

Minutes



Council

Date: 25 January 2022

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Cleverly, P Cockeram, K Critchley, D Davies, M Al-Nuaimi, C Evans, M Evans, C Ferris, D Fouweather, G Giles, J Guy, D Harvey, Councillor R Jeavons, M Kellaway, M Linton, D Mayer, R Mogford, Councillor J Mudd, J Richards, M Spencer, T Suller, H Thomas, K Thomas, C Townsend, Councillor R Truman, T Watkins, M Whitcutt, K Whitehead, D Wilcox, D Williams, G Berry, J Clarke, Y Forsey, P Hourahine, J Hughes, J Jordan, L Lacey, S Marshall, H Townsend, J Watkins, A Morris, Horton, Hussain and Jones

1. Preliminaries

1.i Apologies

Apologies were reported from Councillors Dudley and Routley

1.ii Declarations of Interest

None

1.iii Mayor's Announcements

The Leader introduced Gavin Horton, new labour councillor for the Victoria ward and the Mayor formally welcomed him to the meeting.

2. Minutes

Minutes of 23 November 2021 were approved and accepted as a true record.

3. Appointments

To consider the proposed appointments set out in the report

Councillor Harvey moved the appointments set out in the report, as agreed by the Business Managers, subject to the additional appointments set out below.

Resolved: That the following appointments be agreed.

Governing Body Appointments

Governing Body	No of Vacancies / Re-appointments	Nominations Received
High Cross Primary School	1	Stewart Jones
Bassaleg School	1	Gavin Horton

Clytha Primary School	1	Lucy Arthur
Newport High School	1	James Clarke
Malpas Church in Wales School	1	Jane Mudd
Ysgol Bryn Derw	1	Chris May
Malpas Park Primary School	1	TBC
Crindau Primary School	1	Colin Seeney
Lliswerry Primary School	1	Ruqia Hayat
Tredegar Park Primary School	1	Allan D Screen
Caerleon Lodge Hill Primary School	1	Abby Vowles
Rogerstone Primary School	1	Paula Bartlett
St Joseph's High School	1	Alex Pimm
Maindee Primary School	1	Gavin Horton

Committee Meetings

Performance Scrutiny Committee: Place and Corporate, Councillor J Cleverly to replace Councillor C Evans as Chair.

Dispensation

It was moved by Cllr Harvey and duly seconded by Cllr Fouweather that dispensations for extended absence should be granted by Council to Councillor Holyoake and Councillor White.

Resolved:

That Councillors Holyoake and White be granted special dispensation for six months absence under of section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

4. Police Issues

The Mayor was pleased to welcome Superintendent Vicki Townsend to the meeting.

Members were asked to kindly note that this was Superintendent Townsend's first meeting and she was here today to introduce herself and to set out her policing priorities. They Mayor therefore asked members to confine any questions to any matters arising from her presentation, as opposed to any detailed questions that they may have about specific policing issues in their wards, as Supt Townsend would not be in a position to answer those questions today and they would need to wait until the next Council meeting.

Questions raised by councillors:

- Councillor Whitehead referred to the use of the off road bikes, near St David's Hospice, which had been previously reported and was a constant problem as well as being disruptive and upsetting to patients and their family. The Superintendent advised Councillor Whitehead of similar experience when working at Blaenau Gwent and the measures which were put in place to address this. Supt Townsend attended a meeting recent regarding off road bikes and cars with a review on 27 January. Any further information was welcomed by the Police by contacting 101 to provide intelligence in order for the Police to build a picture.
- Councillor Al Nuaimi mentioned partnership funding between the Council and Police in relation to safety to be spent by March 2022 and asked how the money was being spent and what could be expected by the public. The Superintendent was aware of the Safer Streets initiative and a dedicated Chief Inspector who focussed funding on the identified

areas. The Police were at the procurement stage which meant certain processes and requirements needed to be adhered to however the target of March would be met.

- Councillor Jeavons referred to the inappropriate use of vehicles on SDR during a Sunday night in particular and a Go Safe was requested to be used to address this and Councillor Jeavons asked if the Superintendent could chase Inspector Cawley on this matter. Superintendent Townsend assured the councillor that this would be discussed with Insp Cawley.
- Councillor Harvey mentioned that Inspector Cawley and S Greening were always very helpful with their outstanding work in Always.
- Councillor Forsey mentioned the new Highway Code which was to be introduced with changes of right of road for walkers and cyclists, with this in mind, what plans would be put in place to make this effective and promote this in Newport. Supt Townsend advised that the Police were taking a watching brief on when this was legislated with advice from their legal department. Engagement would be led through 'Go Safe' and Ops Planning and would be supportive of those actions but would not take the lead because education was something that was done from the centre of the force. The Supt would update the Council when changes took place. In addition Councillor Forsey asked did Operation Closed Path take place. The Superintendent advised that she would look into this and feedback.
- Councillor Hourahine asked what resources to chase down off-road bikes and quad bikes were being put in place. Supt Townsend advised that this was a national issue. There were no tactics for these vehicles because of the safety implications if police tried to stop them, because they were not insured for road use. Blaenau Gwent had looked at targeting these vehicles when they were being fuelled or repaired, fuelling vehicles at specific addresses. A safe way therefore needed to be considered to be able to seize and stop the vehicles in a safe way and not chase them as the risk to the individual and the officer could be dangerous.
- Councillor M Evans asked Supt Townsend to elaborate on sustainability and policing referred to during her introduction and an update on the 101 service. The Superintendent advised that sustainability meant doing things more efficiently. An example of this was a device/mobile phone which helped upload information in relation to an incident by logging on and send the information to the station rather than having to physically attend the station which was much quicker and enabled officers to go to their next call. Retrospective facial recognition via CCTV was also used but this was not live use breaching people's rights. There were 26 different projects all with a technical aspect to make efficiencies for the front line. In terms of 101 waiting times were slightly different due to increased demand post covid. Offer additional methods however to report incidences was via social media, with an allocated social media dealer who would deals with on average six to seven calls rather than 1 call through 101 service by comparison. Other methods being looked into was virtual responses by the used of Teams, which meant that members of the public could speak to the police in the comfort of their home rather than visiting the police station.
- Councillor Suller referred to the confiscation of cars. The Superintendent advised that this was done via the use of Section 59 seizures. A centralised road police team focused on anti social behaviour in relation with cars. Training was involved and a cohort was allocated to Newport, with six officers working 12 hour shifts, mornings and nights.
- Councillor Townsend had spoken with taxi drivers about increased racist comments and asked was this being addressed by the police and could they meet with taxi drivers. Supt Townsend advised she was not aware but would talk to her colleague as Hate crimes

