



***PWYLLGOR CRAFFU'R CABINET***

***2.00 PM DYDD IAU, 23 GORFFENNAF 2020***

***REMOTELY VIA TEAMS***

**Rhaid gosod pob ffôn symudol ar y modd distaw ar gyfer parhad y cyfarfod**

**Rhan 1**

1. Galwad Croeso a Rôl am Bresenoldeb
2. Datganiadau o fuddiannau
3. Strategaeth Adferiad (*Tudalennau 3 - 52*)
4. Cyllid a Gwasanaethau Corfforaethol Cynlluniau Cyflenwi ac Adfer Gwasanaethau Cyfredol (*Tudalennau 53 - 76*)
5. Polisi, Gwasanaethau Democrataidd a Digidol - Cynlluniau Cyflenwi ac Adfer Gwasanaethau Cyfredol (i ddilyn)
6. Eitemau brys

**S.Phillips**  
**Prif Weithredwr**

**Canolfan Ddinesig**  
**Port Talbot**

**Dydd Gwener, 17 Gorffennaf 2020**

**Aelodaeth y Pwyllgor:**

**Cadeirydd: M.Harvey**

**Is-gadeirydd:**     **S.Rahaman**

**Cynghorwyr:**     S.E.Freeguard, N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, S.A.Knoyle,  
A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan,  
S.Paddison, L.M.Purcell, S.M.Penry,  
S.H.Reynolds a/ac A.N.Woolcock

**Nodiadau:**

- (1) *Os yw aelodau'r pwyllgor neu'r rhai nad ydynt yn aelodau'r pwyllgor am gynnig eitemau perthnasol i'w cynnwys ar yr agenda cyn cyfarfodydd y dyfodol, rhaid iddynt roi gwybod i'r Prif Weithredwr/Cadeirydd 8 niwrnod cyn y cyfarfod.*
- (2) *Os yw'r rhai nad ydynt yn aelodau'r pwyllgor am fod yn bresennol ar gyfer eitem o ddiddordeb, mae'n rhaid rhoi rhybudd ymlaen llaw (erbyn 12 hanner dydd ar y diwrnod cyn y cyfarfod). Gall y rhai nad ydynt yn aelodau'r pwyllgor siarad ond nid oes ganddynt hawl i bleidleisio, cynnig nac eilio unrhyw gynnig.*
- (3) *Fel arfer, ar gyfer trefniadau cyn craffu, bydd y Cadeirydd yn argymhell eitemau gweithredol sydd ar ddod i'w trafod/herio. Mae hefyd yn agored i aelodau'r pwyllgor ofyn i eitemau gael eu trafod - er y gofynnir i'r aelodau ddewis a dethol yma o ran materion pwysig.*
- (4) *Gwahoddir aelodau perthnasol Bwrdd y Cabinet hefyd i fod yn bresennol yn y cyfarfod at ddibenion Craffu/Ymgynghori.*
- (5) *Gofynnir i aelodau'r Pwyllgor Craffu ddod â'u papurau ar gyfer Bwrdd y Cabinet i'r cyfarfod.*

## REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTORS GROUP

JULY 2020

### COVID -19: MOVING FORWARD STABILISATION – THE PERIOD BETWEEN RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

#### **Purpose of Report**

Although infection rates and related deaths have peaked and are on a steady downward trajectory, it will be considerable time – eighteen months or more – before we can start to plan to recover from the crisis. The intervening period will therefore be a period of stabilisation and the enclosed draft strategy sets out a general framework that will support a consistent and co-ordinated approach as we move towards recovery across the Council.

The draft strategy is accompanied by a Road Map (action plan) which is framed on the basis of a traffic light system, mirroring the approach the Welsh Government has set out in its document “Unlocking our Society and Economy: continuing the conversation”.

The draft strategy is being presented to all Scrutiny Committees for comment before presentation to Cabinet on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2020 for approval.

**Corporate Directors Group**

**July 2020**

**Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**  
**Covid-19: Moving Forward**  
**Stabilisation – the period between response and  
recovery**

**Version 2.1**  
**June 12th 2020**

## **Foreword**

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the way we live and work.

Thanks to the collective efforts of everyone in society, the anticipated peak of infection has been suppressed, the NHS has been able to cope with the influx of patients needing treatment in hospital settings and many lives have been saved.

I am immensely proud of the way in which the Council's workforce and our communities have adapted to the severe restrictions that have been placed on us all. The efforts across the county borough to sustain critical services and to support those most at risk have been extraordinary.

We are now entering a period where we will need to make further adjustments whilst we await an effective vaccine.

It is crucial that we all embed the public health measures that reduce the chance of the virus spreading into our daily routines. This will involve: maintaining good personal hygiene; continuing to practice social distancing; redesigning our services and working environments; continuing to support those who need to shield themselves from the virus; and co-operating with advice to self-isolate and get tested if we develop symptoms associated with the disease.

This strategy sets out how the Council will begin this work – work that will be subject of continuous review as new evidence and policy responses emerge.

**Cllr R G Jones**

**Leader of Council**

## Introduction and Context

In the middle of March 2020, the Council mobilised an emergency response to the developing Covid-19 national emergency situation.

Since then, there has been immense effort to ensure that the Council was able to take action, in step with policy decisions taken by the Welsh Government and the UK Government. At all times our approach has been to work with and in support of government policy. Key actions taken during the response phase of the emergency have included:

- A 7 day/week **enhanced communications** service to ensure that public health messages were aggressively promoted across all channels owned/commissioned by the Council; and accurate and timely information was provided about changes to service delivery, including the establishment of new services to support vulnerable people;
- **Closing down Council services** to assist in reducing the spread of the disease as well as focusing our regulatory services on ensuring compliance with new legislation and guidance by local businesses and other organisations;
- **Changing services** so that critical services could operate safely over the period. For example: supporting continuity of learning using remote technologies to connect learners with their teachers; innovating across safeguarding services to fulfil our statutory safeguarding responsibilities using digital platforms and also creative approaches to outreach work; supporting care providers to minimise the risks involved in providing personal care across community and residential settings; re-prioritising and adapting street-scene services to keep vital refuse and recycling services operational; and re-shaping services at crematoria and burial grounds in line with governmental advice;
- Establishing **new service responses**. The new NPT Safe and Well Service was set up to support people told to shield themselves from the virus and other vulnerable people with daily living tasks. Over 1,000 residents have used the service and over 500 people registered to volunteer; Childcare provision has been provided through a network of school-based hubs, ensuring the most vulnerable learners and the children of those working in essential roles have been well supported over the

period. New on-line services were set up to support the administration of financial assistance to businesses and community groups. The Council undertook the project management of the construction of the Llandarcy Field Hospital, completing the build within four weeks; Children entitled to free school meals have also been supported throughout the period, initially through the “grab bag” scheme and then more latterly by payments into the bank account of eligible parents; and

- The Council has encouraged and supported the fantastic **community action** we have seen across the county borough, helping councillors where needed to complete the setting up of “street champion” networks, adapting the NPT Safe and Well Service to response to community needs, helping to connect local businesses with other businesses and local communities, working with local third sector organisations and housing associations, respecting what each agency is able to offer communities at this extraordinary time.

This would not have been achieved but for the exceptional commitment from the Council’s workforce and the strong partnership between the Council and the trade unions.

Support functions have also adapted to enable these changes. Some examples of the work completed includes:

- Refocusing of the Council’s **Human Resources** Service to support the workforce as many were required to work from home using new remote technologies; providing employees with advice and reassurance if their ability to work was affected by their own health conditions, caring responsibilities or because their work had significantly changed or had temporarily been suspended. All of those unable to work were invited to consider redeployment. Several hundred of the Council’s workforce voluntarily agreed to temporary redeployment into other roles – this has included secondment to the communications team, refuse and recycling, customer services, NPT Safe and Well, Test Trace and Protect;
- **Health and safety** has been a top priority over the period. Risk assessments, identifying the range of protective measures put in place to protect staff and service users, such as: PPE; workplace redesign to

ensure social distancing; and use of other equipment such as in-cab screens has required an immense effort, especially in the early stages of the outbreak when global supply chains were under immense pressure and Government guidance was changing very rapidly as scientific evidence developed;

- Alongside health and safety physical control measures, there was an early focus on supporting the emotional wellbeing of employees. A wide range of new on-line **wellbeing resources** has been established and promoted to the workforce and more recently telephone helplines for all staff and pupils have also been put in place, connecting those needing help to the Occupational Health Service or the Education Wellbeing Service ;
- The nature of the Coronavirus has meant that people should avoid face to face contact wherever possible and void touching things that other people may have touched. The work done in recent years to develop the Council's digital capability has been a key asset during the outbreak. For example: Staff using remote **technology** increased from an average of 50 per day to over 1500 per day over the first four weeks of the outbreak as many were required to work from home using Microsoft Teams to connect with other work colleagues. New software services created through collaboration between business rates, economic development and digital services staff created on-line services to enable rapid payment of government grants to over 2,000 businesses - the value of payments made to date exceeding £25 million. Similarly, collaboration between finance, education and digital services teams have enabled payment of funds to over 5,000 parents of pupils entitled to free school meals and the data sciences skills within digital services enabled lists of people advised to shield to be matched with other data to support the development of systems needed by the NPT Safe and Well Service. More latterly, focus has also turned to those who are digitally excluded. Over 1,350 devices have been issued to pupils who have no suitable device or wifi connection at home which will ensure no learner is excluded from learning because of technology limitations in their household. There are many more examples of digital technologies providing a strong backbone to keep the Council functioning;
- As the pattern and nature of work has shifted over the period, learning and development activities have adapted too. **e-learning** has massively



expanded with many people unable to perform their normal duties taking the opportunity to update their skills include, for example, Welsh language and safeguarding training. Where there has been a need for face to face training adaptations have been made to ensure social distancing.

