

Agenda

Pwyllgor Rheoli Trosolwg a Chraffu

Dyddiad: Dydd Mawrth, 30 Ionawr 2024

Amser: 10.00 am

Lleoliad: Hybrid Meeting

At: Cyngorwyr: P Hourahine (Cadeirydd), B Davies, G Horton, P Bright, C Baker-Westhead, S Cocks, M Evans and L James

Eitem	Wardiau Dan Sylw
1	<u>Ymddiheuriadau</u>
2	<u>Datganiadau o ddiddordeb</u>
3	<u>Cofnodion y Cyfarfod Diwethaf</u> (Tudalennau 3 - 6)
4	<u>Cyllideb 2024-25 a Chynllun Ariannol Tymor Canolig</u> (Tudalennau 7 - 46)
5	<u>Casgliad Adroddiadau Pwyllgorau</u>
6	<u>Adroddiad Cyngorydd Craffu</u> (Tudalennau 47 - 54) a) Camau Gweithredu'n Codi (Atodiad 1) b) Diweddariad ar y Rhaglen Gwaith i'r Dyfodol (Atodiad 2)
7	<u>Adborth Atgyfeirio Pwnc Craffu</u> (Tudalennau 55 - 102)
8	<u>Digwyddiad Byw</u> Cliciwch yma i wyllo'r digwyddiad byw.

Mae'r dudalen hon yn wag yn

Minutes



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 1 December 2023

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors P Hourahine (Chair), G Horton, S Cocks, M Evans and L James

In Attendance: Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director - Transformation and Corporate Centre), Tracy McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation), Leanne Rowlands (Democratic Services and Electoral Register Manager) and Kevin Howells (Senior HR & OD Business Partner)

Samantha Schanzer (Scrutiny Advisor) and Simon Richards (Governance Officer)

Apologies: Councillors B Davies, P Bright and C Baker-Westhead

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held **26th October 2023** were **accepted as a true and accurate record**.

- The Committee asked whether there had been any further response from the University of South Wales. The Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate informed Committee that there was no new information. The Committee noted their disappointment.

3 People Plan 2023-2028

Invitees:

- Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate)
- Tracy McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation)
- Kevin Howells (HR and OD Manager)

The Head of People, Policy and Transformation (PPT) introduced the report, and the HR and OD Manager gave a summary outlining that recruitment and retention would be a key focus.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee highlighted timelines were not mentioned within the Plan. The HR and OD Manager informed the Committee that they would be monitoring the Plan throughout the period and progress monitoring would take place under Service Area Plans.
- The Committee sought clarification on how the Plan would work in practice and how actions were prioritised. The Committee proposed that actions and measures should be separated. The HR and OD Manager informed Committee that actions would have to be evaluated, prioritised and measured over the course of the Plan.
- The Committee recognised the advantages and challenge of working from home for staff culture and asked how this would be managed. The HR and OD Manager highlighted that whilst the pandemic prompted an increase in office-based staff working from home, a vast number of staff outside of central services did not make this change due to the nature of their work. They informed Committee that the New Normal policies had been embedded for approximately 12 months and noted that it was about finding balance between staff and service, considering the needs of the service and employee wellbeing. The HR and OD Manager confirmed that Audit Wales had reviewed the workforce and asset process, providing positive feedback and that Newport City Council (NCC were considering how best to measure and reflect that success).
The HR and OD Manager informed Committee that there was a balance between being an employer of choice that offers flexible working arrangements and managing potential wellbeing and contact issues. The Head of PPT informed Committee that they had established a framework around engagement, directorate roadshows, service area discussions, check ins and 1-2-1 conversations as consistent engagement was important when staff worked from home and in other environments. The Strategic Director informed Committee that during and since the pandemic, they had tried to be pragmatic and flexible. They informed Committee that they were aware of the potential welfare, wellbeing and team development issues working from home presented. They informed Committee that while many staff were unable to work from home, they needed to make fair decisions and increase visible leadership. They informed Committee that the footfall in the Civic Centre now was comparable to pre-pandemic levels.
- The Committee made some recommendations to officers on the presentation of the report and asked for more detail around themes to be included. The Committee queried whether the Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment (FEIA) in full was necessary for the report. The Head of PPT informed Committee they had discussed how to present the FEIA and decided to include it within the agenda and provide a link to it online.

Conclusions:

- The Committee recommended improving the presentation of the Plan and separating Actions and Measures of Success into two separate columns.
- The Committee recommended summarising the FEIA and creating a link to it within the report.

- **Leanne Rowlands (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager)**

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager presented the report to the Committee.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee thanked the officers for the report.
- A member of the Committee reflected on public engagement levels and how this could be further encouraged. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that in response to the Local Government and Elections Act 2021, the Democratic Services Committee had developed a Participation Strategy which was adopted at Council. The strategy sought to reflect the good practice already embedded within the Council's work, but also sought to build on this foundation to continue to improve engagement and participation.
- The Committee queried how could they be alerted to and monitor areas within the Council which might require further investigation. The Chair informed Committee that a summary of considerations and outcomes from all Scrutiny Committees would be requested at the next Chair's Meeting as part of the development of Scrutiny and Forward Work Programmes.
- The Committee noted that Cabinet Member decisions were not monitored and could leave a gap in highlighting areas for Scrutiny. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that this was not part of the role of Scrutiny, however this is considered by other committees as part of the overall Governance framework. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed that training for members on the wider governance arrangements and framework would be explored. They informed Committee that training on how risk and performance is managed would also be offered in 2024.
- The Committee member asked whether regular Chair's Meetings had occurred and how frequently they met. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee they met quarterly.
- The Committee were happy to see more cooperation between Committees.

Conclusions:

- The Committee recommended changing wording within the report to reflect that Scrutiny Chair's meetings are quarterly.
- The Committee were concerned that there may be some information that Committee Members wish to be appraised of that does not come to Scrutiny as a matter of course under their Terms of Reference.

5 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

a) **Actions Arising**

- The Scrutiny Advisor noted that there was one ongoing action about the number of residents contacting the City Contact Centre. The Scrutiny Advisor Informed Committee that a response had been received about this ongoing action.
- The Committee recommended that the number of residents who contact the City Contact Centre as they are unable to access services online is recorded and collated to improve intelligence gathering and resulting outcomes. The Scrutiny Advisor informed Committee of the Customer Services review due to be carried out and highlighted information may be captured there.

b) Forward Work Programme Update

- The Scrutiny Advisor presented the Forward Work Programme and noted no changes.

6 Live Event

[Click here to watch the recording.](#)

The meeting terminated at 10.51 am



Scrutiny Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Part 1

Date: January 2024

Subject 2024-25 Budget and Medium Term Financial Projections

Author Scrutiny Adviser

The following people have been invited to attend for this item:

Role / Areas of responsibility	Lead Officer
Budget Overview and Process	Meirion Rushworth, Head of Finance
Budget Public Engagement	Rhys Cornwall, Director for Transformation and Corporate Tracy McKim, Head of People, Policy and Transformation

Section A – Committee Guidance and Recommendations

1 Recommendations to the Committee

The Committee is asked to:

- (i) Consider:
 - the process undertaken for this year's Draft budget proposals;
 - the public engagement undertaken for this year's Draft budget proposals;
- (ii) Determine if it wishes to make any comments on the budget process or the public engagement to the Cabinet;
- (iii) Endorse the comments made by the Performance Scrutiny Committee – People, and Performance Scrutiny Committee – Place and Corporate to be forwarded to the Cabinet.

2 Context

- 2.1 In accordance with the constitution, the Cabinet is required to consult on the proposals before recommending an overall budget and required council tax to the Council for approval in February.

Scrutiny Committees must be consulted as part of this process. The timetable for the consultation on the budget is as follows:

Cabinet agrees budget proposals as a basis for consultation	10 th January 2024
Consultation period	10 th January 2024 to 9 th February 2024
Cabinet considers feedback from consultation and agrees final budget proposals and recommends resulting overall budget and council tax required to full Council	14 th February 2024
Council approves the 2024/25 overall budget and resulting council tax level required	29 th February 2024

Structure of Scrutiny of the Budget Proposals

2.2 Each Committee will meet to discuss the budget proposals in detail and formulate comments relating to their portfolio:

Committee	Date	Role
Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate	15 th January 2024	Proposals within the Place and Corporate Service Areas
Performance Scrutiny Committee - People	16 th January 2024	Proposals within the People Service Areas
Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee	30 th January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorsement of comments from all Scrutiny Committees • Comments on the budget process • Comments on public engagement

2.3 Recommendations from the Committee meetings on 15th and 16th January will be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) at its meeting on 30th January 2024 to confirm the list of comments that will be submitted from Scrutiny to the Cabinet. The Chair of these committees will be invited to attend the meeting of the OSMC where the Committee's recommendations are discussed.

2.4 The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to coordinate the comments from Scrutiny to ensure that there are no overlaps in what is being recommended and ensure that scrutiny as a whole provides a cohesive and consistent response to Cabinet. It also has overall responsibility for comments on the budget process, and public engagement, which it will be focusing on at its meeting.

- 2.5 At its meeting on 10th January 2024, the Cabinet agreed draft proposals for consultation. The full Cabinet Report and Appendices are available on the [website](#).

3 Information Submitted to the Committee

- 3.1 The following attachments are included for the Committee's consideration:

Appendix 1 – Cabinet Report 2024/25 Budget and Medium Term Financial Projections (MFTP)

Appendix 2 – The minutes from the Performance Scrutiny Committee – Place from the 15th January 2024.

Appendix 3 – The minutes from the Performance Scrutiny Committee – People from the 16th January 2024.

- 3.2 The Cabinet report (Appendix 1) contains background information on the budget setting process, financial planning assumptions as well as outlining the budget process and planned consultation. This is the focus of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's consideration of the budget.

4. Suggested Areas of Focus

4.1 Role of the Committee

The role of the Committee in considering the report is to:

- **Assess and make comment** on the overall budget process and public engagement:
 - Is there evidence of links to the Corporate Plan and a strategic long-term approach to budget?
 - Fairness and Equalities Impact Assessments – have these been completed consistently and used to develop the proposals?
 - Whether the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act Sustainable Development Principle has been considered in the proposals in terms of the need for long-term thinking and planning?
 - Approach to public engagement - is there a cohesive and consistent approach demonstrated to how the public have been involved and consulted on the proposals?
- **Conclusions:**
 - Determine comments / recommendations to Cabinet upon:
 - Budget process;
 - Public Engagement;
 - Fairness and Equality Impact Assessments;
 - Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.
 - Any overarching issues emerging from the two Performance Scrutiny Committee meetings.
 - Agree to forward the comments of the two performance Scrutiny Committees to the Cabinet on the specific Budget proposals..

Suggested lines of Enquiry

- 4.2 Councillors have a fundamental democratic right to commission financial information and provide challenge to executives and officers about finances. Scrutiny councillors are not expected to be financial experts, but they have a key role in ensuring **accountability** and **value for money** are demonstrated to the public.
- 4.3 The following has been adapted from Section 3.1-3.4: Source: Grant Thornton – Local Government Financial Resilience Review 2012 (“Towards a tipping point?”) to provide examples of the questioning and lines of enquiry that the Committee may wish to consider:

Links to Strategic Planning	How does the proposal contribute to the achieving corporate priorities?
	How do these proposals fit into an overall budget strategy / what is the long-term approach to budget at the Council?
Fairness and Equalities Impact Assessments	Have these been completed? Is there a consistent approach to competing FEIAs and have they been used to inform the proposals?
	Have any impacts identified within the FEIA been considered within the business case?
Public Consultation	How has the public been consulted on the budget proposals?
	Has there been a consistent approach to public engagement and involvement upon this year’s budget proposals?

Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act

- 4.4 The Committee’s consideration of the Draft budget proposals should consider how services are maximising their contribution to the five ways of working. Below are examples of the types of questions to consider:

5 Ways of Working	Types of Questions to consider:
Long-term The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.	What consideration have you given to the long term trends that could affect your proposal or; how could your proposal impact these trends?
	How will the needs of your service users potentially change in the future?
Prevention Prevent problems occurring or getting worse.	What is the objective (or the desired outcome) of this proposal?
	How are you addressing these issues to prevent a future problem?
	How have the decisions, so far, come about? What alternatives were considered?
Integration Considering how public bodies’ wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other	Are there any other organisations providing similar / complementary services?
	Have you consulted with the health board, third sector, emergency services, businesses and anyone else you think might be impacted?

objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.	What practical steps will you take to integrate your project with existing plans and strategies of other public organisations to help us all contribute fully to the seven national well-being goals?
<p style="text-align: center;">Collaboration</p> <p>Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the organisation itself).</p>	Who have you been working with? Why? Who have you collaborated with in finding out more about this problem and potential solutions?
	How are you co-working with other sectors?
	How are you using the knowledge / information / good practice of others to inform / influence the Council's work?
<p style="text-align: center;">Involvement</p> <p>The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.</p>	How have you involved the people who are being impacted by this decision?
	How have you taken into account the diverse communities in your decision making?
	How have you used different / alternative methods to reach people and involve them?
	How will you communicate the outcome of your decision?

Section B – Supporting Information

5 Further Guidance on the Scrutiny Role

- 5.1 The information in the following section has been taken and adapted from the [CfPS / Grant Thornton Guidance– “Raising the Stakes: financial scrutiny in challenging times”](#) (pdf) published in June 2014. The extracts reproduced here focus predominantly on Councillors’ role in the annual budget setting process.
- 5.2 For further information, Members are invited to read the publication, which includes more detail about scrutiny’s role in financial planning and management, as well as case studies and best practice examples. *(A link to the publication is provided in Section 7 of this report.)*

Understanding Roles and Responsibilities

- 5.3 Councillors and officers have a collective and individual responsibility for ensuring that a council’s finances are effectively managed. Within the Annual Budget process:

Council	Agrees the policy and budget framework.
Cabinet/Executive	<p>Cabinet agrees a series of proposals for public consultation, which form the draft budget proposals. Scrutiny must be consulted as part of this process.</p> <p>Responsible for proposing the policy and budget framework and key strategies, including the MTFP and annual budget. It has power to take</p>

	all executive decisions within the policy and budget framework agreed by the Council.
Scrutiny Chairs	<p>The Chair should encourage all scrutiny councillors to take a full part in scrutiny, including taking part in any agreed work outside of the formal meetings.</p> <p>Focus the Committee on their role in providing constructive challenge as a consultee in the budget process.</p>
Scrutiny Councillors	<p>The role of scrutiny councillors is to review policy and challenge whether the executive is making the right decisions to deliver policy goals and achieve Council's agreed objectives. Their role comprises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing constructive challenge on the draft budget proposals and ensure that properly costed policy and budget proposals are implemented. ○ Monitoring the service and financial performance of the council and its partners and examining the impact and implementation of cabinet decisions and policies ○ Holding the council leader, cabinet and senior officers to account in how effectively they deliver a balanced budget.
Heads of Service	<p>Within the policy and budget framework and decisions taken by executives, Chief Executives, Chief Finance Officers and Monitoring Officers have key responsibilities for the way Councils are run in terms of compliance with legal duties.</p> <p>Section 151 of the Local Government Act sets out requirements to prepare a prudent and balanced annual budget including maintaining reasonable levels of reserves and the role of the Head of Finance (as the designated 151 Officer) within this. Other members of the corporate management team are responsible for administering annual service budgets.</p>
Finance Professionals	Such as auditors and accountants, should identify how financial planning and management processes can ensure time and space for scrutiny to add value and make a difference.

Fairness and Equalities Impact Assessment (FEIAs)

- 5.4 Fairness and Equality Impact Assessments (FEIA) are a systematic approach to ensure that the Council takes decisions that balances the needs of people, local culture, the economy and the environment over time. FEIAs assist the Council in ensuring that our decision-making process is inclusive. They are used to look at the effect of any change to Council services or employment from everybody's viewpoint, to make sure that changes are fair and do not discriminate.
- 5.5 Officers have a responsibility to inform decision makers of all the relevant implications of any proposal and provide evidence on which they will base their decisions. FEIAs help decision makers understand service users, employees and other stakeholders' perspectives, and provide evidence that citizens have shaped the council's work. There is legal requirement to publish FEIAs.
- 5.6 Within the Budget proposal Business Cases, there is an indication as to whether or not an assessment is necessary for a proposal. The Performance Scrutiny Committees were asked to consider these during their discussion on the proposals within their remit.

5.7 The FEIA's are published on the Council's Equalities page on the [website](#).

6 Links to Council Policies and Priorities

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

7 Background Papers

- [The Essentials – Well-being of Future Generation \(Wales\) Act](#)
- [Corporate Plan 2022-27](#)
- [CfPS / Grant Thornton Guidance– “Raising the Stakes: financial scrutiny in challenging times”](#) including references to: Grant Thornton – Local Government Financial Resilience Review 2012 (“Towards a tipping point?”)
- [Cabinet meeting 10th January 2024](#)
- [Performance Scrutiny Committee – Place 15th January 2024 meeting](#)
- [Performance Scrutiny Committee – People 16th January 2024 meeting](#)
- [Newport City Council FEIAs 2023-24](#)

Report Completed: January 2024

Mae'r dudalen hon yn wag yn

Report

Cabinet

Part 1

Date: 10th January 2024

Subject 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

Purpose To highlight key issues affecting the development of the Council's 2024/25 budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and present the draft proposals for the 2024/25 budget. Cabinet is asked to agree the proposals in order to commence the budget consultation process for this year. Consultation results will be reported back to Cabinet in February 2024, when Cabinet will agree a final budget to recommend to full Council.

Author Head of Finance

Ward All

Summary This report presents the draft budget proposals for 2024/25.

Budget preparations this year have continued to be challenging, building on the unprecedented circumstances of the last few years. The Council, like others, are dealing with significant budget pressures. Cost increases and increasing demand are resulting in significant budget shortfalls over the immediate and medium term.

The timing of the draft budget and consultation has been changed this year so that the Council's draft financial settlement was known beforehand. Whilst there is still further work to complete before the final budget proposals can be completed; it does result in reducing a significant budget uncertainty. The 2024/25 budget shortfall before savings is £3,805k (£42,085k over the medium term), at this point though more analysis is required on certain elements of the Council's financial settlement. The Council is required to manage these shortfalls to both produce balanced annual budgets and which also delivers sustainable future finances to ensure the Council continues to deliver services to residents in Newport and meet priorities.

The Council received its draft 'Revenue Support Grant' (RSG) on 20th December and budget details included in this report include that. More detail on the settlement is included in this report.

Residents, service users, scrutiny committees, school forum and stakeholders, such as the independent Fairness Commission will have the opportunity to provide feedback for Cabinets consideration before they recommend their final budget proposals to full Council.

The report, along with the appendices, set out the draft budget pressures and investments, budget savings and increase in local council tax, which are key elements of the proposed budget.

Section:

- 1 Background
- 2 Context
- 3 The Budget Gap
- 4 Budget savings
- 5 Budget process and consultation

- 6 Risk, financial resilience, and performance
- 7 Report review and statutory comments

Appendix:

- Appendix 1 Budget investments
- Appendix 2 New budget savings for consultation
- Appendix 3 New budget savings implemented under delegated authority
- Appendix 4 Demand models for social care
- Appendix 5 Fees & charges for consultation
- Appendix 6 Financial resilience 'snapshot'
- Appendix 7 Medium term financial projections
- Appendix 8 Projected earmarked reserves
- Appendix 9 Corporate risk register summary - Quarter 2
- Appendix 10 New budget savings for consultation – proposals
- Appendix 11 New budget savings implemented under delegated authority - proposals

Proposal

1. **Cabinet agreed the following draft proposals for public consultation:**
 - i) Budget savings proposals in Appendix 2 (summary table) and Appendix 10 (detailed proposals).
 - ii) A council tax increase of 8.5%, a weekly increase of £1.50 - £2.01 for properties in Band A to C, the most common bands in Newport, as set out in paragraphs 3.8.
 - iii) Proposed fees and charges in Appendix 5.
 - iv) The budget investments shown in Appendix 1, including those for schools.
2. **Cabinet approves:**
 - v) Implementation of the delegated decisions in Appendix 3 (summary table) and Appendix 11 (detailed proposals) by Heads of Service with immediate effect, following the usual Council decision making processes.
3. **Cabinet notes:**
 - vi) The position on developing a balanced budget for 2024/25, noting that the position will be subject to ongoing review and updates between now and the February Cabinet when the final budget is agreed.
 - vii) The current position in the development of a 'Transformation Plan' for the Council and the HoF comments on the importance of that in relation to the medium/long term budget challenge and contributing to sustainable financial footing for services.
 - viii) Further work is required to specifically review and manage the financial impacts of some key risks coming out of the draft settlement for 2024/25.

Action by Executive Board/ Heads of Service

Timetable Immediate:

Decisions subject to consultation include investments set out in Appendix 1, savings set out in Appendix 2 (summary table) and Appendix 10 (detailed proposals), fees and charges (Appendix 5), and schools funding position (section 3). These, along with the proposed council tax increase will form the basis of the consultation process.

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Leader of the Council
- Chief Executive
- Strategic Directors
- Head of Law and Standards
- Head of People, Policy and Transformation

Signed

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1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) included within the Council's 2023/24 budget report, presented in March 2023, identified a potential budget gap of £15,170k in 2024/25. This report provides an update to reflect the on-going work undertaken on the Council's budget, MTFP and saving proposals to balance the budget gap which currently stands at £3,805k.
- 1.2 A significant number of factors are considered when reviewing the Council's budget and MTFP. These factors are influenced by both internal and external issues with the latter itself affected by local, Welsh and UK wide considerations. The table below compares the position back in March 2023 and currently in relation to the 2024/25 budget. The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan is shown in Appendix 7

Table 1. Budget Gap

	March 2023	Current	Significant movements
Funding			
RSG	+10,188	+13,450	Impact of demographic changes and up to date population numbers in particular
Council Tax	+ 2,827	+6,454	Increased to 8.5%, from 4%
Anticipated Teacher's pension increased funding		+3,419	Neutral to budget gap as matched off with costs
Cost Pressures			
Inflation/Increased costs	25,139	17,678	Energy costs reduction -£8,019k
Budget Investments / Pressures	3,046	9,450	Teachers' pensions increase +£3,419k Homelessness demand increases +£600k Children's services- placements +£2,664k
Budget Gap	15,170	3,805	

- 1.3 This report explains the key assumptions and issues which impact on the above factors thereby explaining the position. External considerations and issues drive a large part of the budget preparation, and these are explained first in this section.

2 CONTEXTS

- 2.1 The external considerations impacting on the Council are key aspects in the Council's financial planning. Budget preparations have continued to present significant challenges not only building on the unprecedented circumstances of the last few years but also the continuation of economic issues such as relatively high inflation rates.

UK Autumn budget and spending review 2023

- 2.2 This took place on the 22nd November and did not change the landscape of future public sector funding significantly from the current assumptions though there were some changes and announcements which have an impact on the Council's budget planning. The following outline the key messages and issues which impact on Local Government:
- (i) Minimum wage increased to £11.44 per hour, a 9.7% increase. This impacts on the Local Government National Joint Committee (NJC) pay structure which must meet this minimum at its lowest pay points and then impacts on all pay points above that in the overall pay structure. This brings about significant pay inflation into the Council's budget planning and assumptions. Newport City Council is committed to paying employees the 'foundation living wage' and therefore, within the NJC pay structure, pay levels locally meets the 'foundation wage' minimum levels which is now £12 per hour, a 10% increase itself.

