

Minutes



Council

Date: 22 November 2022

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Reeks, S Cocks, E Stowell-Corten, Harris, A Screen, James, T Harvey, Howells, P Bright, Peterson, A Pimm, D Batrouni, Jenkins, P Drewett, Davies, Adan, M Pimm, C Baker-Westhead, Reynolds, Howells, A Sterry, Jones, Horton, J Cleverly, P Cockeram, D Davies, M Al-Nuaimi, M Evans, D Fouweather, D Harvey, M Kellaway, M Linton, D Mayer, R Mogford, J Mudd, M Spencer, K Thomas, C Townsend, T Watkins, K Whitehead, J Clarke, Y Forsey, P Hourahine, J Hughes, J Jordan, L Lacey, S Marshall, W Routley, A Morris, Hussain and B Perkins

1. Preliminaries

1.i Apologies

None received.

1.ii Declarations of Interest

None received.

1.iii Presiding Member's Announcements

The Presiding Member mentioned that it was Gareth Price, Monitoring Officer's last meeting.

The Leader, Councillor Evans, Whitehead, Jordan, Morris and Al-Nuaimi all took the opportunity to say a few words of personal thanks for Gareth's hard work and support during his 39 years of working for the Council and wished him a long happy retirement.

The Chief Executive also extended her thanks to Gareth for his sterling work and strength and support over the past two years.

The Presiding Member also echoed the comments of colleagues. Gareth's door was always open. The Presiding Member also thanked Gareth for his support over the years.

Gareth Price also said a few words of thanks for everyone's support over the years.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of 27 September 2022, subject to the following:

Councillor Lauren James was marked down as present but had sent her apologies. Item 3, Councillor Appointments should have read Councillor Clarke and not Councillor James.

3. **Appointments**

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

The appointments were seconded by Councillor Fouweather and put to the vote.

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

Governing Body	No of Vacancies / Re-appointments	Nominations Received
Llanwern High School	Reappointment	Mark Spencer
St Julians School	Reappointment	Deborah Davies
St Julians School	Reappointment	Tracy McKim
St Julians School	Reappointment	Phillip Hourahine
Glan Usk Primary School	Replacement	Paul Bright
Pillgwenlly Primary School	Replacement	Saeed Adan

4. **Police Issues**

The Presiding Member welcomed Chief Inspector Hannah Lawton, who provided council members with an update on Police issues within East, West and Central Newport.

The Presiding Member invited the Leader to put question to Chief Inspector Lawton.

The Leader thanked the Chief Inspector for the support the Police had provided for the events held by the Council, such as the Food Festival, Remembrance and the Christmas lights celebration.

On behalf of the ward members and residents, the Leader thanked Chief Inspector for the continued presence in the Malpas Ward, in particular, around Pillmawr Road over the past week.

Questions to the Police raised by Councillors:

- Councillor Morris asked was there any update on guidance in relation to electric bikes from Parliament. With Christmas approaching, a local safety campaign was being launched to encourage parents to buy safety gear and a highway code book to accompany the e-bike to protect younger children. Councillor Morris and ward colleagues had met with Jessica Morden, MP and Police. The Chief Inspector advised that the Police were still waiting on the information to come through.
- Councillor Evans referred to Asylum Seekers and refugees being placed in Newport without the police being notified. Whilst this was not an issue for the majority of placements, there could be people with criminal backgrounds being placed in the city. Was there anything that the Police could do to rectify this? The Chief Inspector advised that the Police were notified by the Home Office if a criminal was being placed as well as the Local Authority, the police were reliant on the Home Office to receive this information.
- Councillor Cleverly referred to the recent fires in Bettws area. One incident was an owner of a local chip shop, whose delivery car was set on fire and another was a resident of Lambourne Hill, whose car was also set on fire. The Chief Inspector was not aware of this and would look into this and get back to Councillor Cleverly.

