



Newport City Council Budget Consultation 2021-22
Response from the Newport Fairness Commission
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1. Introduction and context

This is our **ninth response to the annual Newport City budget**. It has been devised in January-February 2021, so around a year after the arrival of Covid-19 in the UK, and nearly 11 months after the imposition of a UK-wide lockdown in March 2020. This year has, of course, been dominated by those circumstances, and the wholesale transformations of everyday life and the functioning of public institutions to which they have given rise.

In every previous budget response, we have stressed the importance of the **impacts of austerity on how local authorities make decisions**, and the restrictions it has placed on the provision of services and the scope for sustaining a flourishing public realm. While those factors still largely apply, they themselves have been eclipsed by changes in the social and economic landscape the full implications of which are in most respects still to be gauged. Like every annual report published in early 2021, this one is characterised by a sense of **radical uncertainty about what the post-pandemic world will be like**. In terms of our brief, the ways in which that world is different are likely to have very significant effects on the way fairness ‘feels’ in Newport.

In most other respects, this Response has been prepared in the usual way. As usual, we were briefed by Council officers on the context of this year’s budget, with regard to the Welsh Government funding settlement, current priorities and other current factors shaping decision-making about the forthcoming savings proposals. This input has, as always, been very much appreciated as we have compiled our report. Frustratingly, unlike last year, we have not been able to consult with community groups and to draw on their wisdom and insight in developing our reflections – but this is something which we will resume in 2021. **The contents of what follows are the responsibility solely of Fairness Commission members.**

As always, we must note that the Fairness Commission (FC) is not an elected body, nor a special interest group. And while we are diverse, neither does the FC represent any kind of perfect cross-section of the Newport community. **Our role is not to lobby, nor to make specific policy recommendations**, but to provide tools with which to think in fresh and critical ways about the implications of Council decision-making, and to foster public debate which takes fairness, equality and well-being seriously. This response is a contribution in that vein.

2. Executive summary

- We have analysed each Budget Saving Proposal in connection with each **Principle of Fairness: Equity, Priority, Inclusion and Communication**. (See appendix.)
- To summarise our comments, we have applied a **rating** to each proposal, in connection with each of those principles:
 - A. *No specific or pressing concerns*
 - B. *Low risk of negative impact*
 - C. *Moderate risk of negative impact*
 - D. *High risk of negative impact*
 - E. *Impact too difficult to gauge, on the basis of the information provided*

For overviews of these ratings, see p. 3. Here, we draw out the key themes emerging in this report.

1. The number of E ratings is lower, but still too high.

We raised this same concern last year. An E rating says effectively ‘The Fairness Commission cannot determine whether this decision is fair, based on what you have told us.’ Our concern is that if we simply cannot gauge the implications for fairness of this or that proposal, or whether these have been weighed up in the drafting stage, then neither can the public at large. Last year, elements of twelve out of 19 proposals received rating E. In 2021-22, this applies to 4 out of 9. But significantly, each of those 4 have been given an *overall* rating of E – a new measure introduced for this year.

2. Inclusion and Communication need more explicit focus.

The principles most likely to have E ratings attached were Inclusion and Communication. This suggests that the Council still faces challenges in improving the public conversation about its services, and changes to them – and in ensuring that information provided and any adaptations made are as inclusive as possible.

3. The strongest negative ratings are concentrated in the area of Equity.

E-ratings aside, the Equity is the principle most likely to have low ratings attached. So a consistent concern is that proposals may fail to treat different groups in a fair way, or feed gaps between those with more and less.

4. The Covid-19 pandemic has not changed things as much as might be expected, in budget terms.

The circumstances of the pandemic and lockdown have inhibited the capacity of the Council to engage with the public in its usual ways, and will make a difference to how budget changes are experienced in the community. It is a vital background factor. But partly because it is all-encompassing, the proposed changes do not connect up directly with areas of *particular* concern in the wake of the pandemic.

3. Analysis of Budget Saving Proposals for 2021-22

This section presents our analysis of each Budget Saving Proposal, in connection with each Principle of Fairness.

The **ratings** are as follows:

A	No specific or pressing concerns We have no specific or pressing concerns to raise about this proposal, in connection with this principle. This does not mean that there is no possibility of unfairness arising from this proposal – just that there is no <i>obvious</i> cause for concern.
B	Low risk of negative impact In our view it is possible this proposal will have a negative impact, in connection with this principle.
C	Moderate risk of negative impact In our view this proposal is likely to have a negative impact, in connection with this principle.
D	High risk of negative impact In our view this proposal is highly likely to have a negative impact, in connection with this principle.
E	Impact too difficult to gauge, on the basis of the information provided We have not been able to make a clear assessment of the fairness or otherwise of this proposal. This should not be seen as a ‘neutral’ rating. It is a negative rating, in an important sense. The implications of the proposal in question have not been presented in a fully explicit way. It is therefore difficult to gauge the impact of, whether for the Fairness Commission or – more significantly – the public at large.