Delivering change on the scale and at the pace that has been required has been a corporate effort. People from different professional disciplines have collaborated to do what has been required. As well as ensuring the Council has been able to quickly mobilise its emergency response, there many lessons to be drawn from the period that will be drawn out to inform the work that will need to be done in the period ahead as the Council re-shapes its services and functions further to adapt to operate safely with the continuing threat posed by the disease.

## **Leadership and Governance during the Response Phase**

### Political Leadership and Governance

Leadership and democratic oversight of the Council's work needed to adapt very quickly over the period.

Lockdown measures imposed by the UK and Welsh governments meant that all Council meetings were suspended. Decisions have therefore been taken under the urgency and emergency provisions contained with the Council's Constitution.

To ensure visibility of decision making, administrative processes were adapted to work on a digital platform, mirroring as closely as possible what would have happened prior to the outbreak. Scrutiny chairs have been routinely consulted about decisions requested from the Executive. All decisions made under the arrangements have been published to the Council's Modern.gov system – available to all members of Council but also to members of the public (except for private items).

The Leader of Council has participated in the network of meetings established by the Welsh Local Government Association designed to co-ordinate the local government response across Wales. These arrangements have meant that the Council has been able to escalate issues where needed but has also had early notice of additional changes that have been required. Informal meetings of the Cabinet have been held as have regular meetings between the Leader, Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive and opposition group leaders – all of this designed to provide regular briefings on the changes taking place and to receive feedback.

While formal meetings have been suspended, a number of mechanisms have been deployed to keep in touch with all Members of Council. Regular bulletins and e mails have been sent to members by e mail focusing on some of the key changes that have been taken or were being planned to respond to the measures taken by governments.

Following the enactment of legislation to remove the requirement for Members to be seen and heard in formal meetings of the Council, the Council moved quickly to resume key meetings using Microsoft Teams. The meetings held to date have included a meeting of the Council (the first council in Wales to hold a full meeting of Council remotely) and meetings of the Cabinet, Planning Committee, Audit Committee and Cabinet Scrutiny Committee. An initial debrief has been held to tease out immediate lessons learned and a fuller review is scheduled before the end of July to agree the pattern of meetings and associated support from autumn onwards. Issues to take forward in the next period will include enhancing scrutiny, resuming bi-lingual meetings of Council, ensuring public access to all meetings as well as refining practical arrangements such as the type of device used for meetings, meeting protocols, support at meetings and consideration of alternative software systems.

Council has also authorised the establishment of a cross-party Panel to support the Cabinet in moving forward from initial response to stabilising council services in the new operating environment. One of the key tasks given to the Panel by Council is to ensure each member of Council is encouraged to help shape the way forward.

## Professional Leadership and Governance

In the initial response phase of the outbreak, the Chief Executive established and chaired an Incident Management Group to provide professional leadership during the response phase and this met daily, seven days/week using a standard agenda. The Incident Management Group was comprised of the corporate directors and assistant chief executive and heads of service, as appropriate.

Key issues discussed and decided at the daily Incident Management Group meetings were recorded by the emergency planning team. Issues from these meetings were then briefed to daily meetings between the Leader and Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive. Information was also cascaded down to operational teams through the respective chief officers but also where needed into wider structures.

Work tasked from the Incident Management Group ensured that the Council quickly assembled (and where required deployed) emergency responses. Activity mobilised included, for example: project management of the Llandarcy Field Hospital, creation of the NPT Safe and Well Service to meet the needs of shielded and vulnerable people, plans to expand capacity to care for the deceased, creation of child care hubs in schools, support to adult social services, etc

The local emergency response was undertaken in alignment with the work of the South Wales Local Resilience Forum which convened a series of Strategic Co-ordinating Group meetings during the period – with a focus on facilitating co-ordination across the different arms of the public service, eg police, local government and others.

Because of the nature of the emergency, joint arrangements were also agreed between Swansea and Neath Port Talbot councils and the Swansea Bay Local Health Board to oversee the local health and social care response. The governance of the Regional Partnership Board was formally amended to ensure that more agile arrangements were put in place to work through and manage the pressures across the health and social care system and to make contingency plans for a significant surge in people needing treatment for Coronavirus.

The Incident Management Group ensured that these arrangements were focused on the priority issues and that the Council had a coherent and corporate approach throughout the emergency response period.

From the outset, all costs incurred in responding to the outbreak have been assigned to a project code enabling a clear audit trail to be available to identify and substantiate the costs of response, backed up by decisions taken under urgency provisions, where required.

### Next Steps

On Friday, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2020, the Welsh Government published initial plans to lift restrictions in Wales, described as the next phase of response to the virus “<sup>1</sup>Unlocking society and our economy: continuing the conversation.” The publication of the route map signals a cautious shift towards lifting some of the restrictions imposed to reduce the spread of the virus, protect the NHS and save lives.

As in the initial response phase, the Council will act in step with the Welsh Government to establish the arrangements that will be needed to continue to bear down on the spread of the disease whilst also easing the restrictions that have been applied during the lockdown period.

This strategy sets out a general framework that will support a consistent and co-ordinated approach as we move towards recovery across the Council.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-05/unlocking-our-society-and-economy-continuing-the-conversation.pdf>

## Moving Forward

Although infection rates and related deaths have peaked and are on a steady downward trajectory, there will be no return to normality in the immediate future. Until a vaccine and effective treatments are available, we will need to adjust our daily lives to live with the constant threat posed by the disease.

It will therefore be a considerable time – eighteen months or more – before we can consider that we are recovering from the crisis. The intervening period will therefore be a period of stabilisation – a period where we work in step with the leadership provided by the Welsh and UK governments to carefully lift the restrictions imposed on the daily life of our staff and residents, always vigilant to the potential for infection rates to increase.

As in the response phase, it is crucial that we take a corporate approach to the way we achieve stabilisation. There are three key areas of focus for us:

1. **Test, Trace, Protect** – the Council has a significant role in implementing the Welsh Government's Test, Trace, Protect Strategy.

Our Environmental Health Service will oversee the delivery of the local contact tracing service which forms the tier 1 services within the 3 tier Test, Trace, Protect NHS national service model. Environmental Health will also contribute their resource and expertise to the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, regional element of the national service.

This is a significant undertaking for the Council. Test, Trace, Protect plays a vital role in protecting the public health, tracing those who have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for Coronavirus, encouraging people to responsibly quarantine themselves which in turn will help prevent the spread of the virus and break the chain of transmission. The information gathered from this work will also help public health professional better understand how the disease is affecting our local community and consequently informing further public health measures that can help keep our communities safe.

The Council's involvement in Test, Trace, Protect is also significant in terms of the scale of the activity and resource involved. Current

estimates put the financial cost of the service at over £3 million for the initial phase of operation.

Test, Trace, Protect will also play a key role in building confidence in our workforce, our service users and the wider community as restrictions are lifted. Those who are symptomatic can now easily access tests while they self-isolate. All residents and the workforces in closed settings, such as care homes, will access testing whether symptomatic or not - one of a series of measures to enhance protection for those who are especially vulnerable.

- 2. Resumption of Council services and functions** – Whilst some services have been temporarily suspended during the response phase, most council services and functions have continued to operate albeit with changes made to access and operational arrangements to respond to the numerous measures put in place by the UK and Welsh governments.

As we move into the stabilisation phase, all services and functions are undertaking review exercises to tease out the lessons learned during the response phase which in turn will inform the way in which those services and functions may operate as restrictions are carefully eased by governments.

For those services which were temporarily suspended in line with government requirements and guidance, plans are being prepared to bring those services back into operation, adapted to comply with social distancing and high standards of hygiene. However, the timing of when services will resume will be informed by government decisions on the lifting of lockdown restrictions and also our local risk assessment arrangements.

As indicated in the earlier sections of this paper, there have been many innovations during the response period which need to shape the way we plan services and functions into the future. We **should not be assuming a return to the old normality** – we will be forced to live with adaptations

to services and functions until the threat presented by the Coronavirus has been satisfactorily addressed – but there are also clear indicators too that the crisis has enabled new, more responsive approaches to be developed by the Council to the way we respond to community need; that community action has been stimulated in a significant way across all communities; and that other local agencies too have needed to adapt their offer over the recent months. We need to use the stabilisation period to reflect on this and realise some of the opportunities that have been created by the crisis alongside the work we will need to do to address the risks and threats.

It is essential that we approach the exercise of resuming council services and functions from a corporate perspective, taking the unique opportunity now presented to test how well proposed service models are likely to respond to the changed and changing needs of our communities, the financial and human resources likely to be available, applying the important learning we have done during the response phase which has seen some remarkable examples of innovation and ingenuity- for example:

- The completion of the Llandarcy Field Hospital in less than a month;
- The development of a corporate, single organisational view of the most vulnerable children, young people and families that education, social services and community safety all support. This may create an opportunity to also develop a single, integrated response to meeting the needs of this cohort of our population;
- The expansion of digital approaches combining datasets from disparate databases with the rapid development of new digital services using tools such as webchat and chatbots – these changes have reinforced the importance of all elements of the Council’s existing Smart and Connected Strategy with an opportunity to deliver our ambition at far greater pace than initially envisaged;
- The deployment of multi-disciplinary teams to respond at pace to rapidly changing situations – these examples

demonstrate what becomes possible when people are not constrained by service and directorate silos, pooling expertise, knowledge and resources to deliver good outcome for our citizens.

The Roadmap attached at Appendix 1 provides a framework against which we will plot the way services will resume during the stabilisation phase. For some services and functions, the Roadmap is already clear, for others there is more work and thinking to do. The Roadmap will therefore need to be continuously updated as we work through the months ahead, this may include revisiting early plans as we put plans into practice and learn from our own experience and from wider afield.

Our Roadmap will also enable us to demonstrate our local response to the Welsh Government's policy framework set out in "2Unlocking society and our economy: continuing the conversation".

