

Minutes



Council

Date: 28 November 2023

Time: 5.00 pm

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

Apologies: Councillors J Jones, D Fouweather and M Kellaway

1. Preliminaries

1.i Apologies

Councillors Fouweather, Jones and Kellaway

1.ii Declarations of Interest

Councillor Hughes, Item 7 Regional Partnership Board
Councillor Hussain, Item 5 Notice of Motion

1.iii Presiding Member's Announcements

Presiding Member asked Council to take a moment's silence to mark the passing former Mayor Harry Williams who died last month and also Diane Huntley, wife of former Councillor Paul Huntley.

2. Minutes

Minutes of the previous meeting 26 September 2023 were accepted as a true record.

3. Appointments

To consider the proposed appointments set out in the report.

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

Councillor Reeks seconded the report.

Resolved: That the following appointments be agreed.

Governing Body Appointments

Governing Body	Appointments/ Resignations	Name
Eveswell and Somerton Primary School Partnership	Reappointment	Alan Speight
Eveswell and Somerton Primary School Partnership	Disqualification	Geraldine French
Eveswell and Somerton Primary School Partnership	Appointment	Deiniol Parselle
Gaer and Maesglas Primary School Partnership	Resignation	Jackie Littlejohns
Gaer and Maesglas Primary School Partnership	Appointment	Rob Gregory
*Marshfield Primary School	Appointment	Sean Powell
Alway Primary School	Resignation	Michelle Miles
Alway Primary School	Appointment	Kaite Blair
Maindee Primary School	Resignation	Maddy Cameron
Maindee Primary School	Appointment	Gavin Horton

*Suzanne Evans transferred to another governor type

4. **Police Issues**

The Presiding Member introduced Superintendent J White of Gwent Police, who provided Council Members with an update on police issues within East, West, and Central Newport.

The Presiding Member invited the Leader to address Superintendent White.

The Leader was pleased that further street safety funding had been made available, which would make a huge difference to the community.

The Leader asked for assurance that officer support would be available in the city centre during the festive period.

Supt White stated that officer numbers had been doubled in the city centre in the last four weeks on a Friday and Saturday night to increase visibility. The service is in contact with partners such as Pub Watch, Licensing and landlords, and community support officers were starting their shifts earlier in the evening to provide support. Supt White was also looking at a triage service for matters that could be dealt with alternatively to using police resources. Going forward, Supt White felt that the police were in a very good place to manage the additional pressures associated with this period.

Additionally, the Leader asked what advice the police could give to ward members on how to report incidents.

Supt White urged residents that if there was an emergency to dial 999. The 101 service had improved dramatically, with Gwent being the best performing force in the country in terms of handling calls. The police website lists the local neighbourhood teams, for reporting localised issues, such as anti-social behaviour concerns. There are also social media channels, which are monitored 24/7. Face-to-face services are available at Newport Central Police Station.

Questions to the Police raised by Councillors:

- Councillor Evans explained the role of a PCSOs, who provided key support in community policing. Councillor Evans wanted assurance that Newport communities were not disadvantaged by a freeze on the recruitment of PCSO's.

Supt White agreed on the importance of PCSOs and assured Councillor Evans that there are good levels of PCSO support in place. Based on needs and demands they would be placed in the community where needed.

- Councillor Harvey referred to an issue last week where a dispersal order was put in place in Ringland. Residents were concerned and. Councillor Harvey therefore requested a public meeting with the police and residents.

Supt White would speak to the inspector to understand the issue and would make every effort to arrange a public meeting.

- Councillor Adan referred to cannabis factories in abandoned and disused buildings on Commercial Street and asked how this could be prevented.

Supt White noted that the local inspector for the city centre sat on a task group with other officers from the Council including the City Centre Manager. Supt White asked for an up-to-date database of all premises within the city centre to find out who the landlords and tenants of these premises were, as well as the activities in each of the premises to ensure that they were lawful.