As well as for its own staff, the budget assumptions include an increase in social care commissioned services budgets which allows for at least this foundation living wage level to be paid in those sectors, which historically have paid less than this level in many instances. This

has also resulted in significant contract price inflation in these service areas. The social services commissioning team who contracts with the care market are responsible in ensuring all contracted services providers commit to and pay at least this level.

- (ii) extended the cash freeze in capital spending for a further year meaning the WG block grant for core capital spending would fall by 6% in real terms.

Whilst not directly impacting on the Council's budgets, the Autumn budget also announced

- (iii) Local Housing Allowance increased to the 30th percentile of local rent levels which will increase the housing benefits limits available to those who rent in the privately owned housing sector. These benefits are administered by councils.
- (iv) Small business rates multiplier was frozen and the current retail, hospitality, and leisure business relief of up to 75% was extended for one year. In its own budget, the WG confirmed it too would extend the scheme by a further one year but at a rate of 40%. These reliefs are administered by councils.

- 2.3 The biggest impact of the Autumn budget was the confirmation that councils' funding outlook beyond the 2024/25 budget next year would potentially become very challenging. The budget confirmed the impact on the Welsh Government funding which would deliver a £305m consequential increase in funding over the three years to 2026/27, of which £167m would be for 2024/25. Given relatively high inflation levels persisting over the medium term; this equates to significant reduced Welsh Government funding levels in real terms over this period. This creates a potentially very significant funding challenge to Local Government in Wales in that if they were to "pass on" the additional funding to the NHS, schools, and pre-school childcare (the causes of the consequential increases above), spending outside of these areas could see cuts in funding.

Economic and process and demand issues

- 2.4 The continuation of relatively high price inflation and service demand continues as the Council's current year budget monitoring and the Autumn statement outlined above confirms. Key issues include:

- **Increasing inflationary costs** – the impact of specific elements of the consumer prices index (CPI) on council supplies and services; affecting both the Council's own direct costs and that of its key suppliers and service providers. Whilst inflation rates have recently fallen, they are still high by historical levels. As a foundation wage employer, the Council also increases its social care commissioned services contracts as outlined above. The significant rise in the foundation wage levels increase the budget inflation required here by significant amounts and it makes up most of the Council's contracts inflation uplifts.
- **Pay awards** – the impact of high inflation on actual and future potential pay awards. This relates to the Council's own pay awards (teachers and (NJC)) and as outlined above, the increase required in the Council's pay spine structure gives rise to significant pay budgets inflation.
- **Cost of living crisis** – the fall in real disposable income experienced since late 2021 has led to increasing requests for government support and demand on local services.
- **Labour market** – labour market challenges are increasing the cost of commissioned services in areas affected by labour shortages, such as social care and technical/professional roles.
- **Increasing demand** - for Council services which increase the Council's costs. These stem from legacy issues coming from the pandemic period as well as population and demographic/ societal changes. These are most acute in the budget areas of social services and housing services.

3 THE BUDGET GAP

3.1 The budget gap arises due to the Council's funding increase being insufficient to meet the cost increases being experienced and assumed by the Council. Cost increases come predominantly from pay/contract inflation and additional costs from service demand increases as explained in the previous section, and investments in services to meet priorities.

The Council's funding

Revenue Support Grant (RSG)

3.2 This was received on 20th December and confirmed an increase in funding of £13,450k. The following summary analysis explains the drivers behind the increase:

- base increase of 3.1% average across Wales	£8,707k
- increased funding to reflect NCC's greater share of the overall funding due to growing population, pupil numbers and other 'needs based' assessment	£4,552k
- other	£ 191k

The increases above are available to contribute to the Council's budget and the needs-based element is particularly high for 2024/25 due to the distribution formula finally including the full impact of the last census data.

3.3 the RSG is a crucial element in all Welsh Council's budgets and typically contributes c70%-75% of their core funding and at Newport City Council, this is currently 77% with Council Tax at 23%. Given all Council's significant reliance on RSG funding, what happens to this grant is crucial, as any reductions or below inflation increases cannot be easily offset by an increase in Council Tax. It also particularly impacts high growth area like Newport where there are significant cost pressures associated with that growth.

3.4 Whilst the overall core settlement was positive for the Council (it received the highest percentage increase across Wales) there is still outstanding work on-going to understand the full impacts of it. In particular, the settlement confirmed, at an all-Wales level, a significant reduction in a number of key specific grants which will have an impact on the Council's budgets, given that many of these are used for day-to-day service provision. These include:

- All Wales reduction in homelessness related grant - £11,500k
- All Wales reduction in social care workforce grant - £10,000k
- All Wales reduction in school related grants - £2,761k
- All Wales reduction in communities for work+ grant - £10,434k

Services are working through the potential reduction in Newport's element of these grants and any budget issues resulting from that will need to be incorporated, as needed, in the Cabinet's final budget recommendations.

In addition to this, a review of the potential RSG increases will be undertaken for future years beyond 2024/25. Currently, in line with current analysis of the Chancellor's Autumn budget, a nil increase is assumed but this requires further analysis and will be updated in time for the Cabinet's final budget in February and as always, reviewed thereafter from there.

Council Tax base

3.5 The Head of Finance (HoF) has set the Council Tax base (i.e. the number of Band D equivalent properties) for 2024/25 and it will increase by 0.6% to 61,329. This tax base is net of a 2% non-collection allowance. This practice is consistent with all councils across Wales and Newport's 'budgeted collection rate' is one of the highest in Wales. The net increase in available funding from the increased tax base is £488k based on the current rate of Council Tax and is reflected in the MTFP for 2024/25.

Council Tax increase

- 3.6 It is well documented that Newport's Council Tax is low compared to others in Wales, generating only 23% of the Council's net budget funding. This council's current year band D council tax rate is 10% lower than the Welsh average which represents about £8.2m in lower funding levels to the Council.
- 3.7 The budget position and figures set out within this report are based on an 8.5% increase within the MTFP in 2024/25 and 4% thereafter. The 2024/25 increase is subject to consultation before the Cabinet confirms their final recommendations on the Council's budget and required Council Tax increase to the Council in February 2024.
- 3.8 For contextual purposes, the table below shows the weekly increases in council tax based on a 8.5% increase. Given the low starting point on Newport's council tax, it will still be lower than most (if not all) of the neighbouring authorities, even if they have a lower level of increase. Newport City Council's proposed tax increase would maintain its position as one of the lowest in Wales.

Table 2: Scenarios illustrating weekly Council Tax increases based on an 8.5% increase.

Bands	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Increase per year	£78.21	£91.24	£104.28	£117.31	£143.38	£169.45	£195.52	£234.62	£273.73
Increase per week	£1.50	£1.75	£2.01	£2.26	£2.76	£3.26	£3.76	£4.51	£5.26

- 3.9 The low starting point on Newport's council tax also means that, in cash terms, the increase is more modest than the percentage increase suggests. Given that over half of Newport's chargeable properties are banded A – C, most households would see an increase of between £1.50 and £2.01 per week based on this percentage increase.

Council cost increases assumptions

Several areas are explained in this report.

Increasing costs and demand

- 3.10 Financial pressures and demands on our services continue to grow significantly both for next year 2024/25 and over the medium term. The main issues include:

Inflationary Increases

- With inflation continuing to be relatively high, this is a key area in the setting of this budget. Unavoidable pay and inflationary cost increases, including schools, equate to £17,678k in 2024/25 and £58,279k over the three-year period to 2026/27;
- Commissioned care costs and pay are key areas. Whilst energy remain volatile, we have seen costs reduce since budgets were set for the current year and significant savings are included for those and explained later in this report.
- Significant Income budgets under the Council's decision making are inflated at 4% standard and services can adjust as needed as budget pressures (to go lower) or savings (to go higher) as needed.

Staff Costs

- Staff costs account for over half of all council costs. For the current and previous financial years, pay awards have been based on a cash increase to all pay points in the NJC pay structure, resulting in high percentage increases lower down in the pay grades and lower in the higher grades. Teacher's pay has been based on a more traditional percentage increase across the pay scales. Our planning assumptions for NJC and Teacher's pay assume the continuation of these albeit at lower levels to the previous two years.

- NJC pay award assumption is a £1,340 cash increase (£1,925 in 2022/23 & 2023/24) for pay points up to point 43, equivalent to an average 4.2% across this range, and 2.6% on pay points thereafter. This follows the pattern/structure of the last two year's pay awards, albeit at lower levels.
- Teacher's pay award assumption is a 4.0% increase (from September 2024)

As noted above, the minimum wage and real living wage both increased significantly recently, and these have largely driven the above assumptions.

Service Demand

- The Council is experiencing exceptional levels of demand and cost pressure in some areas, most significantly in Children's and housing services. Demand pressures are closely monitored as part of the Council's 'risk based' financial management arrangements and these provide information to assess demand alongside other considerations.
- Increasing demand is also exacerbated with significant workforce pressures in the social care sector and fragility of the care market.
- In housing service, the main issue is the continuing large number of individuals/ households accommodated in temporary accommodation, due to the lack of suitable accommodation options. This has resulted in significant use of hotel and B&B options at a much higher cost than more traditional options. This is because of the inability of housing benefit subsidy to cover these costs as it is capped for short term accommodation; therefore, the additional cost falls to the council.

3.11 Detailed demand models for social care have been included within Appendix 4 and form the basis of the investments proposed for inclusion within the medium-term projections.

3.12 For 2024/25 specifically, the Council is currently planning to invest around £9,021k in the draft budget over and above an allowance for pay and pricing inflation. More details on proposed investments are included in Appendix 1 and some of the key items include:

- £3,419k for increasing teachers' pension costs and £393k for increasing Additional Learning Needs both within Newport schools and outside.
- £3,074k for increasing demand (£2,774k) and other pressures (£300k) in social care for both children and adult services and investment in children looked after
- £600k for increasing demand in homelessness provision.
- £500k for capital annual sums

3.13 Detailed investments proposals will be finalised in the Cabinet's February meeting and will be done so considering feedback from the public consultation. As well as the permanent investment in the revenue budget, the Cabinet will also propose one-off investments, such as in relation to implementation costs arising from savings proposals, funded from current reserves.

3.14 The financial pressures facing the Council continue to come from pricing and inflation pressures over the three-year period, accounting for nearly £56m or 76% of total investment required over the next three years.

Capital programme and financing

3.15 Unfunded capital expenditure (i.e. not from external grants, capital receipts or reserves) undertaken by the Council gives rise to a need to borrow funds. This results in a long-term and fixed commitment to fund the associated revenue costs that come with this for the repayment of that borrowing (Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)) and interest costs – together called 'capital financing costs'.

- 3.16 The Council's capital programme moved to a rolling 5-year programme starting from the current 2023/24 financial year. No new schemes funded from Council borrowing have been added to it and the current programme is made up of slippage from the previous 5-year programme and new schemes funded from grants and capital reserves. The capital financing costs arising from the existing schemes in the programme were fully funded as part of the 2021/22 revenue budget and, therefore, there is no requirement to make new revenue budget provision in connection with the current programme.
- 3.17 As outlined in the Council's Capital & Treasury Management Strategy, and in accordance with its legal obligations, the Council should only commit to unfunded capital expenditure (i.e. that funded via borrowing and, ultimately, the revenue budget via MRP/interest costs) where it is prudent, affordable, and sustainable to do so. Considering the significantly challenging revenue budget outlook facing the Council over the medium term, it would be difficult to argue that any new capital financing commitments, driven by new unfunded capital expenditure, would meet these criteria. In saying that, the Council will inevitably face unavoidable capital commitments from such events as building failures, with unavoidable and immediate impacts and other issues where there are no alternative choices. These will need to be assessed as and when they arise, though the financial impact of approving these are potentially very serious and challenging. At this time therefore, given the context described above, the draft revenue budget for 2024/25 and the MTFP do not include any revenue provision for new unfunded capital expenditure. Any new capital expenditure requirements from 2024/25 will need to be fully funded from external or existing resources, such as capital receipts or WG grants. In addition, service changes requiring capital investment, could be funded from savings or re-prioritised budgets which may come about as part of those changes.