were reported and reviewed daily and the Supt would therefore look into this. Supt Townsend asked Councillor Townsend to send over details.

5. **Treasury Management Six Monthly report 2021/22**

The Mayor invited the Leader to introduce the above report.

The Leader advised colleagues that this was a compliance report to confirm that Treasury activities in the first half of 2021-22 accorded with the Treasury Strategy previously considered and set by Members. The report also compared activity with the year-end position for 2020-21 to indicate the movements and resulted causes.

The report presented the following information:

- A reminder of the treasury strategy agreed
- Details of borrowing and investment activity
- Details of wider economic considerations such as the pandemic and the economic climate
- An update to the International Treasury code on commercial investment funding
- An examination of activity against performance, confirming compliance

The report had been presented to Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet and was endorsed by them for onward consideration by full Council.

As at 30 September 2021 the level of borrowing decreased by £9.1m on 2020-21 levels to £144m.

This was in relation to the repayment of a PWLB loan which matured in the first half of 2021/22, as at 3 September further borrowing to replenish this loan was not required. This may be needed to be covered by temporary borrowing before 31 March 2022.

There were also a number of loans; Equal Instalments of Principal (EIP), which paid back principal over the life of the loan, and the interest associated with the loan went down as the principal outstanding reduced.

The level of investments also increased by £4.1m to £28.9m, meaning a decrease in net borrowing of £13.3m during the first half of the financial year to £115.1m. Included within the investment figure was £13.9m held in the form of cash.

This was circa £6m less than year-end but due to the continuing pandemic the Authority has continued to keep more cash available at very short notice than is normal, to cover any unexpected calls on cash flow.

There was not much demand for very short- term borrowing within the marketplace, and in September rates on deposits below 14 days with the Debt Management Account Deposit Facility (DMADF) were still very low at 0.01%. The Authority had investment with other local authorities of £15m with slightly better, but low interest rates. It was anticipated that investments would reduce during 2021/22 as an alternative to borrowing until we reached the balance of £10m, which would remain invested for compliance with Markets in Financial Instruments and Derivatives Directive (MiFIDII).

As a result, no new long-term borrowing was required to be taken out in the first half of the financial year.

It was however anticipated that the Council would need to undertake additional borrowing on a short-term basis for the remainder of the year in order to cover normal day to day cash flow activity. With current capital expenditure forecasts, it was however expected that there would

be no specific requirement to undertake long-term borrowing this financial year, although external borrowing might be considered to manage interest rate risks and the Council's longer term borrowing necessity.

Lastly, Prudential Indicators; the Authority measured and manages its exposures to treasury management risks using various indicators which could be found in Appendix B. The report confirmed the Council continued to comply with the Prudential Indicators set for 2021/22.

Resolved:

That Council noted and approved the report on treasury management activities to 30 September 2021, approving in the process that activities were in line with the agreed Treasury Management Strategy for 2021/22.

6. Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Mayor invited the Leader to introduce the above report.

The Leader explained that the procedural report was a requirement to be considered and approved by full Council. It confirmed that the Council would adopt the national 'Council Tax Reduction Scheme' which the Welsh Government updated for 2022/23.

Council was required to consider and approve this each year. The report set out some of the key changes the Welsh Government made to the national scheme.

In approving this scheme, the Council ensured that Wales had one national scheme which was consistent wherever you lived. In addition to our approval of the scheme, the Council considered a small number of discretions locally, which were explained in the report. It was therefore proposed that Council maintained the current position on these.

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

Resolved:

That Council approved the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23 in accordance with the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements and Default Schemes) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 ("the Prescribed Requirements Regulations") exercising its local discretions as indicated in the report.

7. Director of Social Services Annual Report

The Mayor invited the Leader to present the report.

The Leader took opportunity to again thank Chris Humphreys for undertaking the Director's role during this period. The Director of Social Services Annual Report 2020/2021 was completed by Chris Humphrey. Chris undertook the role of Acting Director of Social Services from December 2019 – October 2021. This report reflects the period when Chris stepped up into the role under the most exceptional of circumstances.