- On behalf of the allotment holders in St Julians Councillor Hourahine thanked Supt White for the donation of the high-quality fertilizer and compost, which was as a result of a recent drug raid.
- Councillor Mogford referred to e-scooters and e-bikes and was concerned about young people using these modes of transport. Supt White advised that police tactics, are used proportionately to the offense.
- Councillor Cocks referred to the 7.5 tonne weight limit ignored by HGV drivers driving through Caerleon, and asked could measures be put in place to prevent this. Supt White would get in touch with the local policing team to put some action in place.
- Councillor Morris referred to e-bikes and asked was there any way that suppliers of these products could be stopped at source. Supt White mentioned that Trading Standards needed to play an active part, and amended regulatory powers would be welcomed.
- Councillor Forsey thanked PCSOs for attending police surgeries in Rogerstone, which were useful for residents and councillors to raise issues. Supt White would pass on Councillor Forsey's thanks.
- Councillor Reynolds echoed Councillor Forsey's thanks and thanked the police regarding an incident at a care home for young people where he worked.

5. **Notice of Motion: The Westgate Hotel**

The Presiding Member invited Councillor Routley to introduce the notice of motion, with Councillor Mogford to second.

The Westgate Hotel, a historic landmark in our city, holds significant importance as a turning point in history that advanced modern-day democracy, a reminder of our struggles for political beliefs.

We call upon this Council to do everything in its power to ensure the future of this historic building.

With your support, we could be reclaiming this remarkable building, preserving our history while shaping a brighter future for the Westgate, the city, and our citizens.

Councillor Routley explained that the motion was brought to Council in reference to the importance of the Chartist movement and in unify the Council. Councillor Routley went on to say that on 19 October 2023 when the Westgate volunteer group found themselves locked out of the Westgate Hotel without notice. This group had done a remarkable job in celebrating the Chartist movement and supporting the Westgate Hotel.

The motion was therefore to preserve the past. Councillor Routley wanted support for the motion, or even the amendment to the motion, to recognise and honour the fallen in the 22 men who lost their lives at the Westgate Hotel in 1839. This motion was therefore about protection of the Westgate Hotel and turning it into a living monument.

Councillor Mogford reserved the right to speak at the end of the debate.

Councillor Drewett proposed the following amendment to the Motion:

The Westgate Hotel, a historic landmark in our city, symbolises a significant point in history that advanced modern democracy. Promotion and preservation of our cultural and heritage assets is a strategic priority for Newport.

This Council will do everything in its power to ensure the future of this historic building by including it in the Placemaking Plan and the Cultural Strategy, together with input from all stakeholders, preserving our history while shaping a brighter future for the Westgate, the city, and our citizens.

Councillor Mudd seconded the amendment to the motion.

At the request of Councillor Evans, the amendment was circulated to Members for their information.

Councillor Mudd reserved the right to speak at the end of the debate.

Councillor Drewett mentioned that the substantial difference between the original motion and the amendment was that it considered that the Westgate Hotel was already going to be part of the Placemaking Plan and Cultural Strategy.

Councillor Drewett reserved the right to speak at the end of the debate.

Comments of Councillors:

- Councillor Hughes was surprised by the original motion and whilst the amendment was valued, the legacy to protect democracy and what the Chartists were trying to achieve was more important.
- Councillor Screen supported the amendment, which he considered was about preserving the cultural heritage of Newport.
- Councillor D Davies supported the amendment, which focused on Newport being a city of culture, history, and democracy. This was a key issue as part of the Placemaking Plan.
- Councillor Morris was proud to come from Newport, because of the association with Chartism. Councillor Morris would also like to see the Westgate Hotel become a World Heritage site and added that he hoped that his Council colleagues were all in agreement to preserve the Westgate Hotel, which could make a difference to Newport. Councillor Morris therefore supported both motions.