### **3. Understanding and responding to the impact Covid-19 has had for citizens, businesses and other organisation across Neath Port Talbot –**

As countries across the globe reflect on the impact of Coronavirus it is clear that the pandemic is likely to have both and immediate and longer term, significant impact.

Countries around the world are reporting significant political, economic and social impacts. There are also emerging impacts for the environment. We need to make a clear assessment of these impacts for our local area too. The Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board, chaired by the Leader of Council is well-placed to undertake a community impact assessment using the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2014 framework to establish the impact of the pandemic on the economic,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-05/unlocking-our-society-and-economy-continuing-the-conversation.pdf>



social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Neath Port Talbot residents. The community impact assessment will inform our work to respond locally to our communities needs whilst also providing an evidence base to influence policy choices at the regional and national tiers of governments.

A multi-agency group, led by the Council, is collecting data to produce an initial impact assessment by mid June 2020. As well as gathering data from key indicators, for example Universal Credit claimant counts, crime and disorder etc, the exercise is seeking to gather views from a wide cross section of people to understand the lived experience of people from different backgrounds and places across our communities since the outbreak started.

An initial community impact report will be considered by the NPT Public Services Board towards the end of June. It is anticipated that the report will enable the key areas of focus to be identified and the Board will then need to organise work and resources to move the work forward into its next stage. There will be an important community leadership role for elected members here too, both in terms of ensuring the impacts drawn out for each community are relevant and accurate as well as ensuring the Board itself is held to account for the way in which agencies plan to respond to the findings of the exercise.

Political leadership throughout this phase is critical. Governments the world over are striving to secure the confidence of citizens as they work through unprecedented challenges to move from response, through stabilisation to recovery. Elected members must be supported to provide strong community leadership through the next period and beyond as we move towards recovery. The cross-party Member Panel established by Council will be an important mechanism to achieve this.

The work we undertake in each of the three areas summarised above will be tested against the vision, principles and objectives set out in the next section.

## **Moving Forward – Vision, Aims and Objectives**

### **Vision**

Residents, businesses and organisations are able to shape and agree upon the measures each needs to take to protect public health, control the spread of the disease and maximise the life chances of everyone who lives and works in the county borough.

### **Aim:**

To ensure that the residents, council staff and all other employment sectors within Neath Port Talbot are supported to move safely from lockdown conditions in accordance with Welsh Government guidance whilst continuing to reduce the impact of Covid-19 on our communities and most vulnerable populations.

To identify and implement the most effective and efficient ways of delivering and facilitating services in order to support local economic recovery and public service functions, prioritised according to resource and need.

### **Objectives:**

1. To encourage residents, staff and organisations to continue to comply with the public health guidance;
2. To establish a resilient and effective contact tracing capability to support the delivery of the Welsh Government's strategy <sup>3</sup>"Test, Trace and Protect";
3. To support vulnerable residents who are required to shield themselves;
4. To bring the Council's services and functions safely back into operation;
5. To work with Public Service Board partners to identify the wider impacts of the pandemic on the communities of Neath Port Talbot and the collective action needed to address those impacts; and
6. To ensure the Council can mobilise a speedy and effective emergency response should infection rates increase.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect-html>

## **Principles:**

- We will act in step with the policy decisions taken by the Welsh Government, wherever possible;
- We will adopt a corporate and consistent approach to recovery activities;
- We will base decisions on the most recent scientific advice and evidence available, supporting Welsh Government to keep the reproduction rate “R” below 1;
- We will prioritise the safety and wellbeing of our staff and those who need to use our services and functions;
- Where possible, services and functions will be delivered on-line or be re-designed to limit face to face contact;
- We will continuously engage with and involve our workforce, residents, businesses and other organisations in our recovery process;
- We will assess the impact of our recovery work on people who share protected characteristics, on our ability to deliver our statutory responsibilities and also on the Council’s financial health; and
- We will ensure strong democratic oversight and public accountability of our recovery work.

## **Leadership and Governance in the Stabilisation Phase**

### Political Leadership and Governance

Political leadership will be provided by the Cabinet, supported by a cross-party Member Panel – Coronavirus Recovery Phase. Through the work of the Panel, mechanisms will be established to ensure all Members of Council have an opportunity to shape the Council’s plans to resume services and functions as we move through stabilisation towards recovery. Regular reports will be provided to enable Members to monitor the progress made.

Senior members will continue to actively participate in regional and national networks to ensure we are learning from elsewhere, helping to shape national and regional policy and continuing to advocate for the interests of our citizens.

Formal meetings of the Council will be expanded but most, if not all business, will take place over remote technology. Public access to meetings will be enhanced and scrutiny committees will begin to play a more significant role in helping to shaping the Roadmap and associated work as well as scrutinising the done by the Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board, the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, exercising powers delegated to it by Council to scrutinise the work of the Board.

### Professional Leadership

Professional Leadership will be provided by the chief officer group, led by the Chief Executive through a Recovery Planning Group. The Recovery Planning Group will ensure there continues to be a corporate and coherent approach to the way we approach stabilisation through to recovery, using the lessons learned from the immediate response phase.

Each service manager will prepare plans for the recovery of the services and functions for which they are accountable, using this strategy as a framework. The Chief Executive will also designate lead officers to develop other responses as may be required, to fulfil the objectives set out in this strategy.

The development and operation of Test, Trace, Protect and the planning and delivery of health and social care services will operate on the Swansea Bay Health Board footprint, enabling Neath Port Talbot Council to integrate and co-ordinate its local arrangements with Swansea Council and the Swansea Bay Local Health Board. Governance arrangements are in place to support this joint work with clear lines of communication back to the Council's Recovery Planning Group and associated democratic arrangements.

Officers will also continue to participate in the South Wales Local Resilience Forum and wider networks to help shape government policy and to share the learning that is emerging as all agencies adapt to the impact of this pandemic.

## **Risks and Issues**

There are a number of key risks and issues that we will need to manage as we seek to implement this Strategy. These include:

- Risk that the reproductive rate (R) for the disease will increase – ie will exceed 1 and consequently lockdown measures will be reintroduced and emergency responses re-mobilised;
- Availability of suitable Personal Protective Clothing (PPE) – whilst supply chains are improving, in the short term pressures for some stocks continue to be experienced;
- Impact of Test, Trace, Protect – with more extensive testing of the population, it is likely that the number of staff self-isolating will increase, placing strain on business continuity;
- Impact of social distancing measures – the 2m requirements have a significant initial and recurring impact on the model and cost of services and functions;
- Organisational capacity – the Welsh Government is requiring the Council to establish new services such as the NPT Safe and Well Service and the Test, Trace, Protect Service as foundations of its health protection strategy. Resourcing of these new services has been met by redeploying staff from other roles. As the Welsh Government eases restrictions and encourages more public services to come back into operation, staffing resources will come under increasing strain as we balance new responsibilities with existing responsibilities;
- Community Impacts – the economic, social, environmental and cultural impacts will shape the volume, range and pattern of demand for Council services and functions. Impacts may be experienced differentially, between groups with protected characteristics and across different geographies which in turn may require a differential response by the Council and its partners as we design a pathway to recovery;

- Community Cohesion – as restrictions are eased and time elapses there is a risk that people’s propensity to comply with ongoing restrictions will be mixed, creating tension between those who are complying and those who are not. There are also reports from elsewhere of anti-Chinese sentiment that we need to be alert to locally;
- Financial and Resourcing Risks – the Welsh Government has already agreed a supplementary budget for 2020-21 which in part re-prioritises some elements of the budget voted by the Senedd prior to the outbreak. There is a risk that other programmes, including capital programmes will be affected by decisions taken by the UK and Welsh Government to undertake a wider re-prioritisation of public funding and also the policy choices made to fund the financial costs of the pandemic;
- Governance – the scale of the emergency response saw the temporary suspension of legislation, regulations, guidance and a range of statutory reporting requirements. There is a risk that these will be reintroduced without review, placing burdens on the Council at a time when capacity needs to be focused on the work we need to do during stabilisation and in recovery. There is also a need for the Council to ensure its own checks and balances are fit for purpose with systems of governance enabling and supporting the changes that will need to be delivered and not impeding them.

## **Financial Considerations**

At the time of writing, the medium to long-term financial implications for the council are largely unknown. In the short term, the council’s cash flow can be sustained as a consequence of advance payments of Revenue Support Grant and the support announced in the Welsh Government Supplementary Budget on 28 May.

However, the financial implications of COVID-19 will undoubtedly be very significant and decisions in the short-term must be informed by this context.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services and his team are preparing estimates of the one-off and recurring financial impacts of this outbreak and the detail of his work will be reported to Members as soon as available.

### **Strategy Review**

Because of the dynamic nature of the situation, this strategy will need to be kept under continuous review to ensure its continued relevance.

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# **Covid-19 – Moving Forward**

**Stabilisation – the period between response and recovery**

**Road Map**

**Version 2.3**

**July 2020**



The Council has framed its action plan on the basis of a traffic light system, mirroring the approach the Welsh Government has set out in its document “Unlocking our Society and Economy: continuing the conversation”.

