

Appendix 6

Press release Newport City Council, February 18, 2013

Cabinet agree 2013/14 budget

Newport City Council's cabinet has today recommended its revenue budget and council tax for 2013/14. Setting this year's budget has been incredibly difficult as the council looks to make savings of more than £7 million, on top of more than £5m of management savings and efficiencies already identified.

Leader of Newport City Council, Councillor Bob Bright, said: "It is with a heavy heart that we have had to make some very difficult decisions which, while necessary, we did not want to make.

"As a result of funding cuts from central government, and the previous administration not taking tough decisions when setting the budget last year, the harsh reality is that this year we have had to make considerable savings.

"In my 40 years in politics and serving the people of Newport, I have never had to make choices like the ones we have to do now.

"The council has looked at the statutory services it has to provide and our priority has to be to deliver those as well as continue front line services.

"We appreciate the effort and time people have taken to respond to our extensive budget consultation and they have all been considered as part of the process."

Cabinet agreed the budget options for consultation on 18 December and public consultation ran for nearly two months. The final budget will now be submitted to full council on 26 February where council tax will also be set.

As a result of the extensive feedback cabinet has reconsidered some of the proposals.

A hardship fund will be set up to provide financial support for those who will need it to access Gwent Music Support Service (GMSS). Councillor Bright, said: "While we cannot afford to keep funding GMSS at its present level, we recognise the important contribution it makes to young people which is why we have decided to set aside funds for those who genuinely can't afford to access the service."

Maindee library will not close and the council will look to use the building for more community based activities. Councillor Debbie Wilcox, cabinet member for leisure and culture, said: "Having reviewed the responses to the consultation, I appreciate that Maindee library contributes to the wider community life of the area which is why we will also explore other options to make more use of the building."

Hillside was originally due to close in 2015/16. However, following meetings with service users and their families, cabinet has agreed that no-one currently living there, who did not want to, would be forced to move. Councillor Paul Cockeram, cabinet member for social care and wellbeing, said: "We want to

assure residents and their families that they will not be uprooted from the place they regard as home. We will proceed with the plans for the extra care facility as we believe it is important that older people maintain their independence for as long as possible.”

New Willows will remain open until alternative provision is available. We are in discussions with a local RSL (Registered Social Landlord) about the potential for an additional new respite care provision to be provided, newly built to a specification that offers accommodation suitable for people with increasingly complex needs. This could involve current staff being transferred to a new provider.

Councillor Cockeram, added: “We have met with service users and their families and listened to their concerns and it will not close until there is an alternative provision in place which will provide respite care. I will continue to meet with them during this process.”

Cabinet created an administration priority budget last year, of which £195,000 is uncommitted. It was decided to use this money to reduce the required increase in council tax. This means the rise recommended by the cabinet is 3.5 per cent so residents in Newport will continue paying one of the lowest council taxes in the UK. Cabinet recommended an increase of around £29 a year for households in Band D properties – the equivalent of less than 56 pence a week.

Councillor Bright, added: “Cabinet has provisionally agreed a rise in council tax for residents. We have to balance the need to make savings with maintaining services and protecting jobs, while at the same time acknowledging that residents are also dealing with the impact of the financial crisis. We believe the recommended increase is reasonable and means that Newport’s council tax rate remains one of the lowest in Wales.”

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