- Councillor M Howells saw in the amendment a proposal to include a Placemaking Plan for the city centre, which included a Cultural Strategy. Councillor Howells therefore welcomed the amendment.
- Councillor Cocks felt that the amendment improved the original motion and therefore supported it as a substantial motion.
- Councillor Evans recalled that in recent times, the Westgate Hotel was a grade II listed building bustling with life, which hosted dances and weddings and did not want to see it go into a state of further disrepair. Councillor Evans therefore supported the amendment.
- Councillor Batrouni supported the amendment and mentioned that Councillor Drewett championed the Westgate Hotel and that the Placemaking Plan was a critical key point of the amendment to the motion put down by Councillor Routley.
- Councillor Routley spoke to the amendment giving his reason why it was put forward. Councillor Routley was glad that the original motion was able to assist in saving the Westgate Hotel and preserve the future.
- Councillor Hourahine noted that whilst the Westgate Hotel was very important, the Cultural Strategy supported democracy.
- Councillor Whitehead considered that a heritage centre would be good as a catalyst for revitalising the area and suggested a steering group from all political sides to get involved.
- Councillor Al-Nuaimi supported the amendment to see the hotel brought to life and become part of the cultural and heritage scene in Newport. The hotel, however, was owned privately and the Council should encourage the owner to participate in the development, otherwise this was an academic debate.
- Councillor Mudd thanked everyone who contributed, adding that this was important to Members and residents. The majority group embedded in its manifesto its Placemaking Plan, with a solid commitment to stakeholder engagement. Going forward, in 2024, both the strategy and the plan would be under development.
- Councillor Drewett mentioned that moving the amendment served as a reminder of what the Chartists achieved. Part of the Placemaking Plan was that Newport should be a heritage and civil rights destination and Newport's heritage could be utilised for tourism, education, and investment purposes. Councillor Drewett asked that colleagues continued this task and celebrate Newport's ancestors beyond the Westgate Hotel.
- Councillor Routley withdrew the original motion, with the agreement of its seconder Councillor Mogford, and Councillor Evans accepted and supported the amendment to the motion as the substantive motion.

Resolved:

- Council supported the amendment to the motion, which therefore became the substantive motion.
- Council supported the motion.

6. **Treasury Management Half Yearly Monitoring Report**

The Presiding Member invited the Leader to introduce the first report which outlined the Council's treasury management activity for the first half of 2023/24 and confirmed that treasury activities completed so far during the year complied with the Treasury Strategy previously considered and set by Members.

The report compared activity with the year-end position for 2022/23 and detailed the movement from April to September 2023/24 and the reasons for those movements. This was the first of two reports received on treasury management during the year.

The report highlighted the following information:

- Reminder of the Treasury Strategy agreed.
- Details of borrowing and investment activity throughout the year
- Wider economic considerations e.g., economic climate
- A medium to long term outlook for borrowing need.
- And concludes with an examination of activity against prudential indicators, confirming compliance.

The report was presented to Governance and Audit Committee at the October meeting and was endorsed by the Committee prior to Cabinet considering the report on 15 November.

The key highlights included the level of borrowing, which, as of 30 September 2023, decreased by £3.1m from the 2022/23 outturn position and was now £135.5m.

This decrease was in relation to:

- A number of loans which were repaid in instalments over the life of the loan.
- The redemption of two small PWLB maturity loans at the end of September, which did not need to be re-financed.
- This was netted off by a minimal amount of new long-term borrowing that was taken out, totalling £300k from Salix which was interest free and linked to a specific energy efficiency project.

As at the end of September, the Council's overall borrowing also included six Lender Option / Borrower Option (LOBO) loans totalling £30m. Whilst in the first half of the year these loans were not subject to any change in interest rates, in late October and November the Council received notification that three lenders of LOBOs, totalling £15m, had elected to increase the interest rates.

Following advice from the Council's treasury advisors, the Council redeemed the loans, rather than accepting the increased interest rate. This was because the revised interest rate was higher than the current rate and either not dissimilar to current borrowing rates through the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) or significantly higher. The Council managed these repayments through a combination of using available investment balances and applying for one new long-term PWLB loan of £5m.

Whilst not immediately refinancing two of these loans would ultimately accelerate the Council's underlying need to undertake new external borrowing, exiting from LOBO arrangements allowed the Council to de-risk an element of its borrowing portfolio, by taking away the risk of further interest rate rises on these specific loans.

The level of investments increased by £7.4m to £54.7m. It was anticipated however, that investment balances would naturally reduce as the year progressed, mainly due to progress in delivering capital schemes.

The report provided a forward-looking indicator, the Liability Benchmark, which provided a graphical illustration of the Council's existing and future borrowing requirement. This was an important indicator to understand as it demonstrated the impact that decisions taken now in relation to capital expenditure on the long-term net borrowing requirement, which ultimately impacts upon the revenue budget in the form of capital financing costs.

