

Report

Cabinet

Part 1

Date: 14 February 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 informs Cabinet members about the main challenges that Newport communities, businesses, and council services are facing, as well as how the Council is collaborating with our partners and communities to help those who need it across the city.

In a survey published on 15 January by the Office for National Statistics through their [Public Opinions and social trends](#), 49% of respondents said that the cost of living had increased compared to the month before. The report goes on to say that the most reported issue from respondents about the prominent issues facing the UK today, was the cost of living (87%).

NCC and Partner Cost of Living Support

The cost-of-living crisis continues to impact upon our residents, staff, and businesses. Officers across NCC continue to collaborate with internal and external partners to provide advice, guidance, and support.

Residents are not always aware that they have a choice over the number of months that council tax can be paid, there are 3,6,10 and 12 monthly plans available to support residents with monthly outgoings. This will be promoted along with direct debit plans over the coming months. Residents can choose the plan that best fits their individual circumstances and make the changes online or by contacting the team.

Examples of activities and support offered during this period included:

- Targeted support within temporary accommodation hostels. Providing advice and guidance around food insecurity, rent arrears, managing debt, prevention of failed tenancy to avoid falling back into homelessness.
- Provided warm snacks to forty young people through the street games football activity pilot highlighted in last month's report.
- Facilitated sessions for families in debt, providing warm snacks and crafts while helping with domestic tasks.
- Facilitating quieter homework spaces for pupils in local community centres.
- Facilitated sessions on budgeting skills, CV writing and accessing training. for post sixteen youths and families.
- Donated personal hygiene kits/toy boxes to households living in temporary accommodation.
- Facilitated cooking sessions to teach young people how to cook in batches considering affordability and helping them learn new skills to use in the family home.
- Distributed food packs to those in need via Fare Share schemes using supermarket surplus food. One example of how this is used is by the Beaufort Centre which distributes forty bags a week to people evidencing low-income households in Gaer, Beaufort Centre, Duffryn and Pill.
- Distributed feminine products via Welsh Government Proud Period funding directly to peoples' homes.
- Issued 41 Newport Live passes to carers to protect carers via a Welsh Government grant.
- Facilitated family cooking sessions in Bettws and Ringland with families participating weekly.

NCC officers are collaborating closely with partners to coordinate support over the next few months, including the below. Officers are also engaging directly with families across the city to determine the needs of people of different ages and to direct resources appropriately throughout this year.

- City wide 'Think Wise – Live Wise' drop in events in February.
- Fed-Line cooking project supporting adults to prepare and cook breakfast, lunch, and dinner for their family over seven weeks.
- Family Wellbeing Sessions.
- Half Term and Easter Family Fun Days.

The family fun days are well received and attended with 969 people participating over the previous five events.

Warm Spaces

Shared Prosperity Funding has been secured to support the delivery of Warm Spaces during Winter 23/24 and 24/25. The funding will provide small grants directly to third-sector organisations and will be overseen by GAVO, building on the successful scheme implemented last year. To date, sixteen organisations have received funding.

Education

The Transitional Protection for pupils who used to qualify for free school meals will end in December 2023. Education colleagues have provided all schools with support and information about this change. This is because some pupils in year 6 will lose their entitlement when they finish their primary phase of education.

The Benefits Team has estimated that there are about 223 Newport pupils affected by this change and will not have the right to free school meals (FSM) when they start year 7.

School anti-poverty roadshows have provided the opportunity for officers to work with families and provide advice, guidance, and support. Five Newport Schools have hosted roadshows up to January 2024 and a further three schools have arranged dates for Spring 2024. Feedback has been positive with fifty-two families engaged at Llanmartin and Maindee primary schools alone.

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. The council has taken on more units of temporary accommodation (TA) to meet the additional demand. This has placed further pressure on the housing budget because DWP regulations relating to TA cap the amount of money that councils reclaim in fulfilling its statutory duties.

In recent weeks, the council has delivered its Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) providing shelter for people sleeping rough during the wintry weather. The council has been working closely with RSL partners to use additional funding made available through the Transitional Accommodation Capital Program (TACP). This will provide settled homes to people who are homeless or supported through a resettlement scheme, such as the Ukrainian Support Scheme.

Ukrainian Support Scheme

There are currently 149 households supported through the Ukrainian Support Scheme. Of these sixty-four are living in hosting placements. The team are now focusing on reassessing cases and collaborating closely with clients and hosts to ensure they are well supported, identifying alternative options should placements be at risk.

Home Office Streamlined Asylum Process and 7-day notice.

The policy changes have led to more homeless people and rough sleepers in Newport. It is still hard to get reliable and precise data, which makes it hard to plan. However, a group of officers from different services and external partners are meeting frequently to keep track of the situation and deal with the rising need.

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
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* 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 through engaging directly with residents.

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 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: 25 January 2024