The report reflected the unprecedented period of demand and delivery for Social Services across Children's and Adults social care. In May 2021 Care Inspectorate Wales undertook an Assurance Check which looked back at the period of 2020/2021. In their check they noted:

"We found support was underpinned by a relationship of openness and honesty about the options available for people who need care and support and carers who need support".

Children's services were experiencing unprecedented demand and increase in referrals while in adult services they were working under significant pressure. The findings identified a culture of improvement and mutual support and a recognition of positive leadership. It was noted that while staff were exhausted with complex high volume case work morale was generally good.

Across Adults and Children's Social care delivery of services continued with all levels of provision being maintained despite the impact of the pandemic. From Community Connectors, and children's preventative services to advocacy, home care, and family support through to statutory interventions in family justice and provision of foster care and residential homes care and support was offered to citizens directly. Staff continued with face to face service delivery as well as seeking out innovative solutions in order to address the restrictions of the pandemic.

Adult Services developed a new outreach service and successfully embedded its hospital discharge processes into the new Grange Hospital that opened in September 2020. The Hospital and Reablement teams were present at hospital sites throughout. While in Children's Services the introduction of the Rapid Response team and the delivery of Baby and Me supported families to be able to safely care for their children within the family home.

Working in partnership across the public sector and with our communities was key to being able to continue to deliver positive and robust services. At all levels of Social Services officers and Members continued to represent the Council in regional and National fora including the Safeguarding Boards, Regional Partnership Board, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children regional group and a plethora of partnership groups specifically to address the demands of the pandemic and ensure services could be delivered effectively across all agencies.

While 2020/2021 brought enormous pressures across Social Services the report outlined the extraordinary ways in which staff continued to care for and protect our most vulnerable citizens. Going forward into 2021/2022 would bring significant challenges but will undoubtedly create opportunities to continue to improve services.

The Leader invited the Cabinet Member for Social Services to say a few words and also took the opportunity to thank the Cabinet Member for his hard work and dedication to the services.

Councillor Cockeram firstly mentioned that he concurred with the Leader's comments about Chris Humphrey and the excellent job she did during the pandemic and the continued service delivery by Social Services during the pandemic and also thanked all members of the council staff for their contribution over the past two years. There were big challenges faced by Social Services, including safeguarding. Having the Police and the health sector in the Safeguarding Hub was a big improvement. This was a pilot scheme in Newport was now being rolled out across Wales after its success. In addition to this, with schools being in lockdown and not knowing what was happening to children could also be an issue.

The Council had 380 looked after children, with 256 of those in foster care. Foster carers were looking after the majority of the children and the Cabinet Member wanted to thank them for their hard work. The Council had also seen 26 successful adoptions during the lockdown. One of the areas where the Cabinet Member was pleased about was the Children's Services residential homes which was also a big success and minister wrote a letter to thank the Council for this service.

There was 840 referrals from the new hospital in Llanfrechfca and 475 were discharged, which meant they prevented 60% of these going to hospital. There was also a new Dementia Reablement Service which was doing well.

The Cabinet Member thanked the Regional Partnership Board for their funding, on which the Local Authorities relied upon. The report also went to scrutiny and received positive comments. There were underspend but we were currently not in the real world because of the impact of covid.

The Cabinet Member thanked the staff who had been exemplary but were also tired and there was a general issue with staffing across Wales. The Cabinet Member felt that a regional report was needed on how to increase staffing and request that Coleg Gwent and other colleges to provide bursaries to encourage people to enter the profession and work for the council. Finally, the Cabinet Member considered that overall this was a positive report.

The Corporate Director for Social Services, Sally Jenkins was invited to also say a few words. The Corporate Director reiterated thanks to Chris Humphrey, as well as thanking staff as the pressure on them was huge. Staff were tired and morale was low but the positive messages and also with a commitment for staff to continue to work for Newport by retaining students was a tribute to the support offered to them from the Council. The report covered the year of 2021 but it felt that we had rolled straight over into another period of real challenge for 2022.

Finally, the Corporate Director took the opportunity to thank the Cabinet Member for Social Services along with other elected members for their support whilst Social Services continued to deliver their services. In light of the Omicron variant, there was concern about how staff would continue to work, however this would be monitored and Social Services would do everything to ensure the best service with the support offered.

Comments from councillors:

- Councillor Hughes thanked Chris Humphrey for her report and recalled working for her as a social worker. The Council was proud of the teams and the way they conducted themselves. As a social worker himself he felt that it was often undervalued. The Council also mentioned the progress being made with foster care in Newport.

Resolved:

That Council received the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services, 2020/21.

8. Gambling Act - Statement of Principles

The Cabinet Member for Licensing and Regulation was invited by the Mayor to present the report.

Councillor Truman informed council that once every three years, the Gambling Act 2005 required the council, in its position as the "Licensing Authority" to review its Gambling Policy.

The current Gambling Policy came into force in January 2019, therefore a reviewed policy was presented to Council.

The current policy worked very well and supported businesses and guided the council and its officers. This led to the revised policy containing very few amendments.

The proposed changes were mainly updated references, data, and dates. The main principles of the Policy remain unchanged.

The Policy continued to support the three licensing objectives:

- 1 crime reduction
- 2 maintain fairness and

3 protect children.

It was likely that the UK Government would conduct a wide-reaching review of gambling regulation during the year. If this was the case, a more in-depth policy review to deal with any new approaches may need to be carried out.

The proposed policy went out for formal consultation between 16 August 2021 and 31 October 2022.