The Council's underlying long-term need to borrow, coupled with the need to refinance existing loans, meant there was exposure to a higher level of interest rate than experienced over recent years. As a result, the Council continued to defer the need to take out long-term borrowing for as long as possible. It was hoped that by adopting this approach, interest rates may have reduced from their current levels by the time new borrowing was required, reducing to some extent the impact upon the revenue budget of undertaking new borrowing. Any decision about undertaking additional long-term borrowing would be made in line with advice from the Council's treasury advisors and only where there was a clear financial benefit and need to do so.

Finally, the Authority measures and manages its exposure to treasury management risks using various Prudential Indicators, outlined in Appendix A. The report confirmed that for the first half of the year, the Council complied with the Prudential Indicators set for 2023/24.

Resolved:

Council noted the report on treasury management activities during the first half year period of 2023-24.

7. Gwent Regional Partnership Board Area Plan/Gwent Regional Partnership Board Annual Report

The Presiding Member introduced the Leader to present the next report, which was the Gwent Regional Partnership Board Annual Report (RPB) as required in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

The Board had a statutory duty under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and as amended by the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 to produce an annual report and an area plan. These documents must then be presented and considered through the structures of each of the bodies who make up the membership of the Regional Partnership Board.

The Welsh Government set out the statutory framework for the development of both the Regional Area Plan to include how joint health and social care priorities were delivered in partnership across the region and the Annual Report.

The Regional Partnership Board fully embraced and adopted the principles of both the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and was wholly aligned to the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 principles.

Turning to the report itself, the progress on the delivery of the area plan was set out in the RPB Annual Report.

The report highlighted the work carried out in partnership across social care and health. It provided strong examples of the benefits of partnership working and how the work positively impacted citizens.

The Leader was pleased to note that there was a good discussion with Members, when the report was presented to the Council's Performance Scrutiny Committee for Partnerships on Tuesday 10 October.

Comments of Councillors:

- Councillor Hughes mentioned that the plan set out the focus on joint authorities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 as well as providing family care and strong community partnerships. Councillor Hughes thanked staff who helped produce the report and the Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships for its input.

- Councillor D Davies added that the huge positive was making Gwent the first Marmot Region in Wales. Councillor Davies highlighted the principles to colleagues and why they are important in challenging and addressing inequalities.
- The Presiding Member added that as a former Chair of the Regional Partnership Board, it brought health and councils together to achieve more.

Resolved:

- Council considered the joint regional commitments within the Area Plan.
- Council reviewed the RPB Annual Report and progress made against the objectives and provide any feedback/comments.

8. Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2022/23

The Presiding Member introduced the Leader to present the Council's Annual Report on the progress against its Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24.

Under the Equality Act (2010), the Council is required to report annually on the progress it makes against the strategic equality objectives contained within the Strategic Equality Plan, alongside staff equalities data.

The Annual Report was reviewed by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Cabinet. Their comments were included in the report.

This report set out the third year of delivery against Strategic Equality Objectives agreed by this Council.

The summary of achievements highlighted progress against each of the objectives, such as:

1. Llanwern High School being awarded the inaugural Betty Campbell MBE Award for its work on anti-racism.
2. The use of participatory budgeting which distributed funding to 44 community projects during this financial year alone.
3. The promotion, support, and celebration of diversity across the city during significant dates, including Eid al-Fitr, Black History Wales, UN Anti-Racism Day and, of course, Pride in the Port, Newport's first community Pride event, which went from strength to strength and is an example of how communities can come together to achieve real success.

It was encouraging to see the progress made including the closure of the gender pay gap amongst officers and gender equality evident within Cabinet.

The report closed with staff equality data and information underpinning the continued commitment to working towards a workforce that reflected the communities across our city. This is a key objective within the new Strategic Equalities Plan and People Plan (both to be published in 2024) and is embedded within the Corporate Plan.

Comments of Councillors:

- Councillor Batrouni thanked staff for their commitment to equality and paid testament to the work of the staff networks.
- Councillor Hussain met with ethnic minority groups as part of the staff network, listened to their concerns and would take actions forward.
- Councillor Cocks supported the report and the discussion at Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships. Councillor Cocks reflected that Newport had a legal and moral

duty to reduce the disparities of outcomes for people with different ethnic backgrounds. by getting out into the community and talking to people. Councillor Cocks was impressed with the range of activities taking place and the section of the report devoted to data, which he felt was the foundation of effective equalities policy and would make a difference to what Newport City Council did in the future.

