

Report

Cabinet



Part 1

Date: 15 June 2022

Subject Newport City Council Covid-19 Response and Recovery Update

Purpose To present to Cabinet an update on the Council's progress being made towards recovering services and supporting Newport's communities as part of its Strategic Recovery Aims.

Author Chief Executive
Head of People Policy and Transformation

Ward All

Summary Following the April update to Cabinet, the Welsh Government has now removed all covid regulations. The case rate remains low across Newport and Wales and hospital Covid cases are also low in Gwent.

The Council is finalising policies and procedures to enable officers to hybrid work and since the local election in May held its first hybrid Council meeting. Council services are continuing to support communities and groups who are struggling with the cost of living crisis.

Proposal To consider and note the contents of the report and for Cabinet / Cabinet Members to receive updates from officers as part of their portfolio.

Action by Corporate Management Team

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Gold Recovery Group
- Corporate Management Team

Signed

Background

Since the last Cabinet Report in [April 2022](#), Newport Council and its partners have continued to monitor the Covid-19 cases in the city through its Gold Group of senior leaders and in liaison with Welsh Government (WG), Public Health Wales (PHW) and ABUHB partners.

Wales and Welsh Government Covid-19 Update (May / June)

In the last two months Covid cases significantly reduced across Wales with the case rate below 20 cases per 100,000. Further information can be obtained from the [Public Health Wales Dashboard](#). The hospitalisation and beds occupied with Covid-19 related patients has remained low in Wales. However, the NHS is still facing significant backlogs for planned treatment across the system. Across Wales and Newport there are many adults and children that are vulnerable to Covid. WG recently announced its programme for those who will be offered a Covid jab between September and December later this year. This will be offered to those who are residents in a care home for older adults (including staff), frontline health and social care workers, all those aged 65 and over and adults aged 16 to 65 in clinical risk group.

From the 30th May, all legal requirements to wear a face covering in health and care settings has ended. It is no longer a legal requirement to self-isolate but members of the public are still encouraged to take a test if they are displaying symptoms and to self-isolate if you have a positive test. Further information on the Welsh Government long term plan can be [found here](#).

NCC and Welsh Government Support

The last financial year has been difficult for many households and businesses as the City moves into a post pandemic phase. Covid is still impacting many countries across the world e.g. China which are having significant disruptions to the supply of goods alongside the ongoing Ukraine conflict which is impacting on the stability of the energy and food markets in Europe. The cost of living crisis over the last year has seen inflation rise to 9% (May 2022), increasing interest rates and stagnant / low wage increases unable to meet these costs all having an impact on low to middle income households. Businesses are also having to pass these increased costs onto the consumer as well. In April the Welsh Government announced a cost of living payment of £150 for households living in band A-D properties and is being administered by the Council. Access to this payment can be made [here](#). For businesses, Newport Council announced it will be using its [discretionary powers](#) to support businesses in the city centre in addition to the rate relief from [Welsh Government](#).

The Council also offers signposting for households to help with their finances [here](#).

Newport City Council Update

Restrictions at Council buildings have been removed in line with Welsh Government guidance and Office based staff in Newport are still encouraged to work from home and to only work at Council buildings if it is necessary. This requirement will remain in place as the Council is finalising the necessary policies and procedures to fully undertake hybrid and flexible working as part of its 'New Normal' project. Following the local elections in May, the Council successfully held its first Council Hybrid meeting in the Council Chambers and will now be extending this approach across Cabinet, Scrutiny and Regulatory meetings. Public access to buildings will be brought back in subject to meeting necessary security and health & safety requirements. An overview of the Council's position is outlined in the table below.

Strategic Recovery Aim	Summary of Council's activities to 31 st May 2022
Strategic Recovery Aim 1 – Supporting Education & Employment	The Council continues to engage with partnerships to support residents accessing childcare, play and educational provision across the community hubs. A Newport wide jobs fair is being held on the 25 th May at Newport Centre with 42 employers attending. The Work & Skills Team are working with Wilko to recruit for 50 jobs.

