

Minutes



Council

Date: 21 January 2025

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors M Al-Nuaimi, C Reeks, S Cocks, E Stowell-Corten, J Harris, A Screen, L James, T Harvey, M Howells, P Bright, J Peterson, A Pimm, D Batrouni, D Jenkins, P Drewett, B Davies, S Adan, M Pimm, C Baker-Westhead, J Reynolds, R Howells, A Sterry, J Jones, G Horton, J Cleverly, P Cockeram, D Davies, M Evans, D Harvey, M Kellaway, D Mayer, R Mogford, J Mudd, M Spencer, K Thomas, C Townsend, T Watkins, K Whitehead, J Clarke, Y Forsey, P Hourahine, J Hughes, J Jordan, L Lacey, S Marshall, W Routley, F Hussain and B Perkins

1. Preliminaries

1.i Apologies

Councillors Fouweather, Linton and Morris.

1.ii Declarations of Interest

Councillor Thomas declared an interest under Item 11.

1.iii Presiding Member's Announcements

The Presiding Member informed the Council that the running order of the Agenda was to change for the duration of the meeting.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 26 November 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. Appointments

To consider the proposed appointments set out in the report.

Councillor Drewett moved the appointments set out in the report and verbally proposed a further three additional appointments to an outside body, and a resignation from a governing body that arose since the report was written, as agreed by the Business Managers.

Councillor Reeks seconded the proposal including the verbal additions.

Resolved: That the following appointments be agreed.

Governing Body Appointments

Governing Body	Appointments/ Resignations	Name
Always Primary School	Resignation	Daniel Powell
Always Primary School	Reappointment	Deborah Harvey
Glan Usk Primary School	Reappointment	Lisa Hodge
Lliswerry Primary School	Reappointment	Maggie Bain
Malpas Park Primary School	Reappointment	James Clarke
Newport High School	Reappointment	Jan Cleverly
Newport High School	Reappointment	Paul Cockeram
Ysgol Gymraeg Nant Gwenlli	Resignation	Shereen Williams
Ysgol Gymraeg Nant Gwenlli	Appointment	Amy Sefton

Outside Bodies

Outside Body	Appointments / Resignations	Name
<u>Newport Wastesavers</u>	<u>Resignation</u>	<u>Deb Davies</u>
<u>Newport Wastesavers</u>	<u>Appointment</u>	<u>Paul Bright</u>
<u>Newport Wastesavers</u>	<u>Appointment</u>	<u>Matthew Pimm</u>

4. Police Issues

The Presiding Member introduced Superintendent J White of Gwent Police, who provided Council Members with an update on police issues within East, West and Central Newport.

When the Superintendent had addressed the Council, the Presiding Member invited the Leader to address Superintendent White.

The Leader, Councillor Batrouni, thanked Supt White for his update, particularly the statistics and thanked officers for their hard work and dedication in keeping the residents of Newport safe. The Leader was pleased to hear about the changes to the area coverage arrangements and the meetings that have already taken place in the Gaer and Maesglas Wards supporting collaborative working.

Members asked questions to the Superintendent – to access a full recording of the debate and comments made please refer to the Council's YouTube channel. [Democratic Meetings / Cyfarfodydd Democrataidd](#)

5. Notice of Motion: Ban the Release of Helium Balloons

The Presiding Member invited Councillor Forsey to introduce the Notice of Motion.

When released helium balloons rise and eventually fall and end up cluttering the land, rivers and seas and harming wildlife. Balloons bobbing in the ocean are mistaken for food and swallowed by marine life. Other wildlife gets tangled in the string attached to the balloons. Animals such as cows, dogs, sheep and birds have all been hurt or killed by balloons. The animal is usually killed from the balloon blocking its digestive tract leaving them to slowly starve to death.

Another reason for discouraging the use of helium balloons is that the gas helium is becoming scarce. Helium is a non-renewable resource, once used up there is no way to

create more. Helium has many important technical and medical uses. The Marine Conservation Society has encouraged local authorities to implement a ban on release of balloons and sky lanterns from their land due to the threat they pose.

They have implemented a campaign called 'Don't Let Go' which highlights the dangers to wildlife, the campaign details can be found in the link below: Marine Conservation Society - Don't Let Go Campaign Alternatives such as candles, use of bubbles, coloured lights, flower petal confetti or planting a tree should be encouraged. It is noted that Welsh Parliament held a consultation in January 2024 concerning the release of helium balloons following the implementation of policies from various local authorities. The consultation resulted in works being undertaken to publicise the education of using environmentally friendly alternatives and discourage the release of balloons.