Resolved:

Council approved the final monitoring report to be published on the Council's website, in accordance with statutory deadlines.

9. Corporate Plan Annual Report 2022/23

The Leader introduced the Corporate Plan Self-Assessment Report for 2022/23 to Council colleagues.

This was the first annual report on the progress of delivery against the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027, which was approved by Council in November 2022.

This report was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2014 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

The annual report reflected on the progress made by the Council and its partners in the delivery of the Corporate Plan and the four Well-being Objectives.

The report acknowledged the challenges that Newport and many other local authorities face to deliver services in the context of increasing pressures, in supporting households and businesses through the cost-of-living crisis and to ensure that a financially sustainable balanced budget s achieved.

The annual report required the Council to reflect on its performance and outlined how the Council made a positive start in two of the four Well-being objectives with the two remaining Well-being objectives requiring further improvement.

Despite these challenges, the Council's Chief Executive, the senior leadership team, and officers from across the Council demonstrated the positive impact which services have had.

The Council was also listening to the views of residents and those who use its services, as well as working collaboratively with other public, not-for-profit, and private sector organisations to improve services.

It was important for all members to understand these pressures and to work collaboratively to improve services to ensure the Council continued to provide the best services for residents in Newport.

Comments of Councillors:

- Councillor Bright welcomed the report and referred to two projects being undertaken in St Julians, which was the Warm Homes project and the Graffiti Project. Councillor Bright therefore welcomed the report.

Resolved:

Council endorsed the annual Corporate Plan self-assessment report 2022/23.

10. Amendment to Council Constitution - 'Budget Framework procedure rules'

The Presiding Member invited Councillor Mogford, the Chair of Democratic Services Committee to present to Council the recommendations of the Democratic Services Committee that amendments were made to the Council's Budgetary and Policy Framework Procedure Rules under Part 4 of the Constitution.

The proposed amendments were intended to ensure that the Council's Constitution is in alignment with the Welsh Model Constitution and helped support the Council's decision-making processes in setting a balanced budget each year in accordance with statutory requirements.

Following the 2023/24 budget setting meeting of full Council in February 2023, the Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer undertook a review of the Council's Constitution regarding the budget procedure rules.

The review concluded with the recommendations that whilst the Council's Constitution broadly aligned to the 'Welsh Model', amendments were required to the procedure rules for alternative budget proposals to be submitted prior to the budget-setting Council meeting, held at the end of February each year.

The recommended amendments can be summarised as follows:

- i) That Members submit any proposed amendments to the draft Budget to the Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer for consideration by 4pm at least five clear days prior to the Budget meeting of full Council.
- ii) Within this timescale officers are provided with time and opportunity for consideration of the suitability of any proposed amendments; and
- iii) That the budget and policy framework procedure rules are separated to ensure that the budget setting process is distinguished from that of the policy framework to ensure that a finalised budget can be agreed in time for the statutory deadline of 11th March in each year.

The amendments outlined were incorporated into the draft amended Budget and Policy Procedures Rules document included with the report to Council as Appendix 1.

Democratic Services Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer in relation to these amendments at their meeting on 20 November and approved the proposed amendments as drafted, with the recommendation that the proposals be taken forward for approval by full Council.

Comments of Councillors:

- Councillor M Howells referred to errors in the report and drew colleagues' attention to paragraph 2.5 Urgent Decisions, which referred to 2.4 instead of 2.6. This error was repeated twice.

Councillor Howells also sought clarification on a proposal by a Member to amend the budget, which was seconded and submitted to the Proper Officer five days prior to Council. Councillor Howells asked would this be treated as confidential or would it be public information.

The Monitoring Officer advised that it would be put to Cabinet prior to reaching an agreement before the Council meeting. If it was not accepted, it would be discussed at Council.

Resolved:

Council approved and adopted amendments to the Council's Constitution in line with the 'Welsh Model Constitution' and supported the Council to meet its statutory requirements in terms of decision-making concerning the Council's budget.

11. **Standards Committee Annual Report 2022/23**

The Presiding Member welcomed Andrew Mitchell, Chair of Standards Committee to Council to provide a summary of the work of the Standards Committee in the preceding 12 months and note the forward work programme.

