

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 12 April 2023

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Mudd (Chair), D Davies, D Batrouni, J Clarke, Y Forsey, D Harvey, J Hughes and L Lacey

Apologies: Councillor S Marshall

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Marshall.

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes from 22 March were submitted and accepted subject to the following.

- Councillor Davies referred to Item 7 NCC External Pressures Update - PGT referred to Pupil Development Grant (PDG).
- Councillor Harvey referred to Item 7 NCC External Pressures Update - Warm Spaces sessions were held during December 2022 to February 2023 not November 2023.

4 Pay and Reward Statement

At this juncture, senior officers left the meeting.

The Senior Solicitor (Litigation) referred to the Localism Act 2011, which required English and Welsh local authorities to produce a “pay policy statement” on an annual basis. The legislation outlined a number of statutory requirements which must be included in any pay policy statement. The Pay and Reward Policy outlined the current position in respect of pay and reward within the Council. This was reviewed and reported to Council on an annual basis to ensure it met the principles of fairness, equality, accountability, and value for money for the authority and its residents. The Pay and Reward Policy 2023/24 was reviewed, and no changes were proposed this year outside of the normal increases in values. It was noted that amendments were made to some provision in 2022/23 with the appropriate Cabinet Member agreement, these amendments were reported to Cabinet and subsequently Council. This statement would come into immediate effect once fully endorsed by Council. In addition to the annual pay policy update, it was requested that Cabinet and then Council considered alignment of the increased annual leave of the NJC pay award, which awarded an additional

day's annual leave to those covered under the NJC pay award from April 2023, to also include chief officers covered for consistency.

The Leader added that the report had two items for recommendation to full Council, which required Cabinet to review and recommend the Pay and Reward Policy and the alignment of Chief Officer Leave to Council.

The Council's Pay and Reward Policy for the workforce was an annual report that required adoption by the Council. The policy set out the internal mechanisms for remunerating Council officers and provided an update on any changes since the last adoption in 2022.

Any changes that were made during the last 12 months were supported by the correct democratic/officer processes where necessary and were noted in the covering report.

The Council's gender pay gap continued to compare favourably with other Councils across Wales and the UK and it was anticipated to still be the case when the pay data would be refreshed later this month. The Leader was also pleased to report that the Council saw a reduction in the ratio of pay between the lowest and highest paid officers, meaning there was less of a gap between them.

The report also outlined how the Council aligned leave of officers, and other terms and conditions, as part of the Councils commitment to a single status in 2015. In the 2022/23 pay award, all officers, other than Chief Officers, were awarded an additional day's annual leave as part of the pay award. To ensure the continued commitment to have a single status approach, wherever possible, it was recommended that Chief Officers leave was also aligned to include the additional days leave.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Batrouni concurred with the two items that were before Cabinet for approval. As mentioned by the Leader, the multiplier ratio between the lowest paid member of staff and the Chief Executive had dropped. And it was hoped that with the pay increases proposed they would drop again, showing greater equity for all employees. The Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation also mentioned that the Council should take pride in the decrease in the gender pay gap. Every quartile, lower, lower middle, upper middle and upper saw the highest paid staff was nearly 70% women; of which, almost 71% was upper middle, which was a great achievement. The Council however would not rest on its laurels and would ensure that it maintained this high standard going forward.
- Councillor Davies supported comments of colleagues and recalled the Total Reward regrading review, which was undertaken in 2015, which was a massive piece of work, ensuring fairness and equity was at the heart of the Pay and Reward Policy. The fact that this was a transparent policy which was reviewed annually gave confidence to Cabinet that staff were recognised in everything they did. It also showed an increased diversity in the work force. The Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years hoped this would set a standard that local businesses would emulate.

Decision

Cabinet

1. Reviewed and recommended to Council the Pay and Reward Policy in order to meet the statutory requirement for a pay policy statement to be approved and published by Council on an annual basis.
2. Reviewed and recommended to Council the alignment of Chief Officer leave.

The next report the Leader presented was the Digital Strategy for 2023 to 2027. The purpose of the report was to seek Cabinet approval of the new strategy.

This was the Council's second Digital Strategy, developed at a time when digital technology was increasingly important to service delivery.

The strategy followed the development and agreement of the new Corporate Plan and was developed in line with the Corporate Plan aspirations. The strategy was developed following extensive engagement with citizens, businesses, employees, and Members of Newport.

