

# Minutes



## Cabinet

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Date: 6 April 2022

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors Councillor J Mudd (Chair), J Hughes, Councillor R Jeavons, P Cockeram, D Harvey, D Mayer, Councillor R Truman and D Davies

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### 1 Apologies for Absence

None received.

### 2 Declarations of Interest

None received.

### 3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes from 9 March 2022 were received as a true record.

### 4 Pay and Reward Statement

The Leader presented the report to Cabinet colleagues.

The Council's Pay and Reward Policy for the workforce was an annual report that required adoption by Council. This policy set out the internal mechanisms for remunerating Council officers and provided any changes since the last adoption.

The policy was last approved in March 2021 and there were no proposed changes to it this year. However, there were some minor legislative updates as a result of the Local Government and Elections Bill which required removal of reference to the Head of Paid Service and the replacement of the term salary with remuneration. The legislative updates were included in this year's policy. The Leader also highlighted the annual gender pay gap that was published on the Council's website.

The Leader was also pleased to report that the mean pay gap decreased for a third year to 1.49% from last year's reported 1.92% whilst the median pay gap was currently 2% the Council's gender pay gap continued to compare favourably with other Councils across Wales and the UK average of 15.4% but efforts to eliminate the pay gap between men and women employed by the Council would continue to be maintained.

#### Decision:

Cabinet approved the Pay and Reward Policy in order to meet the statutory requirement for a pay policy statement to be approved and published by Council on an annual basis.

### 5 National Collaborative Welsh Adopting/Fostering Services

The Leader presented the report on the National Adoption Service (NAS), which had been operating effectively for the 22 Welsh authorities, hosted by Cardiff, and supported by a joint

committee. It was proposed that as the NAS Director and the central team had also been supporting the National Fostering Framework, now called Foster Wales, that a similar collaboration arrangement, although not a National Fostering service, was created. The reason that a legal agreement was required for a national approach within Fostering was because currently, unlike for adoption, there was no legislation that supported the Foster Wales collaboration.

Foster Wales already supported Foster Newport with foster carer recruitment and retention, and it was hoped that this collaboration would support a longer-term reduction in costs, and increased flexibility of service. For Foster Newport this would mean that recruitment and retention of carers and other linked activities would be supported nationally by the central team.

Foster Wales already supported Foster Newport through advertising and specialised recruitment campaigns that have further reach than previously achieved by Newport alone. The recruitment and retention of foster carers was vitally important to meet Foster Newport's sufficiency requirements to reduce the use of private foster care providers.

This activity was supported by Welsh Government to the end of March 2023, with a response awaited from Welsh Government in relation to options for funding beyond the grant aid timescale. It was acknowledged that resolving this would require the commitment of both Local and Welsh Government.

The preferred option for Newport was that we supported this collaboration and continued to benefit from the 'Foster Wales' support and continued to support collaborative working on a National basis.

#### Comments from Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Cockeram supported the concept outlined in the report, which seemed very sensible, it would also help to reduce the independent sector. Councillor Cockeram however raised two issues: the number of staff; 26, seemed excessive and secondly the Council needed to be mindful that funding was only provided until 2023. After that, there was no guarantee where the funding would come from.
- Councillor Hughes said that it was positive to see this evolving from the 2015 paper and agreed with Councillor Cockeram's comments. Councillor Hughes also welcomed the positive move with regard to marketing and recruiting which would be more competitive with private sector. Councillor Hughes therefore supported the report.

#### **Decision:**

Cabinet signed the Joint Committee Agreement.

## **6 Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 - Corporate Self Assessment**

The Leader introduced the report Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, Corporate Self-Assessment to colleagues, which in February last year, received Royal Assent and required local authorities to publish an annual self-assessment of its governance and performance arrangements.

The Report presented the proposed approach that the Council would undertake to complete its annual self-assessment.

The Local Government Act required Newport Council to undertake an annual self-assessment to ensure that it was exercising its functions effectively, using its resources

economically, efficiently and effectively; and that the Council's governance arrangements were effective for securing these areas.

The Council was also required to consult with the residents and businesses of Newport, Council staff and Trade Unions.

In the last year, the Council was looking at options to identify the best course of action in relation to these requirements, within the resources available.

Three options were considered by the Council including:

- undertaking a standalone self-assessment
- integrating the self-assessment with the Council's Annual Governance Statement
- integrating the self-assessment into the Council's annual Corporate Well-being report.

The report outlined the preferred approach which was to integrate the self-assessment into the Council's annual Corporate Well-being report.

The Council's annual Well-being report already provided an overview of the Council's performance in the previous financial year and included an oversight of the Council's arrangements for its governance, finances, and progress against the Council's Corporate Plan.

The Annual Report would be improved to accommodate the new requirements set out in the Act. Governance arrangements on the scrutiny of the report would remain in place but would also consider the feedback provided by the Council's Governance and Audit Committee.

The Self-assessment report would be published later this year and would be available in Welsh and English.