The Chair was pleased to present the 2022/23 Standards Committee Annual Report to Council.

This was the tenth Annual Report of the Standards Committee setting out the work carried out by the Committee during the past 12 months.

The Annual Report covered a shorter period than usual, from December 2022 to March 2023 and followed on from the last report presented to Council in November 2022. The Annual Report was previously presented to Council on a voluntary basis. However, Section 63 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 introduced an additional statutory duty under Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000, which required Standards Committee to make an annual report after the end of each financial year and for full Council to consider that report within three months. To support this change, this report considered a brief period that spanned from the time of presenting the last report, to the end of the last financial year. The Chair looked forward to coming back to present the next full Annual Report in the Summer of 2024.

The statutory report summarised how the Committee discharged its functions through consideration of reports and actions or recommendations made by or referred to the Committee. In addition, the Annual Report included an assessment of the extent to which leaders of political groups on the Council have complied with their new duties to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within their groups. The Chair was pleased to note the commitment of Group Leaders to their new duty to report to Standards Committee: whilst this was still in the planning stage during the reporting period, the Group Leaders made clear their commitment to fulfilling this requirement.

The Standards Committee was satisfied that this Annual Report to full Council met the requirements of the 2021 Act. The Standards Committee is committed to promoting high standards of ethical conduct among elected Members and officers to maintain public confidence in local government. The Committee continued to proactively review all ethical standards policies and procedures as part of the forward work programme.

This year, the Chair was pleased to report that no serious complaints of misconduct were referred to the Standards Committee by the Ombudsman during the reporting period and no complaints were referred for determination by the Committee under Stage 3 of the Local Resolution Protocol. Finally, the Chair took the opportunity to thank all Members of the Committee and Council officers for their advice and support throughout the last 12 months.

Comments of Councillors:

- Councillor M Howells mentioned that the Standards Committee Annual Report should be presented to Council no more than three months after the financial year as required in the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 and therefore asked why the report was late. The Monitoring Officer stated that the next Annual report would satisfy the new legislative timescales as set out in this update and would provide some further clarify over the requirements of the legislation after the meeting.

- The Presiding Member thanked Andrew Mitchell for his work as Chair on the Standards Committee.

Resolved:

Council received the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2022/2023 and noted the forward work programme.

12. Democratic Services Annual Report 2022/23

The Presiding Member once again invited Councillor Mogford, as Chair of Democratic Services Committee, to provide a summary of the work of the Democratic Services Committee in the preceding 12 months and note the forward work programme.

The Chair was pleased to present the 2022/23 Democratic Services Committee Annual Report to Council.

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

This annual report covered the period from November 2022 to October 2023.

The Committee was a politically balanced group which worked together in a non-partisan manner to consider various aspects of the Constitution and other matters that impacted on the governance of the Council.

The report highlighted the important work carried out by the Committee last year, which met on five occasions during the past 12 months.

Councillor Mogford highlighted several items that were considered by the Committee during the year, including ward meetings, constitutional arrangements and training and development.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank the committee members for their work during this period and looked forward to delivering the work programme of the Committee during 2024.

Resolved:

Council received the Democratic Services Committee's Annual Report for 2022/23.

13. Questions to the Leader of the Council

Before Commencement with questions, the Leader made the following announcements to Council:

Investment zone

Last week, the Chancellor made the much-welcomed announcement that a Southeast Wales investment zone would be developed around the compound semiconductor cluster. This is great news for the semiconductor sector in Newport, the city and its residents, and the wider region.

Newport is home to the world's first semiconductor cluster which, with the right support and recognition, has the potential to deliver significant benefits for the local and national economies.

An investment zone should provide the support required to help the semiconductor industry become a scientific superpower with Newport at the heart of that vision.

The enterprise, capability, and infrastructure to achieve this is already largely in place and the local industry is robust and well-connected. Strong partnerships are in place which would also be key to successful delivery.

An investment zone would deliver a raft of benefits for local people: more highly skilled jobs, inward investment, and economic growth, all of which would translate into prosperity for Newport's communities. There are also broader benefits for the wider UK in terms of national security.

Delivery of an investment zone would complement the work already underway to establish a National Institute of Technology for Wales, with a focus on existing strengths, compound semiconductors and data science, alongside respected existing academic institutions, Cardiff University, and the University of South Wales.