School's funding

- 3.18 The MTFP identifies pressures relating to schools amounting to £9,454k in 2024/25, which equates to an increase of 7.3% on the current schools' budget. This is based on an assumed level of inflationary pay award and non-pay increase as noted above in paragraph 3.10, cost pressures highlighted in paragraph 3.12 and the additional costs of new / expanding schools. For the full three-year MTFP period, assessed school pressures amount to nearly £24m, based on current assumptions. These will, like other MTFP assumptions, need to be reviewed regularly and any actual proposed funding increases confirmed through the budget process. Table 3 below sets out the detailed school budget pressures over this timeframe.
- 3.19 The draft budget includes budget provision for an increase in teacher's pension costs at £3,419k and it is assumed and expected that further funding will be made available from the Welsh Government for this. At this time, the Welsh Government is waiting on confirmation from the UK Government on consequential funding to its budget for this which will be distributed to councils. It therefore remains a potential risk at this time for funding and an update on the position will be included in the final budget proposals in February.

Table 3: School budget pressures 2024/25 to 2026/27

	2024/25 £k	2025/26 £k	2026/27 £k
Teaching Staff – pay award assumption	4,026	3,367	3,066
Non-teaching staff – pay award assumption	2,404	1,621	1,550
Contract/Income inflation	(669)	1,018	1,142
New & growing schools	(37)	1,273	1,360
Teachers' Pension increases	3,419		
Other school investments	311	519	

Summary of key budget assumptions

- 3.19 The budget gap results from the various factors outlined above. The table below summarises these and provides a sensitivity analysis for the assumptions, for information.

Table 4: Summary of key assumptions

	2024/25 Actual	2025/26 Budget Planning Assumption	2026/27 Budget Planning Assumption	Sensitivity Analysis +/- 1% change
RSG Increase - core	13,450k	-	-	£3,000K
RSG Increase – data driven changes		500k	500k	n/a
Council Tax – 8.5% 24/25 and 4% thereafter	7,195k	3,521k	3,662k	£711K
Pay inflation – average 4% 2024/25 and 3% thereafter	10,153k	8,026k	7,528k	Teacher's - £550k NJC - £1,150k
Contract inflation – various	6,717k	10,008k	10,787k	Energy- £110k Care providers - £666k

4 Budget savings

- 4.1 The Council is required by law to set a balanced budget every year. Therefore, there has been a need to consider all potential options for addressing the budget gap. Given the very real potential prospect for significant funding shortfalls over the last two years of the current MTFP, it is important to agree a sustainable and prudent budget to provide a solid foundation to move on from.
- 4.2 The identification of significant new savings is a requirement to balance the budget for 2024/25. The draft proposed savings identified for 2024/25 to date total £5,130k, of which £4,417k are new savings with £713k being full year impact of already agreed savings as part of the current 2023/24 financial year. The table below provides a summary of the new savings by decision over the 3-year planning horizon.

Table 5: Summary of projected savings

Saving Decision Type	2024/25 £K	2025/26 £K	2026/27 £K	Impact on posts FTE
Budget savings for full Cabinet recommendation. (Appendix 2)	592	55	0	0.6
Budget savings delegated to officers. (Appendix 3)	3,825	126	126	12.5
TOTAL BUDGET SAVINGS	4,417	181	126	

- 4.3 The Cabinet takes some budget decisions collectively for Council consideration. These proposals total £592k for 2024/25 and £647k over the life of the MTFP. Some lower level, operational and efficiency type budget proposals are delegated to Heads of Service for decision and implementation. These proposals, totalling £3,825k for 2024/25 and £4,077k over the life of the MTFP are listed in Appendix 3.

Fairness and Equality Impact Assessments (FEIAs)

- 4.4 All budget proposals have been reviewed against our Equality and Welsh language duties, and, where appropriate, have had an initial Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment completed. The initial FEIA identifies potential negative or positive impacts in relation to protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, and on Welsh language. These FEIAs will be further informed as a result of public consultation and developed in line with the new Socioeconomic Duty. FEIAs for all proposals requiring one can be found [here](#).

5 Budget process and consultation

5.1 This report presents the draft proposals for the 2024/25 budget. The report asks Cabinet to note:

- the position on developing a balanced budget for 2024/25, acknowledging that the position will be subject to ongoing review and updates.

5.2 The report also asks Cabinet to agree a series of proposals for public consultation. This includes:

- proposed budget investments in Appendix 2.
- proposed savings in Appendix 2 and 3 (summary tables) and Appendix 10 and 11 (detailed saving proposals).
- proposed fees and charges in Appendix 5.
- the position regarding the proposed school funding for 2023/24 in section 3

Budget engagement

5.3 As part of a cycle of engagement to inform budget setting and Council spending, pre-budget engagement is undertaken every year. This year, as part of the work on the community safety Strategic Needs Assessment a public survey was undertaken in the summer. The opportunity was taken to ask respondents to give their views on how community safety and community cohesion compares to other local issues in terms of Council services and spending. We received almost 300 responses which indicated the high importance the public attach to both community safety and cohesion. These findings are made available to senior decision makers as part of the budget setting process.

5.4 The proposed investments set out in this report have been identified with previous public engagement in mind, and citizens will now be invited to give their views on the draft budget and medium-term financial plan during the consultation period. Unlike during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council again faces severe financial pressures, and this is reflected in the consultation, which will focus on the proposed cost savings and proposed increase to council tax which are needed to balance the budget.

Below is this year's timetable for consulting on and approving the 2024/25 budget:

Table 6: Budget consultation timetable 2023/24

Cabinet agrees draft budget proposals as a basis for consultation	10 January 2024
Consultation period	11 January 2024 to 9 February 2024
Cabinet considers feedback from consultation and agrees final budget recommendations to Council including Council Tax rate	14 February 2024
Final time / date for members / groups written amendments on budget proposals for Council consideration to be received by the 'proper officer' (Head of Law & Standards)	5.00pm, 21 st February 2024
Council approves the 2024/25 budget, service funding and Council Tax rate	29 February 2024

6 Risk, financial resilience, and performance

6.1 A key driver in the Council's budget strategy and MTFP framework is the need to manage the Council's general and financial risks, its financial resilience and performance. This next section looks at these issues and identifies how they are dealt with, whilst considering how they influence the Council's 2024/25 budget and medium-term projections.

Risk

6.2 The Council maintains a corporate risk register, which is regularly reviewed by the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet, as well as the Governance & Audit Committee from a procedural / risk management framework viewpoint. The Council's budget strategy and MTFP framework needs to reflect risks and incorporate appropriate financial mitigation, where required.

6.3 The quarter 1 corporate risk register reported to September 2023 Cabinet identified 15 risks that are considered to have a significant impact on the achievement of the Council's objectives and legal obligations. Overall, 9 of these risks are severe and, in many cases, link the issues set out within the economic context and earlier sections of this report. In some cases, it is increasingly difficult for the Council to effectively prepare and quantify the financial impact of some of these risks until outcomes are known. There are several risks identified in the risk register that to fully mitigate would be unaffordable. In these cases, the risk is identified, and the Council needs to consider and assess how best to mitigate and continue lobbying WG to provide more funding in these areas, as these risks are not unique to Newport. These areas do, however, continue to be monitored closely to ensure that where information is available these risks are considered and where appropriate factored into the Council's financial planning.

6.4 Four current risks with significant uncertainty are (i) stability of social services providers, (ii) pressures on adult services (iii) pressure on delivery of children services and (iv) pressure on housing and homelessness services and in the case of challenges facing social care have already been considered earlier in this report.

6.5 A number of budget investments /pressures are included in this draft budget which directly impact positively on some current risks in the corporate risk register:

Table 7 – Corporate Risk register and the draft budget

RISK	DRAFT BUDGET
Demand for education Additional Learning Needs / Special Education Needs support	budget pressure included in the draft budget
Education out of county placements	
School Finance / cost pressures	no savings included for schools in the draft budget core funding for pay currently funded via grant which is stopping and funding of increased school pupil numbers in the draft budget
Pressure on housing and homelessness	budget pressure included in the draft budget
Stability of social care providers	budget inflation fully funded to maintain at least a living wage level to care providers staff in the

Pressure on adult services	draft budget
Pressure on delivery of children's service	budget inflation fully funded to maintain at least a living wage level to care providers staff in the draft budget budget pressure for increased demand and investment in the safeguarding hub included in the draft budget
Welsh Government net zero carbon target by 2030	The budget saving for reduced energy costs for 2024/25 is 'net' of £500k which has been earmarked / invested for annual match funding for WG funding streams in relation to net zero projects

6.6 In the context of the challenging economic climate, whilst there are potential options to manage these risks, the likelihood is that the following areas of mitigation will be required to support the challenges set out above. Appendix 9 sets out the current risks included within the register.

- existing revenue contingency budget;
- existing revenue budgets not yet committed and could, in whole or part, be set aside to manage revenue budget risks in the short term;
- specific reserves earmarked for budget risks;
- investment in revenue budgets to mitigate risks on an on-going basis.

6.7 The HoF is required to independently assess and report on the adequacy of the budget (and council tax level as an integral part of this) and reserves in the context of the financial issues and risks facing the Council. The assessment of the risks mentioned here and how we plan and utilise the above options are key to this.

Financial Resilience

6.8 A robust view is taken in managing budget risks and protecting the financial health of the Council. The following are key considerations for the HoF in fulfilling his s151 responsibilities in this regard:

- Close monitoring of a number of key indicators relevant to financial resilience. A 'snapshot' of these are shown in Appendix 6 showing an overview of the health of the Council currently. Key headlines include:
 - The relatively low funding levels for the Council due to low Council Tax.
 - A relatively high level, by historical standards, of unachieved savings.
 - Increasingly high levels of service area overspending which has been mitigated by contingencies and non-service underspends to date but the ability for this to continue is reducing significantly from 2024/25 onwards.
 - A growing 'Capital Financing Requirement' and 'Liability Benchmark' which measures the Council's underlying need for borrowing.
 - A relatively large internal borrowing position in the context of high interest rate environment, diminishing cash reserves and reserves which are reducing over the short to medium term.
- *Earmarked & General Reserves*: In line with planned use, earmarked reserves are forecast to reduce by c£26m in the current 2023/24 year and whilst the total remaining is still relatively high at c£112m, nearly all of these are earmarked for specific purposes. However, as a last resort they do provide some mitigation but use of them means that the original purpose would be affected and/or would result in a budget pressure to build those reserves up again, as well as delaying the identification of recurring mitigation for the identified budget gap.

