

Dear Colleagues,

As we are all aware these are unprecedented times that none of us have ever experienced in our working careers. This insight into the work of the Communities Directorate throughout the pandemic will hopefully illustrate how staff have adapted to new ways of working and/or undertaking completely different roles to assist with keeping critical services running and assisting our most vulnerable in society. As Director, I am extremely proud of what the staff across the Directorate have contributed to this huge effort and have tried to feature as much of the Directorate as possible. As I am sure you can appreciate, the Directorate is very large and diverse and I therefore make no apologies for the length of this Directorate insight. I have divided the insight into discreet areas to make it an easier read and where possible have tried to include photos, etc of the excellent work that is being undertaken.

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

The Facilities Management (FM) team continue to provide a constant service throughout all of our 14 corporate offices during these unprecedented times. The team are ensuring there is a 24/7 support service to maintain our vital resources to ensure our teams of essential workers, are able to continue carrying out duties that are fundamental to our front line services, communities and internal support mechanisms.

The team continue to work with all our customers and service areas including the Health and Safety team ensuring vital PPE is available for staff throughout our Corporate Offices. Another is our vital relationship and daily help from our wonderful Building Cleaning Team and our Cleaners who continue to cleanse our working spaces working tirelessly in the battle against Covid-19.

In addition:

- FM are currently working with Catering in delivering the 4500 meals to the children in our community. We are dedicating 3 full days of driving each week to this and are also ensuring the additional waste created is managed.
- FM are working with others service managers looking at the various practices and new ways of working in our buildings and hubs that impact on the ongoing safety of our staff and the eventual inclusion of members of the public.
- Daily delivery of PPE to the care sector within the borough and to neighbouring authorities.
- Assisting in the setting up of Caerphilly Leisure Centre as a Blood donation centre between the 11th – 15th May.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Engineering Projects Group (EPG) have adapted well to the current situation and design and tendering work is still progressing agilely although it is a “background” function.

Network Contracting Services (NCS) too have continued to maintain social distancing while undertaking pot hole repairs and gully cleansing. Comms have been running stories on social media.

The Highways Operations Group have also adapted well to agile working and staff are mostly remote working and all highway safety inspections are still being undertaken.

Community Support

Drivers and escorts in the Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) and Civil Parking Enforcement Officers have been redeployed to assist local pharmacies and so far have delivered over 3000 prescriptions to residents.

The ITU has dedicated seven vehicles with a rota of twenty drivers and escorts to assist with free school meal deliveries. Since the scheme began on 30th March, they have delivered over 8,000 meals.

Public Bus Services

The decrease in use of public transport (over 90% on some routes) has had a significant impact on bus operators and their viability as businesses. In order to support them through the lockdown Welsh Government has agreed to ‘retainer’ payments and a financial support package. The ITU has been working with bus operators to administer this support package that so far is ensuring the sustainability of these services.

Whilst bus service routes have been maintained across the county borough, their frequencies have reduced by 50-75%. The ITU have been working hard with bus operators to identify those services most needed, especially for key workers and shift workers to support services through the lockdown. This has included:

- Keeping information up-to-date on the Council’s website and partner sites like Traveline.
- Updating information at bus stations and other key bus stops in the county borough.
- Providing feedback to operators to ensure bus services meet the needs of many key workers. The biggest feedback has been from workers in supermarkets and factories.
- Continuing to operate the Council’s Connect2 bus service in Caerphilly 6 days a week. This service operates in some of the most rural places in the county borough. Many like Draethen, Rudry, Van and Waterloo don’t have a village shop so we are ensuring residents can access food shops and pharmacies.
- On behalf of WG procuring contactless technology for ticket machines.

- Complying with the 2m social distancing on buses.

PLANNING AND REGENERATION

Development management

Planning Services have sought to maintain a full service and support the development industry throughout the lockdown period and to aid recovery. The majority of officers are now working at home and the service has moved swiftly to adapt working practices and overnight introduce a paperless working environment working with IT colleagues to capitalise and develop existing software systems.