#### **Decision:**

Cabinet approved the proposed approach outlined in this report and for the first Self-assessment to be completed as part of the Council's Corporate Annual Report 2021/22.

## **7 Covid Update Report**

The Leader presented the report to Cabinet, which provided an update on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the City's recovery, ensuring residents and businesses complied with the current restrictions and the progress being made with the Council's Strategic Recovery Aims and Corporate Plan.

Since the last report in March, Covid cases increased and remained prevalent across Newport's communities.

The latest ONS survey findings suggested a rise in case rates was driven by a sub type of the Omicron Variant.

The number of hospitalisations and beds occupied with Covid-19 related patients still remained low, however the impacts of restrictions over the past two years continued to impact health and social care settings.

As of the 28 March, Wales remained at Alert Level Zero with several legal restrictions still in place. Face coverings remained a legal requirement in health and care settings; and workplaces and premises open to the public continued to complete Coronavirus risk assessments.

Face coverings were no longer required by law in retail settings and on public transport.

The requirement to self-isolate following a positive Covid-19 test changed to guidance, and the £500 self-isolation payment to support people continued to be available until June 2022.

Welsh Government continued to monitor the current public health situation, and further assess the potential to remove all remaining legal measures at the next 21-day review by 14 April 2022.

For Newport Council the advice remained for elected members and officers to work remotely unless required by their role.

As part of the Council's New Normal project, staff were being prepare to undertake hybrid working, ensuring rooms and facilities across the Council's estate were suitable and safe places to work and undertake democratic roles.

The Leader may wish to ask Cabinet Members to highlighted areas of achievement, challenge, and progress.

- **Strategic Recovery Aim 1**- Extension of Free School Meals covering the forthcoming May half term and summer holiday period.
- **Strategic Recovery Aim 1** –Newport Council have been working across our communities providing drop-in sessions for basic digital skills and courses through adult community learning.
- **Strategic Recovery Aim 2** – Businesses in Newport will receive Welsh Government rate relief.
- **Strategic Recovery Aim 2** – Our Climate Change plan has been approved by Council and will be commencing delivery in 2022/23.
- **Strategic Recovery Aim 3** – Newport Council continue to follow the guidance for staff to work from home unless required by their role.
- **Strategic Recovery Aim 3** – Library and museum services are now being delivered as per the pre pandemic format with limited control measures in place.
- **Strategic Recovery Aim 4** – Newport Council continues to support the city's foodbanks and food projects.
- **Strategic Recovery Aim 4** – Participatory budget events have concluded with a total of 80 projects securing funding towards local projects.

#### Comments from Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Truman referred to the increase in cases and mentioned that Licensing Officers and Health and Safety Inspectors were still covering care settings and schools, undertaking Risk Assessments, which he commended. Councillor Truman reminded colleagues that residents of Newport still needed to be vigilant, using common sense, to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
- Councillor Davies thanked school staff for keeping schools open during this omicron variant of the virus. It was exam period for pupils as well but staff were making sure that pupils were supported as a matter of priority. Councillor Davies also referred to the free school meals and thanked the Welsh Government for their much needed support, this provision would be extended to September 2022 for all children in Newport.

- Councillor Harvey echoed comments of colleagues and hoped that the Covid virus would soon be referred to in the past tense.
- Councillor Hughes referred to the food banks and community which were accessible for Newport residents and wanted to recognise the hard work being done by volunteers and workers, in these areas.

**Decision:**

Cabinet considered and noted the contents of the report and would receive updates from officers as part of their portfolio.

**8 Post EU Transition Update Report**

The Leader presented the report, highlighting that since the last meeting in March, there continued to be ongoing issues with the cost of living and more recently the war in Ukraine.

Following several announcements from the UK Government and Welsh Government on how we would support Ukrainian refugees to settle in Wales, Council services were working tirelessly to prepare and to support refugees in Newport.

Newport would shortly see its first arrivals and services would be supporting them to settle in the city.

The cost of living was continuing to impact households in Newport. There continued to be support provided by the Council to help families that were struggling with their food and energy bills.

Newport Council would be administering the Council Tax rebate relief for A to D band houses and rate relief for businesses also agreed in line with both the Welsh Government business rate relief scheme and our own rate relief scheme supporting local businesses.

We were also continuing to support food poverty groups and organisations providing funding and support to distribute food and debt advice.

The Report also recognised that there was still more the Council could and would do to support disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in Newport and the Council would be developing its work alongside third sector and other public services to address the concerns raised by residents.

**Decision:**

Cabinet considered and noted the contents of the report and would receive updates from officers as part of their portfolio.

**9 Work Programme**

This was the regular monthly report on the work programme.

Please move acceptance of the updated programme.

**Decision:**

Cabinet agreed the Work Programme.

The Leader concluded that this was the final Cabinet meeting of the administration and the Leader took the opportunity to thank Cabinet colleagues for their support throughout the challenging period.

The Leader also thanked all officers for their help as well as Democratic Services for their support with the remote meetings during the Pandemic.