The strategy was written around four themes, with actions that supported one or more of the themes:

Digital Transformation - We will transform services by the innovative use of digital technology that is effective, easy to use and designed around user needs.

Digital Skills and Inclusion - We will develop the digital skills of our citizens, employees, and members plus support improved access to digital technology.

Data and Collaboration - We will improve service delivery by better use of data and increased collaboration built on secure systems and processes.

Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity - We will drive excellent digital infrastructure and connectivity for the city and for the council.

The strategy was guided by important principles:

Innovative – embrace new ways of working and technology

Data driven - decisions are made based on sound evidence

User centred – users are at the centre of what we do

Inclusive – services are available to meet individual needs

Collaborative – collaboration internally and externally

Secure – systems and data are protected

Green – digital technology supports the council's net zero aspirations

The strategy sets out the council's vision in how it utilised technology to transform the delivery of services, support improving the well-being of residents, improve digital skills of its residents and enabled businesses to thrive in Newport.

This represents an ambitious digital vision that embraced innovation delivered in partnership with the Shared Resource Service and other key partners.

It recognised the need for continued vigilance to protect the council's data from cyber-attacks and other threats.

An action plan was developed, and progress would be reported annually in the Digital Report.

Some initial actions of note were:

- Implementation of the Local Broadband Fund (LBF) project in council adult residential care homes
- The redevelopment of the council's website
- Development of the organisation's use of data as an asset in conjunction with the Newport Intelligence Hub (NIH)

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Batrouni was very pleased with the Digital Strategy, it was long in the process, with a lot of discussion taking place with colleagues and it was critical for the Council and its services going forward. The pace of change was ever increasing, and the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation wanted to ensure that Newport was at the forefront of local authorities. A data driven city was a key building block for success and data should be used as an asset. It was underutilized in many organisations but not in Newport City Council. It would be a cultural transformation for all involved, including elected members and senior officers. Councillor Batrouni emphasised the role that artificial intelligence (AI) would provide in a public service space as a key leading feature, particularly in business to make it easier to deliver services for people. Cabinet, the Leader and senior officers were committed to maintaining Newport's position as a leading light in this field. The Council was well ahead of the game with the Newport Intelligence Hub and could possibly be in the lead of the UK in the near future. Councillor Batrouni wanted to emphasize that inclusion for those who were not digitally savvy were essential to this. Newport had the fastest growing young population and the Council needed to get fit and ready for the next generation and Cabinet was committed to that agenda.
- Councillor Davies welcomed the Digital Strategy regarding inclusion as a focus to access digital technology and the necessary skills to use it effectively. The Wellbeing Objectives focussed on improving skills, education, and employment opportunities in an attempt to reduce inequality of opportunity. Children having access to devices and being able to participate in online learning was a priority. With this came the infrastructure to allow for the use of newly developed technology. Children should be aspirational learners to develop skills and access the job market within the community boundaries, as major international global companies with digital expertise were based in Newport. The Digital Strategy was therefore integral to making this happen.
- Councillor Hughes thanked everyone involved in the report, including officers, the Leader and Cabinet Members. Digital development in the city was supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents. The Cabinet Member for Social Services also thanked the occupational health and care teams who were embracing this area of work. Meetings attended by the Cabinet Member with social services teams often mentioned digital support and AI, which encompassed how the Council was embracing this in some format. Councillor Hughes therefore supported the report.
- Councillor Clarke referred to transformation being key to the move forward to embrace new ways of working. Looking at the Digital Strategy, areas in the report included: developing a new website, improving design accessibility with the Council IT system, maximising the use of digital solutions to reduce paper usage, actively promoting and signposting residents to online services, introducing the tablet loan scheme and supporting schools to access devices. These were all positives and were just a small part of the strategy, even in tough times, Cabinet was still determined to move forward.
- Councillor Harvey supported the report and felt that it was the way forward. Covid meant that a lot of the digital advances within the Council had developed sooner. The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing mentioned that some people might be afraid to use or access digital systems. Someone recently approached Councillor Harvey, with dyslexia and asked how they could they use the equipment. Councillor Harvey advised that if they visited a community hub or asked friends, family, or visited the library, there was always someone to help. The advantage with online services was that it was instant, no waiting for a delivery, it was there and done and therefore the Digital Strategy was definitely the way forward.

Decision

Cabinet approved the Digital Strategy for 2023 to 2027.