DRAFT

**OBJECTIVE:** To encourage residents, staff and organisations to continue to comply with the public health guidance

**LEAD:** Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer

Lockdown	Red	Amber	Green
Promote and amplify public health messages across all of the Council's owned and commissioned channels			
Communicate services available to support vulnerable residents and encourage take up			
Communicate support and assistance available to people and organisations impacted by restrictions			
Communicate business opportunities to local companies and organisations			
Monitor channels to gain insight into how the lockdown is affecting people, business and other organisations			
Extend digital channels available to the workforce and elected members, including access to e-learning and wellbeing support			
Communicate how critical services are operating during the lockdown period			
	Communicate changes to service availability as restrictions are eased. Monitor the impact of changes to service availability on behaviours		
	Survey residents, staff and other stakeholders to assess the impact of ongoing restrictions and to gauge the level of confidence to engage with services as they are recovered		
		Use learning and insight to generate further innovation in the delivery of the communications function	

**OBJECTIVE:** To establish a resilient and effective contact tracing capability to support the delivery of the Welsh Government’s strategy <sup>4</sup>“Test, Trace, Protect”;

**LEAD:** Director of Environment and Regeneration

Lockdown	Red	Amber	Green
	Recruit, train and equip 6 contact tracing teams and associated business support	Expand contact tracing capability in line with governance policy and available resource	Right size contact tracing capability to “new normal” requirements
	Establish regional tier of contact tracing capability to deal with more complex situations		Right size regional tier capability to “new normal” requirements
			Agree the actions the Council can take to sustain the public health protection strategy over the medium term

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<sup>4</sup> <https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect.html>

**OBJECTIVE:** To support vulnerable residents who are required to shield themselves;

**LEAD:** Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer

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Lockdown	Red	Amber	Green
Promote take up of the NPT Safe and Well Service to people who are shielding and to those who need to self-isolate where they have no other form of support	Work with food retailers across the county borough to ensure there are sufficient opportunities for people who are shielding or self-isolating to source their own food	Transition people supported by NPT Safe and Well with a food delivery service to local food retailer alternatives	
	Work with the Health Board to ensure there is sufficient capacity within the community pharmacy network to deliver medication to those who require assistance	Transition people supported by NPT Safe and Well to a community pharmacy delivery service	
	Review all of the cases open to NPT Safe and Well to establish needs other than food and medication	Develop options for meeting wider support needs.	Implement agreed model for meeting wider support needs

	collection where there is a need for ongoing support		
Promote volunteering opportunities with NPT Safe and Well to ensure there are enough people available to support those who are shielding or who need to self-isolate and who have no other form of support	Induct, train and support volunteers	Develop options for sustaining volunteer arrangements in line with changes to the model of support	Implement changes to volunteer model
Encourage and celebrate wider community action mobilised to support communities during the lockdown phase	Continue to encourage and celebrate wider community action	Explore how community action can be sustained over the longer term	

**OBJECTIVE:** To bring the Council’s services and functions safely back into operation;

**LEADS :** Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer, all Directors

a) Education and Care for Children

Tudalen30

Lockdown –closed except for key workers and vulnerable children. Outreach services in place	Red – no change, but able to manage increase in demand from children already eligible to attend schools and daycare	Amber – priority groups of pupils return to school in a phased approach. Increased numbers of children in daycare	Green – all children and students able to access education. All children able to access daycare.
Schools are closed except to accommodate vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers. Measures are in place to support remote learning and to provide outreach services to vulnerable children and special needs pupils	Increase in number of hubs for children of critical workers	Schools re-open for a three week period to enable learners to check in, catch up and prepare for September term  Blended learning continues  Child care for critical workers stopped. Vulnerable learners continue to attend school and receive support over the summer holiday period	All schools re-open on 1 <sup>st</sup> September with all children attending school regularly from 14 <sup>th</sup> September.  Blended learning approaches developed to provide solid contingency arrangements in the event that there is further disruption to schools from the spread of the infection

Early years settings closed	Childcare providers to start re-operating and increasing numbers in accordance with WG guidance issued on 29 <sup>th</sup> June.	Family Information Service will continue to signpost families to operating childcare providers over the summer break.	
Youth services closed for face to face services, remote outreach services operating	Youth service continues to provide remote support and engagement with targeted groups.	Youth service will contribute to summer care arrangements for vulnerable learners and summer enhancement programme for year 5 and 6 pupils from schools with over 17% efsm profile.	
Adult learning services closed	Adult learning provision will be delivered remotely to focus mainly on qualification based courses.		
Safeguarding services and children's social services operating with social distancing and remote contact in place	Safeguarding services will continue to operate and communication issued to all relevant providers.		
'Grab Bags' then cash payments to parents of children entitled to free school meals	Families are receiving a weekly payment of £19.50 per child this covers an allowance for breakfast,	We are currently serving food in half of our school settings but are chargeable to all paying and FSM pupils	

	<p>lunch and milk. The payments commenced from April 6th and they will receive the payment through the summer holidays to the 31st August. During the duration of the hub schools all children and staff were entitled to free school lunches with many of them taking up this offer. A small number of food parcels have been distributed to those families who are entitled to FSM's from the Food Hub (who do not have a bank account to receive the above payment)</p>	<p>as they are receiving the payments. The other half of schools are asking all pupils to provide their own packed lunches due to their school plans.</p>	
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b) Getting Around

Tudalen33

Lockdown – Leave the house for essential travel only	Red – local travel including for click and collect retail. Promote active travel and adapt public transport for physical distancing. Allow outdoor leisure and recreation	Amber – travel for leisure, access non-essential retail and services and more people travelling to work	Green – unrestricted travel subject to ongoing precautions
All council-owned parks closed	All council-owned parks open except for children’s play areas, toilets, cafes and other buildings. Social distancing signage in place	MTB, Mario’s cafe and Orangery re-open at Margam Park with social distancing and hygiene measures in place	All facilities re-open in parks with social distancing and hygiene measures in place
Some rights of way closed			All Public Rights of Way that were temporarily closed due to Covid-19 have now reopened (effective as of 9 <sup>th</sup> July).
Some transport re-purposed to support the delivery of NPT Safe and Well food delivery service	Social Services suspended complex needs freeing community transport service vehicles to be	As complex needs services start to return a new model for food distribution is being developed where volunteers	Transition people supported by NPT Safe and Well with a food delivery service to local food retailer alternatives.

	utilised for the delivery of food packages to those shielding in the community.	and social housings associations will be able to collect packages from the food hub for vulnerable/shielded residents.	
Adapt public transport for physical distancing.	Bus Services severely reduced with many routes suspended.	Commercial Bus Operators have segregated off seats on vehicles to maintain social distancing. The Council has had signage installed at main bus stations and all electronic signage displays social distancing guidelines. Temporary drop off points have been introduced to avoid conflict when passengers are alighting.	Commercial operators have been reintroducing routes with a view to services increasing through the summer.
Social distancing signage erected on the beach promenade supported by use of drone messaging	Signage updated re Lifeguard Service available.		
Parking fees temporarily suspended and parking enforcement temporarily suspended		Parking fees and enforcement reintroduced for car parks (except town	Parking fees and enforcement fully restored from 1 <sup>st</sup> September 2020

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	centres) from 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2020	On-Street enforcement resumed at the beginning of July 2020. Margam Park will be charging for parking from 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2020 (bringing it line with the Aberavon Seafront and Gnoll Park)
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c) Exercise, playing sport and games

Lockdown – exercise once a day outside on own or with household	Red – exercise more than once a day and incidental activity locally. Outdoor sports courts to open. Elite athletes resume some activity	Amber – team and individual sports, non-contact sports and games in small groups indoors and outdoors. Some outdoor events with limited capacity and events behind closed doors.	Green – all sports, leisure and cultural activity open, with physical distancing. All events resume with limited capacity.
All council leisure services closed	Remain closed until further guidance provided.		
All council organised events cancelled	All events cancelled in Margam Park. Private hire - Drive in Cinema arranged at end of August.		
The council community centre closed	Remain closed.		

d) Relaxing and Special Occasions

<p>Lockdown – stay at home and only leave the house for essential purposes</p>	<p>Red – some opening of outdoor cultural and other sites. Relaxation and leisure outdoors where local</p>	<p>Amber – more cultural and leisure sites to re-open (eg museums and galleries). Weddings and other events with limited capacity and physical distancing</p>	<p>Green – all special occasions and cultural and leisure activities permitted with precautions in place</p>
<p>Theatres and other cultural services closed</p>	<p>Remain closed</p>		
<p>Libraries closed except for on-line library service</p>	<p>Pontardawe, Port Talbot and Neath libraries re-open with click and collect service. Home delivery service resumes</p>	<p>Extend click and collect service to all branch libraries operated by the council. Re-open Port Talbot, Pontardawe and Neath Libraries for face to face customers with social distancing and hygiene measures in place Reactivate the mobile library service with social distancing and hygiene measures in place Re-open ELRS</p>	<p>Re-open all branch libraries with social distancing and hygiene measures in place  Community run libraries will be opening on a call and collect basis following advice and guidance from the local authority's library service and subject local decision.  <b><u>- Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July</u></b></p>

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Cwmafan Library reopens for Call and Collect service  
Glynneath Library reopens for Call and Collect service  
**Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> August**  
Mobile Library service resumes – Call and Collect only  
**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> August**  
Neath Library will offer limited access and Public Internet access  
Pontardawe Library will offer limited access and Public internet  
Port Talbot library will offer limited access and Public internet  
**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> August**  
Baglan Library reopens for Call and Collect service  
Sandfields Library reopens for Call and Collect service  
Skewen Library reopens for Call and Collect service

Cefn Coed Colliery Museum	Remains closed		
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e) Working or running a business

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<p>Lockdown – work from home if possible. List of businesses required to close. 2m requirement in workplaces where not possible to work from home</p>	<p>Red – more outdoor work and click and collect retail. Businesses not required to close (eg construction) re-opening and safe working practices</p>	<p>Amber – non-essential retail to re-open with physical distancing. Trial some personal services under appointment (eg hairdressers) Accommodation businesses open without shared facilities</p>	<p>Green – restaurants, pubs and customer contact industries under physical distancing. All businesses and workplaces open under new protocols</p>
<p>Enforcement policy in place – engage, educate, encourage, enforce to support compliance by businesses and other organisations with Government policy</p>			
<p>All council workers working remotely from home where this is possible. Redeployment mechanism for staff unable to carry out their normal duties established</p>	<p>In accordance with WG regs, staff advised to work from home where possible. Essential non-office based services continue where possible subject to risk assessments</p>	<p>Staff continue to be advised to work from home, in accordance with guidance. Risk assessments undertaken in buildings and mitigating measures to achieve social distancing are put in place</p>	<p>Programme for phased return to offices being developed for customer facing services from 1<sup>st</sup> September alongside the revised home working policy</p>
<p>Financial assistance administered in accordance with national and local policy decisions</p>	<p>NDR Grants Schemes closed on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Final residual payments being processed during July 2020.</p>		