We present first a summary of our ratings, and then a second table with comments explaining the ratings.

i. Summary of ratings

No.	Proposal name	Equity	Priority	Inclusion	Communication	Overall rating
1	Transformation of adult day services	D	D	C	D	D
2	Closure of Cambridge house as a children's home	B	B	E	E	E
3	Charges for non-household waste taken to household waste recycling centre (HWRC)	E	E	E	E	E
4	Streetworks – Increased fees and charges	A	A	B	A	A
5	Creation of pay and display car park Mill Parade	C	B	E	E	E
7	New fees and charges within cemetery services	D	A	C	A	C
8	Information Station move to central museum and library	D	D	D	E	E
9	Increase council tax increase from 4% base assumption by 1% to 5%	D	D	A	B	C

ii. Commentary

Proposal title	Principles rating and summary				Overall rating and further comments
	Equity	Priority	Inclusion	Communication	
<p>1.Transformation of adult day services</p>	<p>D</p> <p>This seems to be a well-reasoned proposal in terms of equity of its effect, but the performance will require very careful communication and monitoring where these very vulnerable groups are concerned. Staff without cars will be impacted. This proposal has a good economic rationale which in general would rate but it impacts, arguably, the most vulnerable group of our citizenship: low numbers but potential for high impact on a few individuals.</p>	<p>D</p> <p>Consistency in provision may be more important to this group than the general citizenship. This may have to be weighed against the economic gain. If a level of flexibility in the new model e.g., some provision at Spring Gardens could be prioritised, the rating would be reduced. The needs of the various groups seem to warrant a low rating, but performance will be dependent appropriate provision of third sector and community services which may warrant a high rating. Ultimately, the third sector and community involvement envisaged requires further clarification.</p>	<p>C</p> <p>Prolonged Covid-19 lockdown has provided a long-term pilot for the home-based model. Provided impacts are canvassed well, there could be high confidence in the model. However, building based services provide a social setting for carers and service users with mental health problems. Loss of social interaction is a possibility. Impact on users in terms of staff having to use public transport may have benefits and we therefore depend on social services for pairing client needs and abilities to best outcome.</p>	<p>D</p> <p>All users are at risk of lack of digital inclusion. PMLD users are at severe disadvantage in expressing opinion. This point impacts on the other three principles. It is difficult to deliver fair policies without communication.</p>	<p>D</p> <p>There is potential for high risk of unfairness to users of the services and staff members, though this could be reduced through some changes as suggested.</p>

<p>2. Closure of Cambridge house as a children's home</p>	<p>B</p> <p>The view that on balance the risks of a city centre location outweigh the benefits of access to facilities is appreciated, but the location question may not have been comprehensively assessed with consideration of young people's perspectives. It is not clear whether key considerations for the current residents have been made and whether relocation would disadvantage/ isolate them given Cambridge House is located centrally. We wondered whether the age profile of the current residents was a factor.</p>	<p>B</p> <p>There is detail regarding smaller sites providing better facilities for children and developing a family environment, but does this also take into account the significant increase in numbers of children entering care and future demand for beds? The need for a timely decision and staff across the group being consulted for readiness is acknowledged - but what are the transition plans (if any) for those currently residing in Cambridge House and the staff?</p>	<p>E</p> <p>Who has been engaged in this proposal so far? What are the plans to engage the residents? Key staff?</p>		<p>E</p> <p>On the basis of the information given, the impact was too difficult to measure due to gaps in the perspectives of young people. This gap may be genuine or just not explicit within the detail of the proposal. On balance, these perspectives may need to be heard but ultimately disagreed with.</p>
<p>3. Charges for non-household waste taken to household waste recycling centre (HWRC)</p>	<p>E</p> <p>No info provided other than in FG comments. It assumes that charges will not overly deter collection processes and unintended consequences such as fly tipping and dumping. We know that poor</p>	<p>E</p> <p>There is no info to really complete this and as yet no assessment as to how this may impact on different and especially the most vulnerable. One can imagine a greater impact on those on lower</p>	<p>E</p> <p>Picking up points raised above, how will the views of a wider range of disadvantaged groups be sought, most are unlikely to be being used to responding to wider consultations. No</p>	<p>E</p> <p>Communication There appears to be no attempt to talk with groups and localities most likely to feel negative impacts either through inability to pay, lack of understanding of new rules or living in areas more likely to witness</p>	<p>E</p> <p>This proposal is lacking in crucial information. I'm not sure if the proposal for charges applies to collection of materials from local neighbourhoods or the depositing of refuse at specific dumps by residents or both. Although there are</p>

