

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board

Report of the Head of Property & Regeneration Simon Brennan

17th July 2020

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARD(S) All

Property and Regeneration – Current Service Delivery and Recovery Planning

Purpose of Report

To seek Members with an update on activity since the outbreak of Covid 19, the impact that it has had on services to date and how these services will be provided going forward.

Executive Summary

This report sets out the impact of Covid 19 on the Property & Regeneration service; progress on key areas of work; how the service has adapted; which parts of the service have had to stop; and what will happen to the Service as we move in to the recovery phase.

Background

The Property & Regeneration Service comprises Architectural and Project Management; Strategic Funding; Estates and Valuation; and Regeneration & Economic Development.

The majority of the staff are based in The Quays, with staff also based at The Workstation and Sandfields Business Centre. In addition, there are a

number of staff in Facilities Management working across the County Borough.

The rapid escalation of the Covid-19 issue in March led to the decision that all staff should work from home and several services were initially suspended whilst the health and safety implications were considered.

Staff Response

The staff response to the Covid crisis has been generally exceptional. They have responded well to working at home and have worked hard to ensure that services can continue to be delivered, wherever possible, and new challenges have been met.

Sickness levels have been low. Whilst several staff have been 'shielding', due to their underlying health conditions, or to care for vulnerable relatives, the remaining staff have often been working long hours but have delivered great progress within their work areas

An update for each service area, together with service issues experienced, and the next stages, as we move in to 'recovery' are set out below.

Project Management and Architectural Services

The majority of staff were already 'home enabled' and were therefore able to continue to operate albeit with some limitations in respect of the IT functionality available.

Field Hospital.

Members will be aware of the conversion of the 'Llandarcy Institute of Sport' in to a field hospital. In an outstanding team effort, and working very long hours, our staff delivered the 330 bed Covid 19 facility in 22 days following an approach by SBUHB. The conversion of the indoor sports hall, the indoor 2G playing field and a fitness suite into three hospital wards was undertaken to treat an expected surge in the number of patients with Covid 19.

Instructions to proceed were received from SBUHB on 30th March 2020, site work started on the 1st April 2020 and all work was completed

on the 22nd April 2020. Due to the urgent requirement to establish this hospital facility Andrew Scott Ltd were directly appointed as the main contractor because they were already working on a similar facility for Carmarthenshire Council, they were familiar with the work required and were able to source the appropriate materials and supply chain sub-contractors at very short notice. An urgency action was approved in respect of this appointment. The hospital is expected to remain available for use until late October 2020. The council will then be required to arrange to convert it back to a sports facility.

Schools.

Many of the major schools projects have continued on site, albeit with social distancing and mitigation measures in place.

Site work at Cefn Saeson has continued to progress with Morgan Sindall contractors throughout the pandemic period and the building is expected to be watertight by the end of August 2020. As a result of Covid the contractor has had to take additional H&S precautions on site such as the provision of an additional canteen facility and the restriction of some working practices together with additional cleaning and site signage to ensure that site workers can maintain safe distancing protocols at all times. There is an additional cost for this which is currently anticipated to be circa £300k.

A design and build contract has been awarded to Andrew Scott Ltd for the third and final phase of work at YGG Ystalyfera. Planning approval has been granted and enabling work to demolish an existing teaching block is underway. The detailed design of the new block is more or less complete and work package prices are currently being received in order to establish the total construction cost and to enter into a formal build contract in time for the new building work to start on site in September/October 2020.

Design work is largely completed at Abbey Primary school but the anticipated construction cost currently exceeds the available budget. Talks are ongoing with the Design and build contractor, education colleagues and WG to decide whether to provide additional funding or whether to re-tender the work with a view to obtaining a better tender from an alternative contractor.

An Outline Business Case (OBC) has been submitted to WG seeking to vary the grant funding for Cwmtawe Primary school.

A further 4No school conversion projects have also been awarded during the Covid period at YGG Pontardawe, YGG Tyler Ynn, YGG Rhosafan and YGG Cwmllynfell as part of WG funding initiative to promote the use of the Welsh language.

The Plaza.

A contract has been awarded to BAM construction for The Plaza. Site work commenced on the 29th June 2020 and is expected to be completed by October 2021. The early stage work comprises the removal of asbestos, soft strip and the demolition of the rear building whilst carefully retaining the listed front façade. Prior to demolition the contractor will install a façade retention and after demolition work will commence on ground clearance at the rear to establish concrete foundations for the new building.

