

Minutes



Council

Date: 1 March 2022

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Cleverly, P Cockeram, D Davies, M Al-Nuaimi, M Evans, C Ferris, D Fouweather, J Guy, D Harvey, I Hayat, 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, K Whitehead, D Wilcox, D Williams, G Berry, J Clarke, Y Forsey, P Hourahine, J Hughes, J Jordan, L Lacey, S Marshall, W Routley, H Townsend, J Watkins, A Morris, Horton, Hussain and Jones

Apologies: Councillors K Critchley, C Evans, G Giles, M Whitcutt, R White, V Dudley and T Holyoake

1. Preliminaries

2. Minutes

Minutes of 25 January 2022 were 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. The motion was seconded by Councillor Fouweather.

Resolved: That the f appointments set out in the report to Council be agreed, together with the following additional appointments.

Governing Body Appointments

| Governing Body | No of Vacancies / Re-appointments | Nominations Received |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| John Frost School | 1 | Tracey Holyoake |
| St Andrews Primary School | 2 | Ken Critchley Roger Jeavons |
| St Michaels Primary School | 1 | Modupe Obilande |
| Milton Primary School | 2 | Emma Corten-Stowell Julie Hando |
| Llanmartin Primary School | 1 | Ray Mogford |

Outside Body Appointments

Newport Norse Board Director - Rhys Cornwall

The Cabinet Member also advised Council about the following Heads of Service appointments made by the Appointments sub-Committee. This was just for information purposes, as the appointments do not require ratification by full Council. The Cabinet members congratulated the officers on their appointments.

Head of Service Appointments

Head of Regeneration and Economic Development – Tracey Brooks

Head of Environment and Public Protection – Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez

Head of People, Policy and Transformation – Tracy McKim

Head of City Services – Stephen Jarrett

Head of Children’s Services – Natalie Poyner

Head of Prevention and Inclusion – Caroline Ryan-Phillips

4. Police Issues (30 minutes)

5. Notice of Motion - Suspension of Standing Orders for Ukraine

The Leader moved that Standing Orders be suspended to allow her to present an emergency motion to Council, without prior written notice. This was seconded by Councillor M Evans.

Resolved: That Standing Orders be waived to enable the emergency motion to be presented.

The Leader then presented the following emergency Motion and reserved the right to speak later in the debate:

“That Newport City Council deplores the unacceptable aggression that President Putin has taken against the people of Ukraine; bringing war once more to the continent of Europe

We stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

Newport has a long and proud tradition of giving sanctuary to refugees and we are ready to do what we can to help those having to flee their homes and country as a result of this cruel and unwarranted invasion.

The actions of the Russian government do not respect the rule of international law or the United Nations and are rightly being condemned by democratic nations across the world.

We will support all efforts to secure a peaceful and diplomatic solution, and for conflict and loss of life to be avoided.”

The Motion was seconded by Councillor M Evans, who took the opportunity to speak. Cllr M Evans thanked the Leader for inviting him to second the Motion.

No amendments were proposed.

The Mayor also added that he supported the Ukrainians in their struggle.

Councillor M Evans went on to say:

It gives me great pleasure to formally second the motion. I don’t think there is a single person across the city who hasn’t been deeply shocked by the terrible scenes we are witnessing in Ukraine.

Ukrainians have displayed awe-inspiring bravery and heroism in the face of Russia's attack on their sovereignty and freedom, and we need to keep providing all the economic and military support we can to help those protecting their country.

Locally I am heartened to see so many residents and organisations providing much needed clothes, toys for children and even items for pets.

It is incredibly difficult to really understand the pain, trauma and fear these people are going through, but just watching the news and pictures of a mother, whose young child has cancer having to flee, and no doubt leave her husband behind to fight, puts our problems into perspective.

We take our freedoms for granted and I guess there will be a significant number of Russians who are also horrified by Putin's actions, but fear reprisals, you can still watch Russian TV and their distorted view of the situation, but it's important at times like this, that we recognise how lucky we are.

Mr Mayor, I must confess I have seen some pretty atrocious statements on social media from all sides of the political spectrum, but thankfully from a mindless minority.

At times like this we need to show unity and solidarity as a city and stand together with Ukraine

Comments on the Motion from Councillors:

- Councillor Wilcox was shocked by the unprovoked attack. The situation was changing by the minute but people stood united in Newport, Wales and UK. There was a need to ensure that Russia was out of the economic system. The UK must clear any corrupt Russian money. Sanctions must be comprehensive with a broad response to face down aggression. The ideology was mirrored in despots and dictators around the world.
- Councillor Davies felt that it was right to stand with Ukraine. Putin was a despot invading another country threatening to use nuclear weapons. He invaded Ukraine in 2014 and interfered with elections around the world. Newport was proud to provide sanctuary for asylum seekers. Councillor Davies supported the motion because we were one of the same; human beings.
- Councillor Harvey considered the plight of children and families in the Ukraine. Refugees were welcome in Newport and we would do what we could to keep them safe.
- Councillor Lacey echoed comments of colleagues, adding that it was an unbelievable turn of events and thanked education providers in school to explain to pupils within Newport about the situation. Economic sanctions were supported as there was no price on freedom.
- Councillor Forsey agreed that refugees must be supported during this heart-breaking situation and commended the efforts by the charity Women of Newport, UNICEF and others supporting the children and families.
- Councillor Whitehead supported the motion and also explained that we needed to see that Russians did not accept what Putin was doing either and it was hoped that Newport would offer help with open arms to those Russians opposing the invasion.
- Councillor Suller suggested that the Council could send a letter to the Russian Embassy condemning the actions of their leader.