	Business Start Up Grant Scheme launched beginning of July 2020. Neath Port Talbot limited to 83 applicants. Applications being assessed by Economic Development Unit.		
Refocused employment support services focused on meeting business needs during the Covid-19 outbreak			
		Licensed Premises to be allowed to open outdoors in accordance with Welsh Government Guidance as of 13 <sup>th</sup> July 2020 with social distance being maintained.	

f) Going Shopping

Tudalen42

<p>Lockdown – essential retail only face to face</p>	<p>Red – include click and collect for non-essential retail. Begin making adaptations to public realm (eg town centres)</p>	<p>Amber – can access most non-essential retail where adaptations are possible to maintain physical distancing. Town centres and high streets adapted to facilitate shopping and accessing services under physical distancing</p>	<p>Green – able to access all retail and leisure facilities whilst taking reasonable precautions</p>
<p>Enforcement policy in place – engage, educate, encourage, enforce to support compliance by businesses and other organisations with Government policy</p>			
<p>Enforcement policy in place – engage, educate, encourage, enforce to support compliance by businesses and other organisations with Government policy</p>	<p>Monitoring undertaken to assess the impact on town centres</p>	<p>‘Light touch’ adaptations in place in main town centres to enable queueing and ease pedestrian movement. Monitoring and consultation arrangements in place to enable modifications as required</p>	<p>Ongoing monitoring of adaptations and modification as required</p>
<p>Financial assistance administered in accordance with national and local policy decisions</p>	<p>NDR Grants Schemes closed on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Final residual payments being processed during July 2020.</p>		

	<p>Business Start Up Grant Scheme launched beginning of July 2020. Neath Port Talbot limited to 83 applicants. Applications being assessed by Economic Development Unit.</p>		
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g) Using public services

Lockdown – access to emergency or essential services only	Red – increase the availability of public services gradually (eg waste and recycling, libraries). Increase scope of essential health and social care services	Amber – continue to increase the availability of public services. Increase access to non-essential health and social care services (eg elective surgery, dentistry)	Green – access to all normal public, health and social care services under physical distancing where possible or precautions in other settings
<b>ENVIRONMENT</b>			
Refuse and recycling operational with modifications to comply with social distancing and good hygiene practices. Side waste policy temporarily relaxed	Collection of unauthorised “side waste” will stop on Monday 3 <sup>rd</sup> August.		
Bulky waste services suspended	Bulky waste service re-opened with advance, on-line booking to manage demand. Hygiene rules, limits on collections and PPE in place.		
Civic Amenity sites suspended	Sites re-opened with advance, on-line booking to		

	<p>manage demand and social distancing. Reconfiguration of operations at sites to ensure social distancing. Vans, pick-ups and trailers can access the recycling centres at Briton Ferry and Cymmer on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July using the on-line booking system.</p>		
Public toilets closed	Toilets closed in accordance with Welsh Government guidance	High use toilets to be re-opened in accordance with Welsh Government guidance, with reduced opening hours, enhanced cleaning regime and restrictions on numbers	Monitoring of usage and potential to open remaining toilets subject to available resources
Urgent engineering works only with social distancing, PPE and other modifications	Many contractors closed sites when the lockdown was implemented.	Only urgent engineering works being undertaken with social distancing and appropriate PPE. This is affecting the number of workers on sites with a knock on effect to contract completions and associated financial impacts.	The industry is beginning to resume construction activities however the supply chains in some sectors are affected.

Construction and regeneration projects suspended except for construction of Llandarcy Field Hospital	Some larger projects on site with restricted staff numbers and social distancing in place. Essential maintenance taking place	Most projects back on site with restrictions still in force.	All sites to reopen with social distancing and non-essential maintenance work being undertaken
<b>SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING</b>			
Day services and respite for adult social care users closed	Assess and review on an individual basis of need targeting families in crisis to arrange the most appropriate means of intervention/outreach, such as 1-2-1 case work with appropriate PPE; questionnaires sent to further establish need	Re-open day services on a phased basis, service users attending on a rota basis, based on assessed needs	Day services and respite services re-opened and full assessed service provided
Other Social services for adults operating with significant modifications – PPE, social distancing, remote contact. Suspension of normal eligibility rules.	Increase in assessments and reviews undertaken face-to-face by front-line social work teams, based on need and individual circumstances. Suspension of eligibility rules relaxed in	Re-establishment of domiciliary care ‘green’ packages of assessed need.  Further relaxation of the suspension of eligibility	All assessments and reviews undertaken face-to-face.  Full re-introduction of the normal eligibility rules.

	<p>accordance with WG guidelines</p> <p><a href="https://gov.wales/adult-social-services-during-covid-19-pandemic.html">https://gov.wales/adult-social-services-during-covid-19-pandemic.html</a></p>	<p>rules in accordance with WG guidelines</p>	
<p>Housing Options operating with social distancing and remote contact arrangements in place, supported by PPE and other measures. Expansion of accommodation for people street homeless.</p>	<p>Additional homeless accommodation to be identified and resourced as Phase 2 of the WG Homelessness Strategy.</p>	<p>Implement Phase 2 into Phase 3 of the WG Homelessness Strategy, establishing new accommodation.</p>	<p>Re-introduction of 'Face-to-face' interviews by operational Housing Options staff, where appropriate or required.</p>
<p><b>ASST CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S SERVICES</b></p>			
<p>IDVA and Substance Misuse outreach services operating with significant modifications – PPE, social distancing, remote contact. Other community safety services refocused to support NPT Safe and Well</p>	<p>On-line support for anti social behaviour incidents</p> <p>Crime prevention measures embedded into communications and marketing approaches</p>	<p>Business crime reduction partnership activities resumed as town centres are re-opened</p> <p>Partial return to police station to enable access to</p>	<p>Refocused priorities to reflect new risk threat and harm picture with modifications in place, greater use of remote technologies to support work with some face to face contact where required</p>

and Covid enforcement activities (4Es)	<p>Awareness raising and training in relation to VAWDASV continuing on-line</p> <p>Channel panel activities continue on-line linked to safeguarding outreach services where appropriate</p>	key databases to resume fuller services	
Customer Services – face to face services closed. Contact centre and on-line channels expanded to support new profile of demand.	Further expand telephone and on- services to support the emergency response	Remodelling of one stop shop services at civic centres to ensure social distancing and support further channel shift	New face to face service operational alongside much expanded digital and telephone channels
<b>Finance and Corporate Services</b>			
		Registration Office now open (as of 26 <sup>th</sup> June 2020) for birth registration, death registration, marriage/civil partnerships with limited numbers in attendance to maintain social distance. Registration of deaths under revised protocols.	



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		Licensing Regulatory Inspections and Applications now being processed and facilitated remotely.	
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h) Practicing Faith

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Lockdown – closure of places of worship, with exceptions for funerals and cremations	Red – opening of places of worship for private prayer under physical distancing	Amber – limit services and sizes of congregations linked to ability to maintain physical distancing	Green – all places open with full range of services, alongside physical distancing
Registrar Offices closed – weddings and registration of births suspended. Registration of deaths under revised protocols.		Registration Office now open (as of 26 <sup>th</sup> June 2020) for birth registration, death registration, marriage/civil partnerships with limited numbers in attendance to maintain social distance. Registration of deaths under revised protocols.	
Limitations on attendance at funerals and enhanced cleaning regimes		Limitations on attendance at funerals and enhanced cleaning regimes	
Temporary closure of graveyards and crematoria	Graveyards and crematoria open with social distancing measures in place		

**OBJECTIVE:** To work with Public Service Board partners to identify the wider impacts of the pandemic on the communities of Neath Port Talbot and the collective action needed to address those impacts; and

**LEAD:** Chief Executive

Lockdown	Red	Amber	Green
Work within the South Wales Local Resilience Forum			Exit from South Wales Resilience Forum
	Convene PSB to agree process to work towards recovery and commission initial community impact assessment	Further develop community impact assessment	Establish ongoing arrangements for community involvement, data, research and evaluation
		Agree initial areas for action	Establish full recovery plan within Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act Framework

**OBJECTIVE:** To ensure the Council can mobilise a speedy an effective emergency response should infection rates increase.

**LEAD:** Chief Executive

Tudalen52

Lockdown	Red	Amber	Green
Identify organisational capability and capacity needed to respond to level of threat and risk identified in modelling	Workforce audit process to monitor capability and capacity with overview by Workforce Planning Group. Adjust organisational response and contingency plans as threat and risk changes – plan for local outbreak situations as well as wider lockdown scenarios.		
Mobilise resources needed to implement emergency measures needed	Workforce data capture (including skills audit) to support workforce planning processes and to enable rapid deployment of resourcing to reflect changes to the threat and risk identified by modelling. Agreed framework in place to facilitate this.		
Ensure democratic oversight of emergency response			
Ensure effective governance to assess and record financial and organisational impact of emergency measures			
Communicate and escalate issues where appropriate			

## NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

#### REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES

23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020

#### SECTION A – MATTER FOR SCRUTINY

**WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

#### **Finance and Corporate Services Directorate service response during Covid-19 Pandemic**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

To provide members of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the status of the Finance and Corporate Services Directorate and the work undertaken by the directorate during the Covid-19 pandemic.

##### **2. Background**

As members are aware on the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Wales Regulations 2020 came into force, which placed significant restrictions of service delivery within the Finance and Corporate Services Directorate.

