

**PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PLACE AND CORPORATE**

**Draft Budget Proposals 2023-24 and Medium Term Financial Plan**

Invitees:

- Meirion Rushworth – Head of Finance
- David Walton – Head of Housing and Communities
- Silvia Gonzalez-Lopez – Head of Environment and Public Protection
- Stephen Jarrett – Head of Infrastructure
- Elizabeth Bryant – Head of Law and Standards
- Tracey Brooks – Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
- Tracy McKim – Head of People, Policy and Transformation
- Alastair Hopkins – Senior Finance Business Partner

The Head of Finance introduced a brief overview of the budget process and advised that at the moment there had been a change to reflect the level of savings. There was a £2million budget gap last year. In February 2022 the MTFP showed a £2million budget gap, in Spring 2022 inflation increased as well as food and fuel cost increases along with emerging budget challenges around Housing and Homelessness with Social Care also a big issue which moved the position.

The Cabinet Member report showed the movements with pay being increased by £6 million. There was an £18 million increase in contract inflation where energy was a big part of that, with Gas prices rising as well as Social Care contract inflation. There were budget pressures in Social Care with £3.5 million needed for Housing Area and Homelessness. There were budget targets for each area and there was a £12million of budget savings presented here to Committee. The Revenue Support Grant (RSG) was confirmed in December 2022 and the budget gap was £16 million where the increase in RSG was about 9%. 50% of the budget proposals have been consulted and the other 50% was done under Delegated Authority.

**HC2324/01 - Library and Adult Community Learning Services**

The Head of Housing and Communities gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which included a change to services with a saving of £110,000 for the first financial year and £15,000 the following year. It is also proposing to reduce library opening hours, particularly a one-day closure at Rogerstone and Betts Libraries. A reduction in Malpas Library opening hours and to refashion Pill Library with a smaller library space and other areas of saving such as a reduction of staffing hours and a greater investment in digital borrowing.

Members asked the following:

- What will the function of Central Library be, and would other services be integrated?

It was confirmed that the Central Library would become a community hub and a coordination point, although those wider changes are former decisions to change services, not related to these proposals.

- What will happen to the staff affected, and would they be engaged with other services?

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It was confirmed that this proposal was just about changing the way the building is used and using the staff in a more flexible way.

- A Member referred to Appendix 10 where there was a £110,000 saving in year 1 with £88,000 worth of costs in that saving. What is the net amount?

The Head of Housing and Communities advised that in all the budget proposals, there is a recurring saving, so the one off cost would be against the recurrent £110,000 saving each year.

### **HC2324/02 - Reduce financial support to the Shop Mobility scheme in 2023-24**

The Head of Housing and Communities gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to reduce the financial support to the Shop Mobility scheme from £17,000 to £10,000.

Members asked the following:

- A Member asked the value of this scheme and the benefits of the city centre or in terms of the access allowing people being able to get out and how was this being looked at, as the saving was noted to be a very small amount.

It was explained the service was looked at as a whole with the non-statutory functions being where the savings were achievable.

- Will this mean the service will end, or is there a replacement that will take up the service provision?

The Committee were advised that we do need to recognise that in order to make the necessary savings, we must look to these non-statutory budgets. It is not the intention to cease the service, but this is a component of the funding that Shop Mobility currently receive.

- A Member asked whether there was any data of how the service was used with the fall in traffic in the city centre due to the pandemic.

The Strategic Director stated that this data could be provided at a later date for the Committee and there was a wider public consultation taking place also.

- Query was made regarding the investment of £3.5 million for Homelessness provision and was the revenue locked in for each year.

It was confirmed that this figure would be locked in for each year as the landscape was pre and post covid was totally different.

- A Member commented on households continuing in temporary accommodation and would the situation improve.

The Head of Housing and Communities explained that the Housing system needed to be looked at as a whole with more development in the city. There was a plan to engage with the private rental sector to increase supply, to look at people in

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temporary accommodation and other issues they faced. A project was being looked at to develop a rapid re-housing transition. This was all very challenging and would take time to galvanise all the resources.

- How much funding had increased since Covid?

The Committee were advised that the Social Housing grants have increased since Covid with an additional Welsh Government grant with other pots of capital funding also available. The funding pots were grants where distribution had not been agreed yet and this was a big challenge. A Member then asked whether the basic amount had increased and could it be supplemented. It was advised that this was a combination of things as in the Covid years the costs were picked up by Welsh Government and so this was a large re-adjustment.

- A Member commented that the £3.5million was the bottom line of what we have to find.

The Head of Housing and Communities explained that the extra money given allowed the Council to fulfil their statutory duties which have expanded and with the issues of supply in the city, more people had to be given temporary accommodation. The Committee requested a report on Housing's statutory duties to be presented to Committee which was agreed by the Strategic Director and the Head of Housing and Communities.

- The Committee queried the investment of £11,000 for a Homelessness Officer. Is this a new role?

The Committee were advised that this was for a new role, funded for 9 months which would take us through to the end of the year. The Strategic Director advised that this was an investment made last year and is showing up now as a part investment this year.

### **EPP2324/02 - Community Safety Warden Service Restructure**

The Head of Environment and Public Protection gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which included a saving of £169,000 saving a year.

Members asked the following:

- Is this a deletion of the service?

Members were advised that the service will remain, the proposal would be to reduce the service to half the number of staff the service area previously had. The service will still be 7 days a week, but with less hours and less face to face interaction.

- Do we know what the peak hours are? These would need to be covered.

The Strategic Director advised they do; reports have been conducted and the majority of the Warden service work is non statutory which is an area that can be reduced. Staff have been consulted with to discuss how the service can be made

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more efficient. The Head of Environment and Public Protection reiterated that at data is looked at and will focus on what is needed and based on what requests the service gets.

- Do we work with social landlords to mediate on issues that the Community Safety Wardens may get involved with? Have you spoken to them to see whether they would contribute to the service?

The Committee were advised that we do, and we are revisiting the conversations with Registered Social Landlords on the contributions made to this. This is a model that works well already with Waste Enforcement. To date, the service is funded by the Council, however speaking to social landlords about contributions is something they could perhaps look at in the future.

- Members voiced disappointment to see reduction in services but commented that this could be an opportunity to work more effectively with partners. Comment was also made that Rent Smart Wales seem to be inactive with anti-social behaviour issues and should have more involvement. The Strategic Director advised that although the service area is trying to make a budget saving with proposed reductions, it should not result in a reduction of quality of the service.

### **EPP2324/04 - Increased fees and charges within Environment and Leisure Services**

The Head of Environment and Public Protection gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to introduce higher fees and charges for services provided within the Environment and Leisure services including Parks, Cemetery, Countryside and Grounds services, where the Authority has seen significant increases in the supply chain for either the purchase of goods or operational costs such as maintenance, energy or fuel and has to pass these onto the customer, and also increase charges where these have been benchmarked against service provision elsewhere within the authority and/or other neighbouring local authorities.

- The Committee had no comments or questions on this item.

### **EPP2324/05 - Introduce parking charges to four park and countryside car parks**

The Head of Environment and Public Protection gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to install pay and display meters in Glebelands, Christchurch viewing point, Morgan's Pond (off Bettws Lane), and Bettws Lane (opposite Newport High School).

Members asked the following:

- Could a £50,000 saving be generated from people paying fees?

It was confirmed that this was included and repairing equipment had been considered.

- A Member commented on some of the parking machines being covered up previously due to them being broken or vandalised.