The Business Support Services Team, managed by Helen Hotchkiss, have been integral to maintaining business continuity and have worked tirelessly to review and implement new business processes for the service, realign and rebuild back office systems and manage changing public demands on the service throughout the lockdown period.

Lea Pinney and the Address Management Team continue to provide a high quality service and were recently announced the winner of the 2020 Geoplace Exemplar Gold Standard Award for Address Data which is an exceptional achievement given the challenges the team have faced in maintaining the service.

Over 100 planning applications have been received and 140 planning applications have been determined since lockdown by the Development management Team lead by Chris Boardman and Michele Davies. 97% of which have been determined in accordance with timescales which is a stepped improvement in performance reflecting a renewed focus on the speed of determination of planning applications to assist the recovery of the development industry and the delivery of new school facilities and infrastructure.

An online enforcement complaints system has also been deployed to facilitate the submission of planning enforcement complaints and allow evidence and photographs to be uploaded to facilitate the continued investigation of alleged breaches of planning control.

The Building Control team led by Jason Lear continues to provide a full inspection service relying on technology and new ways of working to maintain social distancing rules whilst facilitating the delivery of construction projects and dealing with safety issues associated with numerous dangerous structures. Following lockdown George Davis Apprentice Building Control Officer instantly volunteered and has been delivering from food banks to vulnerable people whilst balancing the demands of his existing role.

Strategic Planning and Land Charges

Dave Lucas and the Strategic Planning Team continue to work on the evidence base to underpin the review of the Local Development Plan with a growing focus on the impact of COVID -19 on our communities, key employment, housing and retail centres to ensure that the emerging policy context facilitates recovery.

Despite depleted staff resources and an increase in service requests the team continue to maintain the land charges service helping people into their new homes during the current crisis.

Arts Development and Blackwood Miners Institute (BMI)

BMI creates and presents the highest quality professional and community arts for a diverse range of audiences and participants, with the aim of giving everyone easy access to great arts and culture. The team strives to create a balanced programme designed to inspire, educate and entertain.

Clearly, the way in which BMI objectives are delivered has had to radically change as a result of Covid19. There have been no performances in the building since it closed in mid-March. However, the team is now working on case studies for the Wales Arts Health and Wellbeing Network, and efforts to establish the National Arts and Education Network are ongoing. In addition, the following activities have been tailored to the current situation:

- Sunday Sessions – a weekly video featuring a local band or artist posted on our Facebook page. It's a way of reminding our community we're still here and shining a light on local artists. Sunday 10th will be our third session, and will feature Laura Power from RCT. The previous - from Super Marine (Blackwood Boys) and WYNT – have had an amazing response and engagement.
- Family Corner – a banner under which we share and post activities and content for families. A recent example is a video exploring the Industrial Heritage of Caerphilly from which families can learn together
- Time Capsule project – CYT are taking part in the project, which was developed by Company Three. Each week the young people are given a theme and asked to record their response to the theme and the lockdown. The videos are then edited together and posted on Facebook.
- Lockdown Creative Project – It's a weekly call out for people to make and do arts activities on a specific theme, and each week the work from the previous week will be showcased. At some point it will all be curated in to an exhibition. Again, it's all taking place on Facebook.
- a pop-up street arts project, which is aims to:
 - Reach the community of Caerphilly County Borough through arts practices, especially those that are isolated alone in their homes by providing pop up street arts opportunities in people's streets, cul de sacs etc
 - Give artists opportunity for paid work during Covid-19

- Navigate ways to work with and reach care homes (of which there are 25 in the borough) , sheltered accommodation complexes (of which there are 23 in the borough)
- Allow opportunity for creativity and social inclusion through arts practices, either observed or taking part
- Enhance wellbeing by providing opportunities to engage with the arts and engage with neighbours
- Enhance the sense of community and help to tackle social isolation and

Business Support Team

The Business Support team has been extremely busy working with the Council's Finance team to support the process of distributing up to £30m in financial aid to local companies, and helping to direct companies to the most appropriate financial support they can get.