- *Revenue Contingency budget – General Reserves:* The contingency base budget and other specific risk reserves held by the Council are taken into consideration when assessing the level of the general reserve and help to mitigate the risk to the Council. The general reserve is increasingly becoming too low, as the Council's net budget increases each year but can be maintained at that level due to the overall level of reserves which, in the last resort, provide more than adequate financial mitigation, albeit with resulting impacts as noted above.
- *School budgets- Reserves:* Although the position in relation to school reserves has improved over the last couple of years, there is a forecasted large reduction in these in 2023/24 as they spend additional grants received over those years and more worryingly, overspending in their day-to-day activities. The forecast net spends against school budgets this year will see reserve balances reduce by nearly £5m to £9.8m at the end of this financial year.
- *Current budget savings-managing the revenue budget – demands on the revenue budget:* The Council has identified and continues to monitor budget reductions of nearly £12m in 2023/24 and whilst understandable delays in delivery is evident, HoS continue to confirm they can and will be implemented though are high, by historical standards at this point. This needs to be viewed within the context of continued significant demands which are faced by service areas, namely children's social care and homelessness, which have been highlighted throughout the year as part of the budget monitoring process. Mitigation for these have been mainly provided from planned savings on the Council's 'capital financing budgets' but this will reduce from 2024/25 onwards as the capital programme is delivered. Whilst financial management is increasingly challenging in some areas, all services need to ensure they spend at their approved budget levels and the budget investments provided in the budget will assist in this respect.
- *Transformation Programme -* The Council has yet to finalise a developed and costed strategic transformation programme and work on that is on-going. Several individual projects have already started but some of these and key projects in Children's social care and homelessness, which have not yet started have yet to finalise business cases. The development of a costed programme, with target savings and an appropriate governance structure to support and review progress is key to the future financial sustainability of the Council. The Council has its 'transformation plan fund' (previously invest to save) reserve to fund the one-off cost of change and Cabinet have already been recommended to invest the current year's underspend back into this reserve to ensuring on-going sustainability of this reserve which is key. The programme is integral to developing ongoing financial sustainability whilst also ensuring key services can be delivered.
- *Loss of specific grants and worsening homelessness finances –* The settlement was received on the 20th December and confirmed potentially large reductions in several key grants streams, some of which fund demand led services. The Cabinet will need to consider and where needed, address these in the final budget recommendations. As noted earlier in this report, a significant investment in homelessness provision is already included in the budget but at this time, further pressures are also evident and will also need further consideration and addressing in the final budget. Lastly here, funding for the teacher's increased pension costs is still outstanding and this will need to be reviewed as the final budget recommendation is conformed in February 2024.

6.8 The HoF will need to consider all of the above when a final budget is proposed to the Council. It is evident that whilst finances have been managed very robustly in recent years, the on-going challenges in services managing within budgets, delivery of savings and managing future borrowing requirements will be difficult in the forthcoming MTFP period and all done within an environment of low funding coming from relatively low Council Tax and increasing demand on services.

7 Report review and statutory comments

7.1 Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
Planning parameters around inflation are incorrect	H	H	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Use of contingency, where required 2 Use of reserves, where appropriate 	Head of Finance Exec Board
Planning parameters around Welsh Government revenue grant are incorrect over medium term	H	M	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of contingency, where required 2. Keep the assumptions under constant review 3. Use of conservative assumptions 	Head of Finance
Increasing budget pressures over medium term	H	M	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manage demand, where possible 2. Keep MTFP under constant review 3. Exec Board review all budget pressures within MTFP 	Exec Board

* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The overall aim of the budget and MTFP is to ensure resource allocation is based on priorities, supports the delivery of the Council's soon to be developed change programme, saving proposals and protects the financial health of the Council.

Options Available and considered.

There are few options available as the Council is required to consult on its budget where decisions do not fall under delegated authority and therefore needs to agree the basis of its consultation.

Preferred Option and Why

To consult on the new medium-term package of investments and savings to ensure a sustainable offering deliverable over the medium term.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

The budget report is seeking Cabinet approval to begin consultation on a range of draft budget proposals. Cabinet will agree final proposals in their February meeting after considering consultation feedback. Final proposals will be considered by full Council in their February meeting and a budget agreed, alongside a Council Tax rate, at that point.

There are outstanding issues that remain to be worked through between this time and the final budget proposals as officers work through the detailed issues of the settlement, in particular specific grants and other issues like levies. These will inevitably lead to considerations of further budget investments / pressures and savings as it does every year.

In the context of potential real terms reductions in RSG funding from 2025/26 onwards, delivering a robust budget is important as it provides a solid foundation to move into those future years. The draft budget here does not rely on a general use of reserves to 'balance the budget' and that is important in

this respect. Similarly, developing a more medium term, strategic approach to identify budget savings will be more important than ever. Whilst a number of corporate wide transformation projects are on-going, there is still a need for further plans in other areas, in particular Children's services and housing services to manage the demand and cost issues impacting on these areas. A key requirement will also be to identify financial savings from these projects as soon as practically possible and appropriate governance arrangements to support and monitor progress.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the Report at this stage. Cabinet is being asked to approve the draft savings proposals and council tax rate set out in the Report in order to deliver a balanced budget for 24/25 and as the basis for public consultation, where the relevant business cases will have an impact on service delivery and are not matters delegated to Heads of Service. Cabinet will then take the final decisions on those business cases in the light of the responses to the public consultation, prior to full Council approval of the annual revenue budget and council tax rate for 24/25. Relevant business cases have been the subject of fairness and equality impact assessments to ensure that the Council has regard to its public sector equality duties under the Equality Act and is acting fairly in terms of the impact of the proposed changes on service delivery. In addition, where specific proposals require more focussed consultation with staff and key stakeholders, this will be carried out prior to the implementation of any proposed changes. The setting of the overall base budget and council tax rate for 24/25 is a matter for full Council as these are non-executive reserved matters under the Constitution.

Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation

This report describes the challenging financial position facing the council, its residents, staff, and businesses. The financial position for 2024/25 reflects the increasingly challenging situation in the medium term which is expected to impact on service delivery and meeting our public sector duties. Officers across service areas are working closely to support actions to enable a balanced budget across the council.

Public consultation will take place on the proposals as outlined in the report. Any direct impact on Council staff will require formal consultation with those staff impacted and the relevant recognised Trade Union Officers. The Human Resources team are supporting senior officers and staff members during this period and will continue to do so during consultation period. Minimising the impact on staff will be a priority, however the scale of budget challenge will likely mean that the Council may have to make redundancies though the numbers are low by historical levels, especially on posts which are currently occupied. Feedback from consultation, both public and staff, will be included in the report to Cabinet in February and decision making around proposals will consider relevant feedback.

The Fairness and Equalities Assessments undertaken will be amended following consultation with due consideration for ensuring we meet our public sector equality duties with all decisions.

Scrutiny Committees

The constitution requires that Scrutiny Committees be consulted on Cabinet's draft budget proposals.

Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment:

- **Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act**
- **Equality Act 2010**
- **Socio-economic Duty**
- **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011**

Long term - The medium-term approach that is in place for financial planning within the Council is intended to bridge the gap between longer-term strategic aspirations and sustainable development concerns with the more immediate pressures of setting a balanced budget each year.

Prevention – Taken as a whole, the proposed investments are geared towards sustaining preventative type services and focussing on some of the most vulnerable groups which should have the greatest impact over the longer term and will help to prevent negative outcomes getting worse.

Integration – The budget and medium-term financial plan has the overall aim of balancing resource allocation across services to support the range of strategic priorities and the delivery of the Council's change programme whilst ensuring financial sustainability.

Involvement – The budget is informed by insight gained from public engagement work, including previous budget consultations. Pre-budget public engagement on the relative prioritisation of Council services has informed the proposed budget investments. Newport Fairness Commission along with other stakeholders will be engaged as part of the consultation.

Collaboration – Whilst the budget and medium-term financial plan is a Council owned document it recognises that services are increasingly delivered in a collaborative public sector landscape with a greater emphasis on regional working e.g. through Corporate Joint Committees, Gwent-wide and South East Wales based partnerships.

Consultation

Details included within body of the report.

Background Papers

November Revenue Budget Monitor
2023/24 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

Dated: 4 January 2024

**DRAFT SCRUTINY COMMENTS – EXTRACT FROM DRAFT MINUTES
(FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 30 JANUARY 2024)**

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PLACE AND CORPORATE

Draft Budget Proposals 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Plan

Invitees:

- Paul Jones (Strategic Director Environment and Sustainability)
- Rhys Cornwall – Strategic Director – Transformation and Corporate Centre
- Meirion Rushworth – Head of Finance
- David Walton – Head of Housing and Communities
- Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez – Head of Environment and Public Protection
- Stephen Jarrett – Head of Infrastructure
- Elizabeth Bryant – Head of Law and Standards
- Tracey Brooks – Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
- Tracy McKim – Head of People, Policy and Transformation

The Head of Finance introduced a brief overview of the budget process.

Budget Pressures and Investments

The following was discussed:

Housing and Communities

Shortfall in Housing Benefit subsidy arising from increasing demand for temporary accommodation

- The Committee raised concerns about the reduction in the Communities for Work grants by the Welsh Government and its impact on homelessness services. They questioned if the proposed additional funding of £600,000 would be sufficient, considering the £1 million overspend from the previous year. They also enquired about strategic asset investment to address the reliance on bed and breakfast accommodations for temporary accommodation and homelessness. The Head of Housing and Communities advised ongoing work with Registered Social Landlord partners to develop more social and transitional accommodations and emphasised the focus on homelessness prevention. The Strategic Director acknowledged the increasing pressures and the need for a long-term plan to address homelessness, while also highlighting the need to monitor the impact of grant changes and refine the financial position accordingly.

Environment and Public Protection

Costs associated with increasing requirement for tree maintenance

- The Head of Environment and Public Protection explained that the ongoing costs associated with tree maintenance, including the need for intervention in various tree species, are separate from the specific project addressing ash dieback. The maintenance costs are attributed to the ongoing need to manage and maintain trees on public land, adopted highways, schools, and other areas due to issues causing structural damage and the need to increase tree cover. This ongoing maintenance proves to be quite costly in terms of resources.
- The Committee asked about the projected costs for tree maintenance in the next few years, and the Head of Finance confirmed the figures. The Committee expressed the

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need for clearer communication regarding such budget items. The Head of Finance acknowledged the suggestion of aligning budget reports for better clarity.

- The Committee asked about the Council's equipment and capabilities for tree maintenance in relation to ash dieback and whether any of the allocated £115,000 would go towards plant and equipment. The Strategic Director explained that the majority of tree maintenance work is outsourced to contractors due to the need for specialised machinery, such as cranes, which would not be cost-effective for the Council to own.
- The Committee questioned whether the allocated budget of £115,000 for tree maintenance in subsequent years could vary, and the Strategic Director confirmed that it could fluctuate based on historic performance and the identification of tree defects.

Landfill site closure – associated loss of income.

- The Committee enquired about the £975,000 investment related to the closure of the landfill site and its associated loss of income. The Head of Environment and Public Protection explained that the landfill site at the Docks Way site is reaching the end of its life and will no longer be able to accept waste, leading to a loss of income. The Strategic Director clarified that there are no plans for a new landfill site, as the trend is towards reducing disposal and increasing recycling and incineration. The Committee also sought clarification on the impact of the landfill closure on commercial businesses in Newport. The Head of Environment and Public Protection advised on the upcoming workplace regulations that will require businesses to segregate recycling, leading to a decrease in residual waste. Additionally, the Committee sought assurance that the Council would continue to provide businesses with waste collection services. The response confirmed that the Council would continue waste collection services, and non-recyclable waste would be directed to Trident Park for disposal.
- The Strategic Director clarified that the closure of the landfill site would only affect the disposal of waste into the landfill, and that the site's commercial operations and public waste disposal facilities would remain the same. Additionally, the Strategic Director advised that medium-sized businesses may need to consider alternative waste disposal methods, such as incineration, due to cost-effectiveness and tax considerations.