In September 2017 Council passed a motion that the release of sky lanterns on Council owned land was not permitted and that alternatives should be sought with the use of sky lanterns being discouraged. This proposed motion would be bringing helium balloons in line with the Council's stance on sky lanterns.

This motion proposed that –

- 1. Regardless of the purpose, the release of helium balloons should not be permitted from any Council land;*
- 2. The Council should publicise and encourage the use of alternative, environmentally friendly methods of celebration or remembrance; and*
- 3. Officers should take appropriate steps to implement the above, for example through appropriate clauses in leases and licences granted by the Council and the development of communication strategies to increase public awareness of the issues caused by helium balloons.*

Councillor Hughes seconded the Motion.

Members debated the Motion – to access a full recording of the debate and comments made please refer to the Council's YouTube channel. [Democratic Meetings / Cyfarfodydd Democrataidd](#).

Resolved:

That Council unanimously supported the motion.

6. Treasury Management Half Yearly Monitoring Report

- The Presiding Member invited Councillor Batrouni, Leader of the Council to present the report which is the first of two reports received during this year. The purpose of the report is to inform Council of treasury activities undertaken within the first half of the 2024/25 financial year.
- The report outlined borrowing and investment activities during the year, provides an update that outlined compliance against the agreed prudential indicators and provides an outlook for the forthcoming year and medium term.
- The report was already considered by Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet, who provided no comments for Council's consideration.

Councillor D Davies seconded the report.

Resolved:

Council accepted the Treasury Management Half Yearly Monitoring Report.

7. **Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26**

The Presiding Member invited Councillor Batrouni, Leader of the Council to present the report, which was a procedural report required to be considered and approved by full Council. It confirmed that the Council would adopt the national 'Council Tax Reduction Scheme', which the Welsh Government updated for 2025/26. This report was approved each year and was required to be considered annually as the report set out some key changes the Welsh Government made to the national scheme.

The Leader took the opportunity to remind and encourage all residents in receipt of low incomes, who required financial assistance to pay their Council Tax, to contact the benefits department to apply for the scheme.

Councillor D Davies seconded the report.

Resolved:

Council agreed to adopt the amended Regulations and retain local discretionary elements, as outlined in the report.

8. **Governance and Audit Committee Annual Report**

The Presiding Member invited Rhys Cornwall, Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate to present the report which looked at the work undertaken by the Committee in the year 2023/24.

The Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate gave more detail about the Committee and the key activities undertaken in 2023/24. They recommended that the Council accepted that the Council met its legislative responsibilities and agreed the Committee's annual report. They offered thanks to committee members for their robust challenge and hard work during the year.

Councillor M Howells proposed the report. Councillor D Davies seconded the report.

Resolved:

Council agreed:

- to note the contents of the Governance and Audit Committee Annual Report for 2023/24,
- to agree that the Council has met its statutory responsibilities as set out in this report, and
- to approve the Committee's annual report.

9. **Review of Standing Orders**

The Presiding Member invited Councillor Routley, Chair of the Democratic Services Committee to present the report that proposed amending the Standing Orders for Leader's Questions at Full Council meetings. The report was prepared by the Head of Law and Standards, in consultation with the Leader, Deputy Leader, Presiding Member, senior officers and the Democratic Services Committee.

Members debated the report – to access a full recording of the debate and comments made please refer to the Council's YouTube channel. [Democratic meetings / Cyfarfodydd democrataidd](#).

Councillor Batrouni seconded the report.

Resolved:

Council agreed that the Standing Orders for Meetings in the Council's Constitution be amended by the Head of Law and Standards to reflect the proposal set out in this report.

10. Schedule of Council Meetings 2025/26

The Presiding Member introduced this item to Council colleagues providing the dates for committee meetings for 2025/26.

Resolved:

Council agreed to adopt the schedule of meetings as the basis for arrangements for May 2025 to May 2026, recognising it was subject to change and amendment to meet the needs of the work programmes of each committee or other group.

11. Mayoral Nomination 2025/26

The Presiding Member asked Councillor D Davies, Deputy Leader to present this item regarding the nomination of the Mayor for 2025/26.

The Deputy Leader formally moved Councillor Kate Thomas as the Mayor for the municipal year 2025/26, which was seconded by the Opposition Leader, Councillor Matthew Evans.

The Deputy Leader took the opportunity to wish Councillor Thomas all the very best for their term for the Mayor's Office for 2025/26.

Resolved:

Council supported the nomination of Councillor K Thomas as Mayor.

12. Questions to the Leader of the Council

Leader's announcements

Festive Newport

There are lots of positive things on the horizon as we head into 2025, but we have some great data from the run up to Christmas

Thanks to all the partners who helped us deliver an amazing Festive Newport offer – from our first winter wonderland, the most popular Countdown to Christmas event ever, grottos, performances and live music, to festive food. And of course, we were pleased to support that with our free city centre parking offer.

