

Report

Cabinet

Part 1

Date: 10 January 2024

Subject Newport City Council response to external pressures impacting Council services

Purpose To present an update to Cabinet on the external pressures impacting on the delivery of Council services, and a summary of Newport City Council's response.

Author Policy and Partnership Manager

Ward All Wards

Summary This monthly report provides an update on the external pressures facing the Council which include the cost-of-living crisis and pressures on housing and homelessness services across Newport.

As with previous months, 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:

- Head of Prevention and Inclusion
- Head of Housing and Communities
- Deputy Head of Education
- Head of Finance
- Head of Law and Standards
- Head of People, Policy, and Transformation

Signed

Background

This report provides Cabinet members with an update on the key pressures facing Newport communities, businesses, and council services along with information on how the Council is collaborating with our partners and communities to support those in need across the city.

In their [Public Opinions and social trends](#) report for December 2023, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), found that 'around 1 in 5 adults reported being occasionally, hardly ever or never able to keep comfortably warm in their home', 'around half of adults reported using less fuel such as gas or electricity in their home because of increases in the cost of living', and 'around 2 in 5 adults reported finding it very or somewhat difficult to afford their energy bills'.

This report states that among those who are currently paying rent or a mortgage, 37% reported finding it very or somewhat difficult affording these payments. Information further in this report describes how this is impacting on housing and homelessness services across the city.

Research shows the effect of the cost-of-living crisis on peoples' mental health. The results of a poll of 5000 UK adults published on the 21 November 2023 by [The Mental Health Foundation](#) reveals that 31% of UK adults had felt anxious, 27% had felt stressed, and 9% had felt hopeless about their personal financial situation in the past month.

NCC and Partner Cost of Living Support

The cost-of-living crisis continues to impact upon our residents, staff, and businesses. Officers across NCC are aware that poverty awareness and actions to reduce financial pressures including families with children and young people at school is important.

Helping school communities better understand poverty, its impact on learning and the financial barriers to education and how they can be reduced and removed is a key part of the Education Services Poverty Strategy.

The newly appointed Cost of Living Advisors are collaborating with internal officers, including education colleagues, and partner agencies to provide advice, guidance, and support to our residents across the city.

Examples of activities and support offered during this period included.

- Free October half term activities across four sites, supporting 237 families.
- Anti-poverty school roadshows at Newport High, Llanmartin and Maindee Primary Schools,
- Promotion and encouragement for families to take up the universal free school meal offer.
- Promotion of job opportunities, which would enable parents to work during school hours and term times.
- Dissemination of shopping vouchers and recipe cards.
- Free Newport Live memberships and pantomime tickets issued to carers.
- Use of equipment grants to provide microwaves to those in need.
- Local foodbanks supported to provide food parcels and other practical support with additional resource from local businesses.
- Weekly family cooking sessions in Bettws and Ringland.
- Assessment and allocation of £3K carers support fund grants.

Officers have also provided advice, guidance, and signposting information at community events across the city in collaboration with key partners. Further events and road shows are planned for 2024 with the aim of visiting as many Newport schools and residents as possible and reaching out to families from across the city. Outside school, food poverty funding is being used to provide warm and healthy snacks to young people prior to football and youth club. This is currently being trialled in one area of the city.

Internally, three workforce cost of living staff training sessions were facilitated in November, and the mapping and development of a directory of food bank provision has been shared with staff to support them to effectively signpost those in need of support.

NCC officers are collaborating closely with partners to coordinate support over the next few months, including the below.

- January Family Fun & Wellbeing Sessions
- Easter Family Fun Days
- National Play Day event

In addition a coordinator is being recruited within NCC to support the distribution of £106K Carers Trust additional Carers Support Funding from November 2023 to March 2025, and the Community Connector Team received training in December from the Trussel Trust to issue crisis food parcels in the New Year as part of the Food Insecurity offer.

Homelessness and Financial Resilience

Pressures on housing and homelessness services in the city continue to be a concern, with the lead reason for homelessness continuing to be due to loss of rented accommodation followed by parent/relative/ friend no longer willing to accommodate. As pointed out in previous papers a significant cause of the loss of rented accommodation is the DWP's Local Housing Allowance cap which has been in place since 2020. The LHA cap will increase to the 30th percentile of the local market in April 2024. Whilst this is welcome, given the wider pressures on the Private Rented Sector in Newport, the impact of these changes remains to be seen.

The number of households in temporary accommodation continues to rise due to the lack of affordable settled accommodation for move on. The lack of suitable temporary and supported housing is also impacting on the ability to support those sleeping rough in the city. In response to cold weather over the winter months the Council has established a network of temporary spaces which can be used under the council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, providing shelter for people sleeping rough.

Ukrainian Support Scheme

The Super Sponsor hotel was successfully decanted. The focus for the team over the coming months will be to work more closely with clients and hosts to ensure they are well supported and to identify alternative options should placements be at risk.

Home Office Streamlined Asylum Process and 7-day notice.

Newport is beginning to see an increase in homeless presentations and people sleeping rough as a direct result of these policy changes. The flow of clear and accurate data is still challenging making planning difficult. That said, a cross services group of officers and external partners are meeting regularly to monitor the situation and to respond to increased demand.

Risks

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
Homelessness and housing concerns across the city.	4	4	See this Report on the Council's response to these issues	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 examples of 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. Evidence of this can be seen via the financial pressures upon the Housing & Communities budget, driven by the high levels of homelessness in the city.

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

The cost-of-living crisis continues to impact on our residents and staff, and this report provides information on how we are working collaboratively to help mitigate where possible. In-line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, officers and partners are working to ensure short term support is provided alongside a focus on long term resilience.

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 Generation (Wales) Act

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 our external public, private, third sector, voluntary, and housing sectors.

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.

- **Equality Act 2010**

Consideration of protected characteristics as detailed within the Equality Act has informed the activities and support provided.

- **Socio-economic Duty**

The support provided is fully congruent with the requirements of the socio-economic duty.

- **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011**

All information is provided bilingually.

Consultation

Not applicable

Background Papers

Monthly reports to Cabinet.

Dated: 3 January 2024