



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL

CABINET

30th June 2021

Report of the Director of Environment and Regeneration Nicola Pearce

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All

Covid-19 Enforcement Team

Purpose of the Report

To provide an update on the work of the Covid-19 Enforcement team.

Background

The 'Swansea Bay Prevention and Response Plan' (initially published in August 2020 and updated in June 2021), details the regional response to Covid-19 and identifies enforcement action and advisory interventions as tools to minimise the transmission risk particular settings present to staff, customers or premise users.

Experience highlights that sectors such as the hospitality industry (in particular, pubs and clubs), large retailers, manufacturers and large employers and the beauty sector are facing challenges in terms of adopting the legal and statutory guidance requirements and maintaining compliance on an ongoing basis.

In addition, clusters of infection across the region have over time shown a lack of compliance with social distancing rules, mixing of households and infection prevention / control measures. This has led to an increase in the number of community exposure locations being associated with new cases. The night time

economy presents particular challenges in both town centres and suburban locations.

Public Protection resources within the Council are finite, this therefore limits the proactive support available for sectors and the availability of officers to take the necessary enforcement action in response to intelligence or complaints from across the region. In addition, experience from the Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) Regional Response Team and the wider Contact Tracing Service shows that additional resources are required to investigate identified exposure locations and ensure appropriate control measures are in place to control the onward transmission of infection.

Neath Port Talbot Covid-19 Enforcement

Since October 2020, in order to strengthen the prevention element of the Regional Plan and to enhance the resources available to the Council, a team of Covid-19 Enforcement Officers were recruited.

Based in the Environmental Health and Licensing teams respectively, officers have been deployed on a reactive and proactive basis across a range of commercial, licensed and domestic settings, including:

- Proactive advice and support to community settings as identified in the Swansea Bay Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plan;
- Responding to requests for support and advice from businesses;
- Responding to complaints regarding compliance with Coronavirus Regulations;
- Supporting the Regional Response Team in investigating potential exposure / transmission locations identified through contact tracing; and
- Wherever proportionate and necessary, taking appropriate enforcement action to ensure compliance with Coronavirus Regulations to protect public health and link with other enforcement agencies such as the Police as required.

Service Demands / Pressures

In addition to the continuation of the above and as part of the wider work in relation to the management of 'variants of concern', local authority enforcement teams are now required to undertake enhanced monitoring and compliance visits / checks on

travellers arriving from Amber list countries. It is hoped that this work will help ensure compliance through active management and deterrence, with cases being passed to the Police where there is strong evidence an offence has been committed.

It is also important that a programme of proactive inspections across sectors to ensure 'Covid secure standards' continues to be delivered, including licensed premises, retail premises, close contact services and workplaces. It is intended that such inspections, will also include 'safety inspections' as part of the overall recovery plan to restart programmed health and safety inspections of workplaces.

Furthermore, the Environmental Health service is now experiencing an increase in requests for advice and guidance for events and outdoor activities. With larger events being planned to re-start, it is anticipated further advice, visits and checks will be required by our Health and Safety Enforcement Officers moving forward.

In terms of a broad overview of activity undertaken to date, the Covid Enforcement team have proactively advised 1,250 premises; conducted 912 visits; issued 173 warning letters, 13 business improvement notices and 3 fixed penalty notices; and dealt with a total of 1,550 enquiries.

Staffing Arrangements

Notably, on 2nd June the Welsh Government (WG) announced that Contact Tracing in Wales is to be extended with associated funding until the end of March 2022. In light of the ongoing enforcement service demands and pressures highlighted above, it will be equally important for Welsh Government and individual local authorities to commit to the continuation of support / funding for the Covid Enforcement team over the same period – whilst currently, staff contracts end on 30th September 2021, in line with Personnel Committee agreed processes, an extension of contracts until 31st March 2022 is proposed.

In addition, and in order to meet the current and emerging service demands, there is a need to keep under review how staff resources are deployed. As referenced above, the pool of Covid Enforcement Officers will continue to be split and deployed across the Environmental Health and Licensing teams respectively.

Through to the end of March 2022, it is proposed that the team will comprise of:

- 1x Senior Covid Enforcement Officer (GR9) – in recognition of the supervisory role;
- 4x Covid Enforcement Officers (GR7) – based in Environmental Health, split into area teams;
- 2x Health & Safety Enforcement Officers (GR7) – based in Environmental Health, with the focus on proactive Covid and H&S workplace inspections;
- 2x Covid Enforcement Officers (GR7) – based in Licensing; and
- 1x Operational Support Officer (GR3).

Members should be aware that if demand for the service continues to increase, there may be the potential need to recruit further staff resources from the external market to meet the demand.

Financial Impacts

The cost associated with the proposed staffing structure is as follows:

Post	Per Annum	6 Months Pro-Rata
1x GR9 Senior Covid Enforcement Officer	£ 46,952	£23,476
4x GR7 Covid Enforcement Officers (EH)	£149,380	£74,690
2x GR7 Health & Safety Enforcement Officers (EH)	£ 74,690	£37,345
2x GR7 Covid Enforcement Officers (Licensing)	£ 74,690	£37,345
1x GR3 Operational Support Officer – Covid Enforcement	£ 25,261	£12,631
Total:	£370,973	£185,487

Whilst the TTP programme in Wales is funded from a separate Welsh Government pot, funding for enforcement activities is drawn from the Local Authority Hardship Fund – the fund is run on a claims basis for additional costs incurred and/or loss of income.

In terms of additional funding in 2021-22, the Welsh Government Budget has secured circa £207m for local government Covid support for the first 6 months of the financial year (i.e. 1st April – 30th September 2021) – this figure includes additional funding for a number of work streams, including enforcement.

Decisions on funding for the second half of the year will be for the new administration in Welsh Government. Whilst to date no decision has been made, given the importance of the enforcement work going forward it is anticipated that confirmation of extended funding will be received in due course.

At this point however, the extension of contracts to 31st March 2022 for this critical work to be delivered will be at financial risk to the Authority and ultimately will be a financial pressure should the Authority be unable to recover costs incurred from Welsh Government.

Integrated Impact Assessment

An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

Valleys Communities Impacts

No implications.

Workforce Impacts

No implications.

Legal Impacts

No implications.

Risk Management Impacts

The Swansea Bay Prevention and Response Plan includes a risk register.

Consultation

There has been no requirement to externally consult on this matter.

For Noting

Members to note the following:

- The continued work of the Covid-19 Enforcement team; and
- The extension of staff contracts (in line with agreed Personnel Committee delegations) until 31st March 2022 and for the Authority to seek to recover costs incurred from the WG Local Authority Hardship Fund.

Appendices

None.

List of Background Papers

Swansea Bay Prevention and Response Plan.

Officer Contact

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