	<p>neighbourhoods like Pill suffer hugely from no compliance with waste and dumping – partly possibly because of ignorance of rules but possibly cost related. One wonders if introducing charges will prompt higher levels of dumping in poorer neighbourhoods particularly.</p> <p>From work a Commission member did in Pill some years ago we know there were major issues agencies faced because people either ignored the rules or were unaware of them and there were difficulties in agencies improving levels of understanding and compliance. This does look like a more complex charging system and therefore may be even more difficult to promote in such areas than is current position.</p>	<p>incomes, lower levels of education, language barriers and more chaotic lifestyles. There is no indication as to how they may compensate with such groups and overcoming issues of ability to pay, compliance with routines. Would expect greater negative impact on these rather than better off areas.</p>	<p>mention of any plans to target some groups and neighbourhoods and to work with them to find workable solutions that don't risk non-compliance and higher levels of dumping with impacts in some communities likely to be far worse.</p> <p>One also assumes that to be cost effective, it will be an entirely digital system thus further disadvantaging those more likely to be uncomfortable with such for either digital or literacy reasons.</p>	<p>greater risk of dumping. The main means to get feedback relies on whether there are views included in the general budget proposals. No idea of what plans they have to ensure people know of, and understands the charging system, nor of soliciting their views to this proposal.</p> <p>One would have thought they could do some direct sampling with some groups and in some poorer communities especially. Currently there is no data or information on how residents without access to this booking system are disposing their excess non-recyclable waste. Will every single vehicle be checked for waste regardless of whether they've declared the type of waste they have? If this is the case, it adds time and delays to the site being accessed. If the system is reliant on residents self-declaring then it opens it up to abuse. There is also no information on how payments will be made.</p>	<p>some comments in relation to wellbeing & future generations, there seems to be a lot of guesswork as to impact without any evidential base to support it. There is no FEIA, only a note this needs to be done.</p> <p>So crucial information is completely lacking, for me. It will rely on general responses through the wider budget consultation process i.e. awaiting any negative reaction, which is a very lazy way, as issues may be hidden by more contentious proposals in the whole.</p>
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<p>4. Streetworks – Increased fees and charges</p>	<p>A</p> <p>It seems all costs are paid by the requesters and there is no financial implication or burden for Newport residents. The proposal also states that the proposed charges are in line with road closure charges made by other local authorities. This indicates to me that Newport will not suffer from a lack of infrastructure improvements or land/property developments that would be made elsewhere because its road closure charges are too high.</p>	<p>A</p> <p>The savings offered are low in the grand scheme of things but useful nevertheless. All costs seem to be paid by for the requesters and there is no financial implication or burden for Newport residents.</p>	<p>B</p> <p>Based on the proposal being directed at circumstances where availability for road users and pedestrians is affected, there will be implications for the public. However, it is not specified whether developers have to consult the community or just pay application fees to the council to mitigate the temporary inconvenience while construction takes place. However future wellbeing should be improved by Streetworks and consultation may create problems for development.</p>	<p>A</p> <p>The proposal seeks to standardise charges for road closures. It is not specified what is meant by ‘developers’, but we take it to mean those engaged in property or land development.</p>	<p>A</p> <p>Overall this proposal is regarded as ‘neutral’ with regard to the principles of fairness.</p>
<p>5. Creation of pay and display car park Mill Parade</p>	<p>C</p> <p>Is it hitting an already economically challenged community with further costs OR is it responding to community concerns</p>	<p>B</p> <p>Maybe charging will help Newport prioritise the most vulnerable and disadvantaged generally by increasing income?</p>	<p>E</p> <p>There is no evidence that local citizens/businesses have either suggested or expressed the need for this proposal or been</p>	<p>E</p> <p>Is the Maindee car park example a credible one? Is there evidence about the effect of charging on usage here, effect on Maindee</p>	<p>E</p> <p>More information is certainly needed to ensure harm to the local community is minimised. Have the interests of stakeholders including</p>