The Leader looked forward to collaborating closely with partners in the industry, academia, the Welsh Government, and the UK Government on this exciting development.

Fast Track City

Newport last week became a Fast Track City and joined a global network of over 300 cities committed to eradicating HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths.

The international initiative worked to end new cases of HIV by 2030, have zero preventable deaths from HIV/AIDS, zero stigma and discrimination and a better quality of life for people living with HIV.

The Council worked closely with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Pride in the Port to establish a Fast Track Newport group to become a pathfinder city, with the potential for the scheme to expand into the wider health board area.

The Newport group would initially focus on three priorities:

- 1) Increasing awareness of testing and numbers of people getting tested.
- 2) Reducing the stigma around HIV.
- 3) Reaching out to communities that have traditionally been underserved with access to HIV services.

This is about supporting communities, and joining Fast Track Cities will give the backing and resources of a global network of knowledge and experience to use at a local level, to deliver positive outcomes for people living with HIV.

New employment and skills scheme

Newport has delivered many excellent schemes that have helped local people improve their employability prospects.

A new project – the Shared Prosperity Fund employment and skills scheme - offers support to people who might have missed out on other avenues of support.

The scheme is open to unemployed people and people who are in work if they meet certain criteria. It would work with individuals to give them the tools they need to help them into sustainable employment, further learning, or a new challenge.

Funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and delivered by the Council, it would help to ensure that every resident had access to support and gained the skills they needed to improve their job prospects.

Further information on the scheme and how to get involved are available on our website.

Tackling empty homes

At the last Cabinet meeting, a proposal was supported to seek residents' views on introducing a premium on council tax for long-term empty and second homes.

Demand for affordable housing is outstripping supply but there are more than 800 properties in the city that were unoccupied for at least a year, and 15 second homes.

In March, more than 450 households were in temporary accommodation. There were 8,500 people registered for social housing but in 2021/22 there were just 686 new social housing lettings.

From these figures there was motivation to take steps to increase the availability of good quality and affordable housing, in turn helping to tackle homelessness.

Considerable efforts were made to encourage the owners of empty homes to bring them back into beneficial use, but this had limited success.

Councils were allowed to charge a council tax premium of up to 300 per cent and most across Wales have already started, or were due to start, making a charge.

At the time of the meeting, the consultation was live on the Council website, and the Leader urged people to have their say on a scheme and whether they think it would be a positive move for the city.

Small Business Saturday

Newport City Council is again supporting Small Business Saturday which took place the weekend following Council.

The campaign was a celebration of the independent businesses that are a vital part of the local economy and encouraged everyone to "shop local".

Small Business Saturday puts the national spotlight on shopping local, but the message is also about shopping local every day.

When shopping locally, more money stays within the community.

Spending money with local independents also encourages more small traders to set up in the city. And the more businesses that are operating in Newport city centre, the more vibrant it becomes.

Whether it was Christmas shopping or everyday shopping the Leader urged residents to please shop locally, buy locally and support local independent businesses.

New events listings

A new events portal was launched for residents to explore all the amazing events Newport had to offer - together in one place.

Newport has a growing reputation as host of major events, such as the marathon, as well as some great regular events like the Countdown to Christmas.

The Council, working with organisations across the city, created the new events portal for exploring all that Newport had to offer and it was one everyone could contribute to and use.

From talks and walks, live music, and performances, to late-night shopping, community events and job fairs.

Anyone organising an event in Newport can submit details using a simple form and it would be there for all to see.

Take a look at whatsoncityofnewport.co.uk

Leaders Questions

Councillor Evans:

Councils in Wales are supporting traders during the Christmas period. Councillor Evans referred to the park and ride scheme that used to operate in Newport. Additionally, Councillor Evans mentioned the previous temporary free bus scheme. Councillor Evans referred to the Leader mentioning in November 2021 that the initiative was a boost to the local businesses as well as encouraging the use of more sustainable transport. This would be a great way to improve footfall and deter Newport residents going to Cwmbran or out-of-town shopping centres.

