

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

10 December 2020

Chairperson: **Councillor M.Harvey**

Councillors: S.E.Freeguard, S.K.Hunt, D.Keogh, S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Paddison, L.M.Purcell, S.H.Reynolds and A.N.Woolcock

Officers In Attendance: A.Evans, H.Jenkins, C.Davies, C.Griffiths, K.Jones, C.Furlow-Harris, T.Davies, R.Headon, C.Jones, K.Warren, S.Brennan, D.Griffiths, P. Jackson, Clarke, C.Plowman and R Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors C.Clement-Williams, D.Jones, L.Jones, E.V.Latham, P.A.Rees, P.D.Richards and A.Wingrave

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2020 were approved.

2. Verbal Update on Test, Trace and Protect

Members were presented with a verbal update on the Test, Trace and Protect Service (TTP). Before providing a breakdown of the statistics and current overall picture, Officers highlighted that the figures were a snapshot in time of a very dynamic situation and that the numbers were currently increasing.

Local Figures

It was stated that in the Swansea Bay Region over the last seven days the TTP Service had received 2,604 new index cases with almost 5,000 contacts associated with those cases, and in Neath Port

Talbot over the last seven days the TTP Service had received 1,124 new index cases and 2,536 contacts associated with those cases.

Officers added that the epidemiology was showing that there consistently appeared to be more contacts associated with each case in the Neath Port Talbot area than in Swansea.

National Figures

In terms of national figures, it was noted that the seven day case incidence figure identified that Neath Port Talbot was currently the highest in Wales with 697.1 cases per 100,000 population; Merthyr Tydfil was second highest with 668 cases per 100,000 population and Swansea was ranked fifth in Wales with 549.8 cases per 100,000 population.

Test Positivity Figures

Members were informed that Neath Port Talbot was ranked second in Wales for the amount of tests that were identified as positive at 25.5%; Merthyr Tydfil was ranked first with a 28.7% positivity rate and Swansea was at 23%.

Age Group Breakdown

The positive cases were stated to be predominately within the working age population (40-49 year olds and 50-59 year olds); however, in recent weeks there had been an increase in the number of positive cases within the younger age groups (10-19 year olds and 20-29 year olds) which was being closely monitored and analysed.

Clusters and Exposure Locations

The Committee was informed that there were currently 22 care homes in Neath Port Talbot with ongoing outbreaks and that there was a high level of concern over the stability of the care home sector and community care in general; due to this business continuity issues were being experienced at this point in time. It was added that there was a number of clusters in open and closed work place settings across the Country Borough.

Schools

It was highlighted that 27 schools in Neath Port Talbot had reported more than one case in the last 14 days, however this was more likely to be due to the increase of transmission in households; the evidence was continuing to show that there was not wide transmission within the school environment and that much of the transmission within the

school age range was a consequence of what was happening at home and during out of schools activities such as birthday parties and sports training. It was added that although there was transmission in schools, they were generally providing a Covid 19 secure and controlled environment.

Members were informed that the TTP Service had developed strong working relationships with Senior Management within the Councils education department and regular dialogue was taking place between the TTP Service, regional Environmental Health Officers and the Head Teachers.

TTP Resilience

Officers explained that one of the main challenges at the moment for the TTP Service was the extremely high workload which was putting a strain on the service as the staff were struggling with the caseloads; the Council was seeking mutual aid on a daily basis and a national team had been set up whereby requests from Councils across Wales could be submitted, however given the demand across Wales, there was not a huge amount of mutual aid being received. It was added that the service had a finite resource in terms of staff, particularly at the regional level; staff wellbeing was also a concern due to the amount of stress and anxiety and having to deal with difficult situations.

It was mentioned that the service was currently in the midst of a rolling programme of recruitment for tracers, advisors, supervisors and data analysts; there were as many as 80 posts to be filled to achieve what would be regarded as optimum capacity, however logistically it was taking a lot of time to get the right people in the right roles. Officers added that in the interim, they were currently looking to recall staff that were previously redeployed to the service to build resilience in the short term while recruitment continued.

Due to the lack of clear steer coming from Welsh Government in relation to how to deal with the high level of cases received, Officers highlighted that a prioritisation framework was being produced in order to try and efficiently deal with the workload.

Covid 19 Enforcement

A team of Enforcement Officers were noted to have been recruited, working respectively with teams including the TTP Service, Environmental Health and the Councils Licensing department to ensure the public and business premises were complying; Officers

were receiving a lot of positive feedback in terms of that particular group of staff. It was added that the Council and affiliated services were also working closely with the Police to ensure that a coordinated response was delivered.