- Councillor Cockeram supported the motion and suggested colleagues watch ex president Gorbachev on YouTube, as his opinion was insightful in relation to the situation.
- Councillor Truman added that Ukraine was a democratic country and that innocent people were being killed. It was also deplorable that the threat of nuclear weapons was being used.
- Councillor Jeavons referred to images such as tank driving over a car which was sickening and added that his heart went out to the people of Ukraine.
- Councillor Spencer had full support for Ukrainian citizens and stood with them in solidarity.
- Councillor Hussain fully supported the motion and also mentioned that there were charitable groups in Newport who would gratefully receive donations.
- Councillor Marshall went to Kutaisi, Georgia, Newport's Twin Town and mentioned that they were also shocked, wondering where it would end, which was worrying.
- Councillor Horton supported the motion and mentioned that he had a Russian member of staff in his employ who had similar views as those shared this evening. Unfortunately, she had received negative remarks but we needed to ensure we also showed support for Russian people living in Newport. The Mayor suggested contacting Supt Vicki Townsend, if Councillor Horton was concerned.
- Councillor Cleverly fully supported the motion.
- Councillor Guy referred to an image of victim who was shopping as normal the day before and also fully supported the motion.
- Councillor Routley said that it was heartening to see the Council join forces with one voice, from Wales, UK and Europe. Putin underestimated people's reaction to his attack.
- Councillor Fouweather added his concern that this invasion might not end with Ukraine.
- Councillor J Watkins shared all the views and stood in solidarity, their bravery was humbling and would do everything to support Ukraine.
- Councillor Mogford mentioned that there was a lot of inspiring comments. Appeasement should not be an option for dictators and despots.
- The Leader summed up by thanking Councillor M Evans for seconding the motion and all colleagues in supporting the debate. Today in Wales, the Leader visited two of Newport schools and shared in the joy of the children and listened to a choir singing, full of enthusiasm and excitement. Because of the impact of Covid the children didn't have that opportunity over the last two year. It therefore made the images more disturbing coming into our homes on the attack in the Ukraine. The Leader added that our thoughts were with Ukraine and the Russian citizens who did not support Putin. The Leader also thanked the polish and eastern European communities. Anyone that needed help and support were welcomed to Newport. The Leader was meeting with other LAs in Wales on 2 March to see what support could be provided. The Leader would offer strength compassion and support to those victims and refugees.

The Mayor invited Councillors to vote on the Motion.

Resolved:

The Mayor declared the Motion unanimously carried.

6. Notice of Motion: Cost of Living

Councillor Hughes presented the following motion to colleagues and reserved the right to speak later in the debate:

“This council recognises the unprecedented cost of living crisis facing many households across Newport, Wales and the UK. In the coming months more and more households will see increases of a magnitude never seen before as the energy price cap is removed or energy deals come to an end. This comes on top of a cost of living crisis created by the impacts of Brexit and Public Document Pack the Covid Pandemic which have already seen an unprecedented squeeze on peoples incomes. Inflation remains is at the highest level for over 30 years which is putting huge pressure on household budgets as earnings have not kept pace with prices, leaving family budgets squeezed and people worse off. The additional costs of day to day living are already impacting negatively on every household across Newport but even more so on families who are living close to the bread line many of whom still need to visit food banks and will now be faced with the terrible choice of heating their home or putting food on the table. The charity National Energy Action (NEA) has warned that a record 6 million UK households will be in fuel poverty when the next increase in the energy price cap comes into force in April, and this view is compounded by the findings of the Resolution Foundation think tank, which warned that millions of UK families face a "year of squeeze" in 2022 thanks to rising energy bills, stagnant wages and tax rises. The Bank of England has also said it expects inflation to reach 6% by the spring. The Resolution Foundation have said that an increase in National Insurance contributions from April, along with an expected rise in energy bills in the same month could amount to a £1,200 hit to household finances, with low-income families forced to bear the brunt of these rises as they spend a greater proportion of their income on electricity and gas. As a Council, we will continue to do everything within our power to help mitigate energy costs by signposting residents to the number of financial support options available. We have administered over £1.5million to our eligible residents through the winter fuel support grant. We have also increased our support for food banks and related charities to £100,000. However, the help families need to deal with the cost of living crisis can only be fixed by decisive action by the UK Government This Council therefore calls upon the Leader of the Council to write to the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer and call for the immediate implementation and action for the following:

- *Suspension of the proposed increase in National Insurance contributions*
- *A reduction in VAT for Energy Bills to help families and householders*
- *An introduction of a new lower price cap on energy bills to protect households from excessive price rises”*

The Motion was seconded by the Leader, who also reserved the right to speak.

