

## **A Message from the Chief Executive – 15<sup>th</sup> June**

I hope you enjoyed your weekend and took some time to rest up. Are you ready to do it all again? Are you ready to do it even better? The image above really captures the mindset we have at the moment. We are certainly in the space of “ambition” - up for giving anything a try – and it’s making such a big difference.

We have another big week ahead of us and I know that together we will achieve great things, but before I cover that, I feel I need to reflect on the events of a turbulent weekend.

The scenes in London that followed events in Bristol, have been really disturbing to many people and, I’m sure, for many of you too. I’ve been asked a few times, where we stand on this as a Council – and as I explained to you last week – this is quite simple for me. Absolutely everyone matters in our organisation and across our communities. The colour of our skin is part of who we are, but it’s our character, spirit and humanity that defines each of us. I’m really proud of how welcoming we are as a Council, but there is always more we can do and we are constantly reflecting and reviewing what we do.

So on to our week ahead :-

It is undeniable that the virus in Gwent is, for the time being, contained. New cases each day are more often than not, zero and thankfully we have seen very few deaths over the last couple of weeks, albeit we will never lose sight of every single one being a tragedy. The R number for Wales has fallen to 0.7 (which is lower than England) and there is a feeling that the First Minister may loosen things (but only marginally) when he makes his three weekly statement at the end of this week. As I stated last week, we now need to shift our focus to supporting our citizens to feel safe in their community and continue to encourage them to keep supporting each other.

In normal major emergency events, there is an initial “Response” phase and then a secondary and longer “Recovery” phase. However, it strikes me that in this Covid national emergency we have an intermediate stage to move to next, which must connect to our original “response” phase of protecting our people and place. I mentioned last week, the personal and collective challenges our communities face, and we need to wrap our support blanket around them to help them return with confidence and comfort.

In the meantime, we have some very significant issues to resolve. As things stand, we have 14 days to get all of our schools ready to open safely. As I have said previously, the safety of both staff and pupils is the primary focus of myself and the Leader. Ed, Keri and myself all need to be satisfied that each school is safe. If they are not - they simply will not open. However, I know that our school based staff, working with Keri and her colleagues, will continue with their fantastic efforts to ensure we get to where we need to be.

One of the topics of conversation on the TV this morning was around the Government’s decision not to continue meals to Free School Meal (FSM) children in England. This is not the case in Wales, as we will continue to deliver high quality meals to our children over the summer period. This is an area where we have seen a big shift in the numbers accessing

this service over recent weeks. Before we began this service some 12 weeks ago, our FSM percentage was 69%, now it is over 90% with over 5,000 children accessing this service, and enjoying a warm and healthy meal every day.

This week will see us finalise proposals for how we adapt our main town centres to make them safe when retail returns. Lots of work and engagement with Members will take place before we get things moving on the ground.

We go into week 3 of our Pan Gwent contact Tracing as part of the national Test, Tract and Protect programme. Numbers are low but we have had first-hand experience that the process does work very well and very quickly.

This week should see the completion of a first round of intensive testing of all staff and residents in every care home across the county borough. It's a bit annoying that this has taken so long to achieve but at least it's nearly there now. The plan from this point is that every member of staff in a care home will be tested every week for four weeks so we will see how this works through.

The First Minister announced last Friday the imminent opening of a further testing facility in Abergavenny. This is helpful as it provides a location along the Heads of the Valley area we can access, but we are pushing for a further testing station a little more local to those in Newport and Cardiff.

This week is Shared Lives week – we will be pushing out a lot of social media activity over the next few days to recognise the wonderful work of our amazing Shared Lives Carers and the fantastic role they play in supporting the vulnerable adults in our communities. A massive thank you for all you do!

I know there are thousands of you I haven't mentioned over my recent updates, but I know that you continue to put in amazing efforts each and every day and are making a positive difference. I'm grateful to each and every one of you. Please remember it's ok to have bad days. These are extraordinary times and we are all having unexpected energy dips from time to time. Don't be afraid to share this with your colleagues – as we are all here to help and support one another, as I'm sure they will have experienced the same and nobody will judge you. Also don't forget we have lots of support available for you too, so please take a look at the intranet or speak to colleagues in HR who will point you in the right direction.

Continue to do your best, take some leave and make sure you have at least half hour for lunch every day – that's all I ask of you!

Have a great week – take care.

Christina

Christina Harrhy

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