

A message from the Chief Executive – 4th May 2020

Dear Colleague,

I hope you and your family enjoyed a good weekend. I took the opportunity to take a long walk with my family around the surrounding countryside. As I was walking it struck me how we take so much of our green and rolling countryside for granted. It was great to have the chance to stop, take a deep breath and really take in the beauty of our local place.

Today I'd like to take the opportunity to talk to you about the next couple of weeks and how we will need to adjust our behaviours in response to any new guidance around the possible relaxation of current lockdown restrictions.

As I shared with you last week, the speculation continues to grow about an easing of restrictions and a move onto a 'cautious' recovery phase. It is definitely true in our area that things are becoming much more settled within the hospital settings.

ABUHB now accounts for around 1/4 of all deaths in Wales (you may recall we were well above half at one point). Peak 1 is certainly behind us, but our vigilance needs to increase if we are to avoid seeing Peak 2 and Peak 3 later in the year. However, there are still many people dying in hospital and within community settings and it is unlikely that this is going to stop anytime soon.

Our revised purpose of doing whatever it takes to protect our people and place still holds true. We cannot let up, or slow down and we must hold onto our sense of urgency as we know we are months away from a steady, predictable norm. It is understandable that many public commentators are using a narrative to build public confidence, but the reality 'on the ground' is that we are still very much responding to the challenges of this virus. We appear to be denting this virus and I do believe that together, we can beat it, but that will only be achieved through hard work - there are no short-cuts and that is why I need you to continue with your extraordinary efforts and continue to shine brightly as true public servants.

Public behaviours are starting to change and when you have places like DIY stores opening up, you can hardly blame people for believing things are lightening up. This is pretty scary, particularly as we approach a bank holiday weekend. Over the last 24 hours, I have dealt with an endless stream of contacts, asking when the 'tips' are opening, when schools are opening, when libraries are opening and the like. My consistent answer has been - not for a while.

However, I anticipate things may start to change w/c 18 May. I wish to be clear with you though; we will not be pushed into making any changes until we are comfortable that they can be safely introduced. As I have said before, this is not about making easy decisions, instead it is about making the right decisions. Your welfare and that of our citizens is of paramount importance and this will not be compromised by our Council.

Some thinking around how things will look the other side of COVID19 is taking place. We

have learnt a lot and we cannot simply fall back to where we were. We have now demonstrated that many of you don't need to be in offices 5 days a week ever again, we certainly don't want to travel over 2 million miles as an organisation like we did last year with all the associated wasted time and environmental damage and maybe we can operate with less buildings and maybe we want to see more wild flowers / pollinators than we previously thought we could get away with, etc., etc.

In readiness for an expected relaxation of the lockdown, I have been working with CMT to develop a phased service delivery plan, which I will share with you once fully developed. Additionally, we have also started to make some physical changes at Ty Penallta and our other corporate buildings to ensure we are able to maintain the social distancing requirements, once we return. At the core of our strategic thinking, we will be looking at how we can deliver our services, whilst maximising the use of agile working and minimising the number of staff who physically have to work at our buildings. A very different way of working, but one we are certainly ready for as this is a fundamental part of our organisational transformation strategy.

You will recall that one of our strategic priorities is around civic leadership. How we behave and lead as a Council is vital. Trust, truth, hope and working 'with' is essential to our overall approach and underpins our "Team Caerphilly" ethos. I have attached an article that takes you through these which I encourage you to read, as this applies to us all, as we are all leaders.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/21/opinion/covid-dov-seidman.html>

Over the next few days, I expect to see national conversations continue to be dominated by testing. We are now engaged in a conversation with Public Health Wales about how community testing, tracing and contact management might work. From my perspective it is the cornerstone of any relaxation of lockdown if we are to stay on this virus until (hopefully) a vaccine is produced.

In terms of what has been happening "on the ground", there's still a lot going on -

- We continue to assist our most vulnerable through the "Buddying scheme" supporting 1400 people in the community with 600 volunteers.
- We continue to check on the wellbeing of our most vulnerable housing tenants. These calls are appreciated and we are finding some people that need a little more support - so that's good news.
- We will re-start our bookable bulky household collection system this week which is important.
- We continue to find places to stay for those without a home.
- We continue to process planning applications and enforcement cases where we can and look to bring forward the first virtual Planning Committee in June.

- We continue to process the significant number of new benefit claims that we are seeing
- We continue to deliver meals to our most vulnerable – over 100,000 delivered to date!
- We continue to support vulnerable children and adults
- We continue to enable many people to return home from hospital settings
- We continue to advocate for local businesses that are falling into gaps in the current government support programmes
- Our advice lines and support functions for family support, youth services, etc. will continue
- We continue to support the learning of young people and it was great to see Bedwas Childcare hub on Wales This Week last week!

Please don't forget that there are many more things that we are still doing than things we have stopped doing - we are just delivering differently and in many situations I would say BETTER.

So colleagues, keep your heads up, keep smiling and continue to amaze yourself with what you are capable of all over again.

I'm so proud of Team Caerphilly and everything we continue to do collectively to protect our people and place – you truly are amazing!.

Until next time, take care,

Christina

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