All services were required to adapt, not only to the concept of working remotely but also to develop new ways of meeting service delivery but also implement, often on short notice, programmes of work necessary to meet the requirement on local authorities during the emergency period and often develop new services to meet required needs.

The aim of this report is to provide an overview to members of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, the status of each service area and an overview of work that has been undertaken to date by these sections. To assist members, key service information in respect of each service area is also provided with this report.

### 3 Service Overview

#### 3.1 Legal Services Division

##### Key Service Information

**Monitoring Officer** - To ensure that the Council, its officers and its elected Councillors maintain the highest standards of conduct in all they do, as prescribed in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

**Litigation** - To provide advice to the directorates of the Council in respect of all contentious issues and providing advice in respect of Licensing, Employment Law, Environmental Law, Environmental Health and Public Protection, Rights of Way, Freedom of Information and Data Protection, Adult Social Services, Enforcement and Prosecutions, Education and any other contentious areas.

**Property and Corporate** - To undertake all non-contentious legal work in respect of the Council's Estate Management functions and to undertake the preparation of all statutory agreements including Highway, Planning Agreements, Commons Registration Work and other property related matters.

**Business Administration** – To provide support to the Legal Services section in all areas of business administration and to assist the Finance and Corporate Services and Chief Executive Directorates with information governance responsibilities and complaints.

**Land Charges** – To maintain the Local Land Charges Register and to provide Solicitors, Conveyancers and prospective purchasers or sellers of a named property or piece of land within Neath Port Talbot, with information by means of a local authority property search document

**Information Governance** – To provide advice and support to the Council in respect of information security and data protection issues.

**Legal Safeguarding** - To advise the Social Services Directorate on all aspects relating to its social services functions including safeguarding, adult social services and child protection issues.

**Corporate Procurement** – To set out best practice for procurement across the Council, ensuring that all procurement activities operate within the context of value for money, efficiency and continuous improvement. The team supports the Council's aims and objectives and undertakes the legal work in relation to all of the Council's commercial arrangements and supporting the Council in corporate tenders and use and availability of the procurement frameworks issued by the National Procurement Service, Crown Commercial Services, etc.

**Licensing** – To oversee the licensing and enforcement functions of the Council in accordance with the applicable licensing laws, with the accountable manager acting as the Commons Registration Officer

**Registrars Service** - undertake all registration services for births, marriages (including civil partnerships) and deaths in accordance with registration laws.

**Mailroom** – To oversee the mail related functions of the Council and the provision of a courier service to Council buildings and other venues as and when requested.

#### Work during Covid-19 Emergency Period

#### **Monitoring Officer**

As well as all legal work and management of the Legal Section, the Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer also sits on the Council's Incident Management Group. Work has also been ongoing to consider the implementation of the recent legislation produced by UK and Welsh Government because of the pandemic, with a particular focus being on the facilitation of Council decision making during the pandemic.

#### **Litigation**

The Litigation team have worked remotely since March 2020, advising on the enforcement issues the Council faces as a result of Covid-19, facilitating traffic orders to ensure safety of the public in town centres and other areas, employment matters on redeployment/furlough, education matters as a result of school

closures and now reopening, rights of way closures, debt recovery, data protection matters and freedom of information queries,

Officers have also ensured the smooth running of ongoing Council litigation and contentious matters.

The local criminal and county courts adopted a system for case management during the pandemic where court hearings were limited to key decisions required, for example bail hearings or individuals remanded in custody. As of the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020, Council matters are now being heard in court once more and work is ongoing to complete any outstanding prosecutions.

### **Property and Corporate**

The Property and Corporate team have also worked remotely, with limited presence in the office to facilitate the completion of complex property transactions, which are still required to be prepared in hard copy.

The team have continued to keep all complex property/planning transactions proceeding as well as providing advice and assistance on the recent project work undertaken by the Council because of the pandemic, for example the property documentation required as part of the construction of the Field Hospital in Llandarcy and arrangements to assist in the Council's homelessness strategy

### **Business Administration**

The Business Administration section have worked from home but have since recommenced limited office working since the 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 to facilitate the general administrative functions of the service.

They have assisted at all times in the provision of administrative support to the Legal Section. Officers have coordinated the supply of PPE for the Legal Section, undertaken the payment of invoices and coordinated any Freedom of Information Requests, Subject Access Requests and Complaints.



Work has also been ongoing during this period to prepare for the migration of the Legal Services Case Management System to a new provider in October 2020.

## **Land Charges**

The Land Charges officers have worked from home during the pandemic with occasional visits to the office to facilitate certain aspects of the service i.e. the issue of search results and to check plans that are not held digitally.

Although the number of land charge searches being received has dropped slightly they are now starting to increase because of restrictions in respect of home moving being relaxed by the Welsh Government.

Since March 2020, officers have processed 242 official searches (compared to 525 in 2019 for the same period).

Officers were also able to develop a system to provide personal searches given the Port Talbot Civic Centre has been closed to public access whereas other authorities did not provide such a service. Officers have processed 118 personal searches (compared to 289 in 2019 for the same period).

Work is now ongoing to further develop the service by the conversion of hard copy documents to electronic versions

## **Information Governance**

The Information Governance officers have worked remotely from home during the pandemic. The team consists of two officers though one officer has recently been seconded to the Safe and Well Service until the end of August 2020.

The team have advised on all matters concerning data protection and information security and governance during the pandemic, for example the establishment of data sharing processes with organisations such as Public Health Wales, Welsh Government, and Business Wales to assist in the arrangements put in place in other sections in respect of their service changes. They have also led in the development of new privacy notices (due to new ways of

holding data) and the preparation of data protection impact assessments.

As a result of the usage of new software and technology, the officers have also liaised with the Digital Services team to ensure information governance and data protections are considered at all times.

To date compliance with data protection laws has been extremely positive during the pandemic with no breach reports being submitted to the Information Commissioners Office

### **Legal Safeguarding**

The team have also worked remotely during the emergency period.

Legislation in respect of social services provision was amended by the UK and Welsh Governments by virtue of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and officers have advised the Social Services directorate of all new requirements and obligations throughout the emergency period.

Advice has also been provided on all areas of work in respect of safeguarding via the legal surgeries that are held between officers of the legal section and social services directorate.

All ongoing safeguarding cases have continued to be progressed within the statutory times and procedure laid down by the courts.

Court hearings in respect of public law childcare matters and adult safeguarding matters are now being dealt with remotely by the local Courts, this often being due to the number of parties in such cases meaning physical hearings are often not possible (given the difficulties in social distancing). Work however is presently ongoing to allow for the safe reintroduction of physical court hearings.

### **Corporate Procurement/Commercial**

Officers have worked from home during the emergency period.

As well as the complex work of overseeing procurement and commercial contracts, work has also been ongoing to liaise with the supply chains of the Council to determine the effect that Covid-

19 has had on them. Officers have also advised (in conjunction with finance colleagues) on support available for our suppliers, following guidance introduced by the Welsh Government. Advice has also been provided on contractual obligations through the emergency period to work with our contractors to address contractual issues.

Officers have as well liaised with various sections throughout the Council to consider the sourcing and purchase of PPE for all sections of the Council and liaising with the Welsh Government on the approval of suppliers.

Work is now ongoing with various sections of the Council to commence on programmed procurement activities whilst at the same time liaising with national organisations such as the National Procurement Service to further develop procurement best practice

## **Licensing**

All staff continue to work from home with an occasional physical presence in the office to enable the processing of documents. All members of the public have been directed to a generic email ([licensing@npt.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@npt.gov.uk)), which is being monitored continuously throughout the working day.

All renewal applications for taxi drivers are being processed, with electronic verification of documents for DBS validation continuing. Changes in service provision whilst working remotely have also been introduced, for example, knowledge tests for drivers are being conducted virtually (using Microsoft Teams). All taxi vehicle renewals are being processed, with vehicle safety inspections recommencing on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020.

All applications under the Licensing Act 2003 (for pubs, clubs etc.) continued to be processed, with the first remote Licensing and Gambling Sub Committee being held on the 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Overall premises compliance with the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 has been positive across Neath Port Talbot and regular inspections are undertaken to ensure compliance. With restrictions, having been relaxed in respect of the opening of licensed premises on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020, the workload of the Licensing Team has increased as further enforcement and

inspections take place in cooperation with other stakeholders such as South Wales Police.

All other applications such as Commons Registration and Street Trading Licences have continued without disruption.

### **Registrars Service**

On the advice of the General Register Office and the Welsh Government, all marriage/civil partnerships and citizenship ceremonies were cancelled from March 2020 onwards. However, because of restrictions now being relaxed and guidance being made available by the Welsh Government, the provision of marriages and civil partnerships have now recommenced at the Register Office (with the first such ceremony taking place on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020). Work is presently ongoing to rearrange dates that were required to be postponed to new dates and Cabinet agreed in June 2020 to waive any amendment booking fees that may be necessary to facilitate this. At present, ceremonies are only taking place at the Register Office (the first taking place on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020) with a limited number present (due to the size of the venue) but ongoing work is being undertaken with the approved premises in the locality to allow ceremonies to take place at those venues.

The General Register Office also advocated the suspension of birth registrations during this period, given that birth registrations have to be undertaken face to face. This meant that 124 birth registrations in the locality could not take place. The legislation has now since being changed to allow elements of the birth registration to be undertaken remotely meaning the level of physical contact that is required with individuals is now limited (only required to attend to sign the birth certificate). With some alterations being made to the premises to provide additional safeguarding to staff, the birth registration process re-commenced on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2020, with the Neath Port Talbot Register Office being one of the first in Wales to do this. As of the date of this report, 51 births have now been registered.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 identified that changes were required to facilitate the death registration service and changes were made to allow this process to take place by telephone. This allowed all processing of such forms to be dealt with electronically or verbally (instead of having to be produced in person) which has had a very

positive impact on the service to the extent that consideration is underway nationally whether to retain these temporary changes. Since March 2020, the Registration Office has registered 387 deaths (with 64 being Covid-19 related), this being compared to a figure of 261, in the same period in 2019.