The service is regularly engaging with the business community through its e-news bulletin that reaches over 8,000 interested subscribers each week and are dealing with up to 100 enquiries day from businesses looking for help and direction.

The team have rapidly adapted its regular grants support programme to help facilitate those companies who are looking to survive by adapting their operations to produce new products such as Motion29, a local company based in Pontllanfraith, whose grant application was turned around by the team in less than two days so that the company could purchase a specialist piece of equipment that would allow them to produce vital 'connectors' that are needed in the production of ventilators and help safeguard 11 local jobs (see link below)

<https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/News/News-Bulletin/April-2020/Pontllanfraith-company-gearing-up-to-make-vital-ve>

The team have also been working in collaboration with the Employment Support team within Community Regeneration in proactively contacting local companies to point them towards opportunities to transition their production capability to producing vital PPE equipment, major employers in the area such as Transcend packaging and Nuaire are now producing certified face shields in large quantities for frontline services in the battle against covid-19.

Community Regeneration

During the COVID19 lockdown the Employment teams have continued to support people within the Caerphilly borough to gain employment in these difficult times.

Staff are continuing to contact and enrol customers via telephone and people are still being supported into employment, which we can only see increasing now as opportunities are emerging (some of which are obviously short term) in some sectors as a result of increased demand in certain key areas of supply. The Employment Mentors from both programmes have been able to keep in touch with their caseloads via telephone calls, video calls and emails. Some members of the employment

teams have also been utilising their skills to support the covid-19 response in other ways, for example the employment triage team are supporting with the co-ordination of foodbank referrals, whilst other members of the employment team are assisting with delivering foodbank parcels and have also signed up to support vulnerable community members as part of the Council's buddy scheme. As a team we have also had to manage a range of safeguarding concerns in response to information received from people experiencing difficulties in these times; and the appropriate referrals have been made and support provided in these circumstances.

The Employment Manager has ensured that we have maintained strong links with our DWP colleagues, which is particularly important at present as we work with them to support over 1000 new Universal Credit Claimants to gain the support they need throughout the Caerphilly borough. As initial discussions have now also commenced regarding the easing of some lockdown restrictions, we are also now working with Welsh Government as part of a participant insight taskforce, to consult customers with regards to how they would prefer to engage with us and what our services and support could look like as we emerge into a post-lockdown period, ensuring that we maintain delivery whilst maintaining standards for public and staff safety.

GREEN SPACES/BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

During these unprecedented times, staff within the authority's Bereavement Service have continued to provide a caring and dignified service to our residents when they need us most. Our ten municipal cemeteries, although initially closed to visitors at the start of the global pandemic, have now re-opened and signage has been erected to ensure social distancing measures are followed, which will protect both our staff and residents from the unnecessary spread of the Coronavirus.

This time has certainly highlighted our staff's resilience and determination to continue to provide valuable frontline services to the community. A number of staff from within our Parks and Countryside Operations section have been redeployed delivering free school meals. One of our Groundsman, Luke Whitcombe, who would normally be maintaining our green spaces across the county borough at this time of year, can be seen rising to the challenge.

Additionally, staff have been supporting our Facilities Management Team to keep our corporate offices open and safe. Some of the tasks they have been undertaking include routine fire alarm testing, opening and closing building, undertaking general inspections and liaising with contractors. In addition, a number of staff have also been redeployed within the waste service to assist with collections and delivery of new bins etc.