- Councillor Harvey thanked the Chief Inspector on behalf of Alway ward colleagues and residents for the safer streets initiatives. Residents were given window alarms, security water markers, which was well received by residents. The Chief Inspector mentioned that when the bid was put in, it was the most money they had received from Home Office. Part of the initiative was also looking at causes of anti-social behaviour and victims of crime.
- Councillor Whitehead mentioned the recent Ward report and noticed there was a spike in recent anti-social behaviour, particularly in the Bettws shopping area. The police had made promises of patrol, however residents did not want police patrols for two or three times during the period of a week. Regular patrols over a longer period would be the preferred option for residents. The Chief Inspector advised that resourcing could not be planned and there were other long term solutions and other ways of preventing behaviour rather than patrols, such as identification of who was responsible for the crime.
- Councillor Watkins referred to car cruisers, how many were prosecuted out of the 120 reported. The Chief Inspector did not have the information to hand, the local policing team would have that information therefore the Chief Inspector would get back to Councillor Watkins with those figures.
- Councillor James referred to an incident of anti-social behaviour she witnessed recently in the city centre bus station, and that residents could find this intimidating at certain hours during the day. What work was being done so that residents could report to the police, knowing that their report would be followed up by the police. The Chief Inspector advised that calls would be reviewed by the neighbourhood policing team. City Safe was also in operation during the night time economy, however the Chief Inspector would contact the neighbourhood policing team regarding incidences that occurred in the day.
- Councillor Adan raised concern regarding the nitrous oxide cannisters. Possession of these cannisters was not a crime. What measures did police have in place regarding recreational use and supply of these cannisters as well as protecting future generations? The Chief Inspector advised that school liaison officers would pick up on this, the main work around this was also anti-social behaviour. It was important to link in with the schools to educate children on controlled substances as well as illegal substances.
- The Presiding Member thanked the Chief Inspector and Sergeant Turner on a successful meeting with Shaftesbury, Malpas and Bettws Wards, which was very useful and hopefully it would continue. Finally, the Presiding Member and thanked Chief Inspector Lawton for attending the meeting.

5. **Corporate Plan 2022/2027**

The Presiding Member invited to the Leader to present and move the recommendations in the report.

Newport Council was required as part of the Well-being of Future Generations Act to carry out sustainable development to improve Wales' economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being.

The Council had a duty to fulfil its statutory and non-statutory duties to support citizens, businesses and stakeholders. This Plan prioritised the Council's long-term strategic focus and met the requirements of the Well-being Act.

The development of the Council's new Corporate Plan (2022-27) was undertaken between senior officers and the Council's Cabinet Members through a series of workshops.

This Plan also considered the short and long term opportunities and risks to the Council, its residents, economy and environment.

In the development of the Plan, the Council consulted with residents on the Well-being Objective themes which were positively received.

Over the next five years Newport Council's mission statement would be working to deliver an *'Ambitious, Fairer, Greener Newport for everyone.'*

To support this goal, there would be four Well-being Objectives to deliver these strategic priorities:

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

The next five years was going to be challenging as we balanced the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan whilst delivering our strategic priorities. It would require the Council to take innovative and transformative decisions and it must be recognised that the achievement of these objectives could not be delivered by Newport City Council alone which was why key principles were followed throughout the delivery of the Corporate Plan:

- **Fair and Inclusive** – We will work to create fairer opportunities, reduce inequalities in our communities, and encourage a sense of belonging.
- **Empowering** – We will work with and support communities, groups and partners to thrive.
- **A listening council** – The views of communities, service users and partners will shape the services we deliver and the places you live in.
- **Citizen Focussed** – Everyone who works and represents Newport City Council will put the citizen first, focusing on our core organisational values.

The Corporate Plan would also be underpinned by key programmes and projects that aimed to improve the economy and communities of Newport and the delivery of Council services. Each one of the Council's service areas would develop a service plan that outlined their own strategic priorities to support the delivery of Newport City Council's Corporate Plan and continuous improvement of Council services.

To ensure the delivery of these plans, the Service Plans would be monitored throughout the five years and be reported to the Council's Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet and Council.

The Leader moved that Council agree and adopt the Corporate Plan and this was seconded by the Deputy Leader.

Comments from Councillors:

- Councillor Evans agreed with the objectives and aims of the plan however there were concerns around the city centre, with the University virtually abandoning Newport City Council. It was hoped there would be meaningful consultation with residents. The conservative party would also be monitoring the plan closely over the coming years, but would be supporting the plan.