No amendments were proposed.

Comments on the Motion from Councillors:

- Councillor Harvey fully supported the motion and compared the cost of living to the 1920s. It was appalling and horrific for everyone in dire straits; those working or out of work were equally affected.
- Councillor M Evans advised that the Conservative party would not take part in this debate as it was being used for political purposes.
- Councillor Davies considered that supporting the motion was the right thing to do and this was the highest rate of inflation and could rise further. The fuel increase was the highest on record and could rise further due to the position in Ukraine. Many homes were poorly

insulated and people were turning their heating off. Wages were stagnating and the average worker would only be earning £13,000 by mid 2020s. As Cabinet Member for Education Councillor Davies was also concerned about the children in Newport who were being supported by schools because of the situation.

- Councillor Wilcox felt that the cost-of-living crisis is about steep price increases in everyday and essential food items and making the situation worse for the 4.7 million adults and 2.5 million children already living in food insecurity.

The Welsh Labour Government in collaboration with local government was doing all it could to ameliorate the worst effects of the price rises for people in Newport. Councillor Wilcox therefore fully support the motion.

- Councillor Truman supported the motion to try and help people living in hardship, cost of living increase meant people were suffering and should be supported by all.
- Councillor Hourahine also supported the motion.
- Councillor Cockeram also supported the motion.
- The Leader made a point about the impact on the National Insurance increase and energy increase on businesses and service providers as well as the potential wages stagnation it could also stagnate the economy. 17,000 Newport households saw their universal credit cut by £1,000. WG was offering a £150 payment to ameliorate the situation, we would do everything to support Newport residents. Therefore, the Leader supported the motion.
- Councillor Hughes added that this impacted Newport families in every ward and that people were falling into poverty in their hundreds of thousands. There was an increase in people using foodbanks therefore Councillor Hughes supported the motion.

Resolved:

The Cost of Living Crisis Motion was carried.

7. National Non-Domestic Rates: Discretionary Rate Relief Schemes 2022/23

The Leader presented the report to Council regarding the non-domestic rates paid by businesses in Newport and in particular the city centre.

The report considered adopting two schemes, firstly the Welsh Government's Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Rate Relief scheme 2022 (Part A of the report) and a new Newport City Centre Local Rate Relief Scheme (Part B of the report).

Firstly, the Leader highlighted the Welsh Government Scheme, which outlined a continuation of the previous relief arrangements, but at a reduced maximum rates relief of 50% to qualifying businesses across the city.

This was fully funded by Welsh Government and was a national scheme in Wales. It was an extremely valuable scheme offering support for up to 1,200 businesses in Newport and recognised that support was still required for this sector as they attempted to 'recover' from the impacts of the pandemic over the last two years.

Secondly, the Leader highlighted the local city centre scheme. This was completely new, and unique to the City Centre.

It represented a significant investment and focus on businesses in the city centre and illustrated how the Council proposed to help them 'recover' after the last two years.

Whilst the national Welsh Government funded scheme was welcomed and would provide rate relief to those in the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors, the Council recognised that the scheme alone would not be sufficient to address the problems faced by the Newport city centre. The second innovative scheme therefore, was designed to assist existing businesses to remain viable post-covid and to incentivise new businesses to open in empty city centre retail units, building on the national scheme.

The number of empty shops in Newport has remained persistently high, as well as being unsightly. The longer these units remained empty, the harder they were to let. It was important that existing viable businesses were supported as well, especially after the economic shock of the pandemic.

If adopted, the Newport City Centre Local Rate Relief Scheme would see eligible businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector receive 25% of the full rates payable in the form of a reduction on their rate bill. Those eligible would also to receive the Welsh Government relief and the Newport City Centre Local Rate Relief, further reducing their bill, and in most cases, they would only have 25% of the rates to pay in 2022-23.

It was proposed that the scheme would run for a second year and eligible businesses will then, assuming no further national scheme is in place, have 25% business rate relief.

It was anticipated that the Newport City Centre Rate Relief would make the centre of Newport a more attractive proposition to new businesses, whilst assisting existing businesses to overcome the covid pandemic and remain viable.

The report detailed those businesses that were eligible and it was predicted that it would assist up to approximately 160 businesses in the city centre. The scheme was carefully designed to:

- target the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors as they were particularly affected by the Covid pandemic
- be comprehensive for businesses and administration for the Council was straightforward as the scheme replicated much of the Welsh Government's national scheme in terms of eligibility
- focus on the city centre providing significant benefits for all residents from this investment, due to anticipated employment opportunities and a better 'street environment'
- be specifically aimed at reducing the current number of vacant premises, in conjunction with other existing economic development grants
- limit the rate to 25% and apply the scheme to properties with Rateable Values at or under £50k, enabling the scheme to operate for two years, and allow sufficient time for recovery in the sector; balancing this with the cost of any scheme.