	<p>regarding lack of parking? It's unclear how pay and display would effectively tackle this. Is there an Anti-social behaviour issue that necessitates CCTV or does the introduction of CCTV link only to monitoring car parking?</p> <p>We are assuming that many visitors to the Transporter Bridge visitor centre will be able to afford to pay and that won't be a barrier to some. This is a much-needed tourist attraction in an area that would benefit from its success. The possible income from visitors and the positive additional effects of this footfall should be weighed up against the minimal income from introducing pay and display (which doesn't benefit local people directly) and may put some visitors off.</p> <p>Agree parking needed for TB visitor centre but less convinced of the need to charge for it. Will charging mean that people are less likely to</p>	<p>Can this income be somehow ringfenced for Pill?</p> <p>Where will those currently using the carpark for free parking now park? Will this just shift the problem?</p> <p>Can fixed penalty notices be issued to those taking advantage of the space (targeted intervention) rather than introducing pay and display which affects all?</p>	<p>part of the design/delivery. Might this disproportionately hit business owners (who are parking there) struggling in the midst of Covid?</p> <p>What is the reason behind and relevance of electric charging points – are these for visitors to the Transporter Bridge, businesses, residents? Feels tokenistic. Perhaps part of the WBFAG agenda.</p> <p>Although residents have complained about lack of parking it's a jump to assume that people will therefore pay for this. Little evidence of thought as to where businesses and residents will now park and how this change will be communicated with them. Can this be mitigated in any way? Phased implementation etc.?</p> <p>Need for CCTV not given – is there a sub text?</p>	<p>foot fall and citizens views on this. Maindee car park cited as a parallel example but only from an income generation point of view. Lack of details on how the 6k will be made (pay and display/electric charge?) No evidence as to the scale and nature of the residents' complaints.</p>	<p>businessowners, citizens and even tourists really been considered? It seems as though the belief of success is based on ideals and assumptions, but this may be due to a lack of information. Details are needed to decipher whether this implementation will be beneficial.</p>
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	attend the TB visitor centre and therefore bring less footfall / spend into Pill OR would the presence of a paid parking option reassure visitors and make them more likely to visit/spend in Pill? Interests of different groups affected (such as minorities) don't appear to have been taken into account.		We have assumed there will be disabled parking bays.		
7. New fees and charges within cemetery services	<p>D</p> <p>It may appear to penalize families by charging for missing details when the forms are incomplete or mistakes made. If they are in a position to choose a more expensive private provider they would probably be supported through administrative processes.</p> <p>With little information provided on the incidence of previously used plots requiring the digging of test graves the proposed charge seems substantial. It is assumed this proposal links closely to the brick facings. Should the cost be spread</p>	<p>A</p> <p>All councils are obliged to provide internments for deceased citizens who are without assets. This focused approach to saving council tax payer's funding on Public Health Funerals, instead of using private providers, is also welcome.</p>	<p>C</p> <p>It is recognised that there remain many individuals in society with low educational achievement and literacy skills, also Newport's diverse communities and cultures mean that English will not be the first language for many.</p> <p>Undoubtedly many people will also make mistakes when distracted by grief. The incidence of such mistakes is not given but it would be reassuring to know that in these situations there is signposting voluntary organisations such as</p>	<p>A</p> <p>It is thought this is the first time in recent years that cemetery services have appeared for public consultation. Their inclusion adds to the council's transparency and accountability in decision-making however for comparison, details of previous charges, which it is stated has been available, would be useful to the public, who may not in a position to know if increases are reasonable. However, it may appear uncaring if charges increase substantially at a time when the public are being told</p>	<p>C</p> <p>Some concerns.</p>