- Councillor Davies stressed the importance to work with partners both in public and private sector, it was a collaborative approach on local and national basis. The impact the cost of living crisis was affecting all of us. Councillor Davies therefore supported the Plan.
- Councillor Corten was proud that as a council we could face climate change. Newport had already shown that it was ahead as one of the best at recycling in the whole country.
- Councillor Cocks supported the plan. Whilst he was not a local resident, he chose to move to Newport as he liked the look of Newport, which had so much going for it in terms of historical heritage and place to work as well as being a gateway to Wales. It was also a fantastic place because of its people. The plan held up an exciting vision for Newport and therefore councillor Cocks supported the plan.
- Councillor Harvey was very proud of the Corporate Plan and urged every council member to support it.
- Councillor Forsey mentioned that it was privilege to be involved in the development of the Newport Plan and referred to Objective 2, Newport's Environment and Infrastructure. The Council planned to be a net zero carbon city by 2030. We were already seeing effects of climate change. It was therefore vital that we adhered to our carbon reduction plan. The Council was also working towards net zero waste, with a good recycling system in place. The Council needed to work with businesses and as residents we should play our parts.
- Councillor Hourahine mentioned that the objectives would be achieved by hard work and dedication, not only cabinet and councillors but from staff and officers of the Council, who work very hard day in day out to help deliver the goals of the objectives. There was World class engineering taking place in Newport to support economic development of the city. Councillor Hourahine was please to see the number of small businesses popping up in town. Councillor Hourahine referred to the report, which stated the need to respond to the short-term needs of the community, money must be set aside for those instances that cannot be predicted. Newport City Council had coped with the economic downturn and Covid remarkably well and it should be recognised. Partnerships with Local Authorities would help us achieve our long terms goals for the city and strategic investment would follow and encourage the future generations to stay in Wales.

At this point, Councillor Evans asked for a point of clarification, as he felt that Councillor Hourahine had taken what Councillor Evans had said out of context. Councillor Evans was not putting Newport down.

- Councillor Routley supported the aims and objectives of the report and the Opposition group would try everything they could to ensure that the administration would do what they proposed within the report and had always supported Newport.
- Councillor Clarke referred to key points within the report, which was fair, inclusive, empowering a listening council and citizen focused.
- Councillor Morris broadly supported the plan with his colleagues, it was a step in the right direction. Would have liked to have seen more support for the teenage generation, who were being left behind. Would have been nice to assure teenagers of a better Newport for them.
- Councillor Drewett supported the plan and was proud of Newport and its history and where it was today and what it would become tomorrow. We needed to work together as councillors to get the city moving forward.
- Councillor L James supported the report but felt that the conduct at Council regarding the report was not appropriate and intimidating. Councillor L James would had liked to see

more in relation to the air quality management areas. It did say that it would improve air quality but not by how much. Councillor James felt that she wanted the best for Newport and hoped all councillors shared her opinion.

- Councillor Horton, as a small business owner, supported the business plan.
- Councillor Baker-Westhead worked for the National Museum Wales and the National Roman Legionary Museum and wondered if she needed to declare an interest on the plan. The monitoring officer confirmed that she did not need to declare an interest.
- Councillor Fouweather supported the corporate plan and felt that there was talent across the city and needed that talent to work with us. We should work together to get this plan on the move.
- Councillor Whitehead supported the corporate plan. Councillor Whitehead felt that Councillor L James raised some important points.
- Councillor Forsey raised a point of clarification under Objective 2, item 5, transform Newport's highways and transport system to improve air quality, therefore there was a commitment.
- The Leader thanked everyone for their input and was encouraged to see that so many councillors were engaged with the corporate plan. The importance the economic partnerships would play in this plan and the support for businesses. Colleagues could track these objectives through the Scrutiny Committees and hold cabinet to account. This was an ambitious plan which residents of Newport deserved. There was also an important that there were 51 councillors who were the council collectively and all had an ethical and moral obligation to citizens, as well as being accountable to them.

The motion to adopt the Corporate Plan was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

Resolved:

Council adopted the Council's Corporate Plan for 2022-27.

6. **Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report**

The Presiding Member invited the Leader to present the next item, which was the Council's Annual Report on the progress against its Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24.

The Leader presented the report. Under the Equality Act (2010) the Council was required to report annually on the progress it made against the strategic equality objectives contained within its Strategic Equality Plan.