Strategic Recovery Aim	Summary of Council's activities to 31st May 2022
	<p>Get into cleaning event to be held at Pill Mill Millennium 26th May & Job Centre Plus on 27th May in collaboration with Newport Norse to promote the benefits of working in the cleaning sector.</p> <p>Consideration is being given to how we can support social work skills and abilities and offer progression for entry level candidates. We are also hoping to match Restart participants into roles required through Community Renewal Funding projects, particularly in the filming sector.</p>
<p>Strategic Recovery Aim 2 – Supporting the Environment and the Economy</p>	<p>We continue to work with Housing Association partners to facilitate the delivery of affordable housing via the Social Housing Grant Programme. Newport spent its full Social Housing Grant allocation of £12m in 2021/22 plus an additional £4m of slippage. For the financial year 2022/23 Newport has an allocation of £16.3m of Social Housing Grant which it is proposed will support 14 affordable housing developments including two highly energy efficient and low carbon schemes.</p> <p>The Indoor Market opened in March and is a very popular venue. The Chartist Tower is nearing completion and hosting the Coach Tourers Association at end of May.</p> <p>Environmental Health activity is still disrupted by secondments into Test, Trace, Protect but the impact of the response to the pandemic on the service is easing. Excellent progress has been made on inspections of Food businesses to meet the requirements of the Food Standards Agency's Recovery Plan. Additional resources were made available for this work in April and May as resources for the Covid response were further reduced. 2 agency EHOs were also retained during April and May to increase performance in this area. All regulatory activity provides support to businesses wherever possible to avoid formal regulatory action.</p> <p>Officers no longer provide advice regarding COVID regulations as the business restrictions have been removed. Managers across Licensing and Trading Standards are now actively returning to business-as-usual activities. While absences linked to COVID still need to be managed, Council services regarding waste and cleansing activities and environment and leisure are also being delivered as business as usual.</p> <p>The revenues team have administered the WG NNDR relief scheme for eligible retail/hospitality businesses, with 50% reduction in bills as well as the NCC local discretionary scheme within the city centre.</p>
<p>Strategic Recovery Aim 3 – Supporting the Health & Wellbeing of Citizens</p>	<p>For the Council's Children services it is now business as usual. Adult services continue to provide all statutory duties with very limited staff. However internal residential staff for our 3 homes has improved and we are able to facilitate additional residential beds for the community or discharge from hospital. Domiciliary care providers continue to be a challenge for all our brokerage needs, with around 300 hours per week (roughly 30 packages of care) each week requiring a service. This pressure is due to their workforce pressures. The Occupational Therapy service is now fully staffed, but has a significant backlog that is audited and prioritised each week.</p> <p>Newport Council's Benefit team is administering the Unpaid Carer's Support scheme from the Welsh Government. A one off £500 payment is available for unpaid carers receiving Carer's Allowance from 16th May. Residents receiving Carer's Allowance need to submit their registration to the Council to access the funding here.</p> <p>Newport Council is still following Welsh Government guidance for staff to work from home unless required by their role. There is ongoing work as part of the New Normal project for staff to work hybrid from both their homes, Council offices and other suitable locations. We will continue to work closely with managers and trade union representatives as this work develops. Meeting rooms and other shared locations are now available for use and we continue to develop hybrid meeting technology.</p>