Things to look forward to

- March is looking to be a super busy month with exciting events every weekend including St Davids Day celebrations, International Women's Day events, street performances, our first ever Festival of Words – which will be a celebration of words in all their forms from song writing to storytelling, poetry to novels, in a programme of events in Newport city centre venues.

- And of course, Newport Music Trail - a free event with a diverse line up of live music. With performances in venues and spaces around the city, you'll be able to hop between gigs, just like you would between stages at a festival.
- Opening of the Transporter Bridge's new visitor centre
- The ABP Newport Marathon in April
- Return of the hugely popular Newport Food Festival in October

Plus developments such as:

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- Painting of the City Footbridge
- Cleaning of the Civic Centre clock tower
- More roads resurfacing
- Refurbished and reopening of more play parks
- And the ongoing development of the new leisure centre building ahead of its scheduled opening in 2026.

Le Pub

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- One of the aims of Newport Music trail is to shine a spotlight on local talent – and that is something one of our best local venues has been doing for many years – Le Pub. We are so pleased that this has been recognised and the venue's future secured following its purchase by Music Venue Properties (MVP).
- MVP was created by Music Venue Trust a charity dedicated to protecting and improving the UK's grassroots music venues and ensuring that they remain cultural hubs for their communities

Schools (Pill and St Andrews, budget investments)

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- We've also had some great news around schools over the last few weeks.
- Last week we also saw the new £16 million St Andrew's Primary School fully open to pupils and staff, with features including a radio studio, learning resource base with sensory room, new play equipment, bike storage area and welcoming reception and of course a hall and amazing classroom spaces.
- And back in December the new £17 million school building for Pillgwenlly Primary also opened – again with state-of-the-art facilities, the net zero carbon school also has a new 3G sports pitch which could be used by the community under the school's management.

Flytipping prosecution

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- Another area that always features highly in the concerns of our residents is fly-tipping.
- The result was the conviction of a serial fly tipper who pleaded guilty to twelve counts of fly-tipping between January 2023 and May 2024 – and that was after he was previously convicted of fly-tipping offences in 2022 and lost his waste carrier's licence.
- As we said at the time of the court case, there is no place for fly-tipping in our communities, and prosecutions like this underline our commitment to tackling the issue.

Youth service inspection

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- In addition to the education inspection, our youth service also received an extremely positive inspection.
- This is the first time that the council's youth work has been inspected by Estyn, which found that the council listened to young people when designing services.
- As a result, young people enthusiastically take part in youth work opportunities, enjoy themselves and develop their understanding of a range of appropriate issues. They are articulate and confident to express themselves and mix well with one another in their local areas.

- The report also recognised that the service is still under development and praised the senior leaders and staff.

Questions to the Leader

Councillor Evans asked:

Back in 2017, the Conservative Group said they would oppose additional tax in the city. I thank the Leader and the Labour Group for their support in putting Newport first and opposing the Tourism Tax. An important measure of success is getting more people to work in the city centre yet the Admiral building is still vacant, as is the office block behind the station, so why are we unable to fill these units and why are the Welsh Government still investing heavily in Cardiff and not in Newport?

Leader replied:

There will be no visitor levy in Newport, we are open to business and tourism is key to this city. We have many cultural and heritage attractions such as the Transporter Bridge, Roman remains and the Celtic Manor resort. We fight for Newport and fight for growth and investment in Newport. In terms of regeneration we are ahead and further details will be provided in future.

Councillor M Howells asked:

The Authority is currently struggling with customer services and there are issues with dealing with enquiries within an acceptable timeframe, especially within the contact centre. When speaking to residents, the recurring theme is that no-one answers a phone or email and although there have been some improvements there has also been some decline. We often hear that staff are working from home so does the Leader agree that it is time to mandate staff back into the office for a Monday – Thursday to build a culture of customer first and start delivering better services to our residents?

Leader replied:

This is conflating two issues, working from home doesn't necessarily impact the service to residents. As Cabinet Member before I was Leader, I had already made significant investment into a review of customer services to find out what can be done to improve these complex issues. This is being constantly reviewed and reflected upon so that we can increase customer resolution at first point, and reduce waiting times and I am determined to drive that through to effect changes.

Councillor Whitehead asked:

Has there been much contact from people who are struggling following the removal of the winter fuel allowance and have the council been able to assist them?

Leader replied:

I do not know the exact numbers but I can get that data for you. Suffice to say people have been contacting individual Members and the Council directly to access the support and we encourage more to do so. We are investing £50k into the LIFT Programme (Local Improvement Finance Trust) to identify residents across Newport who might be eligible for support from the UK Government but currently don't apply for the relevant benefits that would open up other benefits that they are eligible to receive.