Newport Council's Equality Objectives were developed in partnership with key internal and external stakeholders and was subject to extensive community engagement.

This Strategic Equalities Annual Report was reviewed by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Cabinet, comments were included in the final report.

The impact of the pandemic continued to present challenges in delivering against some areas of work in 2021/22, however Newport's equalities work continued to be flexible, responding to emerging challenges, particularly around access to information, education and addressing hate crime.

Highlights from the past year were outlined by the Leader to Council colleagues including inclusive Leadership training completed by nearly 300 Senior Leaders and Managers and the recent appointment of the Leader as WLGA Spokesperson for Equalities, Migration and Anti-Poverty.

Significant dates, including LGBT+ History Month, Ramadan, Holocaust Memorial Day, Pride Month, Refugee Week, Windrush Day, Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month, Black History Month and Hate Crime Awareness Week, were recognised and promoted across the city. Fairness and Equality Impact Assessments including the Socio-economic Duty against policy/decision making were ongoing and been considered against a range of decisions. Our good practice here was recently cited in a national Audit Wales report.

£415,000 of funding was distributed to 79 community projects, overseen by and a representative community steering group, working closely with Newport's Fairness Commission.

Staff networks for disabled, LGBTQ+ and ethnic minority staff continued to provide a platform for staff from under-represented groups to influence the workplace policy, service delivery and strategic decision making.

Significant support provided to EU citizens in Newport ensured eligible residents could submit late applications to the EU Settlement Scheme post deadline.

Equality, Hate Crime and EUSS awareness sessions delivered to senior customer service staff.

Preparing schools for the requirements of the Relationships and Sexuality Statutory Education Code (RSE).

During the year over 2,665 people were supported by all floating support schemes to access and maintain their accommodation, including adults with learning disabilities and refugees.

The council's ethnic minority representation remained similar this year despite a slight increase in staff numbers, and our gender pay gap had reduced for this period.

The council still had work to do to improve the representation of minority ethnic staff at all levels of the organisation, and this would be a focus for our work during 2022/23.

The Leader moved acceptance of the Strategic Equality Plan Annual report asked the Presiding Member if the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation could second the motion and say a few words.

Councillor Batrouni seconded the motion and added that the report was a summary of the work undertaken during the second year of the Strategic Equality Plan. It set out the Council's commitment to a workplace culture and approach to service delivery that valued inclusion and diversity.

The Council would continue to progress this work over the next 12 months. The Annual Report set clear priorities for the next period based on a review of our workforce data and progress against our Equality Objectives.

The Council's Strategic Equalities member and officer Group would continue to support the delivery of our Strategic Equality Plan and ensure that the Council was innovative in its approach and effectively involve key stakeholders.

Comments from Councillors:

- Councillor Batrouni focused on the participatory budget process; 79 community groups benefited from over £400,000 of funding last year and it was open this year, with £300,000 funding. Councillors were encouraged to advise people to contact the council for funding. Councillor Batrouni also thanked predecessor Councillor Mayer on his work highlighted in the annual report.
- Councillor Davies commented that a key aspect of the plan was the implementation of the socio-economic duty, which came into force in March 2021 by the WG and it was good to see that it was embedded within the authority. Its purpose was to reduce inequality of outcome for residents.
- Councillor Cocks was delighted to see the plan and was duly proud of work in relation to equalities and it showed the commitment that the Council had for these groups. It also celebrated the good work that was done and there was an emphasis on data and engagement.
- Councillor Al-Nuaimi supported the report and issues that came under strategic quality. Councillor Al-Nuaimi also referred to equality, which had come a long way in the council. There was however concern with Islamophobia within Newport, Councillor Al-Nuaimi was approached by the Muslim Council and felt that engagement through strategic equality group by inviting people from the Muslim communities would benefit the Council and hoped that they would look at further engagement.
- Councillor Hussain supported the plan and wanted to second what Councillor Batrouni had said regarding the participatory budget and had seen first-hand projects undertaken in Maindee and Victoria. It was encouraging to see funding and budget going to well-deserved projects.
- The Leader thanked colleagues for their engagement regarding the report. The Leader also acknowledged the work driven forward by previous cabinet members Whitcutt and Councillor Mayer, however there was still more work to do. The Leader was aware that the Cabinet Member had engaged with Cllr Al Nuaimi and there would be further development on this going forward.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried unanimously

Resolved:

Council approved the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report and agreed to publish it on the council's website, in accordance with Statutory guidelines.