Strategic Recovery Aim	Summary of Council's activities to 31st May 2022
	<p>Families First recommissioning is in progress, aspiring for the new providers to be launched in the new year. The establishment of the new Prevention and Inclusion service area is welcomed, and is presently progressing with building the infrastructure. Discussions with stakeholders have commenced, with the outcome of this work providing an integrated and SMART programme of support for families and individuals.</p> <p>Early Years has continued to facilitate emergency grants 180 in total allowing families to access fundamental items such as bed etc as a partnership with Save the Children, geographically targeted at Bettws</p> <p>Transition from predominantly virtual delivery to face to face is moving at a pace with parenting groups now reconvened across the City</p> <p>Child Development Funding made available through the WG has continued to be targeted at providing activities that promote delayed development as a result of the pandemic across Newport. Additional resources have been targeted at children with ALN the % of ALN children has increased</p> <p>Early Help funding has been distributed to support organisations internal and external to the council to support reduction in waiting lists and increase support</p> <p>Summer Of Fun - The Early Years team continue to coordinate this increased package of support which aims to build on the success of the previous schemes and to continue important support for the wellbeing of children and young people aged 0 – 25 years. Engagement with play, sporting and cultural activities enables children and young people to continue their recovery from the restrictions of the last two years, with the added benefit of supporting families with the costs of activities over the summer holidays.</p> <p>Play – enhanced services have been implemented to mitigate isolation and encourage play opportunities, play provision for children with complex needs has been offered every school holiday to support the negative effect of COVID</p> <p>Flying Start expansion work is underway with additional areas due to be included in the near future, with an added focus on Welsh medium provision.</p> <p>Families have been supported with Covid Recovery grant funding, assisting with a variety of measures to improve family wellbeing following the pandemic.</p> <p>Temporary Active Travel schemes implemented during covid are being reviewed to either implement as permanent alterations where successful or remove as required.</p>
<p>Strategic Recovery Aim 4 – Supporting Citizens post Covid-19</p>	<p>In 2021/22 the Social Housing Grant Programme funded the development of over 55 new affordable homes. Developments at Tredegar Court, Coverack Road and Treberth are all due to complete shortly with developments at Emlyn Street and Hubert Road completing later this year.</p> <p>We have worked with RSL partners to access the newly established Welsh Government Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme funding. This funding supports the return to use of empty housing association properties and the development of housing association owned land and sites. We anticipate knowing the outcome of our first bid in early June 2022. We continue to work in partnership with Registered Social Landlords to provide suitable, affordable move on accommodation, although supply remains a challenge. Partnership work is ongoing which will help support vulnerable homeless households to ensure they receive the right support and accommodation. Phase 2 capital funded projects at Hill Street and Central Chambers will provide 24 units of accommodation and a housing support hub. Both are due to complete in June/ July 22.</p>

Strategic Recovery Aim	Summary of Council's activities to 31 st May 2022
	<p>Participatory Budget events have concluded and a total of 80 projects have secured funding, covering a diverse range of activities and audiences. We continue to work with these groups as the funding is issued.</p> <p>NCC is working in partnership with GAVO funding a fixed term Food Sustainability Co-ordinator to consider preventative work in relation to food poverty. The postholder will work closely with third sector partners and managing a grant programme which will further boost the capacity of food related projects</p> <p>The Council will be implementing the WG 'cost of Living grant scheme' from April – September which pays £150 to all households in Council Tax Bands A-D and those receiving Council Tax Reduction relief and this also includes a discretionary element of £1.2m which the Council will design and implement over the same period.</p> <p>Preparations underway for the WG expansion of Flying Start from Sept 23. Successful providers day was held with interested agencies as we progress with the recommissioning of Families First.</p> <p>Disabled Facilities Grant now sits in the new Prevention and Inclusion service area. We have identified ways to have a greater and earlier reach to support independent living post Covid.</p>

Financial Summary (Capital and Revenue)

The Council's financial (revenue and capital) update is reported separately as part of the Council's regular budget reports to Cabinet. The Covid-19 impact(s) are considered in the finance reports and are closely monitored as part of the Council's financial management processes.

Risks

Through the Council's Risk Management process, the Covid risk has been monitored every quarter to the Council's Cabinet and Audit and Governance Committee. Below is the latest update taken from Quarter 4 (January to March) 2021/22 risk report update.