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It was something the team were aware of and there was going to be a move towards card payments and a payment app being looked at to be used to pay for parking and models varied with a slight charge back to the Council, so these issues had to be considered. There was a provision for charges which was not to be passed on to residents.

- A Member commented on the proposed areas being locked in the evening, for example Bettws area, as the bigger parks were locked at night time.

Members were advised that the charges applied between 8am- 5pm in the evening and was not 24 hours.

- A Member stated that they did not support this proposal it as it was near green spaces, but they wanted to consider youth sports teams who used the parks, this was an issue at the Glebelands, and it would be great to see an exemption here.

Members were advised that the charges were £1 for two hours and £3 for up to 5 hours so the team were trying to keep charges down.

- A Member commented on the impact of parking on residents in adjacent streets and asked what was their financial projections for each car park and how many visitors were expected.

It was confirmed that there had been a lot of conversations around this and despite a worry there had been no displacement.

- A Member commented that there were reports of cars that had allegedly been hit on Waterloo Road while driving as there was now parking on both sides of the street.

Members were told that this was a difficult issue, but the park would be kept open as the other option was to shut the park which was not wanted. A breakdown of costs was looked at and there was a proposal per different side.

- A Member commented that there were more cars parked on the side than in the car park which was difficult, and it was important to ensure that we take neighbours views into account. It was also asked whether there was any return on investment and with the smaller car parks when would the charges return a profit.

It was noted that a breakdown provided to the Committee would help and that it was immediate in the first year of savings. In the first year after this it did vary from car park to car park such as an income per year of £50,000 excluding any yearly maintenance costs.

- A Member asked regarding subsidies with people using the leisure centre for 2 hours free, who provided this subsidy?

It was explained that Kingsway carpark was different as it was a long lease and there were some historic agreements with some businesses which did vary and elsewhere

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there were some parks which had business spaces so there were a number of concessions.

### **EPP2324/06 - Household Waste Recycling Centre - Charging for non-household waste**

The Head of Environment and Public Protection gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) need to accept household waste free of charge as the cost of collection and recycling / disposal is met through Council Tax charges. Although not required to, Newport City Council also accepts construction waste and DIY materials at the HWRC as these are commonly produced by residents. The Council incurs additional charges to handle and recycle these types of wastes and a small fee is proposed to offset these charges. Fees would be in place from 1st April 2023, payable at the time of booking with an appointment to attend the HWRC through the current booking system.

Members asked the following:

- Could these items be recycled and sold on to builders for rubble.

It was confirmed that all this material was recycled and there was a process for how it was recycled. For each material- rubble etc there was a small income but there was a lot of mixed material which had a lot more cost. The equipment skips etc net of all the income received and this was taken into consideration.

- A Member asked whether we had the systems to do this and whether the manpower was there to be checking what people brought in.

It was noted that residents did follow the rules and the site was monitored. People were asked to bring in waste and it was charged at the time of booking. A size of a bag was not imposed as an average weight was used.

- Was there an expectation that there would be an increase of trade waste cost and were the amount of trips people made being recorded to investigate this activity.

Before the system was introduced it was hard to anticipate who was coming to the site as there was an increase in people using it. There were no limits in the number of times that people could use the site. It was a free available service so as waste was segregated this was not considered but it could be done if necessary.

- Has an increased of fly tipping been thought about?

It was confirmed that there was no evidence of any fly tipping, and these were systems introduced across the country and most people comply.

- Would be a charge to be paid before entry into the site, and if an item could be recycled would you get a refund on this item? Also, if someone made mistake then how was this rectified.

It was commented that this would be taken on board and considered.

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- What sort of volume of materials were anticipated and was there a sliding scale of cost?

Residents were asked to assess this at the time of booking and therefore there was a charge, for example for each car tyre given.

- Who currently collects fly tipping on public land, as there were a lot of resident enquiries about this? Was there a capacity to handle all requests and was it flexible?

It was confirmed that the Council removed waste on public roads and investigated and took enforcement action where required. Non-Council land was the challenge where private landowners were not clearing their own land.

### **EPP2324/08 - Charge for replacement (residual waste) bins**

The Head of Environment and Public Protection gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to charge residents that request replacement of residual waste bins. Implementation of this would be in April 2023.

Members asked the following:

- Is the charge a flat fee or means tested?

It is a flat fee that reflects the administration costs associated with this activity.

- What if they've been stolen or damaged by youths such as being set on fire, is there any discretion?

There was a certain element e.g., a communal bin but in general it was up to the homeowner to look after the bin.

- A Member asked whether there was any considerate for stolen bins and was there any plans for these issues to be looked at.  
It was noted that the challenge was who really needed a new bin or was it genuinely stolen.

- A Member asked about the charges and liability where 2 bins were stolen from outside the front door, and another resident complained that their bins had been broken by the operatives collecting the bins. Was there any sort of leeway for these residents?

It was explained that the lorries have cameras, and the operatives were encouraged to handle them with care although accidents did happen so in that case residents would not be expected to pay to replace them. In other cases, it would be for the residents to take care of the bin.

### **EPP2324/09 - Domestic Residual and Garden Waste Collection – 3 Weekly Collections**

The Head of Environment and Public Protection gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to move from alternate week domestic residual and garden waste

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collections to 3 weekly collections, in order to reduce cost and increase the recycling rate to achieve 70% by 2025.

Members asked the following:

- A Member commented on helping residents to recycle more and asked for an explanation for the thinking behind this proposal.

Members were advised that it was very important to recycle as there were recycling targets to be met. Sometimes residents did not have all the information to recycle correctly and there have been studies undertaken as to what was inside resident's bins. Every 5 years the Council provided a report on the composition of wheelie bin contents and there was already a lot of Councils doing this. There was a significant increase in recycling. 20 years ago, the recycling rate was 6% and now the rate was 67%. When we picked up mixed up mixed recycling materials there was a large cost to dispose of this. The Statutory targets stated that by 2024/25 the Council must hit a recycling rate of 70%. If not, the Council would have to pay an additional £200 a tonne for the extra waste. Current recycling collections still contained material where residents had been reluctant to recycle them. It was the case of changing the way people do waste.

- Are there going to be educational supports in place to supplement this change?

We are proposing to start this in a small trial first to see what it looks like before rolling out wider.

- A Member asked whether the financial costs of fly tipping had been considered as Newport was the worst local authority for fly tipping clearance. There had been materials all in the bins recycled with not a lot of reduction. There was a need to increase recycling and a behaviour change.

Fly tipping the Council dealt with was usually not by residents and all fly tipping was recorded so the amount recorded was high. If someone was struggling with their waste, there was help available where the Council could meet with those residents and so awareness needed to be raised.

- Do we have a waste strategy in place?

It was confirmed there is waste strategy and policy in place and has been in place for 3 years.

- A Member asked about households with a large amount of people and would this be looked at in relation to communal bins where neighbours could fill it up with items that shouldn't be put in there.

The Council were willing to be fair on this and the Council worked with registered social landlords and private landlords to see how to improve bin collections from blocks of flats.



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- The Head of Environment and Public Protection confirmed there would be no redundancies to the team. We are increasing recycling rounds as we are reducing waste collection rounds, and some of the reductions will be on posts that are currently vacant.
- A Member asked whether the Council could pay Wastesavers to do this and was this contract looked at to make sure it was providing a good service.

It was confirmed that this would be looked at as part of the Council's waste strategy.