7. Climate Change Plan Annual Report

The Presiding Member invited the Leader to present the report to Council, which was the introductory annual report for our Climate Change Plan.

As a globally responsible organisation, the Council declared an ecological and climate emergency last November and stated that the Council would:

- Develop a clear Climate Change Organisational plan, in consultation with citizens, for the next five years that would set out the actions needed to achieve this.
- In March, of this year Council agreed the Climate Change Plan for the next five years. This plan set out how we would:
 - Reduce council carbon emissions to net zero carbon by 2030
 - and
 - Review the services the council provided to ensure it supported the city's journey to both net zero carbon and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

The plan ran from 2022-27, this was an introductory report setting out where we were at the start of the plan and detailed some of the important projects already taking place.

The plan was a key document for the Council and was now guiding our direction of travel as an organisation in tackling the climate and nature emergency and their impacts.

The Leader moved acceptance of the report and asked the Presiding Member if the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity could second the motion and say a few words.

Councillor Forsey seconded the motion and advised colleagues that the Council had already made a substantial reduction in carbon emissions exceeding targets set out in the Carbon Management Plan. Councillor Forsey looked forward to further reductions as we continued to retrofit council buildings, and further increase our electric fleet vehicles.

There was however, still much more that needed to be done as an organisation to mitigate and adapt to the nature and climate emergency and our Climate Change Plan set us on the right path for this journey to ensure we acted on behalf of current and future generations.

As Cabinet Member with responsibility for the climate change and biodiversity, Councillor Forsey was pleased to see this positive introductory report and would be monitoring progress of the plan closely and requesting regular progress updates to ensure that we continued to proceed at the required pace.

Comments from Councillors:

- Councillor Davies recommended that councillors view the animation that was accessed via a link on the front of the report. Councillor Davies was pleased that schools were locked into this plan, Bassaleg was being built as a carbon neutral school and there was focus on retro fitting, this was seen already in Kimberley Nursery, which was now Ysgol Bryn Derw, this was fitted with two air source heat pumps. Other schools would also be retro fitted across Newport to be net carbon zero going forward. It was pleasing to see that children were working with teachers to address this issue. Young people had also become advocates, speaking on the national stage.
- Councillor Routley considered that it was a good plan that would protect the future of the residents of Newport. Councillor Routley was however disappointed that there was no alternative to help relieve the M4, this had an impact on residents and communities along the M4 corridor.
- Councillor Fouweather also agreed that it was a good document and was interested to read about the new council buildings and schools. Councillor Fouweather felt that the Civic Centre was a huge resource from a cost of energy point of view. Road access must also be improved, with more buses and trains being more accessible.
- Councillor Cleverly supported the plan.
- Councillor Corten supported the plan.
- Councillor L James supported the plan but felt that the level of details in the report should be explained further. This was an aims document rather than an actual plan and felt the public and council deserved more to look at with regard to this. There should be more focus on the 11 air quality management areas such as Malpas Road.
- The Leader emphasised the opportunity for councillors to debate and raise any issues through scrutiny. The Leader advised that the main focus was on alternative transport. The Leader recently visited the Gaer active travel route through consultation with

residents and it was a fantastic amenity for residents. Cabinet were continually exploring transport alternatives. Working with Burns Commission measures were being put in place. There were still improvements to be made but the quality was improving. There was a visit recently by Deputy Minister which saw the opening of a new storage cycle shop in Newport, which was citizen focussed and not imposed upon us. With reference to rail, there were recommendations within the Burns Commission report for additional stations. The infrastructure was managed and owned by Network Rail who were funded by UK Government.

The motion to accept the report was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

Resolved:

Council reviewed and approved the organisational Climate Change Plan Introductory Report.

8. Democratic Services Committee Annual Report

The Presiding Member invited the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee to present the report.

Councillor Fouweather introduced the 2021/22 Democratic Services Committee Annual Report to Council.