Just one representation was received from the firm of solicitors representing the Betting and Gaming Council. This representation was reproduced within the report. As a result of their input several minor changes were made to the policy. These changes had the effect of making the policy more 'reader friendly'. Councillor Truman thanked the Betting and Gaming Council for their input.

The Policy did not cover either online gambling or games run by the National Lottery as these were governed and enforced by the Gambling Commission.

Councillor Truman therefore, moved that Council approved the revised Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005.

Resolved:

That Council approved and adopted the revised Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005.

9. Schedule of Meetings for 2022/23

The proposed schedule of meetings attempted to structure the diary with a series of meetings to facilitate the decision making process through the Council, Executive and Regulatory Committees. The schedule of meetings set a pattern of meetings for Scrutiny Committees and other bodies.

The diary did not include dates for meetings of individual Cabinet Members as Cabinet Members would take a view on when they needed to meet to make decisions, rather than be bound by a diary of meetings. This would of course, not affect members' opportunities for consultation on proposed decisions or to request to meet the Cabinet Member before decisions were taken.

It was suggested that the dates, times and locations of all meetings other than the Council meeting were to be left to each individual committee. It was suggested that the needs of Councillors who had work or other commitments at any time during the day were taken into account by the various committees and groups.

The schedule would remain a guide, was subject to change and amended to meet the needs of the work programmes of each committee or other group.

Resolved:

That Council adopted the schedule of meetings as the basis for arrangements for May 2022 to May 2023.

10. Democratic Services Committee Minutes: 13 December 2021

The Mayor advised that the Democratic Services Committee Meeting Minutes from 13 December were before colleagues for noting. There was however, one matter that was referred by Democratic Services Committee to full Council for a decision and that matter would be put to council members.

Under Item 5 there was a minuted discussion about whether the Committee should recommend that Council appoint a Presiding Member to chair Council meetings as from May 2022. At the meeting, there was a tied vote and the Chair declined to exercise a second and casting vote.

The matter had therefore been referred to full Council without any recommendation.

Before there could be any debate and vote on this matter, it would, therefore, be necessary for a member of the Council to formally move and second a motion as to whether or not the Council should appoint a Presiding Member.

The Mayor invited colleagues to move a formal proposal to appoint a Presiding Member. Councillor Hourahine moved the proposal and reserved the right to speak at the end of the debate. Councillor Whitcutt also seconded the proposal and reserved the right to speak later in the debate.

Councillor Fouweather raised a point of order, querying whether it was a legal motion as it was not itemised on the Council Agenda.

The Monitoring Officer assured Councillor Fouweather and the rest of Council that this was a valid motion, in line with the Council Standing Orders. The matter had been referred to Council and was referenced in the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee, which had been published with the Council agenda. It was not necessary for the motion to be written down. The motion that had been moved and seconded was simply to appoint a Presiding Member.

The Mayor then asked if any Councillors wished to request an amendment to the substantive motion. Councillor M Evans, therefore requested an amendment which was seconded by Councillor Fouweather, that further information on the job description and remuneration be referred back to the Democratic Services Committee for further discussion.

Council then debated the amendment first.

Comments from councillors:

- Councillor M Evans spoke in support of the amendment., The appointment of a Presiding Member was originally turned down in 2019 because there was a cost to this role and was not sure if it was a fixed term appointment of five years. In addition to this, it was felt that the role of the Mayor would be diminished and undervalued and should therefore go back to the Democratic Services Committee. At this point, Councillor Evans asked for a recorded vote on the amended motion.
- Councillor Whitcutt spoke on the amendment and advised that if the substantive motion was passed the details of the role could be discussed at Democratic Services Committee and would then come back to Council. The role of Presiding Member would be able to carry out the role as well as their normal duties, similar to committee chairs. Councillor Whitcutt therefore asked that the original motion be considered.
- Councillor M Evans asked for point of clarification on whether who could be appointed as Presiding Member. The Monitoring Officer advised that the Democratic Services Committee would determine who could apply as part of the application process adding that the Presiding Member would be a full time appointment for Council.
- Councillors Suller, J Watkins and Fouweather spoke in support of the amendment and stressed the importance and elevation of the role of Mayor of Newport and that it was appropriate to debate this at the Democratic Services Committee for further consideration

- Councillor Harvey mentioned that the Democratic Services Committee Chair referred it to council and added that the role of Presiding Member would be apolitical.
- Councillor Mudd observed that the status of the mayoralty would not be diminished and that the Council had applied for the elevation Newport City Council's Mayor to that of Lord Mayor during the Queens Platinum Jubilee.
- Councillor Cockeram added that when he was in the role of Mayor, chairing council was very difficult and training as a Presiding Member would be ideal as well as possibly chairing member seminars, consistency was therefore required.
- Councillor Jordan queried the reported that the salary of £25,000 PA and asked if this was only for council meetings or would there be other meetings to chair. The Monitoring Officer advised that it was for chairing the council meetings only. The total salary was £25K but it was an additional £9K a year on top of a councillors basic salary, hence £25K in total.
- Councillor Morris referred to impartiality of the Mayor and that a Mayor should not act politically. However, he felt it was difficult to decipher what was being put in front of the Council and was in agreement that this should be sent back to the Democratic Services Committee to be re discussed and considered next year.
- Councillor Spencer supported the original motion as this recommendation could be put back to council again, after being discussed at Democratic Services Committee.
- Councillor M Evans summed up his amendment and mentioned that if the motion was taken on face value a Cabinet Member could also become mayor and impartiality would be removed. The Chair of Democratic Services Committee could have stopped the President Member discussion but felt it needed further debate at Council. Councillor Evans felt it was far too early to consider the motion and requested that a recorded vote be taken to look at the role in more detail.
- Councillor Hourahine, in his right to reply advised that the recommendation came from the Democratic Services Committee and that it was a straightforward request for an appointment of a Presiding Member. All the questions asked this evening were partially answered in the report and there was no suggestion that the role of mayor was to be diminished and it was hoped that the elevation of Lord Mayor would mean further engagements and opportunities for Newport. All Mayors had done their best in representing the city but not necessarily council meetings. In compliance, the role of President Member, which came from the WG was a positive move and should therefore not be batted back and forth. Councillor Hourahine therefore asked that the amendment be rejected and return to the substantive motion.