Last week we started to phase in our grass cutting service, which was temporarily paused following the lockdown measures that were imposed on the 24th March. We are now in a position to start phasing in this service at priority locations. The team are currently concentrating their efforts on cutting vision splays, roundabouts and main highway verges across the county borough to improve visibility and prevent vegetation protruding onto the highway network, which could pose a potential danger to our road users. This is part of our maintenance programme, which we have undertaken four times during the growing season for many years. By keeping such areas under control, it not only assists with highway safety but also helps prevent any illicit tipping at the roadside and other potential hazards from being hidden. We undertake a programme of litter picking ahead of our cutting regime so we cleanse the areas as part of the programme to improve the visual environmental quality.



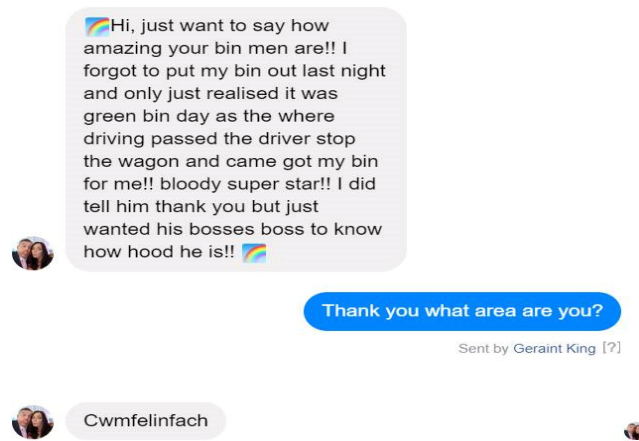
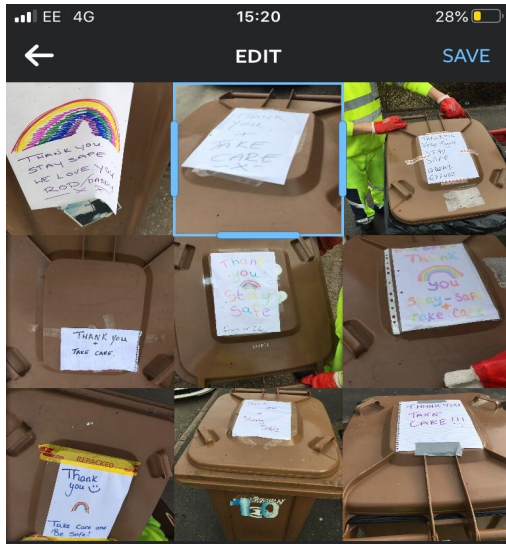
Since lockdown, the Countryside Team have launched a brand new Facebook page called 'Go Wild at Home' [Go Wild @Home](#). This page is packed full of ideas to encourage wildlife in gardens, this has generated a fantastic response in the community and is well worth a visit. It is one of the many exciting things the team have planned in the coming weeks.

Finally, we are working closely with our Comms Team to develop a virtual gardening competition for our residents whereby they can submit photographs of their gardens, window boxes, hanging baskets etc. Hopefully this will go some way to raising the spirits of our residents particularly those who maybe self-isolating.

WASTE STRATEGY & OPERATIONS

- Operatives from the Parks Department initially came in to assist with staff self-isolating and to help continue running our services, and transitioned seamlessly.
- Our tonnages have increased during the lockdown (23rd March to 30th April 2020) in comparison to figures during the same period of 2019.
- We have collected 4,101.30 tonnes of refuse, a 15% increase on previous year.
- We have collected 1,906.82 tonnes of dry recycling, a 20% increase on the previous year.
- We have collected 1,499.23 tonnes of food / garden waste, a 11% increase on the previous year.

- Residents have shown a massive amount of appreciation towards our operatives for their continued efforts with gifts and kind messages. Below is an example of a message we have received for their efforts.
- The attached photo of a Facebook message from a resident is an example of one of our operatives going over and above.



I want to express my gratitude to the wonderful people who show up every Friday and deal with our rubbish, recycling and compost waste. They are kind, thoughtful people who always have a smile and a wave for me and how anyone could be horrible to them as they do such essential work is humanity at its worst. When you think about where we would all be without them.....well, it would be a horrible mess, wouldn't it? I live in Risca at Cotswold Way and I get up every Friday at 5:45 AM so I can give them a smile and wave and a thank you for the work they do. They are very appreciated and I would love it if you would tell them that not all of us nasty, horrible people. Thank you.