Infrastructure

Bus station departure charges

- The Committee questioned the £225,000 pressure for bus station departure charges and the lack of a budget allocation for the following year. The Head of Infrastructure explained that public transport operators pay a departure charge to use the bus stations, but the bus industry is undergoing significant funding changes. The end of bus transition funding and the consideration of new funding contribute to the pressure. Increasing the departure charge to cover the gap could negatively impact bus routes and residents.
- The Committee enquired about the previous identification of the budget shortfall related to bus departure charges, which the Strategic Director confirmed would have been covered by subsidies in the past. They also discussed the historical context of the issue, highlighting that the shortfall was not a recent development due to the end

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of transitional funding. The Strategic Director explained that the costs have increased over the years, leading to the current gap in the budget. The Committee sought clarification on whether the figure represented actual costs or a loss of revenue, to which the Strategic Director confirmed it as a loss of revenue. They also discussed the contributions from bus companies and the impact of the departure charge on the budget shortfall. The Strategic Director emphasised the significant gap between the realistic expectation of bus departures and the budgeted revenue. Finally, the Committee enquired about addressing the issue in the future, to which the Strategic Director explained that once the pressure is addressed, the gap in the budget would be eliminated.

- The Committee expressed their concern about including the bus costs in the budget every year without finding a solution. The Strategic Director explained that one alternative would be to pass the costs fully to the bus companies, but this could result in a significant reduction in bus services. The Committee mentioned the need to wait for the Burns report to assess the impact of any changes.
- The Strategic Director explained that the Council subsidises bus routes in various ways, but this budget investment specifically focused on departure charges. The Chair emphasised the need to understand the current payment before determining if there is a deficit. The Strategic Director clarified that the gap in the budget developed due to a decrease in the number of bus journeys, resulting in a shortfall. The Head of Finance provided additional context, advising that many councils charge bus operators for accessing and using bus facilities to cover the costs of infrastructure maintenance. They acknowledged that the current departure charge may not fully cover the costs but increasing it significantly would require careful consideration. The Committee expressed the need for the cost per trip to align with the actual maintenance costs. The Head of Finance acknowledged the comment and explained that the budget adjustments were necessary to ensure the budget is appropriately sized. The cost per trip could be a topic for discussion during the budget review.
- The Committee questioned why the bus charges were not recurring in the budget and why they were not being included. They expressed concerns about inflation and the potential impact on bus services, suggesting that the budget should reflect these ongoing costs. The Head of Finance clarified that there is an existing budget for departure charges, and the £225,000 mentioned is a reduction in that budget line. The bus companies will continue to be charged for using the bus station, and the adjustment is necessary to ensure the budget is appropriately sized. The Committee asked if there would be additional costs in the coming years, to which the Head of Finance explained that it would depend on factors such as bus patronage and service levels. They acknowledged the need to consider future developments, such as the Burns report and the city centre's housing and transportation provisions. The Head of Finance mentioned that if there is higher patronage and more bus services in the future, there could potentially be savings associated with the budget. The Committee emphasised the importance of considering these factors in the budget and showing indicators of future considerations. The Head of Finance clarified that the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covers a three-year period and assumes a certain level of bus patronage for the next year and relatively flat levels for the following two years. Adjustments can be made if there are changes in bus services and patronage patterns.

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Fleet maintenance – budget pressures in relation to tyres and other supplies.

- The Committee raised concerns about the ongoing budget pressure for tyres and other supplies, questioning whether it would be included in the budget for future years. The Head of Finance confirmed that once a figure appears in the budget, it is assumed to be a permanent and ongoing cost unless there is a negative adjustment in the following year.
- The Committee questioned why the maintenance contract did not include services such as tyre replacement to avoid repeated payments, and suggested renegotiating the contract to include all maintenance services. The Head of Infrastructure explained that they already secure services competitively and ensure appropriate purchasing through term or framework contracts. The Strategic Director advised that the contract is for a specific duration and parts prices tend to increase over time. The Chair asked if the Council leases vehicles, to which the Strategic Director clarified that the discussion pertained to the maintenance of Council-owned vehicles. The Chair suggested that tyre replacement could be included in the lease charge for full repairs. The Strategic Director acknowledged that such negotiations may have been considered during procurement, but factors such as the number of vehicles and the rising costs of parts and staff wages need to be taken into account.

Regeneration and Economic Development

Staffing resource to fulfil the client role in relation to leisure services.

- The Committee requested a broad outline of the new role and if a job description had been written for it. The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained that the funding management areas are complex, with a document of about 600 pages outlining the Council's expectations and the services to be delivered by Newport Live. They have monthly liaison meetings with Newport Live to discuss relevant issues, but there is room for improvement in understanding the finer details of the funding management agreement. The Committee expressed the need for a better mechanism to provide feedback from constituents regarding the services of Newport Live. They suggested following up on this matter when someone is in place to address it.
- The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development advised that they have client contracts but not one specifically for Newport Live, which is a significant multi-million pound contract. They believe that having additional resources would help them manage the contract more effectively, as it currently requires a significant amount of their time. While they cannot guarantee savings or efficiencies at the moment, they believe that having more focus and scrutiny on contract management would be beneficial, especially considering feedback from audit reviews. The Strategic Director emphasised that Newport Live is delivering services on behalf of the committee. The goal is to ensure that the Council has enough resources to effectively oversee these services. This is seen as an opportunity to address any deficiencies and improve the overall management of the contract.
- The Committee raised concerns about whether the proposed position is necessary for one person, considering that it hasn't been needed previously. They also highlighted the significant salary of £65,000, which they consider to be a reasonably senior position within the Council. They questioned the savings or benefits that would be delivered by this position, especially in a time of budget cuts. The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development emphasised the importance of maximising

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efficiency and return on the multi-million pound contract with Newport Live. They felt that having someone dedicated to scrutinising the contract and ensuring accurate reporting to the Council is necessary. While they acknowledged that additional efficiencies may be derived, they currently allocated a portion of their and the service manager's time to this task.

Energy budget requirement for new leisure centre.

- The Committee expressed doubts about the figures regarding the energy budget requirement for the new leisure centre, and commented that £500,000 has been allocated to subsidise the medium-term financial plan for this year and the next, but they believe that it doesn't cost £500,000 to run the leisure centre. They suggest that there may be a surplus from the centre that could potentially cover the £500,000 required in year three. The Strategic Director explained that the current budget associated with Newport Centre for energy is £500,000, which has been treated as a saving for the Council in the next two years. However, it was always understood that this money would need to be returned to the budget once the leisure centre was operational. They highlighted that the Council has benefited from this arrangement for the past two years, and the money would be allocated back into the budget in year three.

The Committee questioned whether the energy costs would reduce significantly, considering the zero carbon nature of the building and the significant solar investment. They wondered if the costs would be much less than half a million pounds going forward. The Strategic Director responded, explaining that the original budget for energy costs was higher. Adjustments were made when energy prices increased, and some net savings were put forward last year. The challenge lies in the transition from gas to electricity. The savings from using electricity are currently marginal compared to gas, as the price of gas was cheaper. The long-term projection is that the price of gas will increase as necessary, and electricity costs will be lower. The Strategic Director noted that gas cannot be used past 2030, meaning that while there are some savings due to energy efficiency, the fact that gas cannot be used going forward offsets some of those savings.

Law and Standards

Increased contribution to Coroner's Service, resulting from additional staffing resources and the running costs of the new building.

- The Committee enquired about the input of other councils in the increased costs of the Coroner's Service. The Head of Law and Standards confirmed that other councils are fully involved in the process and will contribute based on their population size.
- The Committee clarified that the minimum investment needed from Newport City Council's perspective is £85,000, which is the Council's share of the investment.

Resources (external and internal) required to support the Transformation Programme.

- The Committee asked if there are plans to take into account the Welsh Government's policy of taking profit out of children's care when looking at children's care transformation. The Strategic Director referred to the Eliminate agenda and the regional and Newport transmission teams associated with it, which are already looking at the transformation of children's care. The Performance Scrutiny Committee - People would be involved in the ongoing work related to the transformation. The

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Strategic Director highlighted the link between the Eliminate agenda and the assets work, with the goal of reducing the burden on the Council and ensuring the right assets are in place for children's services.

- The Committee expressed concern about the high percentage of children in care in the private sector and the need to address the lack of existing assets. The Strategic Director advised of the existence of an asset board and the involvement of the Head of Children's Services in that agenda.

People, Policy and Transformation

Property budget pressures, including income shortfalls and additional maintenance costs

- The Committee advised that there were price pressures in estate management, yet in 2025-26, an underspend of £115,000 was forecasted. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation acknowledged that this was an oversight and stated that it was definitely an overspending situation year on year. They recognised it as a typo and advised that they would review and amend the forecast accordingly.

New Budget Savings for Consultation

02 - To transform Malpas Court Mansion House into a new Community Learning Centre. To meet changing customer demand, develop Library community outreach whilst reducing the number of physical sites.

- The Committee expressed support for transforming Malpas Court due to its underutilisation, but opposed the closure of Pill Library, highlighting its importance to the BME community and its role in education and language learning. The Committee suggested relocating the Community at Work team to the library space in Bettws Library and utilising it for workshops and services for young people. The Head of Housing and Communities acknowledged the importance of libraries to communities and expressed willingness to consider the Committee's input during the consultation process.
- The Committee questioned the workload and responsibilities of the proposed Community Librarian position, which would replace two grade five posts. They expressed concern about one person covering the entire area of Newport and requested more details on the role's responsibilities. The Head of Housing and Communities explained that the workload would be manageable within the existing structure, with support from the community regeneration manager and library manager. The specific program of events and services would be shaped through consultation and tailored to meet the needs of the community.

03 - Charge for replacement (residual waste) bins

- The Committee asked if there would be any dispensation for residents who are unable to control the safety of their bins, such as those living in areas prone to theft or without secure storage. The Head of Environment and Public Protection clarified that the charging only applies to refuse bins, while recycling boxes and garden waste bins would still be provided free of charge. The provision of bins incurs costs related to managing requests and delivery. The Head of Environment and Public Protection acknowledged that some locations may be more disadvantaged in terms of bin placement, but the measure would apply equally to all residents. The Committee

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enquired about whether residents were charged for replacement bins in the previous year and the revenue generated. The Head of Environment and Public Protection confirmed that the measure was not implemented in the previous year.

- The Head of Environment and Public Protection confirmed that the charge for a replacement residual waste bin would be £23.70, and this appears in the Fees and Charges section in Appendix 5 of the agenda.

04 - Highways fees and Charges - Increase of Fees by 8%

- The Committee enquired about the allocation of funds for unexpected issues such as potholes and pipe repairs. The Head of Infrastructure explained that there is a revenue budget specifically designated for reactive maintenance, including pothole repairs. The budget is utilised on an annual basis to address these issues as they arise. Highway inspectors and customer contacts help identify areas that require action related to potholes. The Chair advised the Committee that the Highways Asset Management Plan will provide more detailed information on maintaining and repairing highways, which will be discussed in future committee meetings. The Strategic Director confirmed that the core revenue budget for highways maintenance has not changed as part of the budget proposals.

05 - Reduction in Newport Live Management Fee

- The Committee enquired about whether the reduction in fee is in line with the agreement. The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained that the funding management agreement states that the funding will be set each year. However, the fee reduction has not been reviewed since the trust was established and the contract was awarded. Last year, they implemented a 10% reduction in light of the financial situation and the need for businesses to review their operations and delivery. They propose another 10% reduction this year, acknowledging that it may not be necessary to come back every year with the same request. They expressed that, at this time, they consider a further 10% reduction to be reasonable.