- A Member commented on issues with communal bins and the charges got passed on to the residents. It was then noted that on the continent these bins were managed more successfully where there was a pay as you go service where waste was tagged but this was not used in the UK. A common approach was needed to solve the problem with a specific analysis needed for each location so there was a number of things that could be done.
- If you go to shops abroad, many of them have options to submit recycling for remuneration. Is UK Government looking to do anything similar and would that reduce our rates of recycling?

The Strategic Director confirmed this was a Welsh and English proposal and systems would collect this on a larger scale. The challenge would be that it would target more high value recyclables and local authorities needed to understand the detail of this proposal.

- A Member asked if the target was not reached it would be a 1% increase on council tax.

It was confirmed that there was environmental damage with this as consumers could not keep consuming and throwing away recyclables.

### **INF2324/02 - Changes to Operational Practice and Procedures**

The Head of Infrastructure gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which included the reduction in the Levels of Water Management and Drainage Operational Service by 2 FTE operatives and one vehicle, and also the reduction of the gully emptying service by 2 FTE operatives and one vehicle.

Members asked the following:

- Where have other improvements been made elsewhere to have this reduction?

It was confirmed that the Council was fulfilling the function as we were with the changes to policy and procedures and a change to 12 monthly schedules.

- Would investment be considered for flood alleviation as there was a concern about road flooding and drains being blocked. What was the impact of this on the proposal?

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It was advised that in extreme weather events then we do have other operatives that we deploy to support on an ad-hoc basis, albeit other work capacity is reduced as a result during that time. However, there is a need to make savings, and this is being offered as an option, with a reduced service being the impact.

- Are there any options to work with partners to mitigate this?

It was advised that as we are talking about adopted highways, then this is our responsibility.

- Comment was made about extreme weather conditions – recent floods at Malpas Road have occurred with current levels of maintenance, so surely these instances will increase in future? Has the cost of sending out a team to respond to this, in comparison to taking pro-active action as part of a schedule for clearing gullies?

It was advised that this is hard to quantify, some of the flooding is not caused by what the Council does or doesn't do, however we often have to deal with the impacts. In some instances we deploy external teams to support the response. Diverting our own teams result in an opportunity cost rather than a financial one.

- Have we explored collaborative working with our neighbouring local authorities to try to mitigate our costs?

It was advised that from knowledge of colleagues working in other local authorities, they do not necessarily have the capacity to support joint arrangements. This would be challenging to manage, particularly in weather events as the prioritisation would become more of an issue. However, this is something that we can explore further in future.

- Have we reviewed our contracts with external providers to assess any time boundaries in response times that would help us?

It was advised that we don't have any long-term contracts, it is a seller's market, which is a real challenge to manage. As councils responding to emergency events, we need to move quickly and deploy in difficult circumstances whilst competing with other LA's usually needing the same services at the same time.

### **INF2324/04 - Streetlighting Switch off 00:00 to 06:00 (excluding safety critical sites) and Reduction in Maintenance**

The Head of Infrastructure gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was with the exception of safety critical sites identified by road safety audits, all streetlights citywide are switched off during the hours between midnight and 06:00 hours in the interests of achieving energy and carbon emissions savings. The Head of Infrastructure then gave an overview of the Reduction in Maintenance proposal, which was that the reactive maintenance budget (£365k in 2022/23) is reduced by £100k to secure a saving on the levels of maintenance undertaken each year. This will require a comprehensive review of

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how we risk manage our assets to ensure that only low risk/ low impact maintenance is deferred.

Members asked the following:

- A Member stated that this was the biggest area of contention with a lot of concern being expressed by residents. There was concern from people regarding safety and crime and disorder which might have a significant quality impact on residents. The Member recommended that this proposal be reviewed due to the real impact on residents.
- What considerations have been given to areas of safety, resulting in the saving of £300,000.

It was confirmed that an assumption had been made of what was there due to knowledge of the network and that the top-level estimate could be moved as percentages of the network was considered with a detailed assessment to be done on areas. It was also based on other LA's assessments inclusive of bands of safety. A more detailed assessment is planned to arrive at a final position.

- A Member commented on the 50% of lights to be switched off and how we improve the safety of residents?

The proposal mainly looked at the other half and in terms of the balance of safety this was mixed but other Councils have done this. This was not a statutory function so the Council did have discretion and lights would be on until midnight. A Member then asked was there only a legal obligation to light junctions? It was confirmed that the Council lit junctions and roundabouts as they were busy.

- A Member stated that this proposal was disappointing in the fact that funding for Improving Safety for Women and Girls in high-risk areas that had been implemented, now they will be switched off again under these measures. Was this now a waste of money? The Member also hoped that the Council worked with partners to identify any safety concerns as the perception of safety was also important.
- Will the street lights switch off at midnight every night, or could weekends be later?

The Strategic Director advised that that they will be set for midnight as a non-variable. The switch functions do not permit daily variations; however this can be verified for the Committee. Members then made comment that many workforces start at 6am, so they will be likely travelling to work in the dark, perhaps they need to be switched back on earlier.

- Members commented on seasonal differences which may be needed to be considered as well as licensed premises which also have a late time of closing so this needed to be considered, as there could be an increase of crime.

**INF2324/05 - Fees and Charges – Fees increased by 10% rather than the standard 4%**

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The Head of Infrastructure gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to increase the fees and charges made by the infrastructure service area in carrying out its statutory duties above the standard annual 4% by a rate of 10% to meet inflation. This was to ensure the authority continues to deliver a sustainable service by recovering all its incurred costs for statutory and discretionary functions.

Members asked the following:

- A Member asked would these charges be fair against other authorities and would it take fines into account.

It was confirmed for Committee that Newport Council compared broadly compared to other local authorities. It was also confirmed that the cameras on M4 that have been switched back on were controlled by Welsh Government and the fees were paid directly to them.

### **LS2324/03 - Reduce Staffing levels in the Registration Service**

The Head of Law and Standards gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which included which was to reduce staffing levels from 5 members of staff to 4 members. The provision was delivered through a scheme which had to be agreed with the General Registration Office (GRO) which required the service to have 5 members of staff. An application was to be made to approve the reduction of registrars. The impact of this proposal would be a reduction of appointments that would be made available. The service had a statutory duty to register births within 42 days and 5 days for deaths. The Manager of the Registrar service was happy that we could meet these targets. A diary service would make the booking of appointments a smoother process and people could cancel quicker to open up more appointments.

Members asked the following:

- A Member asked how the service was monitored currently.

The Head of Law and Standards stated that key indicators were monitored on a quarterly basis, and this was reported to the GRO to make sure levels were satisfactory. The manager regularly checked this, with current targets being 98% which was a required time scale.

- A Member asked about the capacity in the building including the civic centre and was it an unnecessary expense delivering it from one place.

The revenue savings had been looked at and these were minimal. The specific proposal included the new IT system being implemented and the service would be in target. Use of the Councils Assets would be commented on later in the meeting.

### **FIN2324/01 - Reducing opening times in Customer Services with move to more self-service**

The Head of Finance gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which included a move to a 3-day week for appointments. The Civic Centre reception to be reduced

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shouldn't have any impact because a later opening was still being maintained. The reduction did have a staffing impact.

Members asked the following:

- A Member commented on the impact of people who rely on the face-to-face service which was worrying.