I would like to thank the "bin men" who are keeping on providing this invaluable service, keeping our streets clean. They haven't missed a collection day even with the increase in workload that the current crisis has caused. They are also at risk themselves but keep on going . Thank you from Llwyn Yr Eos in Nelson.

Building Cleaning

- Currently cleaning 9 hubs that children attend for front line workers, these settings are open from 7am to 7pm. Our staff are working hard following the government guidance to ensure that all hubs are hygienically safe for all who attend.
- The head teacher and teaching staff at each setting have shown their appreciation for our continuing commitment in this current climate with messages of thanks.

I am so impressed with the cleaning team at Blackwood Hub. Lana and Sharon have been outstanding, working together to coordinate this so effectively. They have done this tirelessly and with a smile on their faces. I can't thank them enough for their input in the successful running of the hub. The rest of the cleaning team have also been extremely thorough in their very important role of keeping us safe at this time. Each and every one has done this professionally and with a flexible attitude which has not gone unnoticed. If the children choose to work outside then the team quickly clean the area before their return. Again I thank you all for your input and am so glad I have you as part of our team.

P.s. If Sharon is ever able to join our school when this is over I would be so grateful

- We have also adapted our cleaning at Corporate Offices with enhanced cleaning of desks and hygiene areas to ensure that essential workers can attend work when necessary and feel at ease that we have staff on site all day continually keeping the offices clean. We are still continuing with any House cleans for vulnerable members of the public that are getting released from hospital or at risk environmentally.
- We have also recommenced our cleaning of Void properties alongside our housing department.
- When required we are also doing enhanced cleaning of our Refuse Lorries.
- We are currently planning resources for a phased reopening of offices, schools and leisure centres combined with a likely requirement for an enhanced cleaning regime.

SPORT AND LEISURE SERVICES

- All Leisure Centres have remained open from 8am – 11am to provide essential hygiene facilities for our Waste Collection Teams
- Risca LC has supported the Risca Hwb model through access to the Sports Hall and Dance Studio
- There is a full programme of both online and pre recorded fitness classes being delivered. The classes delivered by Tracey Hughes (Risca LC) was also the topic of a South Wales Argus press article due to the programme's success
- Digital capacity and output continues to grow and it's clear that this aspect will remain as part of any future offering
- Leisure Centre staff have supported the efforts of delivering meals across the county borough to those in receipt of free school meals
- Vital supplies of oxygen and PPE have been donated by Leisure Centres to support frontline efforts and delivery
- Both Caerphilly and Newbridge LC's will be used by the Welsh Blood Service from next week
- The Customer Service Team have continued to operate as questions received from users have changed as the context has changed. The team have also fielded many calls in relation to other council services
- A programme of CPD has been developed across primarily Fitness based staff. This is being developed for other groups of staff to upskill our staff teams to support facility re-opening
- Whilst the majority of Community Centres have