06- Closure of Civic Centre for two days a week, reducing spend on utilities

- The Committee asked if the entire building would be closed or if there would still be some areas in use. They also expressed concern about the impact of temperature fluctuations on the building's fabric. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that the proposal was to close almost all of the building, with only a few small pockets that required maintenance remaining open. For example, the CCTV staff still needed to work from the building due to the infrastructure involved. They explained that the heating system couldn't be fully compartmentalised due to the building's outdated design. As a result, the proposal aimed to close most of the building, except for the manageable small areas. The Committee acknowledged the challenge of temperature fluctuations and the need to heat the building when people entered, especially considering the fabric's vulnerability. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation agreed that it was a challenge. They mentioned that the proposed closure aimed to extend the weekend by shifting the heating problem from Monday to Tuesday, although there was already a heating challenge on Mondays. They further explained that finding arrangements to close the building for two additional days a week was a real challenge. However, they emphasised the need to

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explore all budget options and identify ways to achieve savings, with building closure being one of the potential approaches.

- The Committee asked if alternative models, such as closing the building for four days every two weeks, had been considered. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation acknowledged that alternate models could be fed back from scrutiny and explained that this proposal highlighted the cost implications of one day. They advised that different models and different days would result in slightly different savings, as they had calculated based on the varying footfall on different days. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation further discussed the practical considerations, such as handling mail and post, which often required physical scanning and posting, even if electronic methods were used. They noted that many staff did not have printers and relied on coming to the civic building for printing. They emphasised the importance of convenience and mentioned the possibility of exploring other locations.
- The Committee raised concerns about the practical implications of closing the Civic Centre for a few days and asked about provisions made to safeguard employee well-being and ensure the delivery of services, considering the loss of human interaction and collaborative work that occurs in an office setting. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation advised that the unions had been involved in changes to working from home policies. They explained that they would discuss the proposed savings in more detail with the Employee Partnership Forum. They clarified that most Newport City Council staff had contracts allowing them to work from home or come into the building, and some had applied to work full-time from home. They assured that agreements with the unions were in place, but they were also aware of staff who needed to come into the office due to unsuitable home environments or other reasons. The well-being of employees was a priority, and they had conducted staff engagement and well-being surveys to address concerns.
- The Strategic Director added that they had already experienced changes in work practices due to the pandemic and advised of a previous initiative called "The New Normal," which involved extensive engagement with unions and staff. Many employees already had a hybrid work arrangement, coming into the office for 1 or 2 days a week and working from home for the rest. They acknowledged the complexity of maintaining services that required face-to-face interaction, particularly in departments like social services that had a front door in the Civic Centre. The Strategic Director emphasised the Council's track record of working closely with trade unions to ensure the well-being and welfare of employees. They advised of the ongoing efforts to address concerns and conduct well-being surveys. They also acknowledged the need to consider alternative locations for those unable to work from home full-time and the importance of maintaining engagement and teamwork.
- The Committee enquired whether there were any possibilities of redundancies with the proposal. The Committee were advised that the proposal does not include any staffing impacts because the savings are based on reduced energy consumption.
- The Committee asked if the footfall numbers noted earlier (250 to 300) included both staff and visitors. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation clarified that those

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numbers were likely only for staff and that they could double-check. They mentioned that the number of visitors to the Civic Centre was generally low, with most coming for specific requirements such as a Taxi Licensing review. They explained that the number of customers visiting would depend on the services located in the building. However, they acknowledged the need to gather more specific figures on visitor numbers. The Committee expressed concern about accommodating visitors who may not have online access or internet and rely on physically coming to the building. They emphasised the importance of informing such individuals that they should visit on Tuesday to Thursday instead of Monday to Friday and ensuring that alternative locations were available for them if needed.

- The Committee inquired about the number of people who visit the Civic Centre on a daily basis, specifically those who cannot work from home and come to the building five days a week. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation advised that the specific data on the number of daily visitors had not been collected yet. They advised that the system for logging in was relatively new, and the footfall numbers provided earlier were averages over a short period. They are currently reviewing the specific needs of departments and services within the Council in case the proposed changes were implemented.

07 - Fraud prevention initiative

- The Committee asked about the process for investigations and potential challenges if someone disputes the accusations. They enquired whether there would be an appeal process, possibly involving Magistrates courts. The Head of Finance responded that they would need to establish their own framework for conducting investigations. They advised that the implementation of the policy would focus on cases where someone had claimed benefits for at least eight weeks when they should not have. They referred to their existing work on the National Fraud Initiative, which involves data matching and investigations resulting in actions being taken. They explained that if deliberate withholding of information was suspected, they would go the extra mile and pursue fines. The Committee then asked about the current appeal process for disputes. The Head of Finance advised they did not have that information but assured the Committee that they would obtain it from the Revenue department.
- The Committee asked about the estimated number of individuals with fraudulent intent per year. The Head of Finance responded that they had made a realistic assumption based on the background information, and the figure they used was 350.
- The Committee asked for background information on the draft budget's mention of legislation for increasing teacher pension costs by £3.4 million. The Head of Finance explained that all public sector pension schemes are valued and revalued every three years to ensure that the funds are sufficient to meet the liabilities. In the case of the teachers' pension scheme, it has been revalued, resulting in a 5% increase in the employer's pension contribution. The £3.4 million figure represents the impact of this increase on the Council's budget. The Head of Finance advised that the teachers' pension scheme is a UK national scheme that applies to all authorities across the country.

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- The Committee questioned whether the shortfall in the pension scheme was due to mismanagement by those responsible for it. The Head of Finance clarified that the valuation of the scheme is conducted by the Government's Actuary service, and the cost increase is guaranteed. They explained that they were awaiting final confirmation that the Welsh Government would be funded by the UK government, and if so, the cost would be passed down to local authorities. They assured the Committee that the increase in pension costs would be funded nationally and would not affect Council Tax.

The Chair thanked the Officers for attending.

Conclusions:

Comments to the Cabinet on the following proposals:

- a) The Committee noted the budget proposals relevant to the Place and Corporate Directorates and agreed to forward the minutes to Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.
- b) The Committee wished to make Cabinet aware that throughout the meeting and questioning of Officers, the Committee were concerned that the information presented for consultation is poorly presented and easily misunderstood. For example, in the appendices around budget savings over the Medium Term Financial Plan, the documents do not make clear that investments in Year 1 will continue in Years 2 and 3. Members were concerned that the same misunderstanding could be made by members of the public when responding to the consultation. The Committee also wished to recommend that more detailed budget training is provided to all members to help ensure that the documents are fully understood and to enable proper scrutiny to take place.
- c) The Committee wished to make the following comments to Cabinet on the Proposals within the Place and Corporate Directorate:

02 - To transform Malpas Court Mansion House into a new Community Learning Centre. To meet changing customer demand, develop Library community outreach whilst reducing the number of physical sites.

- The Committee recommended that Cabinet need to ensure that the impact on service users for this savings proposal is minimal. The Committee also suggested that there were other options which don't appear to have been explored, such as the Community at Work and the Youth Service move into Bettws Library to ensure services are not lost.
- In addition, concern was raised about the workload of the new Community Librarian post that would be created. The Committee felt that it may be too much work for one person and emphasised the need for realistic expectations and ensuring that residents who use the services would see a significant difference.

03 - Charge for replacement (residual waste) bins

- The Committee were content for this proposal to go ahead. The Committee recommend to Cabinet that the policy is implemented with an element of discretion given to Officers on implementation, to protect the most vulnerable individuals across the city as well as discretion to protect individuals who may not be able to afford

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replacement bins or who may face difficulties in managing their bins due to their living situations.

- The Committee recommended to Cabinet that the Council should implement a coding/labelling system with a barcode on each bin with its address to prevent theft or misuse.
- The Committee also felt that the cost of the replacement bins should have been noted in the main commentary of the savings proposal and not just in the Fees and Charges section in Appendix 5, making it difficult for members responding to the consultation to locate the detail.

The Committee also wished to leave comments on the following Savings investments for the Environment and Public Protection service area:

Costs associated with increasing requirement for tree maintenance.

- The Committee felt that they did not get an adequate explanation on this saving investment, only that contractors were called in for tree maintenance. The Committee were also concerned that the documents did not make clear that the budget increase is £115k in Year 1, £230k in Year 2 and £345k in Year 3. The committee questioned the need for £345k investment in Year 3 and also questioned the need for investment of £690k over a 3-year period.

Landfill site closure – associated loss of income.

- The Committee were content with this savings investment, but wished to comment that consideration must be given to the impact on our net zero targets of having lorries transport waste to other locations to ensure that the net zero goals are not compromised.

The Committee were also concerned about the Stray Dogs Reclaiming Fees within the Fees and Charges in Appendix 5 – regarding dogs reclaimed within 4 hours being charged at £54.00 per dog. The Committee questioned the fairness of the implementation of this fee at the current level and recommended Cabinet gain an insight from the service area into its planned investment. The Committee also asked for further information from officers as to whether there has been an increase in the amount of XL Bully dogs being given up or abandoned since the new laws come into action.

04 - Highways fees and Charges - Increase of Fees by 8%

- The Committee were content with this proposal.

The Committee also wished to leave comments on the following Savings investments for the Infrastructure service area:

Bus station departure charges.

- The Committee wished to recommend that the bus station departure charges should not be added as a permanent budget line. Instead, it should be treated as an annual subsidy or grant to the bus operators, subject to review each year based on the performance of the bus services and other factors. The Committee suggested that this addition to the budget is effectively the council subsidising fares for members of the public and should be credited as such. An additional reason for assessing it each year as a subsidy is the ongoing work by the Burns Transport Commission might

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have a significant impact on sustainable public transport and mean the subsidy may not be needed in future if user numbers increase. Also, the Council should consider the net zero impact of the bus station charge and explore ways to minimise its impact on bus fares and services.

- The Committee also commented that they would like to consider the bus service charges as a future agenda item to be added to the 2024-25 forward work programme. The Committee asked significant questions to officers around the budget, costs of running the service, rent to Friars Walk, infrastructure costs and were not entirely satisfied with the answers provided. The area is complex and a sustainable, affordable transport network is a vital service, so the Committee felt it would be appropriate to give the area focus and scrutiny.

Fleet maintenance – budget pressures in relation to tyres and other supplies.

- The Committee wished to ensure that the Council follow best value and procurement practices to obtain better value for fleet maintenance services, as well as considering renegotiating the contract for fleet maintenance services to include the cost of tyres and other supplies as part of lease charges.

05 - Reduction in Newport Live Management Fee

- It was acknowledged that the reduction in the management fee would result in cost savings for the Council, but concern was raised about the potential impact it may have on the facilities and services provided by Newport Live. The Committee would like to know what services, if any, may be cut by Newport Live as a result of the reduction in the management fee and at the time of the committee meeting, that information wasn't available to Officers.

The Committee also wished to leave comments on the following Savings investments for the Regeneration and Economic Development service area:

Staffing resource to fulfil the client role in relation to leisure services.

- The Committee questioned whether this resource was needed, as the role was not required in the past, and there was no indication what the extra resource would be made up of as a business case was not presented. The Committee felt that Officers were unable provide acceptable justification for the need for the additional post or whether it was required to be a full-time post. The Committee recommended to Cabinet that it satisfies itself that the post is needed given the budget pressures and the requirement to reduce resources elsewhere.

06 - Closure of Civic Centre for two days a week, reducing spend on utilities

- The Committee recommend that Cabinet put this savings proposal on hold until the proper analysis of the data is understood and the impact that this will have on our people and services. Concerns were raised that more contextual data was needed, such as details of length of time the quoted 250-300 staff were working in the Civic Centre. In addition, no information was available on the number of staff who work at the Civic Centre full-time and no account has been taken of the requirement to heat the building from cold more regularly which could result in higher costs overall. The Committee recommended to Cabinet that whilst this budget line was attractive as a saving, the impact is considerable and should be considered in the wider context of our overall Asset review, as decisions now may affect the ability of that review to rationalise assets in the future. The Committee were also concerned that the

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timeframe was too short to consult with staff and understand the impact on well-being.