The Head of Finance confirmed that the reduced face to face period was 3 days, but the offer would still be there for those people, but the service would keep an open mind on the opening hours so would look at this and the staff rota and would be happy to be flexible.

- A Member asked how many were using the general number as a contact number and could this initially increase the flow of calls.

The proposal included the development in the team of the My Council service to facilitate those people who want to interact digitally with 2 years funding for this service.

- A Member asked about Digitisation where more people go online and how would we guide them long-term. Would we be digitally ready long term and could the system cope with new changes?

There was no knowledge of any issues with this, and the service was keeping the contact centre and phone calls and developing the system.

### **FIN2324/02 - Switching off phone and face to face channels for some transactions**

The Head of Finance gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to switch off phone and face to face channels for some transactions and reduce the resource in the Customer Services team. The proposal also includes a joint saving with Digital to end the contract for call recording within the Contact Centre. Transactions such as bulky waste and fly tipping have been excluded from this list. A post will also be taken out of the team.

Members asked the following:

- Will the reduction in post be a person or a vacancy?  
This will be a reduction in a vacant post, with no-one at risk of redundancy. There was a high turnover in the team. It was fully staffed and 2 people in the team had gotten new jobs in the Council and were moving teams which happened regularly.
- Transactions via phone – which services will be impacted, and how are you improving those digital services?

It was confirmed that to improve the service there would be 2 posts funded for 2 years in the My Council Services team, which will focus on improving the current offer and extending into offering more digital transactions.

- A Member queried about the cancellation of the call recording contract, do we know how many calls are recorded and listened to as part of coaching and training, as well

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as being replayed back for legal purposes? Also, are there any legal implications to this?

The Head of Finance stated that they would provide this data at a future date as they were not aware of any legal implication of not recording calls. The service would work with IT partners and there were challenges in this budget, but we wanted to allow time for residents to get used to the new service.

- A Member commented on Cabinet reports and the RSG supplement announced in meeting itself as it was confirmed that there were 2 elements of savings £5million of Cabinet savings and £5million delegated savings. Comment was made that if we have an additional £11m then in theory cabinet could delegate savings without having to make further savings and increases to council tax to make up the difference.

Members were advised that schools savings were based on 50% pressures in schools – we do need to look at some of our key assumptions in light of new information, it needs to be refined at each stage. For example, pay assumptions will need to be reviewed again and is likely to be bigger than allowed for. Teacher's pay is still very uncertain and NJC staff may need to increase. So whilst there appears to be less of a gap, we will need to account for other budget pressures before coming to our final budget.

- A Member commented that in the report, it mentions earmarked reserves increased by £8m last year. As a last resort the reserves mitigate against the deficit but means we cannot use them for the intended purpose and find the reserve again. In theory, could Cabinet pull a planned project and use that to offset other savings or increases in Council Tax?

The Members were told yes, but as Head of Finance he would not advise this approach as this fills a gap for a single year and the problem is the same the following financial year. You then have to find the saving and replace the reserve, essentially doubling up.

### **N/A - Increase council tax increase from 4% base assumption by 5.5% to 9.5%**

The Head of Finance gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to increase Council Tax from 4% base assumption by 5.5% to 9.5%. The Committee were advised that it was well documented that Newport's council tax was low compared to others in Wales, generating approximately 23% of our income. Newport continues to be one of the lowest council tax levels in Wales.

Members asked the following:

- A Member commented that they appreciate the fact that Newport was below average, but that this percentage increase at the time was unfortunate due to cost of living and rise in energy bills.

The Head of Finance confirmed that for Band A the increase was £2 a week which was not a lot.

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- A Member commented on the extra RSG from Welsh Government and whether this could be used to reduce this council tax.

It was advised that this was for Cabinet to decide where they spend the money and make the recommendation to Council.

- Can anyone make additional contribution through Council Tax if they can afford it?

It was confirmed by the Head of Finance that this is not possible under current Council Tax regulations.

### **RED2324/01 - Newport Live Management Fee**

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development gave a brief overview of the proposal to the Committee, which was to reduce the annual management fee paid to Newport Live for the operation of leisure services across the city. In 2014 the agreement was to reduce subsidy to zero by 2020. A 10% reduction was felt to be a reasonable start at this stage.

Members asked the following:

- How do Newport Live feel this will impact their service?

Members were advised that we have been in full consultation, and this has been part of the business plan since 2014. They have not formally told us of any direct impact, but with the closure of Newport Centre there may be some efficiencies through that.

- A Member questioned the years extra funding and could any be claimed back. It was confirmed that there had been 3 years of extra funding and there had been robust reasons for not reducing it before now.
- Is 10% enough and should we ask for more? It was noted that more would be ideal, but it was mindful of it being a business that provided a service. There would be planning with Newport Live with a need to look at not being able to provide a subsidy at some point.
- A Member questioned the percentage of 10% and had any analysis completed.

It was confirmed that a copy of the accounts had been received and that 10% was considered to be reasonable looking at the picture and was manageable for the business.

- A Member stated that we need to recognise what some of the partners do for us. There is value to citizens in this service and we are saving in vast amount of other ways for our citizens.

### **People, Policy and Transformation – Assets information**

The Head of People, Policy and Transformation advised the Committee that although her service area does not have any savings proposals out for consultation, they do have delegated savings, as well as fees and charges out for consultation. These charges included

## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

increasing in street naming and numbering and for room hire in the Civic Centre. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation also commented on the Council use of assets as there was a large capital receipt. It was important to take public views on asset rationalisation, such as could buildings across the city be used more effectively and should there be less assets? A project had been started to pull all this together.

Members asked the following:

- A Member asked for a list of the assets that the Council possess.

The Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that this request had already been on the list from a previous meeting. When the project has been completed, information will be provided to the Committee.

- A Member asked about budget investment in relation to the Norse JV- increased contract payment of £89,000 for this service this year.

It was confirmed that this was the NJC pay rise uplift which is part of the contract agreement, and this sum represents the sum set aside for this previously.

- A Member queried the Health and Safety investment and asked whether these were new posts.

It was explained that this was part of a long standing commitment to strengthen health and safety arrangements in the Council and as a result the service has been restructured. In answer to the question about whether staff could be redeployed, this is always a consideration for recruitment. It was confirmed that this investment was more than one post.

- Will these represent opportunities for staff at risk of redundancy?

It was advised that under our job security policy we would always look to reduce vacancies first and offer support for staff who may be at risk of redundancy. We will provide the structure for the committee as follow up information.

The Chair thanked the Officers for attending.

### **Conclusions:**

#### **Comments to the Cabinet on the following proposals:**

- a) The Committee noted the budget proposals relevant to the Place and Corporate Directorates and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.
- b) The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet on the Proposals within the Place and Corporate Directorate:

HC2324/01 - Library and Adult Community Learning Services



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- Although this sits outside of the consultation as it relates to previously made decisions, the Committee requested information regarding where co-located services will be sited in the Central Library when it re-opens.

### HC2324/02 - Reduce financial support to the Shop Mobility scheme in 2023-24

- The Committee requested the available data regarding the individual impact on service users and the expected impact on business in the city centre. Members recommended that a review of the demand for the service be conducted before going ahead with the proposal.

### EPP2324/02 - Community Safety Warden Service Restructure

- The Committee commented that whilst it is disappointing to see a potential reduction in the Warden Service, they do see an opportunity to work more effectively with partners, including statutory partners. However, Members recommended that reductions should not be made prior to discussion with partners about contributing towards funding the service so that it could continue at current levels. The Committee considered that alternative options could be explored with partners, including RSL's, to maintain provision.

