

Report

Cabinet



Part 1

Date: 12 July 2023

Subject Newport City Council response to external pressures impacting Council services.

Purpose To present an update to Cabinet on Newport City Council's response to external factors impacting on delivery of Council services.

Author Policy and Partnership Manager

Ward All

Summary This report provides an update on the external pressures facing the council with the cost-of-living crisis continuing to be the main external pressure faced by our residents, communities, and services during this month.

Collaboration and partnership working is key to supporting our citizens and therefore this report provides information on how this way of working is enabling a greater access for our residents to support, advice and guidance.

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

Action by Executive Board and Corporate Management Team

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Executive Board
- Corporate Management Team

Signed

Background

This report is a monthly update to Cabinet members on the key pressures facing our communities, businesses, and council services, along with updates on how we are working collaboratively with our partners to help to support residents.

Cost of Living Crisis

The cost-of-living crisis remains one of the main areas of concern for our residents, businesses, and services. For the second month the UK's inflation rate in May was 8.7% with prices for food and non-alcoholic drinks rising between April and May. Reports describe the UK's 'core inflation' (excluding energy and food costs) being at the highest rate since 1992.

This is impacting upon many different aspects of our residents', staff and businesses lives with new [research](#) from Citizens Advice finding as many as one million people cut off their broadband in the last year as the cost-of-living crisis left them unable to afford internet access. Anecdotally, there is escalating worry of residents using up credit card limits and paying unaffordable monthly interest rates getting further into debt and the rise of unauthorised lenders.

Officers from across the council and our partner agencies continue to work together to coordinate and provide our residents with support, advice, and guidance.

Community Cost of Living Events

Following positive feedback and engagement at the events at the Riverfront Theatre officers have been working with partners to replicate the events in areas across the city, including Malpas, Alway, Pillgwenlly and Maesglas, where residents can access advice, support, and guidance.

These events provided residents with the opportunity to access free help, support, and advice on debt, saving money on utility bills, quitting smoking, wellbeing, benefits, employment, community activities, sustainable nappies, housing, will writing, free training, and, where available, items such as children's activity packs, free Wi-Fi sims and period products.

In addition to those more targeted events, officers and partners are attending other local events to deliver cost of living advice including at job fairs, Chatty Cafes, community events including an event at Rodney Parade for Africa Day, supermarket visits, and stalls at the University campus and Lliswerry High School.

A 'Did you Know' information pack is being developed, which includes information on free activities, weekly shop comparisons, cooking on a budget and home craft activities. This development is in early stages, and community events will help capture further information on the specific types of information to include.

National Support

The Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) and Alternative Funding (EBSS AF) UK Government schemes closed to new applicants on 31 May 2023 with NCC Officers resolving all cases by the end of June 2023.

Newport school's implemented Welsh Government's Universal Primary Free School Meals initiative in September 2022 when the scheme was rolled out across all Foundation Phase year groups. In September 2023, the scheme will be implemented across Key Stage 2, meaning that from this date all primary aged pupils will be able to benefit from this initiative. Newport's target implementation date for full roll-out is in advance of the aspirational timeline set by Welsh Government.

Ukrainian Support Scheme

The focus of the team has been to support people impacted by the closure of a Welsh Super Sponsor Hotel in Newport. The team successfully moved on almost 70% of occupants with the others moving to alternative accommodation elsewhere in Wales. The team is now focused on developing housing initiatives which will enable Newport to meet its increased population share as super sponsor hotels are closed.

The Council requires more people to come forward as “hosts” willing to accommodate people from the Ukraine. We are currently promoting the opportunity and would encourage all Councillors to promote hosting opportunities within their wards.

Afghan Hotel Closures

As part of the Home Office policy to close hotels used to support people from Afghanistan, the Council has begun to receive enquiries from local authorities where hotels are located. We are working with these councils to ensure that people moving on have equitable access to accommodation in the city. At this stage the number of people likely to move to Newport is difficult to quantify but we will keep this under close review.

Risks

Newport Council is reviewing the Council’s Corporate and service area risks as part of the new Corporate Plan.

Risk Title / Description	Risk Impact score of Risk if it occurs* (1-5)	Risk Probability of risk occurring (1-5)	Risk Mitigation Action(s) What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect?	Risk Owner Officer(s) responsible for dealing with the risk?
Cost of Living impact on Council services	4	4	See this report on the Council’s response to the cost-of-living crisis.	Corporate Management Team
Supporting refugees to settle in Newport.	4	2	See this Report on the Council’s response to re-settlement programmes.	Corporate Management Team, Head of Housing and Communities, Director of Social Services

* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Corporate Plan
Strategic Equalities Plan

Options Available and considered:

1. To consider and note the contents of the report on the Council’s response.
2. To request further information or reject the contents of the report.

Preferred Option and Why

1. To consider and note the contents of the report on the Council’s response.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

The report highlights the various support which is available to citizens who are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. Whilst a significant amount of this specific support is funded from UK Government and Welsh Government, certain factors are having an impact on the Council’s finances, both in the short term and across the medium-term.

Especially in the context of an extremely challenging medium-term horizon, budget managers and Heads of Service will be expected to continue to monitor the impact of the external factors included in this report, especially in areas where grant funding ends, and work with Finance colleagues to escalate any material financial implications and report them where relevant. This will need to also include plans to mitigate any issues, as far as is possible.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no legal issues arising from the report. Any specific legal implications will be addressed as part of the Council's operational responses to the key issues identified in the report.

Comments of Head of People, Policy, and Transformation

Our residents and staff continue to be affected by the cost-of-living crisis and this report provides examples of how we are working with partners across the city to provide advice, support and guidance to those most at need.

The council is continuing to consider HR implications for our workforce and working with all service areas closely during this period.

Scrutiny Committees

Not applicable as this an information only report and no decision is required from the Council.

Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment:

Not applicable as this is an information only report and no decision is required.

Wellbeing of Future Generations

Long Term – The short term actions the Council is taking now is considering the longer-term impacts which the cost of living is having on communities and businesses in Newport. Newport Council alongside partners are providing financial and non-financial support to help households and businesses.

Collaborative – Newport Council is working collaboratively across the organisation and also our external partners from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, schools, Welsh Government and other local partners to support cost of living support.

Integration – The actions that the Council and is taking supports the Council's organisational priorities for community cohesion, early intervention, and prevention. This also supports the Welsh Government's priority for Wales being a nation of sanctuary.

Involvement – We are involving communities and residents who are providing vital front-line support and helping vulnerable / disadvantage households, and refugees. The Council is also providing regular updates and communications to those impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

Prevention - The short term actions the Council is taking now is considering the longer-term impacts which the cost of living is having on communities and businesses in Newport. Newport Council alongside partners are providing financial and non-financial support to help households and businesses.

Consultation

Not Applicable

Background Papers

Monthly reports to Cabinet.

Dated: 6 July 2023