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 required the Committee to report annually to the Council on the work that it carried out in the past 12 months and its future work programme.

The annual report covered the period from November 2021 to November 2022. The Committee was a politically balanced group which worked together in a non-partisan manner to consider various aspects of the Constitution and other matters that impacted on the governance of the Council.

Councillor Fouweather moved acceptance of the Annual Report and this was seconded by Councillor Stowell-Corten.

Resolved:

Council agreed the Committee's annual report in order to meet the requirements of the Local Government Measure.

9. Standards Committee Annual Report

As a Member of the Standards Committee, the Presiding Member presented the report to Council.

Councillor Cockeram was happy to present the 2021/22 Standards Committee Annual Report to Council.

This was the ninth Standards Committee annual report and covered the period from November 2021 to November 2022, and followed on from the last report presented to Council in November 2021.

This Annual Report was previously presented to Council on a voluntary basis. However, since May 2022, it was now a statutory requirement under the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 for Standards Committee to make an annual report to Council. In addition, this statutory Annual Report included an assessment of the extent to which leaders of

political groups on the Council had complied with their new duties to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within their groups.

The Committee has met on five occasions during the last twelve months. The earlier Committee meetings were conducted remotely but, since May 2022, the meetings were conducted on a “hybrid” basis, with some members present in person and others joining remotely.

Last year, Standards Committee was called upon for the first time to conduct a misconduct hearing and to impose a sanction on an elected member. This year, we were pleased to report that, once again, no serious complaints of misconduct were referred to the Standards Committee by the Ombudsman during the past 12 months and no complaints were referred for determination by the Committee under Stage 3 of the Local Resolution Protocol during 2021/22.

The Report confirmed that six complaints were referred to the Ombudsman about City Councillors during the last 12 months and five complaints were made during this period about community councillors. At the time of presenting this annual report to Council, only one complaint remained outstanding and all of the other 10 complaints were not accepted for investigation.

Standards Committee met with group leaders earlier this month, and was pleased with the level of commitment demonstrated and the general levels of training undertaken by Councillors. However, further Code of Conduct training sessions would be beneficial for those Councillors who were unable to attend the induction training on 16 May. There did not appear to be any significant issues in terms of standards of behaviour or complaints that needed to be addressed

The Annual Report also contained a draft forward work programme for the forthcoming 12 months. The training requirements for City Councillors, community councils and their clerks would continue to be monitored and reviewed as part of the Committee’s forward work programme.

The Presiding Member moved acceptance of the Annual Report and this was seconded by Councillor Harvey.

Resolved:

Council received the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2021/22 and noted the forward work programme.

10. Democratic Services Committee Minutes: 18 October 2022

The Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee of 18 October were attached to the Agenda papers.

There were two recommendations to Council contained within the minutes:

- That Council formally adopts the statutory Guide to the Constitution, as agreed by Democratic Services Committee;
- That Council formally adopts the changes to the Constitution to reflect arrangements for Job-Sharing of Cabinet posts and the appointment of Executive Assistants

Councillor Fouweather, as Chair of Democratic Services Committee formally moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Stowell-Corten. The recommendations were put to the vote and were duly carried.

Resolved:

- That Council formally adopts the statutory Guide to the Constitution, as agreed by Democratic Services Committee;
- That Council formally adopts the changes to the Constitution to reflect arrangements for Job-Sharing of Cabinet posts and the appointment of Executive Assistants

11. Questions to the Leader of the Council

Before commencement with questions, the Leader made the following announcements:

Christmas and Small Business Saturday

Last Saturday saw the Countdown to Christmas event held in the city centre. It was amazing to see so many people gathering together to mark the start of the festive celebrations. Thank you to Newport NOW and everyone involved in making the afternoon a success.

The Leader reflected that this year was going to be difficult for many; individuals and businesses alike and continued to urge people to shop locally and spend wisely.

To that end, The Council was also supporting Small Business Saturday which would take place on Saturday 3 December. Newport was very lucky to have some amazing small and independent businesses that offered a range of services and products that could not be matched by the larger chain stores.

Street entertainment had been arranged for the day to ensure added atmosphere, it was hoped that there would be a huge turnout in the city centre to support businesses and possibly find some personal and unique gifts.

There would be more news on our social media sites as well as information from our local traders about their own special offers.