- remained closed, some facilities are supporting foodbank deliveries.
- Sports Development and Caerphilly adventures are supporting the day to day deliveries of the Free School meals delivery's as well as the councils Meals on wheels service. Which is growing Dailey and most groups are doing double delivery's each day.
 - Sport Caerphilly is supporting the School Education HUBS through our coaches delivering sports activities in all HUBS (Even on Bank Holiday Friday).
 - We are supporting Sport Wales with the Emergency grants programme linked to sports clubs as well as the information that Caerphilly CBC is providing through the WG Business grants programme.
 - National Exercise referral (NERS) have set up a U-Tube Channel which has – 32 Videos – with 145 Subscribers and nearly 4500 views. This is being updated steadily and consistently rather than putting everything out in one go. We have also shared this on our social media platforms this week for wider use but the general public as well as being shared with WLGA as good practice.
 - NERS have Live classes now set-up with 4-5 per week.
 - DVD's have been produced and posted for people who cannot access classes online. Instructors have hand delivered some of these to people who would like to see a friendly face (obviously respecting social distancing)
 - Paper resources are being emailed or posted as required. Training cards, circuit routines, exercise instructions etc.
 - Instructors have produced newsletters for clients with various information and challenges for them to undertake.
 - Additional support is being provided for vulnerable clients. For example, those struggling with mental health issues. Additional calls and follow ups are being provided.
 - We are running a 28 day healthy at home challenge. Clients ticking them off and sending in us pictures of them completing the challenge.
 - We are putting out quite a lot of wellbeing info and signposting to the appropriate services.
 - Recording of Food wise episodes, building knowledge each week to keep members on track with weight management. Additional episodes each week.
 - Posting of resistance bands & worksheets to members without computer access
 - Coffee and chat session for people to maintain contact with their friends from class
 - We have been preparing for "The new World with NERS and Sports Development in terms of the digital platforms we have and how we enhance this offer in the "New World".



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Newsletter 240420.p

PUBLIC PROTECTION

Registrars

- The registration service deals with significant lifetime events and these last few weeks have been amongst the most challenging they have faced. The normal face to face contact and very personal service they provide has completely changed due to the coronavirus outbreak.
- The ban on social gatherings and closure of venues resulted in hundreds of weddings having to be cancelled and potentially re-arranged without knowing when they may be able to start offering the service again at our 10 different venues.
- Birth registration has been deferred, Registrars are having to say no to parents who want to come in and register the births of their long awaited little bundles of joy. Legislation only allows for registration face to face.
- The saddest situations they are currently managing is the registration of deaths and stillbirths by telephone rather than in person. People who have lost loved ones and may not have been able to visit them in their last days to say goodbye. This is so sad and certainly makes registrars realise how important personal contact and support is during the bereavement journey.
- Registrars have implemented new procedures to electronically receive legally required documents from doctors and hospitals and to issue the documents for burial and cremation to take place. Tell Us Once has become an online or telephone process too.
- Couples who have had to re-arrange ceremonies or can't register the births of their babies and the families who are only speaking to officers by telephone to register deaths have been so understanding and patient and even thanked officers at the end of such very personal, difficult conversations.

Trading Standards

- Advising businesses and enforcing business closure and social distancing regulations along with other colleagues within Public protection.
- Complaints about excessive price increases of scarce goods such as hand sanitiser, rogue traders and scammers linked to Covid 19, firms offering PPE with false approval certificates.
- Advising food retailers who are breaking down bulk food to meet demand on packaging/labelling requirements, particularly allergens and metrology.
- Advising consumers on their rights in relation to cancellation of holidays and other events.

Licensing

- The processes in Licensing changed overnight with all Officers primarily working remotely from home, with limited detriment to service users.
- Prior to lockdown they brought forward and proactively chased renewal applications in readiness for possible service disruption ahead
- Put in place systems to ensure continued production of various licence/permit types including taxi badges / plates in order that that public confidence is not undermined
- Relaxed certain policies / procedures to allow licenses to continue trading
- Kept Licensing Committee Members informed of changes to procedures and potential use of delegated officer powers.

- Updated licensing pages on corporate website with information on business support available to licensees.

CCTV and Out of Hours Control Room

- Maintained a normal service throughout the restrictions with officers working shifts 24/7 monitoring public open space CCTV, corporate buildings and answering emergency out of hours calls for the authority.
- Assisted Gwent Police with crime prevention and detection, identifying public gatherings, locating missing and vulnerable persons.

Environmental Health

Environmental health officers (EHO's) remain a key part of the control and monitoring of the current outbreak as a result of their epidemiology training. This has been combined with keeping normal environmental health functions running.

EHO's are about to become involved in leading the effort across the region in relation to contact tracing and continue to provide advice and guidance to care homes on outbreak control.