Councillor Hourahine asked:

I would like to ask the Leader if he would join with me in commending the tremendous progress that has been made in our primary school development and what can be done to continue with this positive trajectory?

Leader replied:

We have invested £600k into our primary schools this financial year. Schools in Newport are continually delivering under huge pressures yet our teachers and teaching assistants,

parents and governors have delivered for this city. We have also provided an additional £600k to secondary schools bringing the total to £1.2 million. The budget for the next financial year is currently out for consultation but looking to increase funding by a further 8% up to around £11 million in funding for schools. Estyn recently carried out an inspection which gave excellent feedback of the Council, schools and supporting officers. Councillor Davies and I have been visiting primary and secondary schools to speak to Head Teachers about their concerns directly.

Councillor Reeks asked:

At Full Council in November I asked the Leader about the lobbying of the Welsh Government on the M4 motorway network and was pleased hear that the relevant Cabinet Member was visiting Westminster the following day. Could the Leader please provide an update on the outcome of that visit and whether further lobbying will be continued on behalf of the people of Newport?

Leader replied:

The meeting in Westminster was about the Burns recommendations and if Westminster were to support Newport's recommendations it would be regarding train stations. The road network is devolved so those decisions are made by the Welsh Government. We lobby and speak to Welsh Government monthly and I am pro-M4 relief road which the Welsh Government decided should not go ahead but I am very clear with them that they need to deliver on their promises concerning alternatives.

Councillor Thomas asked:

I spoke earlier about the increased footfall in the city centre and hope this can be considered in context with the rest of Wales and the UK?

Leader replied:

It is positive news about the city centre footfall and as a comparator, Wales was down by 1% and the UK down by 2%. This footfall was supported by all the festivals and free weekend parking. We are supportive of the city centre, but footfall doesn't mean spend. We encourage the increased footfall and need to do more to encourage residents to spend in the city centre and Councillor Clarke and I discuss this on a daily basis.

Councillor Routley stated:

My question has already been covered.

Councillor D Harvey asked:

Can you please confirm what we are doing to alleviate pressures on our residents from all wards regarding poverty?

Leader replied:

I would like to put on record the tremendous work that Councillors D and T Harvey, Drewett and Jenkins have done on the poverty agenda across the city by providing food and support to vulnerable residents. It was Councillor D Harvey who suggested the LIFT programme and we have invested £50k into this programme to ensure residents are identified and supported to access monies that they deserve, and I know the entire Council will back this initiative.

13. **Questions to the Cabinet Members**

Question 1: Question to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Democratic Services

Councillor Reeks:

The Welsh Government's Transforming Towns loans programme that supports local authorities with town and city centre regeneration projects closed its latest £10 million round of funding on Friday 10 January.

The aim of the fund amongst other things is to look at ways to reduce the number of vacant properties, to find more sustainable uses for them and to ultimately increase footfall. Can the cabinet member confirm whether any of this funding was applied for to assist with regeneration of Newport City Centre, and if so, what projects has the money been earmarked for?

Response:

Regeneration funding is available in different formats and the Council continues to access funding for our both own priority projects and also on behalf of landowners and developers. We seek to ensure that developers and property owners are offered the right kind of intervention from the right provider. This includes accessing funding from the likes of Cardiff Capital Region, Lottery Funding, Uk Government, Shared Prosperity Funding, Welsh Government and the Council's own funding for businesses. This support is a blend of grants and loans, and the Council have supported a number of projects to secure loan funding. For other schemes, loan funding is less attractive as grant funding is required in order to reduce viability gaps.

An update on our work to target empty and vacant properties was provided to the Place and Corporate Scrutiny Committee in December and Cabinet have previously confirmed its commitment to tackling this issue through the allocation of a budget to support officers in their work. We have seen some positive progress, including the former TJs building and a number of other properties are subject to formal action. Importantly we have also seen an increase in footfall in the city centre over the last 12 months with footfall up by 2.6% compared to 2023.

The recent Welsh Government Transforming Towns funding opportunity was for loan funding only. In this particular round of funding, we did not receive any requests or applications for loan funding, but we have received requests for grant funding, but as a business owner yourself you wouldn't want me to disclose any sensitive information. However, I can say that since 2018, Newport City Council has received more than £20 million from the Welsh government's regeneration funds, including the transforming towns programme. Newport City Council has, therefore, been allocated a significant proportion of the funding that has so far been made available for the programme across the whole of Wales. We will continue to support landowners and property owners to access the most suitable forms of funding to deliver positive improvements across the city.

This concluded the meeting.