Knife Angel

In the city centre over the weekend, an impressive Knife Angel stood proud on Usk Plaza.

We have supported the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent who brought this towering figure to the area as part of a national anti-violence tour.

The 27ft sculpture was made from more than 100,000 knives would stand in Newport until the end of the month as a prominent reminder of the devastating effects of violence and aggression.

Supported by a series of engagement and educational events, it was hoped that the Council would raise awareness and start important conversations.

Cost of living support

Earlier this month the Council hosted a cost-of-living information event and the Riverfront theatre. There was an excellent turn-out on the day and with partners, the Council was able to help many people access the support and advice that was critical in these challenging times.

Work was continuing in this area and there would be further outreach activities and a dedicated advice area on the council website. Following a strategic event with key partners, we were also progressing our coordinated work with partners to ensure we do all we can together to help our communities.

Carers Rights Day

This year Carers Rights Day would take place on Thursday 24 November and was a time to raise awareness of the rights of unpaid carers and recognised their contribution to our society.

To mark Carers Rights Day, our community connector team would be hosting an information event at The Riverfront Theatre and would be on hand between 1pm and 6pm and to provide information and advice on for unpaid carers of all ages and backgrounds.

Carers carry out such an important role; this could be looking after someone who is well, disabled, has mental ill health, substance misuse problems or needed a bit more help as they got older.

The Leader encouraged who may be in a caring role to come along and meet the team and find out more about the support and advice that was available to them.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner – white Ribbon Day 25 November #33 Challenge 16 days of actions.

Questions to the Leader

Councillor M Evans:

Over the last decade there had been initiatives in place to attract people into the city centre, over the festive period, such as Christmas and Small Business Saturday. For many traders, this was the time of the year could mean make or break, relying on trade to survive. Our neighbours in Monmouthshire were offering free parking and free buses as weekend, as were Torfaen and Caerphilly. We had free buses last year and a park and ride. Cardiff had two winter wonderland sites. In Newport residents would pay £2.50 to park. With this in mind, what was the Leader doing to encourage people into the city centre this Christmas.

Response:

The Leader highlighted that she was in receipt of the Footfall report for the food festival, which showed that there was a considerable increase of people coming into the Centre. The Leader was looking forward to seeing the figures on how many people also attended the Christmas lights event. There were limits however to what could be done, especially at this time considering our financial position as a Local Authority, which was set out clearly in a recent video. It was reported to our last Cabinet that the Council was forecasting a £3M overspend this financial year and we were currently looking at a deficit of £33M for next year. Any support was welcome for subsidized travel, such as funding from the Welsh Government or the Burns Commission, however we were not going to provide free parking for Christmas.

Supplementary:

Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Caerphilly and other neighbouring Councils were all facing budget issues but were still providing free parking for residents. In July there was a reported £18.5M underspend from last year, this was the usual time when councils were looking forward to plans for Christmas and there was a £100,000 underspend on the city centre management during the current financial year. Wasn't it important to provide free transport for residents during the cost of living crisis as well as helping the traders over the Christmas period.

Response:

The Leader did not speak on behalf of other councils. We were responsible and accountable for decision making in Newport. We have a healthy underspend. However, due to high inflation and the cost of living there was a demand on services. The cost of care had increased significantly, 1,000 more pupils in schools, pay rises and procurement costs by Council. This was not only experienced by residents but by the Council. The Council was

working with partners to put on events but there was only so much that we could do, free parking would not be a priority. Climate change was a priority. The Council was more than willing to listen to any suggestions for extra funding. The local press, according to ONS data Newport was the fourth best city in Wales for parking both in terms of access and cost.

Councillor Whitehead:

Residents concerns and issues were paramount for councillors to address, with this in mind, councillors have to contact various service providers. Unfortunately, reply to emails from Newport City Council's City Services was hit or miss and sometimes it could take a while to receive a reply. Members were also prevented from contacting Heads of Service directly.

Response:

The Leader advised that there was new legislation going to the Democratic Services Committee regarding officer attendance at meetings. Residents also had the opportunity to try the Newport City Council App which made it easier for residents to contact the Council. The Leader also would ask the Head of City Services as well as the Head of People, Policy and Transformation to contact Councillor Whitehead on how to improve services.

