian Support Scheme

There are currently 149 households supported through the Ukrainian Support Scheme. Of these 64 are living in hosting placements. The team are now focusing on reassessing cases and collaborating closely with clients and hosts to ensure they are well supported, identifying alternative options should placements be at risk.

There have been recent changes to the rules regarding the various Ukraine schemes, the key changes include:

- Ukrainians currently in UK: There is now an opportunity for Ukrainians to extend their visas by 18 months. Applications can be made at the point where the current visa is due to expire in 3 months.
- New arrivals: New visas will only be issued for 18 months rather than 36. Sponsors must now be settled in the UK meaning that they must be a British or Irish citizen or hold indefinite leave to remain. The 'Ukraine Family' scheme has been closed to new applications although any

outstanding applications will be processed. This means that the only route into the UK will via the 'Homes for Ukraine Scheme' and applicants must have agreed a sponsorship/hosting placement before they are granted a visa and travel to the UK.

## Risks

<b>Risk Title / Description</b>	<b>Risk Impact score of Risk if it occurs* (1-5)</b>	<b>Risk Probability of risk occurring (1-5)</b>	<b>Risk Mitigation Action(s)</b> What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect?	<b>Risk Owner</b> 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**

Our residents and staff continue to be affected by the cost-of-living crisis, and this report shows how we are cooperating to help reduce the impact where we can. In-line with the principles of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, officers and partners are offering immediate support alongside a long-term focus on resilience through direct engagement with residents.

We continue to collaborate closely with our workforce and service areas to address and support any HR implications during this time.

## **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: 22 February 2024