Risk Title / Description	Risk Impact score of Risk if it occurs* (1-5)	Risk Probability of risk occurring (1-5)	Risk Mitigation Action(s) What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect?	Risk Owner Officer(s) responsible for dealing with the risk?
Covid 19 Pandemic	4	4	See Report on action being undertaken by the Executive Board, CMT and Gold group to manage the Council's response.	Executive Board

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Corporate Plan 2017-22
Strategic Recovery Aims

Options Available and considered

1. To consider and note the contents of the report and for Cabinet / Cabinet Members to receive updates from officers as part of their portfolio.
2. To request further information or reject the contents of the report

Preferred Option and Why

1. To consider and note the contents of the report and for Cabinet / Cabinet Members to receive updates from officers as part of their portfolio briefings.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

Welsh Government have been supporting local authorities through the pandemic with a Hardship Fund intended to reimburse for all Covid related spend over and above existing budgets and within a set criteria. The fund also includes loss of income compensation; again, within a set criteria. The fund ran for the entire 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years. In addition, where relevant, Welsh Government have provided specific grant funding to fund particular costs arising. This means that, overall, the financial impact of the pandemic upon the Council has been largely mitigated and this remains the case while restrictions continue to be eased.

Close monitoring of the financial issues arising, as a result of Covid, have continued throughout the financial year, with the overall impact during 2021/22 to be reported as part of the Outturn Report. All activities detailed in this report have either been funded via core budgets, specific grants or the Hardship Fund. To date, and in a similar vein to 2020/21, an overall underspend against the revenue budget is being projected. However, the underlying reasons for the underspend are not solely due to the effects of the pandemic and are largely one-off in nature.

The release of the draft settlement for local authorities took place on 21st December 2021 and confirmed local authorities were expected to manage the continuing financial impact of the pandemic from within existing resources. Therefore, as part of the budget setting and medium-term planning process, consideration was given to the potential ongoing financial impact, both in terms of additional expenditure and loss of income, beyond the 2021/22 financial year. The 2022/23 budget reflects the outcome of those discussions with resources allocated on both a one-off and recurring basis, to be reviewed on an annual basis as clarity regarding the permanent financial impact is achieved.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the Report, which provides an update on the actions taken to deliver the Council's Covid-19 Response and Strategic Recovery Aims and progress since the previous report. Any legal issues in relation to the recovery plan will be picked up at the appropriate time as part of the operational delivery of the individual actions, within service areas. All legal restrictions have now been removed, with the exception of the wearing of face-coverings in health and social care setting. Therefore, all of the Covid-response regulatory and enforcement work has effectively ceased, although a scaled-back TTP service is being developed at a regional level.

Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation

There are no HR related issues arising directly from this report, and we will continue to work closely with managers and trade union representatives to develop policies for the workforce legislative measures are relaxed.

Continuing to adopt the rate relief scheme is in line with the Council's strategic recovery aims and its Well-being Objective to "Promote economic growth and regeneration whilst protecting the environment" and will support the "Newport Offer" intervention within Newport's Well-being Plan.

Scrutiny Committees

Not Applicable

Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment:

The areas covered in this report demonstrate the progress being made against the Strategic Recovery Aims which also support the Council's Corporate Plan 2017-22.

In consideration of the sustainable development principle, 5 ways of working:

Long Term – The progress reported against the Strategic Aims support the long term aims of the Council to improve people’s lives.

Preventative – The preventative work outlined in the report support the Council’s approach to minimising future Covid 19 outbreaks and as necessary provide targeted support to those that need it. Re-establishing services in line with necessary legislation and regulation enables the Council to operate in the new normal.

Integration – The Strategic Recovery Aims have been integrated with the Council’s Wellbeing Objectives set in the Corporate Plan as well as Service Plans. Recommendations from the Community Impact Assessment will also shape how the Council can improve the delivery of services across communities.

Involvement – Included in this report are actions to involve Newport’s communities to provide assurance and shape the way in which services are being delivered by the Council. Their feedback and involvement in the process will enable the Council to consider how services are delivered in the long term.

Collaboration - The actions in the report are being undertaken in collaboration with partners from the Council’s Public Services Board but also strategic partners within each service area. The collaborative work enables the Council to share resources and build expertise and knowledge.

Consultation

Not Applicable

Background Papers

Cabinet Report (Strategic Recovery Aims) – July 2020

[Corporate Plan 2017-22](#)

[Responding to the ‘New Normal’ Report to Overview and Management Scrutiny Committee](#)

Dated: 7 June 2022