### EPP2324/04 - Increased fees and charges within Environment and Leisure Services

- The Committee accepted the proposal for the Increased fees and charges within Environment and Leisure Services, however Members feel that the increase should go up in line with the same amount of the Council Tax increase instead of inflation.

### EPP2324/05 - Introduce parking charges to four park and countryside car parks

- The Committee commented that they would like the Service Area to consider the local youth sport teams that use the parks, which would especially be an issue with the Glebelands. Members commented that it was good to see exemptions, in cases such as these through engagement with local football clubs, as there are a lot of families suffering from cost of living.
- Members requested financial projections produced for each car park if charges are introduced, based on historical data on usage against each car park in the proposal.
- Members requested a breakdown of the net cost and the timescales for returns on investment.
- The Committee spoke of concern about parking pressures in adjacent streets, especially if people try to park nearby to avoid paying fees and would like these pressures to be considered, especially in areas where there are parking restrictions in place such as residents parking.

### EPP2324/06 - Household Waste Recycling Centre - Charging for non-household waste

- The Committee requested that the service area consider what the process may be to issue refunds for exceptional circumstances when residents make a mistake on the online booking forms.
- The Committee requested clarification about the disposal of sanitary ware, for example when households wish to disposal of entire bathrooms; would these items carry this proposed charge.

## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

### EPP2324/08 - Charge for replacement (residual waste) bins

- The Committee queried whether there was any room for discretion in the proposed policy, as some residential areas in Newport have to store their residual waste bins on the street, which could cause an ongoing issue with them being damaged or stolen.

### EPP2324/09 - Domestic Residual and Garden Waste Collection – 3 Weekly Collections

- The majority of the Committee felt that this proposal should not go ahead and considered that this proposal was more supportive of achieving recycling targets than being a budget saving proposal. The Committee found that much of the information in the proposal itself related to increasing the recycling rates and encouraging to recycle more; however, it was noted that failing to meet these targets could have a further financial implications associated with performance related fines in future years. Members commented that the saving this currently offered was a small amount, but the wider financial implications were greater than the saving offered, as it would promote fly tipping across the city and the Council would have to use more resource to clean up areas
- Comment was made that if this proposal was to go ahead, then it was extremely important for residents to know that the recycling service would be able to cope with the extra amount of recycling being presented, as this could potentially make the proposal more acceptable to residents. Members also remarked that the current recycling service provision would benefit from reviewed and improvement. Further education to residents about what can be recycled would be also essential.
- The Committee requested that the provision for households of 5 people be reviewed, as they currently fall short of the threshold to get a large bin; with less frequent collections it would be difficult for these families to manage.
- The Committee recognised the difficulties that residents of flats sharing communal bins face, as they have no control over neighbours presenting waste. The Committee also raised some issues they are aware of with bin collections being missed for communal blocks. Members agree that a review with Registered Social Landlords and Rent Smart Wales is needed to manage communal bin collections and recycling spaces more effectively.

### INF2324/02 - Changes to Operational Practice and Procedures

- The Committee commented that the Council should explore collaboration with neighbouring local authorities to try to mitigate our costs. Members also enquired whether there could be possible partnership work with Welsh Water and the Environment Agency to see if they are able to help facilitate more aspects of keeping drainage facilities running smoothly.
- Concern was raised that the team already have a difficult task dealing with flooding and blocked drains with the current provision, so the reduction of vehicles and staff would make this even more difficult. If conditions are escalating with the ongoing adverse weather, it could become a risk to resident's livelihood and safety. Crucial routes in the City Centre that shouldn't be blocked are getting blocked quite often, and these routes are needed to be clear to enable resident to get to work for the economic functioning of the city. Members commented that it is important to avoid putting residents at risk.

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- Concern was raised about insurance risks. If the Council were to go ahead with this proposal, and damage was caused to resident's properties due to the reduced service, would the Council be liable for the damage? Concern was also raised about the Council potentially spending more money on external contractors, which would cancel out any proposed saving.

### INF2324/04 - Streetlighting Switch off 00:00 to 06:00 (excluding safety critical sites) and Reduction in Maintenance

- Whilst the longer term savings were appreciated, the Committee recommend that this proposal should not go ahead, as the impact the reduced lighting will have on people would be too great. Concerns were raised about safety of residents travelling to work in the early mornings, road safety issues especially for taxi drivers, and that rates of crime, including burglaries could rise.
- If the decision to accept the proposal were to go ahead, the Committee hoped that the Council would work with partners to assess the impacts that could be caused, including the public's perception of safety. Members spoke of the importance of working with partners to identify potential and existing issues, especially in areas that contain licenced premises, as this could increase crime and disorder.
- Comment was made that the Council previously secured funding to support the safety of women and girls in the city, particularly in areas like parks, following consultation with residents, and now these lights will be switched off again under these measures.
- Members queried whether the street lighting hardware can be reprogrammed to turn off at a later time on Saturday and Sunday mornings, for example 2am instead of 12am, which could help accommodate the safety of the late night economy. Members also wished to note the seasonal differences in terms of when to switch on and off the street lights.

### INF2324/05 - Fees and Charges – Fees increased by 10% rather than the standard 4%

- The Committee recommend that the fees and charges should go up in line with the agreed Council Tax rise.

### LS2324/03 - Reduce Staffing levels in the Registration Service

- The Committee were happy with this proposal on the provision that targets can still be met.

### FIN2324/01 - Reducing opening times in Customer Services with move to more self-service

- The Committee felt that at this time they did not have the full information they required to make a decision on this proposal. Whilst the redevelopment of the Central Library and re-location of services there is not in scope as part of the budget consultation, and is a decision that has previously been agreed, the Committee felt that it would be necessary to see what the new services in the Central Library look like first before any decisions on opening times are made.
- Committee considered that whilst the staggered opening hours take consideration of residents with different requirements accessing the face to face service, they could cause confusion for some residents.

## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

### FIN2324/02 - Switching off phone and face to face channels for some transactions

- The Committee spoke of the importance of residents being able to communicate with the Council. Members requested information about how many calls received in the Contact Centre are recorded and listened to as part of coaching and training. Members also queried whether there are any legal implications of cancelling the call recording contract. Concern was raised about the protection of staff against abuse without calls being recorded.

### N/A - Increase council tax increase from 4% base assumption by 5.5% to 9.5%

- The Committee recommend that this proposal should be reviewed to be lower, in view of the draft settlement figure, albeit with the understanding that the final figure has yet to be confirmed.

### RED2324/01 - Newport Live Management Fee

- The Committee were happy with this savings proposal and stated the service area were clear in its recommendation that further work be undertaken to support Newport Live to implement a more formalised Business Planning process.

### People, Policy and Transformation – Assets information

The Committee wished to thank the officers for the information provided. Members requested if they could receive information on the revised structure for Health and Safety and also when finalised the list of assets that the Council currently holds.

**PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PEOPLE**

**2023-24 Budget and Mid Term Financial Plan**

The Assistant Head of Finance gave a brief overview.

**Questions**

A member questioned why the forecast for inflation is higher than has previously been anticipated for the next coming years.

- The Assistant Head of Finance noted that inflation is forecast in recognition that it is still likely to be higher than in the previous year. The Assistant Head of Finance added that the issue of high inflation will be compounded beyond a single year as there will likely be further cost increases and funding decreases.