The Leader hoped that Council would agree that it represented a significant opportunity to support business, the city and its residents, with a carefully targeted scheme, helping existing businesses to recover and encourage new businesses into our city centre. The Leader moved the adoption of the proposed rate relief schemes, as set out in the Report. This was duly seconded and put to the vote. There were no amendments or comments.

Resolved:

Council agreed to adopt the Welsh Government's Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rate Relief Scheme for 2022-23 and the Newport City Centre Local Rate Relief Scheme, by making the

appropriate determinations and decision, included within the report, as required by Sections 47(1)(a) and 47(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

8. **Discretionary Rate Relief for Charities and Similar Organisations**

The Leader highlighted to colleagues that the report set out some changes to the existing discretionary rate relief policy that mainly affected charities that occupied premises in the city.

The current discretionary rate relief policy required updating to take account any changes to business rates for small properties, and broaden the scope of the rate relief awarded so that more eligible organisations could benefit from full rate relief.

In particular, those local charities and organisations connected to children and young people and those that directly supported the work of the Council.

The provided framework assessed applications since coming into effect in 2016, although the current discretionary rate relief policy highlighted some anomalies in the way that some organisations were treated:

- Charities were liable for 20% rates when a 'normal' ratepayer in the same building would pay no rates due to small business rate relief. Some charitable ratepayers that were not commercial in nature, for example the Scouts, had to find considerable sums to pay the 20% rate bill currently payable.
- The significant contribution of organisations that directly assisted the Council in pursuing its objectives were not recognised within the current policy

The changes to the policy outlined in this report, if adopted would therefore resolve these issues and enable charities that directly benefitted the city's residents to receive full rate relief.

As the report indicated, many of these charities, such as the Scouts, the Guides and Community Youth Clubs had a positive impact on young people and their families, and on the wider communities they operated within.

The Leader was pleased that the policy now reflected the contribution such organisations made and that they were going to be supported financially to carry on their good work. This new policy was a positive move forward in supporting the citizens of Newport and communities across the city.

The Leader moved the adoption of the proposed charitable to-up rate relief scheme, as set out in the Report. This was duly seconded. No amendments were proposed

Comments from Councillors:

- Councillor Hourahine asked if GAVO would benefit from this change. The Monitoring Officer advised that a written request be submitted to the Head of Finance who would be able to advise on whether they matched the criteria.

The motion was put to the vote and duly carried.

Resolved:

Council agreed to adopt the updated policy in Appendix One applicable from 1 April 2022 by making the appropriate determination and decision, as required by Sections 47(1)(a) and 47(3) respectively of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

9. 2022/23 Capital Strategy and Treasury

The Leader advised Council that the Capital and Treasury Management Strategies, brought to Council was reviewed and commented upon by Governance & Audit Committee at their meeting which took place on 27 January, these were included within the report.

Cabinet also endorsed both strategies, at their meeting of 18 February, and approved the detailed capital programme.

Council was required to approve both strategies and the prudential indicators and limits contained

The two strategies, which were a requirement of CIPFA's Prudential Code, formed a critical part of short, medium and long term financial planning and were intrinsically linked with the revenue budget setting process.

The purpose of the Capital Strategy was to set out the Council's approach to decision making regarding capital expenditure and, in the process, demonstrating that those decisions were made in line with service objectives, whilst giving consideration to risk, reward and impact.

The Capital Strategy was inherently linked with the Treasury Management Strategy which, itself, was concerned with the Council's approach to managing its cash, including, primarily, the approach to borrowing and investing activities. A key aspect of the Treasury Management strategy was the borrowing limits, to be approved today, which formed part of the suite of prudential indicators which governed the Council's cash management activities.

The Capital Strategy was a long-term focussed document, which considered the next 10 years as a minimum. Because of this long-term focus, it was critical that decisions made were reflective of the need for capital plans to be affordable, prudent and sustainable.

Whilst Cabinet made decisions regarding the projects that comprised the Capital Programme, it was full Council that determined the borrowing limits that must be adhered to. Many projects were funded from sources such as grants, capital receipts and specific reserves, however there was a number that could not be funded in this way and were ultimately funded via borrowing. The overall Capital Programme, therefore needed to be set within these borrowing limits.

Capital Programme

The forthcoming financial year (2022/23) represented the last year of the current five-year Capital Programme. However, two years have been added to the programme to reflect those projects which started in this current programme and extend beyond it to completion. It was a large and challenging programme to deliver, with the programme standing at £288.4m in totality and in excess of £100m in 2022/23 alone.