### **Mailroom**

The dedicated mailroom and courier staff have continued to work from Port Talbot Civic Centre during the pandemic. As well as dealing with all incoming and outgoing mail (which has seen an increase because of increased public awareness and the provision of material for the safe and well service), they have also recommenced a courier service to members to assist in the participation in remote meetings. In order to assist other sections throughout the Council who are remote working a printing service has also been developed where sections are able to refer documents for printing to the service that are then subsequently mailed out.

### **Margam Crematorium**

The work of Margam Crematorium is overseen by the Joint Committee of Margam Crematorium and a report on service provision during the Covid-19 Emergency Period was placed before the Joint Committee on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020.

## **3.2 Human Resources Division**

### Key service information

#### **Human Resources**

The **3 Professional Teams** are comprised of CIPD qualified HR Officers and managed by the 3 FTE HR Managers of the Division providing professional, specialist support for the most complex and difficult aspects of managing people and in maintaining employee relations, consultation and negotiating arrangements with trade unions. This includes putting in place the necessary employment framework, e.g. policies and procedures, etc to ensure the Council is legally compliant as an employer. The team have a key role to play in support the management of change across the Council, including change linked to the Council's financial situation.

Included within these teams are 3 posts dedicated to supporting sickness; one of these is funded by schools.

The **HR Employment Support Team** provide the administrative services to the Council that are associated with employment, including recruitment administration, pre-employment and safe recruitment checks, employment contract administration, etc and as well as providing basic HR information and advice. This team also has the important role of supporting redeployment activity, and providing advice and guidance to those at risk of redundancy. The team has now embraced the use of robotics technology to support service delivery.

The small **HR Workforce Information Team** support workforce data management, establishment control and provision of workforce data internally and externally and support workforce planning activity across the Council.

### **Seconded Trade Union Officers (UNISON / GMB)**

The number of trade union representatives who are seconded is a matter that is discussed and agreed annually with the respective trade unions and within the available budget.

### **Learning, Training and Development**

The team provide learning, training and development services to the Council as well as private and voluntary social care providers in the County Borough. The majority of employees in the team are funded through, and employed in line with, the Welsh Government's grant for the Social Care Workforce Development Programme, as well as match funding – services are largely focused therefore on training and developing the social care workforce.

A small corporate team of training officers provide focused training support to the rest of the Council in identified priority areas, for example, Health & Safety related training with Environment and the digital skills development of the workforce.

### **Occupational Health & Safety**

The **Health and Safety** team deliver services in line with Health and Safety legislation and operate safety management systems. This helps minimise risks to health and safety by ensuring that they

are effectively controlled, managed and minimised. The team ensure that the necessary framework is in place through the provision of policy, procedure, advice, guidance and support where necessary, as well as supporting accident investigations. This team also provides support to the Council's Safety Advisory Group, which ensures safe event planning for special events held within the County Borough.

The role of **Occupational Health** is to provide management and employees with the medical advice required to support the management of attendance, reduce the impact of ill health and sickness absence within the workplace and to promote a safe and healthy working environment.

### **Emergency Planning**

This small team ensures that the Council can comply with obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (policies, plans and exercises). The team assess local risks in order to identify what we need to plan for, write and review emergency plans, work with other key organisations to enhance the management of an emergency, ensure that the Council has plans in place to deliver important services to the public during an emergency (Business Continuity Plans), share important information with local organisations to enhance emergency preparedness and provide a 24 hours, 365 days a year on call service to help in the management of a major emergency. The Health & Safety team also provide support to this on call service.

### Work during Covid-19 Emergency Period

The majority of employees across the service have been reorganised to ensure that critical services have continued to be delivered throughout the emergency. In the main, staff across the service are now working from home. This ensured that:

- Council staff continue to be paid
- Key actions to support the Council's response to the Covid-19 emergency have been delivered
- Recruitment to critical posts has continued
- Office telephones have been diverted to mobile phones ensuring that managers and employees can contact officers from across the service to seek advice and support as necessary

- Activity has moved online where this has been appropriate and possible and this has reduced disruption in key employment processes
- Case work (discipline, grievance, etc), management of change, etc that commenced pre-lock down, has been progressed and resolved where it has been possible to do so
- Digital technology has enabled supervision “1 to 1s”, and team meetings to take place, reducing the isolation of team members
- The Council’s emergency planning processes can be activated as and when necessary (and this has proved necessary).

We have risk assessments in place for the circumstances in which officers do need to attend the workplace; this includes health and safety officers undertaking site visits, training officers delivering critical training (and where it cannot be delivered online or via an alternative method) and for any staff across the services who need to visit the office in the Quays to e.g. collect post, print documentation or ID badges, etc. Risk assessments have been shared and agreed with trade unions.

In addition to “work as usual” activity, the following key strategies were implemented to support the Covid-19 emergency response:

1. To support the **redeployment** of employees who are fit and able, and who cannot work from home. Working with other Heads of Service to establish critical skills shortages, and organising the safe redeployment and **urgent recruitment** of staff to plug the gaps, ensuring risk assessments and safe systems of work are in place and induction and necessary training provided. This has included actions to provide workforces for the Distribution Centre and the Contact Tracing Service. To date, 242 employees have been redeployed into alternative roles on a temporary basis.
2. To support the **safety of employees who have remained in workplaces** and to develop processes to ensure **the safe return of some employees to workplaces** where it has been risk assessed as appropriate. This has included developing risk assessments and safe systems of working, including advice and guidance on the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The trade unions have worked with the Health & Safety team to support the development of safe working practices and have supported the messaging around this to the workforce - this has helped provide reassurance to the Council’s employees. We have also focused



on the mental health support available to employees, particularly those at the front line. The Council's Communications Team have developed innovative methods of communicating these measures to employees including video messaging from the Chief Executive and Trade Unions, a cartoon video to demonstrate health and safety measures, and a virtual tour the Quays to help employees understand what to expect when they attend the office.

3. To support the **safety of employees working at home**. This has included the development of a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Application to enable employees to risk assess their home working environment and provide a report to managers for appropriate action to ensure the safety of our employees. We have also developed resources for line managers now managing remote workforces, on line training and development and mental health support.
4. To manage **employees relations**, working with the Trade Unions in social partnership. This has included developing guidance for employees to implement Welsh Government and Public Health Wales guidance for employers, and National Joint Council circulars. We have also worked with the trade unions to develop local employment strategies to ensure the continued health and safety of our employees. We have sought to develop joint messaging with the trade unions, in order to provide employees with both consistent information and reassurance. Our seconded trade union officers have worked, mainly from home, throughout the emergency, as well as actively participating in volunteer redeployment, with 3 of the seconded officers helping out in the Distribution Centre.
5. To establish **Well-being and Mental Health** support for employees (see Section below for a summary of this activity).
6. To manage **workforce communications**, working with the Council's Communications team to ensure clear messaging and appropriate guidance, evolving with the changing situation.
7. To support the Council's Incident Management Team and Recovery Group. The **Emergency Planning** Team has been fully supporting both groups, providing cover 7 days a week, working tirelessly throughout the emergency.

Members can refer to the following resources that have been developed by officers from across the service and working with colleagues in Digital Services and the Communications team:

### **Coronavirus – Staff Information**

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/staff>

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/22499>

### **Staff Health and Well-being**

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/22793>

### **Return to Workplaces Information**

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/23777>

### **Homeworking resources**

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/24395>

### **Online training resources**

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/22632>

These resources are updated as the situation evolves.

### **Mental health and well-being support during Covid-19 emergency**

This sets out a summary of the health and well-being support that has been made available to employees since March 2020.

### **Staff Health & Well-being website**

This was launched on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020 via Gov Notify message from the Chief Executive. Accessible inside and outside the Council, via range of digital devices, including personal smartphones. Provides support on a range of topics including:

- Look after your body (NHS Fitness Studio with gym led exercise videos, links to range of health websites, e.g. Action on Smoking and Health, Change4Life website, resources include food facts, tips, sugar swaps, recipes, and activities to help families be healthier and happier, etc)

- Wellbeing Resources to support mental health (includes online Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Course, online stress management course, NHS Coping Exercises, etc).
- Working from home (Desk set up, posture, mobility, stretching)
- Helplines and support services (Samaritans, Wellbeing Through Work, The Silver Line, MIND, etc).
- Advice for families and children (range of resource packs)
- Bereavement (resources from AtaLoss, CRUSE, MIND, etc)
- Carers (links to Carers UK and Carers Trust)
- Domestic Abuse (Welsh Women's Aid, South Wales Police, You are Not Alone)
- Guidance for Line Managers, to help them support the health and wellbeing of their employees (CIPD tips on managing remote workers, tips for healthy home working, etc)
- Online training courses have proved particularly popular, with 1,040 courses completed between 23<sup>rd</sup> March and 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020. This includes mandatory training e.g. safeguarding, GDPR VAWDASV, as well as occupation specific training courses, Welsh at Work, Managing your Finances, Digital training, including TEAMS and Online Basics.

### **Online First Aid for Mental Health course**

Prior to the Covid-19 emergency we had started to roll out this certificated course, provided face to face by Neath College to groups of around 20 at a time. The LT&D team have worked with Neath College to develop this into an online webinar, which is also certificated. 83 employees have completed this certificate since the online course was launched in June 2020.

### **Occupational Health Unit Helpline for employees**

Monday to Friday, office hours provision providing advice and signposting to employees.

### **Wellbeing Through Work**

The Council has been able to access this service, the mental health and wellbeing service provided to NHS employees. This provides a wide range of support on both physical and mental

health well-being including referral to specialist support services. This onward referral includes Trauma Support for those who encounter traumatic experiences.