The Committee also wished to leave comments on the following Savings investments for the People, Policy and Transformation service area:

Property budget pressures, including income shortfalls and additional maintenance costs.

- The Committee noted the typo under the 2025/26 £'000 column which the service area was aware of and will amend. The Committee recommended that Cabinet be satisfied with the correct data given to them and that the consultation documents are amended. In general, the Committee were content with this savings investment.

07 - Fraud prevention initiative

- The Committee were content with this proposal but wished to recommend to Cabinet to ensure that the Council develop a robust set of policies and procedures for implementing the scheme to ensure fairness, such as presenting a clear set of parameters for appeals, how they are investigated and how the Council would mitigate the possibility of being fined if appeals are overturned against the local authority. The Committee also cautioned that the costs of the additional investment of resource in investigations and appeals may mean the £70 statutory fine for each case is not worth the effort required to manage the process.
- The Committee would like to receive information about the appeals process for this initiative once available.

The Committee also wished to leave comments on the following Savings investments for the Finance service area:

Resources (external and internal) required to support the Transformation Programme.

- The Committee recommended that Cabinet satisfies itself that these resources are required given the budget pressures and need for savings elsewhere

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**DRAFT SCRUTINY COMMENTS – EXTRACT FROM DRAFT MINUTES
(FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 30 JANUARY 2024)**

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PEOPLE

Draft Budget Proposals 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Plan

Invitees:

- **Robert Green – Assistant Head of Finance**
- **Sally Ann Jenkins – Strategic Director – Social Services**
- **Mary Ryan – Head of Adult Services**
- **Natalie Poyner – Head of Children Services**
- **Mandy Shide – Service Manager**
- **Sarah Morgan – Chief Education Officer**

The Assistant Head of Finance gave a brief overview of the budget position.

Pressures and Investments

The following was discussed:

- The Committee enquired about the increase of 4 places in both Sporting Chance and Catch 22. The Chief Education Officer (CEO) informed Committee that budget demand for Education was being met by the Council and this looked at the need to support children in out-of-county placements due to complex requirements. They assured the Committee that work was being undertaken to establish local provision where possible. They highlighted that contracts with current providers would be maintained providing approximately 30 places, but this investment would provide an additional 4 places where required. They informed Committee that if they aren't used, it would be considered an underspend in the budget but they were likely to be filled. They assured Committee of consistent monitoring regarding who required places and what was available, and that when contracting additional places, quality assurance checks were carried out to ensure pupils' welfare and that the student-teacher ratios were correct.
- The Committee highlighted that in the previous year's budget, ALN funding figures were to be confirmed and asked for assurance that this investment would meet requirements. The CEO noted cost pressures for ALN provision and highlighted that more ALN pupils had been identified than ever before. The CEO informed Committee that due to increasing complexities, this investment would not necessarily meet all needs but was in addition to individual school's budgets, who had responsibility with their wholistic budget to provide for all children. The CEO acknowledged the demand on schools and that this investment wouldn't necessarily provide everything, but it was one additional measure to support those recognised challenges. The Committee were pleased that there was additional investment to support ALN students.

Budget Savings Proposals for Consultation

Domiciliary care support to be enhanced with assistive technology to reduce the levels of care hours required.

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- The Committee enquired how assistive technology would be used to help reduce levels of care. The Head of Adult Services informed Committee that implementation had already begun and highlighted the Smart Hub exhibition in Newport Market, where residents sought further information regarding assistive technology. They informed Committee that feedback from the public had been positive but were ensuring that it was tailored to meet individual needs.
- The Committee noted that if domiciliary care would be replaced in part by assistive technology, there was an assumption of familial support to carry out these checks in place of the domiciliary care. The Head of Adult Services noted that during the pandemic there was increased family support but acknowledged the change since and highlighted that for unpaid carers, this assistive technology had been a lifeline. They assured Committee that it would never replace the need for domiciliary care but was in addition to it.

Fees and Charges

- The Committee enquired who paid fees and charges to the Council. The Assistant Head of Finance directed the Committee to the headings within Appendix 5. They noted that amounts were the same under each heading, but differentiated between who pays. The Head of Adult Services informed the Committee that placement vacancies were sold to other LAs who required them, and that Newport residents did not always pay the same amount as it was means tested.
- The Committee queried the percentage increase of Appointeeships. The Assistant Head of Finance informed the Committee that this reflected a thorough review and recosting exercise of the service area that had taken place and was not as significant an increase in cash terms as other services despite the high percentage. The Head of Adult Services noted that anyone who required Appointeeship services was subject to a full financial assessment.

1. Conclusions of Committee Reports

Comments to the Cabinet on the following proposals:

- a) The Committee noted the budget proposals relevant to the People Directorate and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.
- b) The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet on the Proposals within the People Directorate:
 - The Committee were pleased with the ALN funding to schools to support universal ALN provision.
 - The Committee highlighted the importance of domiciliary care not being replaced by assistive technology where it is not sustainable for individuals or their families.
 - The Committee highlighted the importance of the continuation of service delivery quality.
 - The Committee were content to recommend the proposals as they were.

Scrutiny Report

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Part 1

Date: January 2024

Subject Scrutiny Adviser Report

Author Scrutiny Adviser

The following people have been invited to attend for this item:

Invitee:	Role
Samantha Schanzer (Scrutiny Adviser)	Present the Committee with the Scrutiny Adviser Report for discussion and update the Committee on any changes.

Section A – Committee Guidance and Recommendations

Recommendations to the Committee

The Committee is asked to:

1. Action Plan

Consider the Actions from previous meetings (**Appendix 1**):

- *Note the responses for the actions;*
- *Determine if any further information / action is required;*
- *Agree to receive an update on outstanding issues at the next meeting.*

2. Committee's Work Programme:

Consider the Committee's Forward Work Programme Update (**Appendix 2**):

- *Are there any amendments to the topics scheduled to be considered at the next Committee meeting?*
- *Are there any additional invitees that the Committee requires to fully consider the topics?*
- *Is there any additional information that the Committee would like to request?*

2 Context

Background

Action Sheet

- 2.1 Attached at **Appendix 1** is the Action Sheet from the Committee meetings. The updated completed actions are included in the table.

- 2.2 Any actions that do not have a response will be included on the Action Sheet at the next meeting to ensure that the Committee can keep track of outstanding actions.

Forward Work Programme

- 2.3 Attached at **Appendix 2** is the Draft Forward Work Programme for the year 2023-24.
- 2.4 The purpose of a Forward Work Programme is to help ensure Councillors achieve organisation and focus in the undertaking of enquiries through the Overview and Scrutiny function. Effective work programming is essential to ensure that the work of Overview and Scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council's delivery of services.
- 2.4 Further information about the work programming process, including the procedures for referring new business to the programme, can be found in our Scrutiny Handbook on the Council's Scrutiny webpages (www.newport.gov.uk/scrutiny).
- 2.5 The Centre for Public Scrutiny's Good Scrutiny Guide recognises the importance of the forward work programme. In order to 'lead and own the process', it states that Councillors should have ownership of their Committee's work programme, and be involved in developing, monitoring and evaluating it. The Good Scrutiny Guide also states that, in order to make an impact, the scrutiny workload should be co-ordinated and integrated into corporate processes, to ensure that it contributes to the delivery of corporate objectives, and that work can be undertaken in a timely and well-planned manner.

3 Information Submitted to the Committee

- 3.1 The following information is attached:

Appendix 1: Action Sheet from Previous Meetings;

Appendix 2: Draft Forward Work Programme

4. Suggested Areas of Focus

Role of the Committee

The role of the Committee in considering the report is to:

- **Action Sheet from Previous Meetings - Appendix 1**
 - Consider the responses to the actions from the meeting;
 - Are you satisfied that you have received the necessary information?
 - Are there any further issues arising from the responses that you would like to raise?
 - For the actions that do not have responses – these actions will be rolled over to the next meeting and reported back to the Committee.

- **Draft Forward Work Programme - Appendix 2**

Consider:

 - Are there any amendments to the topics scheduled to be considered at the next Committee meeting?
 - Are there any additional invitees that the Committee requires to fully consider the topics?
 - Is there any additional information that the Committee would like to request?

Section B – Supporting Information

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The Corporate Assessment, and the subsequent [follow up assessment](#) provide background information on the importance of good work programming. Specific reference is made to the need to align the Cabinet and Scrutiny work programmes to ensure the value of the Scrutiny Function is maximised.
- 5.2 The latest Cabinet work programme was approved by the Cabinet on a monthly basis for the next 12 months and includes the list of reports scheduled for consideration. Effective forward planning by both Cabinet and Scrutiny needs to be coordinated and integrated in relation to certain reports to ensure proper consultation takes place before a decision is taken. A link to the Cabinet work programme is provided [here](#) to the Committee as part of this report, to enable the Committee to ensure that the work programmes continue to reflect key decisions being made by the Cabinet.

6. Links to Council Policies and Priorities

- 6.1 Having proper work programming procedures in place ensures that the work of Overview and Scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council’s delivery of services, contributes to the delivery of corporate objectives, and ensures that work can be undertaken in a timely and well-planned manner.

6.2 This report relates to the Actions from Committee’s which support the achievement of the Scrutiny Committee, in accordance with the Law and Regulation Service Plan, Objectives, Actions and Measures and the Wellbeing objectives:

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

7 Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act

- 7.1 The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 which came into force in April 2016 sets the context for the move towards long term planning of services.

7.2 General questions

- How is this area / policy affected by the new legislation?

- How will this decision / policy / proposal impact upon future generations? What is the long term impact?
- What evidence is provided to demonstrate WFGA has been / is being considered?
- Evidence from Community Profiles / other data?
- Evidence of links to Wellbeing Assessment / Objectives / Plan?

7.3 Wellbeing Goals

- How are the Wellbeing goals reflected in the policy / proposal / action?
 - *A prosperous Wales*
 - *A resilient Wales*
 - *A healthier Wales*
 - *A more equal Wales*
 - *A Wales of cohesive communities*
 - *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language*
 - *A globally responsible Wales*

7.4 Sustainable Development Principles

- Does the report / proposal demonstrate how as an authority we are working in accordance with the sustainable development principles from the act when planning services?
 - **Long Term**
The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs
 - **Prevention**
How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives
 - **Integration**
Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies
 - **Collaboration**
Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives
 - **Involvement**
The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

8 Background Papers

- [The Essentials - Wellbeing of Future Generation Act \(Wales\)](#)
- [Corporate Plan 2022-2027](#)
- The Corporate Assessment and [follow up assessment](#).

Report Completed: January 2024

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
ACTION SHEET**

	Agenda Item	Action	Responsibility	Outcome
1	Conclusion of Committee reports	Send comments and recommendations to officers	Samantha Schanzer	COMPLETE
10	Strategic Equalities Plan Annual Report 22-23	Provide the number of people who contact the City Contact Centre via phone when they are unable to use the online services.	Tracy McKim/Rhys Cornwall	ONGOING – Scrutiny Advisors determining whether more information is required but initial response received.

Mae'r dudalen hon yn wag yn

Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee Draft Work Programme: June 2023 to May 2024

Meeting	Agenda Items
02/06/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Safeguarding Annual Report • EV Charging Strategy • Consultation Update (Information only)
23/06/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Language Annual Report
28/07/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Risk Report • Climate Change Annual Report
08/09/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Digital Strategy Report
09/10/2023 1pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annual Corporate Wellbeing Self Assessment ▪ Strategic Equalities Plan Annual Report
27/10/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transformation Plan / Budget Consultation Plans / Development of MTFP ▪ Air Quality Action Plan
01/12/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny Annual Report • People Plan
30/01/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MTFP and Revenue Budget – Consultee Meeting
08/03/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset Plan
26/04/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBD

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