This included a number of our key capital priorities, as well as investments such as borrowing for the Cardiff Capital Regional City Deal and an element of borrowing headroom to allow flexibility for new schemes or additional costs to be funded. Some of the larger schemes within the programme included:

- £111.7m for Education and schools, of which £75m was included in relation to the Council's 21st Century Schools Band B plans, which would see a significant improvement in the quality of school buildings
- Over £25m of funding for the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal which contributed towards a huge level of economic development across the region, including for the benefit of

Newport

- Nearly £10m for the new footbridge at Newport Station
- Over £12m in relation to a refurbishment and restoration of the Transporter Bridge
- £19.7m for the new leisure centre which, paving the way for the new Coleg Gwent development, forming part of the Newport Knowledge Quarter

Of the £288.4m total programme, approximately £92m of the expenditure was to be funded via debt, increasing the need to borrow resulting in the Council committing to being a net borrower over the medium to long term. This commitment to being a net borrower was reflected in Table 2 of the report and showed the anticipated level of growth of cumulative level of borrowing, with actual borrowing anticipated to increase from the current level of £149m to an anticipated peak of £203m by 2023/24, based on the delivery of the current programme, set out in the report.

The required borrowing could either take the form of actual external borrowing or be managed via the use of existing cash resources, known as internal borrowing. The Council had historically been successful at maximising its internal borrowing capacity, in turn reducing the need to incur the costs associated with external borrowing. The level of internal borrowing represented by the level of cash-backed reserves held, was expected to be circa £100m heading in to 2022/23. This meant that this was the historic value of debt-funded capital expenditure which was funded via internal borrowing. The capacity for internal borrowing however, was diminishing, as earmarked reserves were utilised. As a result, the need to externally borrow would increase to fund this historic expenditure.

In addition, any future capital expenditure, either in the existing programme or the future programme, would lead to a requirement to undertake further borrowing and add to the overall capital financing requirement. This served to remind us why decisions needed to take into consideration affordability, prudence, and sustainability.

The costs associated with the borrowing required for the existing programme, known as the capital financing costs, were already fully funded, due to the better than expected funding settlement from 2021/22. This was shown in Table 3.

The development of a new capital programme from 2023/24 however, would potentially see the need to borrow grow further and it was important that the costs arising from further borrowing could be met from within the revenue budget. The proportion of the revenue budget dedicated to capital financing costs was already relatively high compared to comparable Welsh councils and, therefore, it was important that the new programme did not disproportionately impact upon the revenue budget and was sustainable.

The Treasury Management Strategy was primarily concerned with the Council's approach to borrowing and investing and includes a number of key prudential indicators.

The Council is committed to being a net borrower over the medium to long term. The preferred strategy was to maximise the level of internal borrowing, although this capacity was expected to reduce year on year. External borrowing may be required in future in order to meet operational cashflow requirements. The Council would defer its need to borrow for as long as possible, it may consider undertaking borrowing early, to secure favourable interest rates, providing this was affordable and within the agreed borrowing limits. This action would only be taken in conjunction with advice from Treasury Advisors.

In terms of investing, the objective when investing funds was to strike an appropriate balance between risk and return, minimising the risk of incurring losses from defaults and the risk of receiving unsuitably low investment income. The Council intended to diversify its investments

into different asset classes, to maximise returns whilst mitigating against the risk and low yields from short-term unsecured bank investments. This change in approach was placed on hold due to the uncertain economic climate caused by the pandemic, however the intention is to explore this further during 2022/23.

The Leader moved the approval of the Capital Strategy, as set out in the Report. This was duly seconded and put to the vote. There were no amendments or comments.

Resolved:

That Council

- Approve the Capital Strategy (Appendix 2), which incorporated the current approved capital programme, and the borrowing requirements/limits needed to deliver the current capital programme.
- Approve the Treasury Management Strategy and Treasury Management Indicators, the Investment Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) for 2022/23 (Appendix 3)

As part of the above:

- Noted the increased debt and corresponding revenue cost of this, in delivering the current Capital Programme, and the implications of this over both the short and medium-long term with regard to affordability, prudence and sustainability.
- Noted the Head of Finance recommendation to Council that borrowing needed to be limited to that included in the current Capital Programme, and the recommended prudential indicators on borrowing limits to achieve this.
- Noted the requirement to limit and manage debt funded expenditure beyond the existing programme period, for sustainability purposes, with particular regard to the development of the new Capital Programme.
- Noted the changes to the Prudential Code and Treasury Management Code, and the impact of those changes on the Council's approach to capital investment and treasury management.
- Noted comments made by Audit Committee on 27 January 2022 (paragraph 6).

10. **2022/23 Revenue Final Budget and MTFP**

The Leader presented to colleagues the Council Tax report for 2022/23. It was an integral part of the Council's budget for 2022/23 which required the increase indicated in February Cabinet meeting, which was 2.4%.

As the 'Administration', the Cabinet made decisions on the allocation of resources and full Council then made the final decision on the council tax level only. Council this evening was to agree the Council Tax for 2022/23 and via this, the Council's total net budget for that year too.