### **Occupational Health Unit Referral Helpline**

A referral service for managers to deal with critical OH matters. We are developing plans to recover OH Physician Clinics to The Quays subject to risk assessment and recovery planning.

### **Communications focus on wellbeing**

Mental health and wellbeing feature regularly in employee communications, including the Intranet, HR SWAY and In the Loop. Promotion of Mental Health Awareness Week in May, with the 'Kindness Initiative' and "5 Ways to Wellbeing".

### **Mindfulness Course**

In partnership with UNISON and funded by WULF, this 4 week online course was offered to 2 cohorts of employees throughout June.

### **Return to workplaces following Covid-19 lockdown / Home working guidance**

Risk assessments and manager guidance refer to the emotional well-being impact of the return to workplaces and working at home, as well as the physical arrangements that are necessary.

### **Anti-Stigma Talks**

Delivered by Time to Change Wales, aimed at raising awareness of mental health stigma in the workplace. These will be provided online throughout the summer months.

## **3.3 Finance Division**

### Key Service Information

**Accountancy Services** – Includes maintenance of the financial ledger, budget preparation and monitoring, Statement of Accounts, Treasury Management (where we manage £300m of borrowing and £60m of investments), Insurance, Court Deputy Service.

**Internal Audit** – Produce, on average, over 65 formal audit reports per year and ensure good governance arrangements across Council Services.

**Exchequer** – We make 80,000 salary payments and more than 74,000 creditor payments a year.

**Debt Collection and Cashiering** – The Miscellaneous Income section administers c£35m of debts, whilst the Cashiering section deals with 1,900 transactions per week.

**Business Rates** – The service deals with the billing and collection of c£42m from more than 4,200 commercial properties. It also manages the collection of funds for the Neath Business Improvement District (BID); and with effect from 2020/21 the newly established Port Talbot BID.

**Council Tax** – The service deals with the billing and collection of £74m from more than 65,000 properties.

**Benefits** – This section handles the assessment and payment of £45m to 10,000 tenants and approximately £18m in Council Tax Support to some 17,000 council tax payers.

**Social Care Assessments** – This service provides assessment for all Social Care clients and payment of £34m to people for social care services.

### Work during Covid-19 Emergency Period

Finance staff are in the main working effectively from home with full access to the required IT and telephony kit. On rare occasions, members of the team visit the Civic offices to carry out particular functions which cannot be performed from home but these are by exception only.

The ability of the Council's Digital Services team to work at pace to facilitate homeworking has meant that the Finance Division has been able to carry on providing services to customers in as normal a fashion as possible.

The only exception to the above is the Internal Audit Service where the team has been temporarily re-deployed to manage and resource the newly established critical Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) Service. The team will start to return to their substantive roles from the middle of August and all will have returned by September.

Throughout the pandemic the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and the Finance Division has worked closely with Welsh Government Officials, the Society of Welsh Treasurers, Distribution Sub Group and the WLGA. This has involved collating information and data for various returns, sharing best practice and developing and designing systems for delivering emergency policy initiatives often at little or no notice.

The following paragraphs provide some additional detail in relation to specific areas of the service.

### **Finance and Accountancy**

The Council's Draft Statement of Accounts for 2019/20 was prepared during the lockdown and forwarded to Audit Wales by the beginning of June in line with the pre Covid timetable. The Draft Accounts were reported to Audit Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> June and the audit process is nearing completion. The final version of the Accounts will be reported to Audit Committee by the original pre Covid statutory deadline of 15<sup>th</sup> September.

In addition to the normal day job the accountancy teams have been required to prepare returns for the Welsh Government and WLGA both in relation to actual and forecast additional expenditure and lost income. This work has been crucial in terms of ensuring that the appropriate evidence and audit trails are in place so that the Council can maximise drawdown of funding from the WG Hardship Fund(s). As part of the emergency response the Accountancy team and Financial Assessments team have worked alongside the Social Services Commissioning team to agree and process additional payments to Care Homes ensuring that they could continue to provide care during the ongoing Pandemic

In order to ensure compliance with Welsh Government funding rules the team were required to develop new ways of recording and coding expenditure in relation to both Covid-19 emergency

costs and also costs incurred developing and running the TTP service.

Work is also ongoing to develop mechanisms for implementing the Welsh Government's policy to pay £500 to all eligible workers in the social care sector. This work is not only in relation to ensuring that Council employees receive the £500 they are entitled to but also working with private residential and domiciliary care providers to ensure that their staff receive the payment; and also finding a way to determine and pay eligible Personal Assistants.

The teams also prepared detailed estimates as to the forecast year-end financial projections for income and expenditure which fed into the Budget Update report presented to Cabinet on 25<sup>th</sup> June with further update reports to be published from September 2020 onwards.

## **Council Tax**

The Council Tax team have been working from home and have been busy assisting tax payers affected financially by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Some of the help being offered to tax payers has included:

- Signposting them to the Council Tax Support Scheme (over 500 new claimants since 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020).
- Deferring payments for 2 months upon request
- Spreading payments over 12 months if initially paying over 10
- Lowering April and May instalments and spread balance June to March 21

All formal Council Tax recovery has been suspended during the pandemic however 'soft reminder' letters have recently been issues to tax payers who have fallen behind on their payments to encourage them to get in touch with the team.

## **Business Rates**

The Business Rates team is made up of four members of staff three of whom work part time. This team have been impacted on significantly due to new work demands over and above the norm

during this period. At the start of the pandemic the Welsh Government announced a new NNDR Rate Relief scheme for businesses operating in the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Sectors. The team worked tirelessly to ensure that this new relief to the value of c£7.7m was applied to 455 eligible accounts so that businesses received the correct bills for 2020/21 before the beginning of April.

The team have also been responsible for implementing the Welsh Government's NDR Grant schemes, these being:

- £10,000 grant for all businesses in receipt of Small Business Rates Relief
- £10,000 grant for businesses with a Rateable Value (RV) less than £12,000 in receipt of charitable rates relief and operating in the retail, leisure or hospitality (RLH) sectors
- £25,000 grant for business with an RV of between £12,001 and £51,000 operating in the RLH Sectors

Implementation of this scheme involved working with Digital Services to design an online application portal, targeting eligible businesses and then verifying applications received. The team will have been responsible for the payment of c2,500 grants supporting businesses to the tune of c£30m. Support in relation to this work has also been received from colleagues in Business Services of the Regeneration and Economic Development Section.

### **Exchequer Payroll and Creditors**

The Exchequer Teams have working from home to ensure that Employees, Members and Creditors continue to get paid on time.

The teams have been required to develop new ways of paperless working in extremely short and challenging timescales to ensure that payments can continue to be made in a timely and accurate fashion whilst ensuring adequate controls are in place.

In addition two Members of the payroll team have been seconded to work on the development of a new HR/Payroll system which is due to be implemented with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. Whilst proving a challenge due to the nature of remote working the project is currently on track and all milestones are being met.



## **Internal Audit**

The majority of the Internal Audit team have been re-deployed to set up, manage and resource the critical Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) Service. The TTP service is vital to the Country's ability to begin relaxing lockdown rules and allowing parts of the economy to start to recover.

The Internal Audit team will return to their substantive posts over the course of the summer and all team members will have returned to Internal Audit by September. An updated Internal Audit Plan will be presented to Members of Audit Committee in September. During the early stage of lockdown the service provided advice and support for implementing new controls for new ways of working and most recently 1.5 FTE staff have continued to undertake audit work including reviewing NFI data outputs.

## **Housing Benefits and Financial Assessments**

Benefits and Assessments staff have carried on performing their substantive roles from home. Benefits staff have been assisting tax payers affected by Covid-19 to apply for Council Tax Support and providing advice and signposting to other available support services.

Financial Assessments staff have been working with Social Services Commissioning Unit to assess and ensure that care providers receive the appropriate additional financial support during the pandemic so as to continue to be able to care for some of the most vulnerable and high risk members of our society.

## **Cash Receipting and Sundry Debtors**

Despite the closure of the main Civic Buildings the Cashiers and Debtors team have continued to work mainly from home but on some occasions from the office. The cashiers have been processing income received into the Council's bank account and cheques received by post ensuring that individual tax payers and other accounts are kept up to date. The Debtors team have continued to raise invoices and deal with queries from the public ensuring that any income due to the Council is collected.

## **Court Deputy Service**

The Court Deputy Service provides a service to vulnerable people who in the view of the Courts cannot manage their own financial affairs. This includes the distribution of cash allowances to some of them on a weekly basis. At the outset of the pandemic emergency arrangements were put in place to ensure that these vulnerable individuals were able to receive their allowances which they rely on to purchase life's essentials. The team worked with Social Services colleagues to put individual arrangements in place such as arranging to pay cash allowances to clients' support workers ensuring that no client was without their allowance.

## **4 Crime and Disorder Impact**

The Council has a legal duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to carry out all its various functions with "due regard to the need to prevent Crime and Disorder in its area". All service delivery is considered with this in mind.

## **5 Integrated Impact Assessment**

There is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment for this report.

## **6 Workforce Impacts**

See main body of report on cumulative impacts to staff as a result of Covid-19 pandemic and work undertaken.

## **7 Consultation**

There is no requirement for external consultation on this report.

## **8 Risk Management**

The Finance and Corporate Services have adapted to current working restrictions and sought to implement service delivery that aims to meet the financial and corporate needs of the Council as well as implementing systems and programmes of work to benefit the Neath Port Talbot locality during the current emergency period. Without such arrangement the Council would have been unable to

fulfil key services that have been necessary during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **9 Recommendation**

It is recommended that Members review and scrutinise the content of this report.

## **10 Appendices**

None

## **11 Background Papers**

None

## **12 Officer Contact**

For further information on this report item, please contact:

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Mae'r dudalen hon yn fwriadol wag