Communication

In terms of communication, it was noted that the service was working closely with the Council's Communication Team to deliver the current message that individual behaviour was key; the evidence showed that it was lack of compliance of individuals in the home and social settings which was driving up the numbers locally and across Wales. Officers were concerned with the lack of compliance with self-isolation requirements, which was making mitigation measures difficult to develop and implement. The tone of the communication to the public was mentioned to have been recently changed in order to try and challenge people to deliver on their levels of responsibility.

In relation to the Covid 19 enforcement teams, it was asked if Officers could provide examples of the types of action the teams have had to undertake. It was explained that once the regional Environmental Health Officers had gathered intelligence of where there were cases and clusters of cases emerging, they would coordinate with the Enforcement Officers, who would then go out into the community to discuss with the identified workplaces and premises what measures they had in place, to make them aware of what they should be doing, and checking if they were complying with what they should be doing; essentially the Enforcement Officers link up with what the intelligence was showing as the cases emerge and go out into the community to be visible and hold those premises to account.

Members asked that due to the current high levels of cases in Neath Port Talbot, had consideration been given to introducing asymptomatic testing that had recently been implemented across some other Councils in Wales. It was stated that all options had been considered, including community wide testing, however it was not currently seen to be a solution within the local context. Currently testing demand in Neath Port Talbot was significant, with the testing facility in Margam beyond 100% capacity and the mobile testing units similar; Officers were currently looking at potential ways to build upon testing capacity within the area. Members were informed that the Incident Management Team (IMT) had been meeting several times a week looking at the latest data and intelligence in regards to the way in which the virus was behaving in the community, they would then

review the control measures that were currently in place for the whole approach being taken across the region including with communications and enforcement; the IMT would then make recommendations about any further actions that needed to be considered in light of the most recent intelligence. As mentioned, mass testing had been considered within the IMT, however currently the expert advice received from Public Health colleagues was that the mass testing would not help to bring the current size of the problem under control and would stretch the resources that were needed to target at other measures, including supporting the mass vaccination process going forward. Assurance was provided to Members that the control measures were looked at several times a week by a number of people who were involved in the process; a number of points including the need for further restrictions, in order to try and bring the number of cases under control, had been raised with Welsh Government.

It was asked if it could be considered that schools transfer to distanced learning in the lead up to Christmas as even though the number of cases in schools was small, it had the potential to spread to more people which would result in larger groups of individuals having to self-isolate close to the Christmas period; it was speculated that some parents would choose not to send their children to school in the upcoming week due to these reasons. Officers clarified that they had to take the epidemiological advice in this matter and needed to secure the right balance, to ensure the decisions made were in the interests of all pupils including those who were most disadvantaged and vulnerable. It was noted that some pupils would be engaged with the distanced learning activities, however they would be others who would not participate in them; there was also the need to secure pupil equity and safeguarding considerations must also be in the forefront of thinking. Members were informed that Officers were meeting with the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, later on in the afternoon and will need to await the outcome of that meeting; however, at the moment it was intended that all schools in Neath Port Talbot would close on Friday 18th December. It was added that there was also a need to understand, fairly quickly, what the opening arrangements would be in January including how these plans would fit in with a whole Wales policy and strategy on seeking to suppress the virus.

Officers were asked to clarify the decision making process behind the schools opening and closing schedule in line with the evidence being received locally in terms of positive cases in schools, as other local

authorities had made their own decisions as to when they would close for Christmas. It was stated that it would be desirable to have a consistent approach across Wales in regards to opening and closing arrangements; however Officers have had to take all factors into consideration, including the possible risks of having a very large amount of children not in schools, to make a balanced decision. In regards to evidence, it was highlighted that there was a protocol in place whereby when a Head Teacher becomes aware of a case in the school they would get in touch with someone in the regional TTP Service; this was effective as it helped the process move more efficiently, as Head Teachers were essentially the first people to be aware of a positive case within schools and waiting for an indication from other informants such as TTP could take some time. Following this, the regional Environmental Health Officers would make a decision as to what extent pupils and staff needed to self-isolate based on the evidence, also taking into consideration the type of contact made and the size of the bubbles that the school had in place.

Members requested that the Communications Team put out information in regards to the risks of holding community events in the lead up to Christmas, as it had been noticed that some smaller communities with the County Borough were planning and advertising Christmas events. Officers noted Members comments and stated that they would inform the Communications Team of this request.