8 Wind Street, Neath.

A contract has been awarded to Knox and Wells to refurbish this property. The rear annexe has been demolished and the existing building has been stripped out to prepare for re-instatement work.

Crown Buildings (Metalbox)

Andrew Scott Ltd have been working on this building for some time converting and refurbishing the existing office accommodation into large modern open plan office areas on three floors. The works programme and budget has been affected by the Covid pandemic and the site was closed for approximately one month whilst the contractor re-assessed safe working protocols. Work has recommenced however it has been a difficult project and there have been additional costs incurred as a result of unforeseen work but the contract is now getting to the finishes stage and the contract will be completed by November 2020.

In addition to the above projects, work has been progressing on Neath Town Centre, Swansea Bay Tech Centre, Steel Science Centre, Cefn Coed Visitor Centre, Resolven WC, Aquasplash, and St Oswald's.

Delivering these projects remotely and with the team separated geographically has not been without its challenges but staff have adapted and improvised and are currently undertaking all work that is required.

As we move towards recovery, there will be a need to reassess the IT kit provided to staff to improve the work process.

Strategic Funding

This team was partially 'home-working' prior to the pandemic and was therefore able to transition seamlessly in to full-time home-working. The focus in the past three months has been progressing the City Deal proposals whilst supporting the regeneration programme.

Homes as Power Stations

This regional project is due to be submitted to UK and Welsh Governments by end of July for formal review. A Project Assessment Review was carried out in June 2020 with the recommendation that the project is approved by the UK and Welsh Governments. A Project Board will be established, with Terms of Reference, supported by a technical advisory group. The Covid-19 economic impact assessment has been carried out for the City Deal Joint Committee and it has been identified that the project is well placed to support the green recovery of the economy and society post C-19.

Supporting Innovation and Low Carbon Growth

This project is due to be submitted to UK and Welsh Governments during September 2020 for formal review. A Project Assessment Review was carried out in June 2020 with the recommendation that the projects are worked up in greater detail by Sept 2020. A Project Board will be established with Terms of Reference, supported by a technical advisory group. A Covid-19 economic impact assessment has, once again, been carried out for the City Deal Joint Committee. This project will also support the green recovery of the economy and society post C-19.

As we move towards 'recovery' the role of the team will be critical as we seek to secure the funding necessary to re-build the local economy by undertaking major projects that are capable of delivering long term economic growth.

Regeneration & Economic Development.

During the crisis created by the virus, the Regeneration & Economic Development team have continued to supply a service, and indeed, due to the nature and impact of Covid-19 on the economy, sections of the service have seen significant increases in demand. For example, the Business Team have helped to process funding applications to over 6,000 businesses across the County Borough, distributing approximately £31,000,000 in support. The team continues to help new start-up businesses via welsh Government grants, and are also able to assist those local businesses who are still looking to expand or invest via our own Business support grants. In addition, the Enterprise Clubs for those looking to set up on their own continue to be held, albeit in a 'virtual' format. Sandfields Business Centre has remained open throughout, in order that tenants are able to access their facilities there when needed.

The Regeneration team has been able to function relatively normally, and continues to process grant applications and funding for a pipeline of existing and forthcoming projects, such as the Plaza cinema, Crown Foods, 8 Wind St. and the Neath town centre redevelopment. The Economic Development team also continues to explore all enquiries and assist wherever possible with ongoing inward investment opportunities.

Because of the negative impact on the employment situation, the Workways+ team has not surprisingly seen a huge surge in activity and enquiries, as you would expect. In the first six months of this year, they have dealt with nearly 900 referrals in Neath port Talbot area alone, which is well over double those received for the same period in the previous year. Although the Workstation remains closed, and face-to-face interaction is not possible, the team remains in contact with

participants throughout, and continues to provide a vital service to our community and businesses.

We continue to support our town centres, and help them and the businesses within them re-open and re-emerge as and when they are able to, although footfall remains down on normal, and trading likewise is reportedly very slow for now. 'Light touch' mitigation measures were introduced in to Port Talbot, Neath, and Pontardawe town centres to enable safe pedestrian movement. In addition, during the initial phase, staff were located within the town centres to assist visitors and businesses, whilst monitoring for any problems.