At the request of Councillor M Evans to take a recorded vote on the amendment, Councillors Mogford, Fouweather, Suller, Jones and J Watkins supported the request and the following was recorded:

Councillor Name		For	Against	Abstain
Al-Nuaimi, Miqdad				1
Berry, Graham	Absent			
Clarke, James			1	
Cleverly, Jan	Left the meeting			
Cockeram, Paul			1	
John Jones		1		

Critchley, Ken			1	
Davies, Deb			1	
Dudley, Val	Apologies			
Evans, Chris				1
Evans, Matthew		1		
Ferris, Charles		1		
Forsey, Yvonne			1	
Fouweather, David		1		
Giles, Gail			1	
Guy, John			1	
Harvey, Debbie			1	
Hayat, Ibrahim	Absent			
Hayat, Rehmaan	Absent			
Holyoake, Tracey	Dispensation			
Hourahine, Phil			1	
Hughes, Jason			1	
Jeavons, Roger			1	
Jordan, Jason		1		
Kellaway, Martyn		1		
Lacey, Laura			1	
Linton, Malcolm			1	
Marshall, Stephen			1	
Mayer, David			1	
Mogford, Ray		1		
Morris, Allan		1		1
Mudd, Jane			1	
Gavin, Horton			1	
Richards, John			1	
Routley, William	Apologies			
Spencer, Mark			1	
Suller, Tom		1		
Thomas, Herbie			1	
Thomas, Kate			1	
Townsend, Carmel		1		
Townsend, Holly		1		
Truman, Ray			1	
Watkins, Joan		1		
Watkins, Trevor			1	
Whitcutt, Mark			1	
White, Richard	Dispensation			
Whitehead, Kevin			1	
Wilcox, Debbie			1	
Williams, David		1		
		13	26	3

The amendment was lost as indicated in the table above. Therefore, the Mayor opened the debate on the substantive motion.

Councillor Whitehead felt that the Presiding Member would still be political, however lost the right to reserve his comments at the end of the debate as the amendment to the motion was lost.

Councillor Mayer moved a closure motion that the matter be put to the vote without further debate. The Closure motion was duly seconded and carried by a majority vote. The Monitoring Officer advised that Councillor Hourahine, as the mover of the substantive motion, had the right to make a closing speech before the matter was put to the vote in accordance with the closure motion.

Councillor Hourahine reiterated that in his view a President Member should be appointed.

Resolved:

It was resolved by a majority vote that a Presiding Member would be appointed by the Council as from May 2022.

11. Mayoral Nomination for 2022/23

The Mayor invited the Leader to nominate the Mayor for 2022/23.

The Leader was delighted to formally move Councillor Kellaway as the Mayor for 2022/23, which was also seconded by Councillor M Evans.

The Mayor was very pleased that the Deputy Mayor would be Mayor.

Resolved:

That Council nominated Councillor Martyn Kellaway as Mayor for 2022/23.

12. Questions to the Leader of the Council

The Leader updated council on recent announcements.

Support for residents and businesses

Many residents and businesses faced a challenging two years and the post-Christmas period could be particularly difficult for some.

Together with its partners, the Council could offer a wealth of advice and support – from help with bills, to assistance in finding work or accessing training. If anyone was struggling financially, the Leader urged them to get in touch. There was also information on the website contact via the City Contact Centre.

The Leader was pleased that the council was able to commit £100,000 to support local organisations dedicated to helping people affected by food poverty. Local food banks provided a lifeline to some individuals and families by providing essential supplies to those struggling to cover the most basic needs.

Demand for the food banks was very high and the Council was putting money into services at the heart of communities, as they were making a real difference to people's everyday lives.

The funding would help community food initiatives meet increased demand or difficulties sourcing sufficient donations.

The council was also administering the Winter Fuel Support scheme for Newport residents and the Leader urged people eligible to apply for this extra financial help before the deadline of 18 February.

The continuation of help for local businesses was available by distributing grants to those whose livelihoods were impacted by the pandemic.

The Council also supported those who wanted to start or expand a small business through its City of Newport Business Fund. This offered grants of up to £10,000 towards costs such as rent, or the purchase of equipment.

City centre graffiti initiative

The Council was working with Newport Now, the Business Improvement District (BID), to tackle graffiti in the city centre. Member businesses could have graffiti removed free of charge by the council thanks to funding from Newport Now.

The initiative was aimed at making the city centre a more desirable place to shop, live and work and promote the local economy.