In relation to testing, it was queried as to why further resources weren't being brought in immediately to assist in the demand. Officers stated that options were being considered as colleagues in the Health Board and Public Health Wales were consistently looking at testing capacity locally, looking at how this could be increased. It was added that the Leader and the Chief Executive were currently meeting twice a week with the Health Board and different options were being actively considered; Officers stated that as the position changes, they would provide Members with regular updates.

It was agreed that the Head of Planning and Public Protection (Ceri Morris) would circulate a briefing note to Members which would include the main points of the TTP Service update.

The Committee thanked all those who had worked and were currently working in the Test, Trace and Protect Service.

Following scrutiny, the update was noted

3. **Update on the Covid-19 Member Panel - Recovery Phase**

The Committee received an update report in relation to the Covid 19 Member Panel – Recovery Phase which included a summary of the business undertaken by the Panel to date.

It was highlighted that the name of the Panel had recently changed to ‘Coronavirus – Member Panel’ as the circumstances had changed since it was first established.

A discussion took place in relation to recovery from the pandemic and if it was anticipated that a recovery phase would be entered during the first few months of 2021; the Council previously started giving some thought to recovery in the summer of 2020, when infection rates were extremely low, however in a matter of weeks the situation drastically changed. Officers stated that they hope that the planning around recovery would resume by Easter when the vaccination programme had made significant progress, so that over the summer discussions could take place with Members and the communities of how the recovery will take shape. It was added that recovery wasn't a linear process and activities were already being undertaken with recovery in mind including progressing the work around the lessons learned over the past 9 months to ensure that this was not lost; there were also some immediate impacts, for example the work around homelessness and trying to develop some models for moving the people who were currently in temporary housing, into more permanent arrangements.

Members thanked all those who had been involved in contributing to the work of the Panel and the Focus Group.

Following scrutiny, the update was noted.

4. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

The committee scrutinised the following cabinet items:

Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024

The Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 was presented to the Committee with the actions to meet the equality objectives.

Members asked how many staff had the Council employed who were on zero hour contracts and the reasoning behind why they were on this type of contract. In terms of the reason, it was noted that the individuals had elected themselves to take up casual contracts for work, for example in the Survey Team within the Environment

Directorate; there was a relatively small number of staff who had specific reasons for being on that type of contract and these individuals make themselves available and can turn work down if it suits them; there was no specific pattern of work that could be planned in advance for them. It was confirmed that Officers would circulate the exact number of staff on zero hour contracts to the Committee following the meeting.

Detailed in the circulated report, it stated that no feedback was received from an event which was held with the Community of Practice for Engagement and Involvement in order to obtain an insight into what was important to the groups they regularly engage with; it was asked who was involved in the event and why wasn't any feedback received. It was explained that the Participation Officers that the Council had across different service areas within the Council (including those who support the youth council, the looked after children version of the youth council and the community veterans) were asked to feed in any views, opinions or evidence that could support the development of the Strategic Equality Plan; whilst the equality objectives were being drafted, these Officers were asked to give some thought as to whether or not the right objectives had been selected, however due to the timing of the pandemic, the engagement work with these network of Officers was disrupted. The importance of their input and the need to pick up this work as part of the implementation was highlighted.

It was asked if the work to improve physical access to the committee facilities in both Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres was still doable and if so, when it would be done; it was still very much the plan to improve the access arrangements for Members, especially in Port Talbot Civic Centre as there was some difficulties in terms of access particularly within the Council Chamber. It was noted that a lot of work was being undertaken prior to the pandemic, and one of the main pieces of work being looked at was clearing out the old kitchen area which wasn't being utilised anymore and turning it into a meeting room as it was a very accessible space; having a meeting room downstairs would be beneficial as one of the issues with having meetings on the upper floors was that someone within that meeting would have to be responsible for evacuation procedures and be trained to do so, if there was a fire for example.

In relation to the development of a Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Equality and Diversity Action Plan, Members queried whether the Council would be anonymising factors such as age, sex,

designation, names and ages so that when applications for positions were received there was no unconscious bias and if it will be adopted, what would the timescale be for implementing it. Officers confirmed that the Head of Human Resources (Sheenagh Rees) had previously identified work that needed to be actioned on the Council application forms as part of the gender equality work and a discussion had started with trade unions and workforce around the BAME aspect of this as well; many of the measures that the Council would be looking to introduce as part of gender equality, would also assist in terms of trying to get people into a position where they haven't got unconscious bias at that point in the selection process. It was added that Officers were also looking to develop an ongoing discussion with the workforce around the BAME agenda and that there were a number of staff who were very interested in helping with this thinking. In regards to the timescale, it was noted that the work had already been actioned planned and Officers would inform Members of the planned dates around implementation.