Response:

The Leader replied that in 2021 it was a very different situation. Due to the pandemic, Newport was in a position to stimulate economy with subsidised free travel. Through Transport for Wales, WG and the Burns Commission, the Council was able to further subsidise free travel across the city of Newport. In the current financial environment, resources were unfortunately not available to implement the schemes at the level seen previously. The Leader was delighted to see the initiative Newport Transport had introduced to ensure that families could enjoy a reduced rate of travel with a £5 family ticket for families to move across the city. The Leader added that if the resources were available to the Council, she would be championing and supporting free and subsidised public transport. There were, however, growing pressures on resources, and particularly the revenue budget. The Leader would support businesses in the city centre, for example, eligible business would not pay rates this year because Newport City Council was providing a 25% rate subsidy, which aligned with the WG 75% subsidy. Whilst this was only one example, it demonstrated a conscious decision to support businesses within the city centre.

Councillor Morris:

Requests from Lliswerry residents to Jessica Morden, MP's Office get relayed directly to the Leader. Councillor Morris referred to an ongoing incident at Thompson Avenue concerning a reen; Could the Leader therefore facilitate an urgent meeting with Lliswerry Ward members and appropriate senior officers to address the issue.

Response:

The Leader clarified that in terms of process, there was one point of contact to effectively relay any issues. The Leader was happy to facilitate a meeting with ward members and senior officers.

Councillor Whitehead:

If Leader was successful as candidate for Police Crime Commissioner next May, would she be standing down as Leader of the Council.

Response:

The Leader advised that for clarity, she was currently the Labour party member selected as a candidate in Gwent. If, however, the Leader was successful at elections in May, the Leader would stand down as Leader at the Council AGM in May.

Councillor Bright:

Referred to the stand in main reception, highlighting the white ribbon campaign and asked if the Leader could update colleagues on Newport City Council's involvement in the campaign.

Response:

The Leader hoped that other Members took the opportunity to also take time to visit the stand and noted that some Members were wearing the white ribbon sticker.

The white ribbon is an internationally recognised campaign which originated in Canada in 1991 and every year, in the UK, on 25 November, the UN day for the elimination of violence against women.

The aim of the campaign is to prevent men's violence towards women and girls by addressing its root causes: harmful and dominant masculine norms. Aspirations such as building a community of change-makers, to raise awareness through campaigns, encouraging everyone to make the white ribbon promise, educating young people and holding policy makers to account.

This year's theme was 'Change the Story', encouraging men and boys to change the story for women and girls across the UK. The Leader highlighted figures to colleagues, adding that 1.7 million women in the year ending 2022 experienced domestic abuse.

Gwent Police reported 2,693 domestic abuse incidents in Newport, which is why White Ribbon Day was needed to change the story.

Within the Council, there was an online quiz for officers to engage with to raise awareness, a social media campaign, sending out key messages and the stand in foyer to promote the campaign and engage with residents, members, officers, and visitors. The Head of Safeguarding and champions would also be helping with the promotion during the period.

The Leader hoped, through liaison with White Ribbon UK, to be able to fly a white ribbon flag next year at the Civic Centre to mark this important event in the calendar.

14. **Questions to the Cabinet Members**

Councillor Chris Reeks:

With new waste regulations for businesses set to be introduced from 6 April 2024, by the Welsh Government, can the Cabinet Member confirm what plans the Council will be implementing to support Newport businesses with these regulations and what extra measures are being put into place at the Waste Transfer Centre to cope with the increased volumes?

Response from Councillor Yvonne Forsey, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity:

NCC is currently redesigning its commercial waste collection services in partnership with Wastesavers, so that it can provide a single integrated service for businesses.

NCC will be able to provide all businesses with the collections its needs by 4 April through a range of solutions that are best suited to individual businesses.

Our comms teams are working with Welsh Government who are leading an engagement campaign, with a dedicated website and tailored communications to all businesses in Wales, including letters to all businesses in Newport, to remind them of the requirements. We have also contacted all our current customers directly and will continue wider engagement with organisations across Newport ahead of the changes.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Reeks asked if the Cabinet Member could confirm were there any plans to introduce the collection of plastic packaging waste for businesses for recycling in the same manner that larger superstores did for shoppers' plastic packaging.

Response:

Councillor Forsey advised that the recycling information was as laid out in legislation and would be communicated to people and a wider discussion took place at the Performance Scrutiny Committee – Place and Corporate.