This remained one of the Council's priorities and the Leader was pleased to see some new, independent businesses opening their doors in recent months. Shop local had never been a more-important message – as well as being better for the environment was so vital, these businesses could only thrive and survive if they were used.

Social value

The Leader announced that last week Cabinet agreed to put social value at the heart of its work.

The Council would adopt the Welsh national themes, outcomes and measures framework for measuring social value (known as TOMS).

It set out seven themes, 35 outcomes and 93 measures that were produced to help public sector bodies gain more social value through their commissioning, procurement, and contract management processes.

This would allow the council to ensure that its work generated as much social value as possible, benefitting the people and communities it served.

Participatory budgeting scheme

In February and March, residents could vote for projects put forward as part of the latest round of the participatory budgeting scheme, Our Voice, Our Choice, Our Port.

Launched last year, 24 community groups and projects received a share of the £103,000 available in the initial round.

The Council allocated £250,000 from its Covid-19 recovery fund for this round of the scheme. This allocation was for community groups to develop community-based Covid recovery projects.

A further £165,000 was made available by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, taking the total available in this round to £415,000.

Community groups and projects were able to bid for up to £15,000 to help support an idea or project that helped meet one of the scheme's key themes.

Funding would be allocated to projects according to the vote share. This was a fantastic way of empowering residents to take decisions on what mattered to them.

Devon Place Bridge

The Leader thanked all those involved in the operation to install the spans of the new Devon Place Bridge over the railway line at Christmas. It went incredibly well and it was an excellent piece of engineering.

The project was being led by the Council working with partners Transport for Wales and Network Rail and local contractors Alun Griffiths.

Work was now underway on the rest of the bridge, which should be completed later this year.

It was a direct replacement for the old Devon Place subway, and would provide an active travel link from the city centre to the streets north of the railway line.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Thursday 27 January would mark one of the most somber days in the calendar.

In recognition of Holocaust Memorial Day, the Council was preparing to light the Civic Centre clock tower in purple and raise the memorial flag outside the building.

This year, the theme was "One Day" when people from around the world would remember all the victims of genocides – in the Holocaust, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur.

Newport had many diverse and wonderful communities and the Leader wanted to celebrate that as well and welcomed those who made the city their home and it was important that everyone feel safe in the city.

The Leader was proud that the Council would again be "lighting the darkness" by lighting up the clock tower and hoped people would join the national commemoration and put a candle safely in a window at 8pm.

Questions to the Leader

Councillor M Evans:

Councillor M Evans referred to an urgent decision taken by the Leader on 1 December 2021 in relation to free bus travel over the Christmas period, where councillors were unable to comment as there was no consultation. Councillor Evans asked why was it not planned earlier and how much did it cost for free travel and did it increase footfall.

Response:

The Leader advised that the decision made was based on professional officer advice. The scheme offered up to residents an opportunity of free travel during 1-21 December around Newport. The Burns report showed that 35% of residents did not have cars and it therefore allowed those with no cars to access the city centre and visit family and friends during the lead up to Christmas. It also reflected the value for people of active travel. Passenger journeys did go up and the details were in the report that Cllr Evans referred to in his question.

Supplementary:

Why was it not decided in the summer to promote funding. On officer advice why was it taken so late in the day.

Response:

The Leader referred Councillor Evans back to the report and advised that securing of external funding was successful for another scheme of this nature and that the Leader would be making an announcement on that soon.

Councillor Whitehead:

When would the cemeteries be fully opened, as we were one of the last Council's in Wales not to fully open and concern was expressed by the public.

Response:

The Leader was aware of the concerns expressed by public and agreed with the acknowledgment by Councillor Whitehead of measures put in place by covid. Some issues with the plant machinery and vehicular access during the week. There was access to cemeteries every day, although only sometimes pedestrians had access. People needing access to the cemetery could contact the council to get this access. Cemeteries were open during the Christmas period, however it was reported that some people treated cemeteries poorly and with lack of respect. One driver almost ploughed into mourners during a funeral. There was £25,000 worth of damages to Christchurch cemetery when it was broken into and there was also numerous photos of those with no respect people parking on graves. But we did need to ensure that they were open to public and in the Council was in the process of undertaking further assessment to open in a safe way to public and information would be coming soon.

Supplementary:

Councillor Whitehead mentioned that the booking system was proving chaotic for a certain age group and hoped to be back to normal as soon as.

Councillor C Townsend:

Similar to Whitehead, Councillor Whitehead also referred to access to cemeteries and asked if a Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment (FEIA) could be carried out, which would be a big help.

Response:

The Leader advised that with a view to opening cemeteries it would not need to be considered as there were no changes to policy although FEIA were relevant and considered in all decisions made by the Council.

Ballot Questions

Councillor K Thomas:

In the light of the emerging cost of living crisis, could the Leader outline to members the support available for citizens at this time.

Response:

The Leader mentioned that this was a difficult time and the main challenge was the energy crisis and in the coming months there would be increases of a magnitude never seen before. The Resolution Foundation had highlighted price increases in energy bills over taking living wages. The Resolution Report stated that Spring looked particularly difficult with April bringing a broad based cost of living catastrophe, which after a pandemic was what citizens were faced with. With other increased bills, this could cost households an increase of over £1,000. The Council did try to mitigate this but there was also huge pressure on council budgets. The impact on families meant that residents had to choose between heating their homes or eating. Residents would be signposted by the Council to help and support, including small businesses. Information on the website was also available and the Leader urged residents and small businesses to get in touch as funding from the Council of £100,00 was available as well as the Winter Fuel funding therefore residents must apply before 18 February.