A member asked whether there had been any consultations with the schools regarding proposals.

- The Assistant Head of Finance informed the member that an overview of the budget was given to schools and members of the unions in the prior week at the School Budget Forum. This forum includes a wide cross-section of stakeholders that will formally input to the consultation if they wish, however any school or individual can also add to the consultation as part of the process.

The member followed on to ask about the different pressures faced by schools such as energy costs increases, and if any in-year budget gaps would be remunerated.

- The Assistant Head of Finance noted these points were also discussed in the aforementioned School Budget Forum. Schools understand which elements are being funded in the proposals, and which would be absorbed by schools. These in-year increases would not be remunerated; however Cabinet would decide on the costs that will be met on an ongoing basis.

A member asked if Heads of Service could give context regarding the expected impact of the proposals for residents in Newport.

- The Strategic Director of Social Services outlined that there will inevitably be impacts from savings proposed, but the focus is to ameliorate the impact of these savings that we need to make whilst working as effectively as we possibly can.

**Investment Proposals:**

A member queried the funding gap in relation to the Aspire Project.

The Head of Prevention and Inclusion detailed the plans to remodel and re-establish the aspire project to progress from the current legacy arrangement, and to make it more secure by identifying funding streams with Education. Currently, there is an ad-hoc arrangement between education and youth service but that there needs to be a more robust arrangement in place including looking at an alternative provider who can oversee the contract in its entirety, rather than the current ad-hoc arrangement.

## APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

A member asked for more information about the proposal concerning Additional Learning Need staff, and how this would affect ALN places in Newport schools.

- The Assistant Head of Education informed the member that funding is sourced through grants however it is unclear how much grant funding will be available in the next year

A member asked if there was a reduction of ALN places, then where those children would be placed.

- The Assistant Head of Education confirmed that there were no plans to reduce ALN places.

A member asked for clarification regarding the Housing Benefit technical overpayments.

- The Assistant Head of Finance informed committee that this was due to exceeding accepted threshold levels of errors in claims to the DWP, and there had to be some planning done to ensure funds were available to meet costs where thresholds were exceeded. The Assistant Head of Finance assured members that there is work ongoing to try and stay within the thresholds, but some things are not always within the Council's control.

A member asked whether underfunding had caused an issue.

- The Assistant Head of Finance explained that the requirement to house everyone was expensive when resources such as bed and breakfasts had to be used to meet increasing demands on the service. The Assistant Head of Finance noted that historically, the DWP funding received does not cover the full costs of housing people, which leads to a gap in funding accommodation, particularly for temporary accommodation. The Assistant Head of Finance highlighted that this was not a new pressure, but the gap between Local Housing Allowances set by the DWP, and the true costs in housing people is something that needs addressing. There was some additional assistance during covid, but these high costs of emergency housing remain.

A member asked what was being done to reduce the threshold below the £600,000.

The Assistant Head of Finance confirmed that the benefits section has moved and there will be changes to arrangements. There is a lot of work going in to manage the budget pressure through improvement of processes. The team are under extreme pressure as they are also administering lots of grants and schemes over and above the HB claims.

A member asked if the Heads of Service work with Newport City Homes to tackle the pressures of temporary housing.

- The Strategic Director explained that the service does work in partnership with Registered Social Landlords, and private landlords on strategic approaches, but also in day to day work. This is relevant in Education, Social Services, Housing and more. These relationships do exist.

## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

The Chair noted a lag in the DWP funding being paid to housing and benefit services and asked that more information on this be provided to committee.

The Head of Adult Services wanted to highlight the importance in the range of partnerships that are there to make sure as people's needs develop that they are able to keep them in their homes, which is an effective preventative approach to homelessness.

### **Savings Proposals:**

#### **CS2324/04 - Oaklands and short break provision remodelling**

A member asked what the impact would be for children, fosterers, and wider service in Newport due to the proposed savings for Oaklands respite support.

- The Head of Children's Services noted that the intention is to minimise the impact on the service by reducing, not ceasing to provide the service. It was noted that Social Service will explore other options for funding if and when possible to seek to re-introduce higher levels of provisions. The service is reducing rather than closing, if other monies become available, for example through WG, then the provision would be revised accordingly. The Head of Children's Services acknowledged that there would be an impact and explained that it would be a need led service in future.

A member expressed concern regarding the reduction in short break services, and another committee member commented that the service was a lifeline for some service users, therefore the service should not be stopped.

A member commented that the reduction of service provided by Oaklands would lead to higher cost pressures in other areas where some children may have to go into full time care, and these displayed costs could also impact on health services.

A member asked what the centre provision would look like in the best-case scenario, and whether volunteers be considered to sustain current levels of service.

- The Head of Children's Services informed the committee that the proposal is proposal isn't too close Oaklands, but to reduce the offer in terms of number of nights available. These are a highly skilled workforce offering an expert level of care, so any volunteers would need to be qualified to this level in order to support effectively. The Head of Children's Service noted the proposal was Monday to Thursday provision from 19 places to 11.
- The Chair noted that it was 21 to 11 places.

The committee expressed strong concerned on the impact on residents due to the reduction of services in the Oaklands and short break services savings proposal. The committee were concerned about the impact not only directly on the residents who accessed this service, but the residents who were able to foster with the assistance of this service and felt that it could have an impact on the number of foster carers within Newport. The committee also felt that there would be long term financial impact due to increasing pressures in other areas such as

## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

the care service and the health service. The committee recommended that this be reviewed and reconsidered.

### **CS2324/05 - Staffing across Children's Services**

A member asked what was meant in terms of reduction of staff.

- The Head of Children's Services informed the committee that vacancies would be removed as the first option, as part of the Council's job security policy.
- The Strategic Director was confident that this saving could be achieved in this way.

### **AS2324/01 - Adult contracts; commissioned services**

A member expressed the importance of the Growing Space service for residents in Newport and questioned what would happen to the Growing Spaces partnership.

- The Head of Adult Services noted that a considerable contribution was made to the partnership by the Council, which was proposed to be reduced. The Head of Adult Services informed committee that the service would be continued through other funding streams with a reduced contribution from the Council. The Head of Adult Services confirmed that the service would continue but on a reduced level.
- The member questioned whether the service would be able to continue working from Tredegar House.
- The Head of Adult services confirmed that this would be the decision of Growing Space as it would continue to operate with a change in capacity.

A member noted that meetings had been held in which the impact of cuts to Growing Space funding were presented.

A member asked for clarification regarding the financing for Growing Space and whether the Council could assist the charity in securing additional funding to bridge any gaps.

- The Head of Adult Service noted that it was not an easy proposal to put forward, but the Council were looking to mitigate the proposal, such as through relationships with mental health services. The Head of Adult Services informed the committee that this would be supported going forward in relation to helping them securing further grant funding where possible.

The committee stressed the importance of supporting local initiatives.

The committee stressed the importance of Growing Spaces and strongly raised its concern the impact that limiting the service would have on residents who need to access these services. The committee further raised concern on the impact reducing the service would have on future finances and services such as the health and care sectors. The committee recommended that these cuts be reviewed and reconsidered.



## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

### **AS2324/04 - Short breaks service for older adults (formerly known as day opportunities)**

A member felt that a £500,000 reduction in funding would have a severe impact on the short breaks service.

A member asked for clarification as to whether this was in reference to Spring Gardens.