A discussion took place around the delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan, the monitoring arrangements and priorities. Officers explained that the Council had a legal responsibility to produce a Strategic Equality Plan and had to work around a particular timescale for it; earlier in the year the Equality and Human Rights Commission gave a period of grace in terms of timescale for the referral of plans, however they had been insistent that the plans needed to be published at the end of the calendar year. It was highlighted that the equality objectives had previously been presented to Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, as one of the specific legal duties that the Council had, and now Members were being presented with the actions to implement those objectives which would then need to be reported to full Council to endorse the action plan. In terms of relevance and priorities within the action plan, it was noted that these would need to be under continuous review due to the speed at which circumstances change, for example if there were to be more job losses within the community this may cause a change in the emphasis around some of the actions; there were a number of actions that were rolling forward from the old plan and there were also new areas of work, including that around the BAME community, which needed to be prioritised. It was added that there were concerns around inequalities before the pandemic, however over the past nine months this had widened and some groups within the community, the BAME community in particular, were being disproportionately affected by the pandemic

which confirmed that priorities needed to be adjusted to target this issue. In regards to monitoring, the Chief Executive (Karen Jones) stated that the committee arrangements would be reviewed in January 2021 and would include discussions around the length of the meeting agendas, staff workload and democratic oversight. It was mentioned that the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee could include the Strategic Equality Plan on their Forward Work Programme regularly for monitoring.

Officers made a note of a typing error within the report which was identified by Members.

Following scrutiny, the committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by cabinet.

Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2019/2020

The circulated report provided Members with an overview of the complaints, compliments and comments received during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Concerns were raised around the violent and aggressive behaviour that staff were being subject to on occasion; Officers were asked to provide more detail on this. Members were informed that the references detailed within the report were specifically around individual cases throughout the year, where the Council had some very difficult behaviours to deal with from a very small number of residents; this caused a re-think around the way in which the Council manages contact with those individuals. It was mentioned that one of those incidents involved a member of the public assaulting the Leader of the Council in Port Talbot Civic Centre. It was noted that fortunately most of the people that are in contact with the Council were polite and those contacts were handled with no issues; however, the Council was in a position where measure needed to be introduced to protect staff and in some very small number of incidents, have had to take action to limit the way in which certain members of the public could have contact with the council. Officers added that there had been individuals who were very verbally aggressive, individuals who sent persistent number of emails which is very time consuming to deal with, and in some exceptional circumstances have had individuals turn up and be physically aggressive and violent within the offices in which Police involvement was required. Although there was a small number of incidents, it was highlighted to have had a massive impact on staff, therefore Officers

were ensuring those staff got support and policies and procedures were strengthened.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

Substance Misuse Counselling Service - Western Bay Area Planning Board

The Committee received a report in relation to the Substance Misuse Counselling Service of the Western Bay Area Planning Board.

Members expressed the importance of funding for this particular area of work, as it could help towards preventing drug related deaths; Officers were asked to provide further details on the money being received, including the Substance Misuse Action Fund (SMAF). Officers explained that the SMAF was a grant that was provided to the region from Welsh Government; the Area Planning Board was a partnership that Welsh Government required that the Council and its partners have in place and it was the job of that partnership to determine how that grant was used. It was noted within the region there was a pattern of services that support substance misuse which had been there for quite some time; through the improvement work being completed, it had been identified that there was a need for work to be developed to join up the services for the purposes of the service users who would need to access them. Officers stated that there currently was too much fragmentation with people being passed from different parts of system, as well as a backlog in some places where there were waiting lists which was an issue as staff needed to be able to respond to those service users in a timely way; the Strategic Manager for Partnerships and Community Cohesion (Claire Jones) would be supporting an exercise next year to recommission the services in the region to ensure they become better fit for purpose, however it would take between 18 months and two years to make its way through the entire system. Members were informed that in the meantime, Officers had been looking more critically at what the money was doing within the current services, and within this particular case with counselling services, the report showed that too much money was going in for amount of need that the service was currently supporting; the Area Planning Board were asking for some of the money, that wasn't needed in the particular service, to be re-directed to help staff provide more timely access to those people who needed support. It was added that the plan was to put the spare money into the low threshold prescribing services. Officers explained that one deficient in the current model was that there was not enough

support in primary care for people who were addicted to substances, resulting in people staying too long in the secondary care service (hospital base services) which meant that these services were full and could not take on any new service users; more capacity was needed in the primary care part of the system for those who were stable or could have their needs met this way, which would then result in more capacity within secondary care for the more complex cases to be dealt with in a timely way.