13. Questions to the Cabinet Members

There were five written questions to the Cabinet Members:

Question 1 – Deputy Leader/ Cabinet Member: City Services

Councillor Forsey:

Many of us have viewed the fascinating footage of the new Devon Place footbridge installation which took place during the Christmas break. Can the Cabinet member give council an update on the project and set out the anticipated completion date?

Response:

The installation of the main decks over Christmas was completed successfully. As the members are aware, rail track possession to enable such activities can only take place when there are no trains running, and so required staff to be working overnight and through Christmas day.

I would therefore like to thank the dedication and effort of staff within City Services, our contractors Alan Griffiths and Welsh Government for the funding of the project.

Contractors are currently undertaking de rig works to remove the temporary concrete pads and supports that were required for the crane to lift in the bridge sections and undertake alterations to the overhead electric lines.

The final fabrication of stairs, ramps and parapets are progressing to programme at the Prosteel Engineering workshop in Pontypool. These will be delivered to site in March and then lifted into place from Queensway and Devon Place.

Following completion of the structural bridge element, works will commence to the public realm which will include paved areas, planters and sustainable drainage.

Works are programmed for completion this summer.

Question 2 – Deputy Leader/Cabinet Member: City Services

Councillor Marshall:

Please can the Cabinet member provide council with an update on Active Travel schemes and outline future plans for active travel in Newport.

Response:

This year's active travel (AT) schemes have progressed well with all schemes complete or programmed for completion by 31st March. The schemes delivered this year are:

Tredegar Park

The route runs through Tredegar Park, continuing through the pedestrian subway under Forge Road to provide a link to the route through the old golf course.

Monkey Island

The route through Monkey Island includes a new unsegregated bridge connecting the north footway of the main road, the open space area and the housing estate, so users do not have to use the multiple pedestrian crossings on the Southern Distributor Road junction. Both routes will also benefit from the introduction of low-level street lighting which has also been designed to minimise the impact on wildlife and the environment.

New Bridge at Fourteen Locks Canal Centre

A new active travel bridge has been constructed at the Fourteen Locks canal site. The bridge is located below the Canal Visitor Centre and provides a safe and convenient crossing point over the pond.

Gaer Fort

The route runs from Bassaleg Road to Wells Close (Gaer Estate) and provides a link to the northern areas of the city and the City Centre.

Future Schemes

Several other projects are under development (outline feasibility study) this year including the Bettws canal link and bridge, fourteen locks road bridge and Old Town Dock bridge. The authority will be submitting further funding bids 2022/23 to see these schemes delivered.

To help plan future improvement and expansion of AT in the city, a major public consultation exercise was undertaken in 2021. The information from the consultation has informed our statutory Active Travel Network Map for Newport. This was submitted in December to the Welsh Government

Question 3 – Cabinet Member: Sustainable Development

Councillor Horton:

At the last full council meeting the Leader announced that Newport City Council had won the “Outstanding Organisation Award” at The National’s inaugural Environment awards. Please can the cabinet member update council on the ongoing work that has led to this award.

Response:

This award is a result of the outstanding all-around effort and a reflection of the ultimate reduction the Council has made in terms of carbon emissions over the past 3 years. Through a combination of capital projects and bold policy changes the Council has significantly reduced its carbon footprint, and these reductions in energy have continued to be delivered despite the impact of COVID 19.

These projects have ranged from:

Training and employee engagement on sustainability and carbon reduction

Through the delivery of carbon literacy training to Members and staff, and through widespread engagement via workshops as part of the creation of the Council’s proposed Climate Change plan. This engagement will continue as part of the delivery of our carbon neutral 2030 objectives and the involvement of all Members and employees will be the key to our success.

Building retrofit

The council has completed projects such as the conversion of the velodrome to 100% LED lighting, and we are now developing an ambitious programme of works across the estate which will include the installation of heat pumps to reduce gas boiler usage, Solar PV, LED lighting, more efficient ventilation and new controls.

Solar panel installation

Working in partnership with Egni Co-op (a community energy group) the Council scooped the award for best “Community Energy Scheme” at the Ystadau Cymru Awards for the work we delivered, rolling out solar panels on an incredible 27 council buildings. Planning permission has also been achieved for a small solar farm on council land and is reflective of the administration’s commitment to climate change and sustainability.

EV charging and vehicles

The council has installed public EV charging points across a number of our public car parks (<https://www.newport.gov.uk/en/Transport-Streets/Electric-vehicle-charge-points.aspx>) and we are continuing the delivery of public infrastructure via the installation of on-street chargers and rapid chargers for residents use.

Sustainable Design

The Council is supporting two low carbon housing developments, both of which have agreed to not use fossil fuel combustion to provide heating. The developments have also included SuDs attenuation zones planted with a wet meadow mix of flora, including nut/berry bearing tree/shrub species to provide foraging opportunities and habitats for wildlife.

It is clear to see why Newport City Council has been awarded this fantastic award.

Supplementary:

Would there be possible training for members to better sign post residents?

Response:

Yes, this would happen later in the year for a better understanding of the environmental agenda in the city. The Leader would also be happy to provide a briefing for Councillor Horton.