The proposed budget built on this year's current budget and how the Council invested our underspend from the 2020/21 financial year. It was also mindful, and demonstrated synergy with the support that Welsh Government gave to businesses and communities over the last two years.

A number of key priority areas would receive significant investment, as we recovered from the last two years. They included the following areas of activity:

- Over £8m in schools and over £6.5m in social care; with a focus on **prevention and early intervention services**. Support for communities, families and young people meant this investment protected and enhanced the ability to do this in a timely fashion. The budget also provided for investment in housing and homelessness services. This would enable the continuity of the good work carried out to support the vulnerable citizens who needed this support with housing and provide capacity to move towards the ambition of net zero carbon.
- Further **support for the city centre**, investing almost half a million pounds over the next two years to promote the city, encourage tourism, provide capacity to co-ordinate the Council's and its partners' work within the centre and improve the environment in and around the city with more cleansing capacity.
- **Green spaces**, providing greater levels of investment. The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on people's lives. Being outdoors and spending time in green space was shown to be highly beneficial to both mental and physical wellbeing. It was the Cabinet's intention that this investment in parks and outdoor spaces would encourage residents and families to connect further with the natural environment and within their local communities.

Cabinet also considered the alignment of the permanent budgets set out within this report with one off funding available from this year's underspend, and how this could be used to further enhance the Cabinet's offering.

- In addition to the permanent funding in the city's parks and open spaces a further £2.5m one off investment in these areas would be funded from the revenue underspend at the end of the year. This would improve access in cemeteries and provide capacity to invest in play areas across the city. This investment would be taken in conjunction with the local residents who used these spaces, prioritising the things that mattered most to our residents.
- In addition, an investment of nearly £1m to support existing retail, leisure and hospitality businesses in the city centre as well as encouraging more businesses to take up our empty premises. This would provide support to businesses recovering from the last two years as well as offering support to new businesses coming into the city centre.

The budget built on last year's programme where we invested in our businesses and communities - with more investment in business, the city centre and in its green spaces. This also aligned with and built upon activity prioritised by Welsh Government

The Leader turned to the recommended Council Tax increase for 2022/23. February Cabinet meeting recommended a reduced 2.4% increase. Before a decision was made on the level of Council Tax proposed the Leader made the following points:

- The percentage increase was used as the focus for comparison with relative increases in other Local Authority areas. This budget however, and the absolute values, the monetary values were what mattered. Newport continued to have one of the lowest Council Tax increases in Wales and the monetary values the percentage increase generated was less than the value it would generate in nearly all other Councils in Wales.

The Leader went on to explain, the monetary value 2.4% generated, equated to £2.48 a month for a Band D property; to generate an equivalent amount, almost two thirds of Welsh Councils would need to increase council tax by only 2.1% and less. This was important to understand.

- Most properties in Newport were band A to C and a 2.4% increase would increase *monthly* bills by £1.66, £1.93, and £2.21 respectively. This was a modest increase and the Leader was pleased that Cabinet was able to deliver these very modest increases, but the total monetary value the increase generated was needed for the budget and would be invested carefully in the areas of our services which supported families and the development of the city.
- Newport's tax level was one of the lowest in Wales and the UK for comparable Councils and a 2.4% recommended increase will maintain that. The rate was not dissimilar to other increases across Wales.
- For the last 12 years Newport's position was consistent and remained in the position of second or third of the lowest Council Tax levels in Wales. A substantial package of savings and efficiencies were implemented over the last five to 10 years to ensure this was achieved.
- Whilst there continued to be a number of financial pressures over the medium term the Leader was very pleased that we managed to respond to the concerns raised by our residents and reduce the council tax increases accordingly.

The Leader commended the budget and the modest level of Council Tax increase required and asked for colleagues to support this. The Leader moved the recommended budget proposals as set out in the report, which was duly seconded. No amended budget proposals were moved.

Comments from Councillors:

- Councillor M Evans advised that the Conservative Group accepted the budget put before Council.
- Councillor Whitehead added that it was a good budget and was pleased to see that it included homeless support, school support as well as a boost to the city. Councillor Whitehead therefore supported the budget overall.
- Councillor Davies mentioned that as Cabinet Member for Education, she welcomed the budget and completely supported the 2.4% Council Tax rise, which recognised the residents increased cost of living. Councillor Davies also reminded residents that council tax reduction was available.
- Councillor Townsend gave the following statement:

The Liberal Democrats on Newport Council recognise the positive news in the budget for schools and social services, and are pleased to support this part of the budget entirely; In terms of the budget as a whole, our amendment seeks to meet additional resident priorities that are not met in the budget elsewhere:

We are proposing:

- An immediate 5.1% solidarity cut to councillor income at all levels – voluntary as individuals if we cannot do this as a Council, generating £51,000 that we can use to meet resident priorities;
- An allocation of the £800,000 underspend to fund a second waste management site, which should come from the proposed underspend this year, – given the proposed scale of savings from having a second centre, of £4.3m by the council's own calculation, this should pay for itself quickly;
- An allocation of £400,000 to establish CCTV in hotspot areas, with an additional £100,000 to support residents in paying for installation of their own equipment – this would come from the £2 million in savings planned for this year;