The Tourism team, as expected, have had reduced activity in that sector, because of the nature of the 'shut-down', however, they have been providing a vital role in administering the placement of key-workers into temporary accommodation throughout the crisis. As the restrictions on the sector are gradually lifted, the team will ensure that they are there to help those businesses within Tourism to re-open and hopefully fully recover.

Estates and Valuation

Civic Office accommodation

Following the lockdown the offices were effectively closed down apart from accommodating the essential services that could not be delivered remotely eg ICT, street care, finance, facilities etc. As lockdown measures started to ease an office re-occupation group was formed that had input from Property & Regeneration, ICT, HR, H&S and communications. The group worked to develop guidance and risk assessments that could be used as best practise templates, and then altered to suit differing environments. These control measures were then rolled out across the main Civic sites, and in conjunction with the Trade Unions, the Communications team put together a series of videos and infographics to inform staff of the measures that had been implemented. Whilst the advice still remains that, if you can work from home, then you should continue to do so, the above measures have allowed staff to return to the workplace for a variety of reasons.

Cleaning

Corporate cleaning has functioned uninterrupted through the entire lockdown period. The importance of this service came to the fore as cleaning is seen as a key control measure in stopping the spread of Covid-19. With the reduced staff in the offices this allowed for the cleaning staff to work in their designated areas whilst maintaining good social distancing for their own safety. Additional control measures and risk assessments were introduced for both the cleaning staff and office staff safety. In addition different cleaning chemicals were introduced that had anti-viral properties, along with a different emphasis on the cleaning areas such as high touch points eg handrails, light switches etc.

Public toilets

All public toilets in the County Borough closed when the lockdown was announced, and remained closed until the 13th of July when the first phase of their re-opening was undertaken. This phase has concentrated on opening the Town centre and visitor attraction sites. As with Cleaning, additional control measures have been implemented with the sites also receiving enhanced cleaning. All sites have also been fitted with Covid-19 advice signs along with social distancing measures. As this is only the first phase this has been managed within the existing staff resources. However, as we open the other sites, it is anticipated that additional staff costs will be incurred.

Support Small Business Tenants

Recognising the hardship being experienced by our small business tenants through Covid 19 back in late March/early April a list of targeted small business tenants which we considered needed support was agreed.

In early March, it was agreed corporately that the Council would award these tenants a rent-free period for the month of April. This rent free period was then extended for the month of May and more recently for the months of June and July.

It has now been agreed corporately that full rent will be charged wef 1st August 2020 and the tenants have been notified accordingly.

Going forward we will have to work closely with these and the other tenants closely to seek to ensure ongoing and current rent arrears are managed and paid in a timely manner

Since lockdown, all staff have been provided with laptops enabling them to undertake their day-to-day workloads remotely from home albeit that initially there was a delay for some staff until IT could provide the same.

Largely the day-to-day workload and operation of the team has continued throughout the period of lockdown with no loss or reduction in service. A few key staff have attended the office to undertake some of their duties and other have popped in occasionally to pick up files or to deal with specific issues.

Recovery Phase

As lockdown eases there is potential for staff who need to attend the offices to do so, subject to adhering to the mitigation measures that are in place. As noted above, a corporate group has been set up to facilitate both staff returning to the office and the more structured implementation of home-working.

With very limited exceptions, for example the remaining public toilets, all Property and Regeneration services are now functioning. A number of additional work streams associated with Covid-19 recovery have been completed, whilst several are still ongoing.

It is clear that the workplace has changed and the service and staff have adapted accordingly to ensure the continued delivery of services

Financial Impact

No implications.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for information purposes.

Valleys Communities Impacts

No implications.

Workforce Impacts

No implications.

Legal Impacts

No implications.

Risk Management Impacts

No implications.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

To provide an overview of current service provision across the Planning and Public Protection service and to outline how the service will look and function as the Council moves into the recovery phase.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

Not applicable.

Implementation of Decision

Not applicable.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as the report is for information only.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

No implications

Workforce Impact

No implications

Legal Impact

No implications

Risk Management

No implications

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item

Recommendations

That the update report be noted

Reasons for Proposed Decision

Not applicable

Implementation of Decision

Not applicable

Appendices

None

List of Background Papers

None

Officer Contact

For further information on **this report**, please contact **Simon Brennan, Head of Property and Regeneration** on extension **6370**, or e-mail **s.brennan@npt.gov.uk**