Question 4 – Cabinet Member: Licensing and Regulation

Councillor Mogford:

Within the last two years a number of UK Cities have introduced 'Clean Air Zones' such as Manchester and Birmingham. Have there been any plans or discussions by the Council to introduce a 'Clean Air Zone' in or around Newport's City Centre?

Response:

There are no current plans or discussion about introducing Clean Air Zones in or around Newport City Centre.

Those councils that have introduced Clean Air Zones have been specifically identified and directed to do so by Central Government and provided with additional funding to enable this, because of specific air quality problems within their City Centres.

I would refer Councillor Mogford to the detailed information that I have previously provided at Council in response to questions about air quality management in Newport. The worst areas of air pollution in Newport, where the levels of nitrous oxide exceed air quality standards, have been designated as Air Quality Management Areas and most of these are located along the M4 corridor. The only AQMA's that are on the outskirts of the City Centre are in Chepstow Road and George Street. All of these AQMA's were declared a number of years ago and, as I have previously advised Council, the emission levels in all of those areas are gradually reducing. Therefore, we are making good progress in reducing emissions and improving air quality.

We will continue to monitor air quality and we intend purchasing and installing additional real-time monitors for these AQMA's closer to the City Centre. This will enable us to update the Council's Air Quality Action Plan with actions to improve air quality in these AQMA's. A key part of the action plan will be to establish local action groups to engage with the local communities, because educating the public and encouraging changes in behaviour are essential if we are to reduce the effects of air pollution on public health. We have already established the first local action group in Caerleon and a second action group will be formed shortly for the Chepstow Road area.

The use of Clean Air Zones is just one of a range of possible measures that can be used to address air quality and would only be appropriate where other, less intrusive, measures have been unsuccessful. As I have advised previously, the Council has developed active travel routes and sustainable travel initiatives, including the use of electric vehicles. The issue of air quality cannot be addressed in isolation and is part of the wider climate change and carbon reduction agenda.

Supplementary:

The designation of a clean air zone would be an improvement, was it therefore in the gift of this council to provide this.

Response:

Councillor Truman advised that it was not.

Question 5 – Cabinet Member: Education and Skills

Councillor Hourahine:

Many councillors are school governors and are aware of the challenges that our schools have faced during the pandemic. Can the Cabinet member provide council with an update on the return to school for the spring term and include an overview of the support that is in place for both pupils and staff?

Response:

The return to spring term has presented various challenges to our schools which continue to operate significantly well under the circumstances. We continue to work with our school leaders to ensure that we provide clear advice and bespoke support based on the needs of individual schools.

Local authority officers have continued to communicate regularly with Headteacher's to provide health & safety advice, information on the hardship fund, up to date TTP self-isolation advice for the school community and any necessary supplies of CO2 monitors, face coverings and PPE.

Face to face learning remains a priority. At the beginning of this term, Welsh Government allowed schools two planning days to consider how they may operate with a forecast workforce pressures. This space and time was gratefully received by all of our schools and as a result of excellent local authority and school efforts; overall Newport has experienced only minor interruptions. This does not take away the high level of operational complexities which schools have managed on a day to day basis and I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Headteacher's, schools staff and local authority officers who have worked tirelessly to 'keep things as normal as possible for our learners'. Their efforts are not underestimated. The dedication of our staff goes beyond any of our expectations.

To date, there have been less than ten incidents of year group closures. At this time pupil attendance has had to be managed very sensitively. School staff and the Education Welfare Service have been supporting families with a range of strategies to reassure pupils, parents and carers that school is a safe place and the best place to be.

Where possible our schools have continued to develop their medium and long term strategic plans which include for instance, work around learner standards, catch up programmes, ALN Reform implementation, and Curriculum for Wales's progression.

In Newport we have ensured that pupil wellbeing remains central to everything we do and I am pleased to report that schools now have further capacity to refer pupils to school based counselling. In addition schools continue to be supported by the local authority to ensure that they are able to sustain and improve their own whole school approaches to wellbeing following the continued unsettlement that the pandemic has brought.

To enable and support pupils in their learning as Cabinet we have over seen the investment in digital equipment which will enable home learning as well as providing an equitable level of access across the whole of the local authority. By the end of this financial year we will have provided schools with:

- 9024 laptops, Chrome books, PCs and apple devices

- 146 charging trolleys
- 105 interactive screens
- 106 projectors

Additionally, Cabinet has made a series of budget investment proposals to support education and our schools. Being minded these are draft proposals, which are subject to consultation and review they currently include:

- 3 new Teacher Advisors for schools who will support with early identification of ALN, behaviour needs and work with the schools who have the most vulnerable children.
- Additional support for the Safeguarding Hub
- An additional £1.2 million for ALN learners
- £1.75 million to support additional pupil place demand
- Funding to address teacher and education workforce pay increases.
- There will be an additional £888k which is needed in order to meet the forecast increases of free school meal uptake.

It is worth noting that at the beginning of the pandemic 3200 pupils were accessing free school meals. There are now 7000 children who currently require a free school meal at lunch time. This is a rise of 118% and shows the level of support families require across our city and is a measure of the impact of the pandemic, as well as Brexit with the consequent rise in cost of living.

As a Cabinet we remain committed to supporting our schools, staff and pupils. We want the best for our children and a focus in recent times has been on well-being and on ensuring pupils and families are kept safe and will clearly continue to be the case. However, we also want our children to have aspirations and go onto achieve their dreams and this will also continue to be a key priority for this authority.