- The Head of Adult Services confirmed it was regarding the Annex of Spring Gardens, not the residential home.
- A member asked whether that part of Spring Gardens would be closing all together.
- The Head of Adult Services informed committee that they would look to mitigate by potentially using part of the residential home or something else. The Head of Adult Services reminded committee that this was out to consultation for public commentary.

A member asked how carers will be supported after these cuts.

- The Head of Adult Service assured committee that they would continue to work with carers and all those attending short breaks as they have a right to a service. The Head of Adult Services informed committee that mitigation would be done by going back to look at how else the people currently using the service could be supported individually.

A member emphasised that they believe that residents will suffer heavily as a result of these cuts.

- The Strategic Director of Social Services assured committee that everyone is working to make savings in the face of difficult circumstances, whilst understanding that these changes will have an impact. The Strategic Director acknowledged the difficulty in this proposal but emphasised that work was done with families on an individual level to ensure that the care and support needed would be provided.

The committee were very concerned about the saving proposal regarding the short breaks service for older adults (formerly known as day opportunities). The committee felt that the reduction would have a severe impact on the service and all those who access it. The committee recommended that this be reviewed and reconsidered as the saving proposal was too large.

### **EDU2324/05 - Educational Psychology Savings Proposal**

A member asked if there were enough educational psychologists.

- The Assistant Head of Education noted that there is a shortage of educational psychologists nationally. The Assistant Head of Education acknowledged whilst this proposal would have an impact on output, for example, preventative work, there is enough staff capacity remaining to complete statutory requirements.

The Chair asked that if schools require additional services how was this achieved.

## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

- The Assistant Head of Education informed the committee that there is a team of educational psychologists on staff, but that individual schools could seek help further afield if they had the funds to do so.

### **Fees and Charges**

A member questioned what the justification was for raising costs.

- The Strategic Director informed committee that these were directly linked to the cost of services due to inflation.
- The Strategic Director assured the committee that for most service users, these increased costs would not be reflected in what they pay.

## **6. Conclusion of Committee Reports**

The committee appreciated that there were hard decisions to be made given the current climate.

The committee asked for further information explaining the lag between costs incurred and DWP payments received by the Council be provided.

The committee stressed the importance of Growing Spaces and strongly raised its concern on the impact of limiting the service would have on residents who need to access these services. The committee further raised concern on the impact reducing the service would have on future finances and services such as the health and care sectors. The committee recommended that these cuts be reviewed and reconsidered.

The committee expressed strong concern on the impact on residents due to the reduction of services in the Oaklands and short break services savings proposal. The committee were concerned about the impact not only directly on the residents who accessed this service, but on foster carers who played an important role with the assistance of this service and felt that it could have a detrimental impact on the number of foster carers within Newport. The committee also felt that there would be a resulting financial impact due to increasing pressures in other areas such as care services and the health service. The committee recommended that this be reviewed and reconsidered.

The committee were very concerned about the saving proposal regarding the short breaks service for older adults (formerly known as day opportunities). The committee felt that the reduction would have a severe impact on the service and all those who access it. The committee recommended that this be reviewed and reconsidered as the saving proposal was too large.

# Minutes

## Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

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Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023

Time: 10am

Venue: Committee Room 3 / Microsoft Teams

Present: Cllr P Hourahine, M Al-Nuaimi, M Evans, P Bright, G Horton, L James, C Baker-Westhead, and B Davies

Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate), Tracy McKim (Head of Policy, People and Transformation), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance)

Samantha Schanzer (Scrutiny Advisor), Pamela Tasker (Governance Support Officer), Taylor Strange (Governance Support Officer)

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### 1. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Routley and Cleverly in their capacity as Scrutiny Chairs for the Performance Scrutiny Committees – People and Place respectively.

### 2. Declarations of Interest

None.

### 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting:

#### 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022:

The Committee asked whether a response had been received in relation to their concerns regarding University student numbers. The Committee asked whether the University would be able to attend Committee and explain why student numbers were low.

- The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development would be providing an answer on this topic in due course.
- The Strategic Director stated that the Committee had no powers to call in the University, although an invitation could be extended, and that this topic could be brought to the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

The minutes of the previous meeting held 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 were **accepted as a true and accurate record**.

## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

### Minutes of 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022

The Committee asked for clarification regarding the wording of the Scrutiny Annual Report verbal update.

The Committee asked when they would receive the Scrutiny Annual Report 2021-22.

- The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that this report was with the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager and would come to Committee for comments before it went to Council

The minutes of the previous meeting held 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022 were **accepted as a true and accurate record**.

#### **4. 2023-24 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

##### **Invitees:**

**Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate)**

**Tracy McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation)**

**Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance)**

##### **Budget Overview and Process**

The Head of Finance introduced the report to the Committee and provided context regarding setting contingencies to manage risks and the points of note.

##### **Questions:**

The Committee asked for clarification regarding RSG sensitivity, where a large element of funding from Welsh Government was assumed to be a 3% increase on last year. The Committee also asked that as the percentage increase had now been clarified to be 8.9%, what did this mean in relation to the current size of the gap in funding.

- The Head of Finance confirmed that there was a 3.5% increase on the figure originally expected; the report that went to Cabinet in December 2022 stated the expected gap was £16 million at that time, but no school savings had been included. The extra settlement came to £11.7 million, which is an increase of just under 9%.

The Committee asked for an update regarding the current status of the deficit.

- The Head of Finance confirmed that the Cabinet would announce the final details and decisions in the upcoming Cabinet meeting.

The Committee asked whether the Cabinet would be looking to plug a gap of £15 million.

## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

- The Head of Finance noted that the gap was much smaller than £15 million and the final budget to be announced in Cabinet meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

The Committee asked how negotiations were going with partners and contractors in achieving savings, and queried the level of confidence that these savings could be delivered.

- It was confirmed that the Committee would be provided a written answer as it was not within this Committee's remit.

The Committee asked about streetlights and commented that budget savings seemed lumped into one and queried how much had been saved in budget maintenance.

- It was confirmed that the Committee would be provided a written answer as it was not within this Committee's remit.

### **Budget Public Engagement**

The Head of People, Policy and Transformation introduced the report. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that:

- This was part of an all-year-round consultation on various things, with 40 activities last year.
- It was the highest level of response in several years and was the longest possible period of consultation undertaken.
- Activities undertaken included online surveys, a supplementary survey on bus Wi-Fi (with a more nuanced response option given for online surveys rather than just yes or no answers), social media promotions with 39 social media posts and press releases and promotion through schools. Consultations were also held with council staff, reflecting the significant number of staff live in Newport and other community events were attended.
- Several meetings had taken place with pre budget engagements in the Autumn to consult on the Corporate Plan and budget proposals.
- A response was also expected from the Fairness Commission, and trade unions had been met with through the Employee Partnership Forum. This was attended by service leads and trade unions, and chaired by the Cabinet Member.

### **Questions:**

The Committee welcomed the pre-budget consultation.

The Committee asked for more information regarding the type of question asked and the level of detail included in the question. The Committee also asked what focus groups were involved as smaller savings such as the Shop Mobility saving of £7000 a year was a relatively small saving, but could have a large impact on this organisation.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed the survey included questions to ascertain which services were important to residents but noted it was complicated, as much of what is important to residents is universal, whilst a lot of high cost services are important to smaller groups of residents due to their needs.

## APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that managers were aware of this when determining their budget proposals. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that given the scale of the savings required, it would be difficult to respond to all the feedback from residents whilst still making the necessary savings.