6 **NCC External Pressures - Cost of Living**

The Leader presented the monthly update on the main external pressures facing the council, businesses, residents, and communities.

Members were aware that the cost-of-living crisis was having a significant impact in the city, compounded by higher food and energy bills affecting many residents and businesses.

Whilst the main drivers of the cost-of-living crisis were outside the control of the council, this report provided information on how the Council was helping to facilitate, coordinate and work with its partners and communities to alleviate some of the impacts.

The Leader urged residents experiencing difficulties to contact the council for information and signposting on the advice and support available, in person, by phone or by visiting its support and advice pages on the website.

Members would see from the report the council was seeing a significant number of enquiries from residents linked to the ongoing pressures following the issuing of council tax bills.

National Non-Domestic rate bills would be issued soon and show the rateable values following the revaluation carried out by the Valuation Office Agency. It was estimated that approximately a quarter of ratepayers would see their bills decrease and a similar number would see an increase.

This report was presented within the context of the Bank of England's raising interest rates last month, the impact of which was yet to be fully understood.

As Leader of Council and as Chair of our OneNewport partnership, the need for us to work collaboratively was clear.

Newport had strong partnerships, and these continued to help mitigate some of the impacts faced by its residents.

The report detailed some of the interventions facilitated during the period and information on how consultation with residents supported how we worked together during the following period.

The Leader drew Members' attention to the cost-of-living event in the Riverfront Theatre on 26 April which was being supported by a myriad of partners and organisations offering advice and support to residents with managing finances and maximising income.

Comments of Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Harvey was looking forward to the event at the Riverfront Theatre on 26 April. Last year's event was a success with Welsh Water attending and giving financial help to residents. The cost of living was at the forefront of everyone's mind and some families were struggling to feed their children and food banks were running out of food. The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing thanked the Leader for supporting residents by signposting them to the Council and Cabinet Members to provide advice on where to get financial support. Councillor Harvey reiterated that it was important for residents to contact the council and ask for assistance as there was always someone to help and they might not know what they were entitled to financially. Councillor Harvey once again encouraged the public to go to the event at the Riverfront to find out what financial benefit was available.

- Councillor Davies supported Councillor Harvey's comments and wanted to focus on children in schools in terms of deprivation. All foundation phase children would be entitled to free school meals, this would be rolled out to KS2 children at the beginning of the new school year. The Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years however wanted to point out that when parents applied for free school meals, there was also access to the pupil deprivation grant, which gave access to free school uniform. Families could still apply for additional school benefit even though they were receiving free school meals. It was also hoped that the Welsh Government would provide free school meals over the holidays as families still needed access to this support.
- Councillor Hughes mentioned that he was glad that collaboration was mentioned in the report and felt that the foodbanks within the city deserved a special mention as the challenges increased for them. The Cabinet Member for Social Services also mentioned the exceptional work at the Kindness Exchange in Caerleon who were distributing food locally and also the work of the Green Caerleon Partnership which had an allotment launch this coming weekend. These examples of work were being replicated throughout the city and showed a genuine and caring side of the city.
- Councillor Lacey also followed on from Councillors Harvey and Hughes in thanking everyone for their hard work regarding food banks. The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Assets also echoed Councillor Harvey's comments about urging residents to attend the event at the Riverfront on 26 April. For those who could not attend this event Councillor Lacey and her ward colleagues had recently referred residents to the Citizen's Advice Bureau to provide help and advice with residents finances, this also meant that some residents who attended CAB might have their financial issues resolved immediately and might not need support from the Council or food banks which was very positive.
- Councillor Clarke mentioned that he and the Leader visited their local community centre in Malpas to deliver Easter eggs and whilst the children enjoyed the event the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Regulation and Housing considered the stress on the parents regarding the cost of living and therefore wanted to re-iterate that the event at the Riverfront on 26 April was very important. It might hopefully ease the stress and help to take some anxiety away for parents. If residents could not attend the event, they could contact the council.
- The Leader reiterated that everyone was committed to delivering information to residents and that Cabinet Members would signpost residents to support provided by the Council.

Decision

Cabinet considered the contents of the report on the Council's activity to respond to the external factors on Newport's communities, businesses, and council services.

7 Work Programme

This was the regular monthly report on the work programme.

Please move acceptance of the updated programme.

Decision:

Cabinet agreed the Work Programme.