- An allocation of up to £50,000 for legal advice and support on how to extricate ourselves from the disastrous arrangement wherein this Labour Council are paying almost £1m a year to subsidise commercial failure in Friar's Walk – again, this would come from the £2m in savings for this year;
- The contingency funds would reduce from £2m to £1.45m, which is only a cautious divergence from the proposed council budget, and would therefore have no impact on Council tax.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that this was not a proposed amendment to the motion, as Councillor Townsend was not proposing any change to the Council tax rate or the base budget. These were simply comments and a request that Cabinet consider these matters when deciding how the base budget should be spent.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Townsend for her statement.

- Councillor Hourahine added that this was a beneficial budget to council tax payers of Newport and therefore commended the budget.
- Councillor J Watkins referred to the school budget and felt that some schools were in the red and improvement on the learning environment was required, in particular Caerleon Comprehensive.
- Councillor Wilcox supported the budget, saying that it was an excellent example of what could be done with money. Councillor Wilcox commended the Leader on her budget and the way the money was spent on the people of Newport.
- Councillor Routley also supported the budget.
- Deputy Leader agreed that the outcome of the budget meant that residents of Newport had been listened to during the consultation process.
- The Leader summed up by saying that she had taken into consideration comments of colleagues and welcomed their supportive comments. Housing and homelessness budget was £15M likewise, the investment in CCTV £700,000 as mentioned in the report. Investment in education was over and above inflation and the previous report highlighted £75M capital expenditure going into Band B programme match funded by WG. This included Bassaleg and Caerleon School. This overall budget was because of the settlement from WG.

The budget motion was put to the vote and duly carried.

Resolved:

Council agreed to the following

Revenue budget and council tax 22/23 (section 2-8)

- 1 To note that an extensive consultation exercise was completed on the 2022/23 budget proposals. Cabinet took this into account in recommending final details of their budget
- 2 To note the Head of Finance's recommendations that minimum General Fund balances be maintained at a level of at least £6.5million, the confirmation of the robustness of the overall budget underlying the proposals, subject to the key issues highlighted in section 7. Also, to note the potential use the general reserves and the wider package of revenue budget provision and uncommitted reserves, as set out in section 7 to provide mitigation for the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

- 3 To approve a council tax increase for Newport City Council of 2.4%, a Band D tax of £1,272.01; and resulting overall revenue budget shown in appendix 1
- 4 To approve the formal council tax resolution, included in appendix 3 which incorporated The Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and Community Council precepts

Medium term financial plan (section 5)

- 5 To note the MTFP and the uncertainty facing Local Government over the medium term around the progress of the pandemic, economic challenges, increasing demand within service areas and Brexit
- 6 To note Cabinet's approval of the implementation of the three-year plan, including all budget proposals, as summarised within the medium-term financial plan (appendix 4). Considering point 5 above it should be noted that financial projections was subject to on-going review and updating.

To note and approve the councils reserves strategy and invest to save protocol. Estimated reserve balances as of 31 March as set out in appendix 5a of the report.

11. Welsh Language Five Year Strategy

The Leader informed colleagues of the recent death of the Welsh Language Commissioner, Aled Roberts on Sunday 13 February. Aled was a former Leader of Wrexham Council and an Assembly Member for North Wales region in 2011.

The Leader presented the report to council which was subject to a number of Welsh Language Standards, imposed by the Welsh Language Commissioner. Standard 145 placed an obligation on the council to publish a five-year strategy which set out how we proposed to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language in Newport.

The Standards also required that the Strategy includes a percentage target for increasing or maintaining the numbers of Welsh speakers in the area and a statement setting out how this would be achieved.

This was the second Welsh Language Promotional Strategy which built on the links, good work and progress made over the last five years.

This Strategy represented an evolution from the 2017/22 plan, with a focus on delivering a vision for the Welsh language in Newport that included all of its diverse communities, working in partnership with key stakeholders and meeting its statutory obligations.

The Strategy reflected Newport as a Welsh city with rich multicultural, multilingual communities, celebrating the Welsh language as part of our shared identity, and increase opportunities for everyone to see, hear, learn, use and love the national language.

Welsh language work across a range of areas included the new Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and work with Public Service Board partners through the Right Skills Board.

The Council continued its commitment to develop internal structures and policies to support staff who wished to learn Welsh, or to use their skills in the workplace.

This Strategy provided drive and focus for the next five years as Newport continued to raise the profile of the Welsh language, supporting Welsh Government reach its target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050.

The Leader moved the acceptance of the Welsh Language Strategy and invited Cllr Jason Hughes, Welsh Language Member Champion to second the motion and comment:

Mae'r strategaeth yn. Cyflwyno gweledigaeth y cyngor ar gyfer yr iaith gymraeg Yong Ngasnewydd-
Bod pawb yn gallu gweld; clywed; disgru, defnyddio a caru Cymraeg.