The Committee asked whether residents had been asked what was less important to people in terms of services they used as part of the consultation.

- The Head of People Policy and Transformation informed Committee that corporate front line services were generally less important to people, whilst the priorities were services for the most vulnerable people.
- It was noted that Newport City Council had a low corporate spend compared to other councils.

The Committee asked whether the consultation asked what services residents would be happy to pay for.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that the public were not asked those kinds of questions.
- The Strategic Director stated that the service was developing the transformation programme to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan, and this was a valid point to take forward.

The Committee noted it was a difficult task to balance the budget, and commended the quality of the survey. The Committee asked for an outline of the engagement initiated with stakeholders before Cabinet met.

- The Chairperson noted that only work done up until this point could be scrutinised fairly.
- The Head of Finance confirmed that work on the final details on the budgets were currently in progress and could not be discussed at this point. The Head of Finance confirmed that this would be announced by the Leader at Cabinet with the Council tax rate to be the Cabinet's decision.

The Committee felt that many people did not know about the Glebelands parking charges and other proposals.

- The Strategic Director noted that it was a significant task to engage with all schools and that Finance and Education were working closely with individual schools regarding this. The Strategic Director did not feel that there was an issue with engagement in this area. The Strategic Director noted that if the Committee felt a written response was required, then this could be provided.
- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that there was service area specific engagement with service users and potential service users, giving a number of examples; meeting with parents who accessed the Oaklands service, library staff speaking directly to users, schools being made aware through trade unions and the Employee Partnership Forum, and passing information to parents. Other

## APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

stakeholders such as SRS, Newport Live, Newport Norse were engaged with separately.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that this consultation had received the largest number of responses in memory.

The Committee again commended the quality of the survey and noted that the format of the survey presentation of proposals should be used in Performance Scrutiny Committees when considering proposals due to the ease of understanding they provided.

The Committee asked for more information regarding trade unions and the Fairness Commission.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that many meetings had been held with trade unions directly and through the Employee Partnership Forum. The Fairness Committee responses had also been received and would be looked at.

The Committee asked for the number of social media posts and how effective the posts were, with reference to how many individuals the posts reached and what actions arose from the posts.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that 39 social media posts were made. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation informed Committee that the figures requested could be provided to Committee if they wished.
- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation reminded Committee that the consultation was now closed but a reflective 'Lessons Learned' activity was always completed and Scrutiny attendance was also part of the consultation.

The Committee asked if data would be tracked from responses in relation to where the individuals lived.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that location, age, and the ethnicity of the person were requested as part of the completion of the survey.

The Committee noted that they would have liked to have seen the data assessed before it came to Committee and could this be done for in future budget cycles.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that as they had allowed the maximum consultation period, the brief turnaround time meant that the analysis of responses was not available in time for Scrutiny to consider.

The Committee noted that the consultation covered a population of 155,000, and responses measured half a percent with 900 responses. The Committee agreed that many activities had been undertaken to maximise engagement but felt that there could be a proportion of people living in the city who were affected by the budget that had not submitted their views. The Committee asked whether the results received offered a skewed view of the budget as these responses were likely not received in the same number.

## APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation clarified that there were 1,300 responses received, and participation numbers are historically low which is challenging. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that this could potentially skew results but those who engaged were the ones largely affected.

The Committee asked whether residents in good financial positions were specifically engaged with, and whether Newport City Council undertook comparative review against similar Local Authorities for best practice on this approach.

- The Strategic Director confirmed that Newport City Council did look at other LA's processes. The Strategic Director felt that Newport City Council had improved in putting out consultations. The Strategic Director noted that there had been intelligence building on what mattered to residents a result of engagement, and this needed to be incorporated into how we adapted the proposals.
- The Strategic Director noted that it was fair to say that service users are the most likely to comment about it in consultation and that their responses matter most.
- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation noted that residents are more interested in some proposals than others, and gave the examples of the city centre safety survey, which received 1,600 responses and the Perception of Newport survey where 2,000 people responded. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation felt that the way forward was to pick up wider intelligence to ensure that the Council's engagement with the public is only one part of the understanding.

The Committee asked that the Scrutiny Adviser summarise previous recommendations made on consultations and provide the information to Committee.

The Committee asked whether people completed the survey or skipped responses.

- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation confirmed that while the full view was sought, people could skip on responses. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation informed Committee that this analysis of data was not complete yet but could be provided to Committee at a later date.

The Committee asked what percentage of the survey was fully completed.

- The Strategic Director confirmed that analysis would be done on this but was not ready at this time.

The Committee asked how the analysis was completed.

- It was confirmed that there were multiple feeds analysing the data.

The Committee asked whether the results of the consultation came back to Committee.

- It was confirmed that it would be provided to Committee as an information only update.

The Committee felt that there was a level of complacency in terms of responses from residents and it would be interesting to see how Newport's responses compared to other authorities ahead of next year's budget setting process.



## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

- This is a topic that could be addressed in Lessons Learned. WLGA would also be consulted, particularly as when comparing consultation response a community with a similar makeup and urban areas would be required for a reasonable assessment.

The Committee asked how responses were fed back to the public.

- It was confirmed that the responses would be communicated back to the public as part of the transparency in decision-making. It was confirmed that a summary would also be included in the Cabinet report.

### **Performance Scrutiny Committee (PSC) – Place Minutes**

The Committee raised questions regarding page 52 where the PSC – Place had commented on whether some residents could pay more council tax, if they felt they could afford it.

- The Strategic Director informed Committee that council tax regulations confirmed that this could not be put in place.
- The Committee commented that maybe residents could donate to a library or another service in lieu of this.
- The Strategic Director stated that charities could take donations, but Newport City Council could not do this.

The Committee asked whether there would be a re-banding for private properties.

- The Strategic Director noted that there would be a review of council tax banding and there would be a brief note on this to be provided to Committee.

The Committee noted and endorsed the minutes from the Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place Committee.

### **Performance Scrutiny Committee - People Minutes**

The Committee noted and endorsed the minutes from the Performance Scrutiny Committee - People Committee.

## **5. Conclusion of Committee Reports**

The Committee welcomed the improved consultation, particularly the increasing methods of consultation through different channels and the inclusion of the pre-budget consultation, that took place prior to drafting budget proposals.

The Committee noted that it would be helpful to have access to consultation data before the meeting occurred, however the Committee appreciated the restrictions that the Council works within concerning availability of information that feeds into the budget setting process and statutory consultation timescales.

The Committee welcomed the Council's use of the longest consultation period possible but felt that there should be a period of advertising the consultation in advance of it happening.

## **APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees**

The Committee felt that whilst resource should be focussed on people using the services impacted by the proposals there could be an expansion of engagement to those who have limited interaction with the Council and its services to capture a broader picture.

The Committee felt more face-to-face consultation should be used.

The Committee recommended that the results of the consultation be brought back to Committee as an information only update. The Committee also asked that a benchmark comparison of performance in engagement between Newport City Council and other Local Authorities be brought back to Committee. The Committee also asked that an update on the post-consultation 'Lessons Learned' (where the process of the consultation is reviewed to inform continuous improvement) be brought back to Committee.

The Committee recommended increasing engagement and participation throughout the year wherein residents could provide feedback on the impacts of the budget proposals.

The Committee also recommended that there be a greater attention focused on collecting and analysing data from individual calls and enquiries raised via channels like the contact centre or webforms.