12. **Questions to the Cabinet Members**

There is 1 written questions to the Cabinet Members:

Question 1 – Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years

Councillor Routley

At the recent Cabinet meeting you stated it has been reported to you that school children are shaking with hunger and are starving in certain schools.

What have you done Cabinet Member to raise this issue and alleviate the suffering?

Response from Councillor Davies

Thank you for your question, which I am pleased to answer.

You have quoted me without providing the context on why I was speaking about child hunger and poverty. I was responding to the update published by Newport City Council on our response to external pressures impacting on Council Services. The paper explicitly describes the impact of the cost of living crisis on our communities.

Indeed over the last 18 months communities across Newport are facing unprecedented financial pressures resulting from inflationary increases in the cost of energy, food, mortgages and rent along with other household costs.

Currently the financial stability of the UK remains in a precipitous position despite the autumn statement published last Thursday, which for Wales will leave a budget shortfall. The extra £1.2 billion will not offset or address increased costs due to soaring inflation and is actually £300 million less than was set last year. Furthermore, OBR analysis following this budget makes it clear that real disposable income will fall to its lowest level since ONS records began in 1956. Globally we are falling behind our economic partners and who is overseeing this mess? The Tories -twelve years of mismanagement and incompetence. As a Labour administration in Newport we are working hard to support our residents and help them to survive during this cost of living crisis. Something I firmly believe would not have been necessary if a Labour Government was in power.

Returning to my comments in the Cabinet meeting last week the actions we have undertaken so far include the setting up of a task and finish group to help support households to access additional financial help from Welsh Government, along with drop in sessions in Pill and the Riverfront where NCC and partners provided advice, support and guidance. The intention is to coordinate support so that our most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents get the support and help they need. A summit was recently held so that plans can be coordinated to ensure there is local access to food banks and warm rooms in preparation for this winter.

In my reply to the Leader at Cabinet I listed what actions are being undertaken within our schools to ensure children are fed and support is also given to families. I made clear that 10 years ago when I was first elected I did not envisage visiting schools and being introduced to family liaison officers who have been employed using grant funding to support parents with financial advice, housing advice and links to healthcare professionals as well as providing counselling where there is a breakdown in parental relationships.

Along with this, schools are running food banks, as well as uniform libraries where clothing can be swapped and shared. This includes coats, shoes and PE Kits and sometimes clothes for outside school. I have seen washing machines so that children can wear clean clothes as parents struggle with the cost of electricity.

What I said is children cannot learn if they are hungry. What I also said was this is not about neglect or a lack of love, this is about parents struggling to find money to put food on the table. This is not necessarily about benefits. Parents are experiencing in work poverty. Therefore our primary schools run breakfast clubs, and many are now opening earlier to ensure parents who work can leave their children to be fed before they start their school day.

Additionally we have seen the universal roll out of free school meals currently within our foundation schools and next year this will be extended to key stage 2 and then to our secondaries. A Welsh Government initiative that I am proud to see being delivered in Newport. Our officers have worked intensively to ensure that kitchens and dining areas in our schools can accommodate the additional numbers of children benefiting from this provision.

We are fortunate in Wales as our children on Free School Meals continue to be provided with vouchers during the school holidays and this puts at least £250 pounds worth of supermarket vouchers into family homes in Newport.

Finally, as part of our focus on delivering and supporting those in poverty I have asked for an audit to be undertaken within our schools on how grant funding is being spent to address the worst aspects of poverty that impact on learning, I have already had an interim report back and there are some outstanding projects and initiatives being undertaken with our schools but my intention is to promote the sharing of best practice and new ideas.

At this point I would like to take the opportunity to thank our teachers and the support staff. They truly are going above and beyond. They are witnessing on a daily basis the cruel impact that this unnecessary cost of living crisis is having on our Newport families. They are incredible and it's their work that has an impact on our children's lives as they ensure children are fed before they start the school day.

Supplementary:

During Councillor Davies' statement there was no mention of safeguarding, we all had a duty of care and should work together.

Response:

Councillor Davies, quoted transcript from comments. It was not about neglect or lack of love but due lack of resources for children.

There were no further questions or items and, therefore, the Presiding Member declared the meeting closed.