

Update from the Chief Executive – 29th May

Dear colleague,

I hope you enjoyed a great bank holiday weekend. The weather really has been glorious and I am so thankful that we are able to enjoy the fresh air and the great countryside and green space we have across our local area.

This week has continued to be full of activity. I'm sure you are still following the health statistics and certainly, within hospitals, things are going well, with no reported deaths across Gwent for the past few days and an ongoing reduction in new cases. Aneurin Bevan Health Board area remains the hot spot area across Wales, and you will recall we have been in this space since the onset of the virus, however, our neighbouring Health Board areas have now closed the gap between us all, in terms of the number of deaths and confirmed cases.

The picture, however, remains challenging across the care home sector. Welsh government have finally introduced an intensive programme for testing for all carehomes in Wales, and across the region, we are finding some challenging circumstances both in terms of infection rates and sustainability of some of the privately run homes. We certainly are not immune to this across the county borough, and I am grateful to our care staff and environmental health staff for providing all the support they are currently offering.

The chart below tells the UK wide care home story and I continue to believe that this needs more attention than it is currently getting.

Deaths involving COVID-19 registered from 29 December 2019 to 15 May 2020		
	Year to date	Week 20 (up to 15 May)
Home	1,876	145
Hospital (not including psychiatric)	26,817	1,909
Hospice	524	58
Care home	11,650	1,660
Other communal establishment	191	27
Elsewhere	162	11

Source: Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional: week ending 15 May 2020

Office for National Statistics

The infection rates across our care homes has been identified as one of our key risks in our corporate risk register, which as you know is the key document that shapes our corporate response to the pandemic. Another, new risk has been introduced over the last week and that is about the money. Welsh Government have taken forward a supplementary budget this week and I have extracted some of the key parts from it, which directly relate to local government:

“The Welsh Government has today published the first Supplementary budget for this financial year. The budget outlines the £188m Local Authority Hardship fund which includes: £40m to support the extra costs adult social care services are now facing. £40m for Free School Meals provision to support children who are eligible. £10m to support immediate action to protect against homelessness and support rough sleepers in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. £7m to support LA's in making difficult but necessary choices to handle the tragic increased number of

deaths during the pandemic. £78m to support LA's for the loss of income experienced as a direct result of the pandemic."

The reference to £78m in the final point is very important to us as we estimate that we will lose approximately £3.2m in income in just the first 3 months of the current financial year. We will need to submit a claim to the Welsh Government to make good the income losses that we have experienced so far. We also estimate that we will incur additional costs of about £4.5m by the end of June as a result of the pandemic and we will also seek to claim this from the Local Authority Hardship Fund. The Welsh Government funding is of course welcomed, but we will still have a funding gap to fill moving forward. Hence, the risk!

I mentioned earlier, our Free School meals offer. Many of you would have seen the Wales Online article which showed the complex and far reaching FSM offer which we have developed in response to the pandemic. It really does demonstrate the benefit and impact of Team Caerphilly – please do take a look at the following link:

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/army-people-striving-deliver-thousands-18293413>

In terms of headline figures, the Communications team have pulled this infographic together – it's just awesome!



With regard to other areas:

- Our school hubs continue to work brilliantly and my continuing thanks go to all those involved. The numbers are increasing and we are considering whether we will need to introduce another hub or two.
- Schools – dialogue is still ongoing and despite some “noise in the system” over the past few days, the focus remains upon any decisions regarding a return to school will be informed by the scientific data and with engagement with all key parties. We are anticipating some announcement from the Minister for Education some time next week.
- Our 6 HWRC's opened on Tuesday to the public. All the pre-planning paid off and the first few days have gone well, even though, despite sending loads of communications advising the public not to rush to the centres, each site experienced queues of up to 5 hours waiting time. (Take a look at the photograph below taken by Mark S Williams outside Aberbargoed HWRC at 6.30am!) The whole experience has demonstrated that there is nothing as “queer as folk”, with stories from staff, of some individuals queuing for hours to dispose of two tins of paint, or in another case, one piece of plywood! A great effort by all the teams involved. Interestingly, the Welsh Government recently published information on public views and behaviours during the coronavirus crisis for 15 to 18 May 2020. An interesting read - <https://gov.wales/survey-public-views-coronavirus-covid-19-15-18-may-2020>



- Our waste teams continue to be a triumph of endeavour – continuing to collect mammoth tonnages of waste and I know that the public are really appreciative of all they do. My own niece, has been baking cakes and cookies every week and leaving them out for the collection crews – I hope they are enjoying them!
- We are just under £30m in terms of business grants that we have administered for local businesses and we are readying ourselves for a role, in a yet to be announced, bursary scheme which will enable us to support very small micro-businesses.
- Colleagues worked across the bank holiday to make sure we are in a position to commence the Track, Trace, Protect Programme. I have shared with you previously how I consider this absolutely fundamental to us getting on top of the virus and enabling a relaxation of lockdown. We have trained 100 people across Gwent (30 from us) this week to enable the commencement of a programme next week.
- Our colleagues in Gwent Police are patrolling like crazy and in a briefing with the Chief Constable earlier this week, she confirmed they continue to report high levels of

compliance across the region and our county borough. They are also continuing to take vehicles off the road, that lack tax, insurance, etc. which is good to see as well as dealing with more serious crime.

- We are getting ready for our first virtual Cabinet on the 24th June, where I will present a report outlining our response to the pandemic so far, and what our next steps will be. (Once finalised, I will share it with you). The first virtual Planning committee is on the 17th June and the Annual General Meeting of Council will be in early September. Democratic services and digital services colleagues continue to train Members in readiness for these meetings.

The First Minister offered his update lunchtime today and announced some relaxation to the lockdown rules. As from Monday, we are now able to meet people from outside our own households, in the open air. I'm sure you will be really pleased with this announcement, as I know we are all missing our family and friends. To facilitate this, we are re-opening our country parks. This slight change in emphasis really does indicate that we are in for a long journey towards any form of normality.

However, regarding the workplace, the message remains, that if you are able to work from home, you continue to do so. Our current operating position, therefore, remains as is and there won't be an immediate return to our corporate buildings for some time yet. I have shared with you previously, that my intention is to embed the agile working we have been doing for a number of weeks now, into our new norm. In order to assist me, I will be asking for you to share your experiences of the past few weeks with me, in a quick survey next week, as this information will really help me shape our new norm.

So onwards into another week, but in the meantime please have a lovely weekend and enjoy the sun (not forgetting the sun cream of course!)

Take care

Christina

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Prif Weithredwr | Chief Executive

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Caerffili | Caerphilly County Borough Council