Following scrutiny, the committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by cabinet.

Syrian Resettlement Programme: Support Service

Members received a report on the Syrian Resettlement Programme (Support Service); detailed within the report it stated that one family had declined support and two families had left the programme, Members asked if the reasons for this could be explained. It was noted that there were different, legitimate reasons families had moved away for example, job opportunities or because they wanted to be within a different community.

Following scrutiny, the committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by cabinet.

NPT Air Quality Progress Report 2020

The NPT Air Quality Progress Report for 2020 was presented to the Committee and Officers highlighted that the Council was in a positive position in meeting the air quality objectives; the report captured the 2019 calendar year, therefore the impact of the Covid 19 restrictions weren't necessarily included within the detail.

Concerns were expressed in relation to the evidence of non-compliance with nickel levels at Tawe Terrace and it was asked if the Vale Inco works in Clydach also impacted on the levels as well as the main source, Wall Colmonoy works; Members also asked for more detail around this issue as the Councils aim was to minimise the emissions. Officers confirmed that Wall Colmonoy was the issue causing the non-compliance; monitoring of the Vale Inco metal plant was commenced by the old Lliw Valley Borough Council, but monitoring did continue following Local Government re-organisation. Officers added that it had been required to relocate the sampler from where it was in Trebanos to Pontardawe due to the fact that the Trebanos sewage works was upgraded; however, the measurements at Pontardawe leisure centre do continue to monitor the impact of

nickel emissions from the Vale Inco plant and it was displaying low levels. In relation to how the issue is dealt with on a day to day basis, it was noted that it was the Council's responsibility to regulate this particular operator and Officers would be looking at enhanced regulation in terms of maintenance procedures and Best Available Techniques (BAT); these conversations and issues were ongoing, however the Head of Planning and Public Protection (Ceri Morris) would liaise with the relevant Officer to gather more detail for Members outside of the meeting.

Members were informed that this particular industrial operation was the most heavily regulated within Neath Port Talbot and the situation in relation to Wall Colmonoy was being taken very seriously; Officers, with other colleagues from other organisations, meet regularly to ensure the Council were securing improvement, to which has been progressing over the years however there was still further work to do. It was added that Officers were putting a lot of pressure on the company, who have since improved their maintenance and management systems.

It was queried how long this issue had been ongoing, to which Officers stated that they would have to confirm what the levels had been over the various years prior to 2019 and provide this information to Members following the meeting, however the levels were known to change year on year. It was mentioned that this issue had been reported on an annual basis to the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee; it was not a new situation, however it was improving which demonstrated the work that had been undertaken with Officers at securing some form of success.

Detailed within the circulated report it stated that nuisance dust related to activities at Tata Steel Works did not have an impact on health in the same way as other pollutants; Members asked what measurements were used to determine this and how could Officers be sure that it was not having a growing impact on people's health. It was agreed that Officers would provide this information outside of the meeting and at a future meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee.

Members asked if Officers could take into consideration the fact that Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council were in the process of approving a 90 metre stack close to Glynneath and stressed the importance of having this area regularly monitored once it had been approved.

It was queried as to whether there was some degree of doubt around the accuracy of the monitoring process itself due to the fallout levels in Prince Street and Port Talbot Fire Station being very different even though the sites were quite close together. It was noted that there were no current concerns in relation to the accuracy of the monitoring process as even though the two sites were close together, it wouldn't necessarily be expected that the results be identical and tally all of the time; the polluting impact of the Steel Works seems to be mainly felt in the vicinity of the Prince Street Site and the extent as to how each site would be impacted was dependent upon some variables including, which sources in the vicinity the blast furnaces were producing the pollution and which direction the wind is blowing at any given time.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

5. **Access to Meetings**

RESOLVED: that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

6. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s**

The committee scrutinised the following private cabinet item:

Passenger Transport Subsidised Network

Members were updated on the private report on the Passenger Transport Subsidised Network.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

CHAIRPERSON