	<p>across the entire cemeteries budget to be equitable and not born entirely by individual bereaved family? A description of the circumstances which necessitate brick linings is scant in this budget proposal however, it is recognised that they may be requested by some families. There no information provided on how plots are allocated, or the incidences of the necessity of stabilising the soil within some plots.</p> <p>Unless the provision of brick lining is at a family's request, or where it is needed to support subsidence in an older previously purchased plots, where the walls might collapse when being dug out, it would seem inequitable to charge the family. If land subsidence is a problem in previously unused ground, to be equitable, should the cost be spread across the entire cemeteries fees and not born entirely by individual</p>		<p>Citizens Advice and that information is available in translation. Under the present circumstances digital exclusion and skills also need to be considered.</p>	<p>the number of deaths (from Covid-19) are rising and that their elderly and vulnerable loved-ones are at risk of dying prematurely.</p>	
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	bereaved family who may not be able to be given a choice of interment plot.				
8. Information Station move to central museum and library	<p>D</p> <p>Not enough info provided to assess impact on service provision and service users. It may well be a good move and says so but other than in FG comments. Provided it maintains the same levels of provision it sounds a sensible move but this detail is missing.</p>	<p>D</p> <p>It seems that its priority groups and their ease of access to a service might not change and it says (without detail to assess) that access would be better. Does it retain the capacity to offer the same levels of support/service to users? It says there will be no significant detriment to users but does this imply there will be non-significant detriment or not – not clear.</p>	<p>D</p> <p>The Info-station service is usually pretty inclusive. It, without detail, implies there will be better access which may indicate improvements in inclusion but the detail is infuriatingly missing to confirm whether this is the case or not. Is the site sharing with Museum/Library likely to advantage users, would this encourage users to make use of these additional services or not – no info to support this supposition.</p>	<p>E</p> <p>Oddly it mentions consultation with staff, private businesses and targeted users of the library and museum but mentions none with Info-station users. There is no indication if this has happened or is planned. It almost appears the bigger consideration is in filling a gap for business start-ups. It does beg the question of how the views of different interest groups have been sought and balanced. It might have the full support of users but we don't know that from the info given.</p>	<p>E</p> <p>This proposal lacks crucial information, preventing a realistic verdict. It says a FEIA has been carried out but only a snippet is selectively quoted in this submission: it would have been useful to have seen the fuller version. Most of the proposal's information relates to the new use of the building rather than new physical location and capacity of the Info-station. On the surface it appears a positive change but it lacks detail. Presumably the move to a joined City centre location does not cause any issues with users accessing the site and it seems that access may be improved for users but there is no detail to support this. It would have been useful to know if the new location has as much space and physical capacity. Can it deal with the same number of users, does it have same/better facilities and</p>

					opening times etc. This sort of detail is missing.
9. Increase council tax increase from 4% base assumption by 1% to 5%	<p>D</p> <p>Wales has a higher proportion of its population employed in public services. These workers have had more employment security however a pay freeze has been announced, which will impact many and those earning below £24k will see only a 1% uplift. For those retaining their employment, there are likely to be substantial changes to contracts of employment. Some of these may constitute new agreements, resetting the clock on previously accrued years of full employment rights protection. Salary increments cannot be assumed, and higher Wales and UK tax increases may be introduced. With some other cost increases in particular council services, citizens may have a choice not to use them, council tax is, for nearly all families, universal and unavoidable.</p>	<p>D</p> <p>Although the extra weekly amount maybe considered small, citizens with permanent disabilities may experience increased financial insecurity and extra ill-health related costs leading to difficulties making decisions on which of their bills to prioritise. This may exacerbate the gap in quality of life experience between the more secure and financially stable and those who are most vulnerable.</p>	<p>A</p> <p>The council's monthly collection as the default payment but does offer plans to alleviate hardship are these alternatives known to those with difficulty managing their budgets.</p>	<p>B</p> <p>The council have experienced difficulties recovering outstanding council tax during the last year. Is the recovery of these amounts influencing the proposed increase? The council previously set a baseline of 4% annual increases in Council Tax to gradually close the gap created by previous year's diminished Revenue Support Grants. Within this year's proposals it is not made clear to consultees that increases of 4% is an historical budget decision and the proposed 1% rise is a discretionary figure. 1% may not be an above inflation rise but 5% definitely will be.</p>	<p>C</p> <p>This proposed increase in council tax will enable the local authority to develop and improve some of its public services but is coming at a time of huge uncertainty when the types of demand and volume are unpredictable. This proposition, providing approximately £500k, may enable the local authority to offer some greater flexibility in finding ways to minimise the impact to struggling families which could otherwise cause possibly overwhelming demand on council services.</p>

Appendix: Principles of Fairness

Equity

We should acknowledge differences but also treat people in a consistent way, while aiming to reduce the gap between those with more and less.

- *Are people being treated in a consistent way, while acknowledging their differences?*
- *Will the gap between those with more and less be reduced?*
- *Have the interests of different groups affected (such as minorities) been taken into account?*

Priority

We should prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

- *Have the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable across the city been given priority?*
- *Have we taken care to consider possible indirect consequences for these people of decisions made with other priorities in mind?*

Inclusion

Citizens should be given the opportunity to participate in the shaping of how services are decided upon, designed and delivered.

- *Will the voices of all those affected be heard?*
- *Have possible impacts on the well-being of future generations been taken into account?*
- *Are all relevant citizens able to participate in and shape the service, as well as receiving it?*
- *Has consideration been given to the impact on citizens' relations with each other, and the spaces they share?*

Communication

All decisions should be clearly communicated to those affected, in a way which allows for feedback and recognises the obligations between citizens and their Council.

- *Are decisions being made transparently and consistently?*
- *Will relevant decisions be communicated to those affected in a clear way, with the opportunity for feedback?*
- *Are the obligations of citizens to the Council, and vice versa, clear?*