Er bod ein targed ar gyfer twf yn canolbwyntio ar addysg, rydym yn cydnabod bod angen uchelgais ehangach ar gyfer y Gymraeg yng Ngasnewydd er mwyn gwneud yr iaith yn hygyrch a gynhwysol fel y gall ein holl drigolion ymgysylltu a hi.

I gyflawni hyn rydym wedd datblygu tair thema strategol syn canolbwyntio ar gymunedau addysg, diwylliant ac hefyd chyflogaeth a sgilliau.

Mae cypress o gamau gweithredu syn ymwneud ar themau hyn wedi cynnwys y strategaeth a bydd y rhain yn cael eu hadolygun barhaus, yn enwedig yng ngoleuni data's cyfrifiad (sensws) newydd a all dweud mwy wrthym am brofil ieithyddol Casnewydd.

Byddwn hefyd yn defnyddio strwythurau llywodraethu presennol I fonitro cynnydd y strategaeth gynnwys drwy ein bwrdd sgilliau cywir; grwp gweithredu iaith Cymraeg ac hefyd fforwm yr iaith Cymraeg yn y ddinas. Adroddir yn gyhoeddus ar gynnydd y strategaeth fel rhan o'n hadroddiad blynyddol ar y iaith Gymraeg a gyhoeddir fel rhan o'r adroddiad bob blwyddyn ariannol.

Diolch yn fawr Arweinydd

In English...

The strategy introduces the Council's vision for the Welsh language in Newport – that everyone is able to 'see, hear, learn, use, and love' Welsh.

Although our target for growth is education focussed, we recognise that we need a wider ambition for the Welsh language in Newport in order to make it an inclusive, accessible language which all of our residents can engage with.

To achieve this, we have developed 3 strategic themes which focus on Education, Communities and Culture and Employments and Skills.

A series of actions relating to these themes are included in the Strategy, and these will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, particularly in light of new census data which may tell us more about Newport's linguistic profile.

The Council would monitor the progress of the Strategy, through the Right Skills Board, Welsh Language Implementation Group and Welsh Language Forum.

Progress on the Strategy would be published each financial year as part of an Annual Report.

No amendments were proposed and no comments were made. The motion was put to the vote and duly carried.

Resolved:

That Council adopted the Welsh Language Five Year Strategy.

12. **Regional Population Needs Assessment - Social Services and Wellbeing Act**

The Leader informed colleagues that, as set out in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, local authorities and local Health Boards must enter into a partnership to carry out a joint assessment of people who were in need of care and support and to identify the range and levels of social care services required to meet those needs, producing one population assessment report per local government electoral cycle.

This joint regional population needs assessment was overseen by the Gwent Regional Partnership Board and was undertaken in accordance with Welsh Government guidance and in consultation with all partners and key stakeholders.

The Regional Partnership Board was seeking approval from Newport City Council prior to submission to Welsh Government.

Once agreed by each of the partners, it would form the basis of the joint regional action plan, to meet the assessed social care needs through partnership working and collaboration.

The social care assessment process was aligned to the regional well-being assessment undertaken by the Gwent PSB and was consistent with the Council's corporate plan objectives.

Partners across the PSB and RPB would work together to ensure that the priorities identified by the PNA and those identified as part of the Wellbeing Plan were aligned and provided the best opportunities for joint working.

The statutory PNA themes, as set out by Welsh Government were:

- children and young people
- older people
- health / physical disabilities
- learning disability/autism
- mental health
- sensory impairment
- carers who need support; and
- violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence

Within Gwent, the current PNA identified and reinforced existing areas of need and priorities for action including:

- Continued support for looked after children and reduction of out of county placements
- Ageing population, loneliness amongst older people and increase in people living with dementia
- Carers and the need for access to information, respite and mental health support
- The need for emotional wellbeing and mental health support across the region
- To mitigate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and long covid
- Support to vulnerable groups including people living with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and autism

Engagement with citizens was a key requirement under the Social Services and Well Being Act and the PNA developed and included qualitative data from a range of citizen groups.

The Regional Partnership Board would develop a regional Area Plan for publication on 1st April 2023 setting out how the identified need would be met through partnership working and collaboration. The Leader moved the acceptance of the PNA, which was duly seconded.

Comments from Councillors:

- Councillor Cockeram thanked the Regional Partnership Board as well as the Health Board, LA, third sector and PSB. Councillor Cockeram recommended that councillors read the report as it helped councillors prioritise their needs. Councillor Cockeram went on to read out some interesting facts in relation to the population of Newport which the council needed to give consideration to in due course.

The motion was put to the vote and duly carried.

Resolved:

That the regional Population Assessment Needs (PNA) be accepted and approved.

13. **Questions to the Leader of the Council**

14. **Questions to the Cabinet Members**