

Matter which the Chairman has decided is urgent by reason of the need to ensure that Council business is maintained in light of the current COVID 19 pandemic

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 23 March 2020
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	COVID 19 / CORONAVIRUS - SERVICE IMPLICATIONS AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY
Purpose of Report:	To outline work undertaken to date in responding to the threat posed by the outbreak of COVID 19/Coronavirus and to set out on-going work being undertaken to ensure that all possible steps are being taken to prepare the Council for the challenges in coming weeks.
Report Owner:	Leader
Responsible Officer:	Managing Director
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Corporate Management Team
Policy Framework:	This is a matter within the Policy Framework
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report provides an update on COVID 19/Coronavirus, the work undertaken to date in responding to the situation as well as work currently underway. The report also sets out some key issues for consideration with immediate effect and the work that is on-going on Business Continuity Planning to ensure the Council is prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

Recommendations

1. THAT Cabinet considers and endorses the work that has been undertaken to date in responding to COVID 19/Coronavirus by the Council.

2. THAT Cabinet considers and endorses the planning assumptions that have informed the strategic and operational emergency planning arrangements that have been put in place in respect of COVID 19/ Coronavirus and the associated Business Continuity Planning work that is in progress across the organisation.
3. THAT this report is circulated to all Councillors and Town and Community Council clerks for information.
4. THAT the use of Article 14.4.2(ii) of the Council's Constitution (Urgent Decision Procedure) be authorised in respect of the above recommendations in order that the Council's business can be maintained as outlined above in light of COVID 19.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To note and agree the work undertaken to date in response to COVID 19/Coronavirus.
2. To note the Business Continuity arrangements underway across the organisation and to endorse that work, so that it is afforded the necessary urgency and priority and to protect and support the public and ensure services can respond to increased demand with a potentially reduced workforce.
3. To provide this information to all councillors and Town and Community Councils.
4. In order that matters can be dealt with immediately.

1. Background

- 1.1 Coronaviruses are a family of viruses ranging from the common cold to more severe acute respiratory illnesses such as MERS and SARS. COVID 19 is the illness seen in people infected with a new strain of coronavirus not previously seen in humans.
- 1.2 On 31st December 2019, Chinese authorities notified the World Health Organisation (WHO) of an outbreak of pneumonia in Wuhan City, which was later classified as a new disease, COVID 19. The main symptoms are a cough, high temperature and in severe cases, shortness of breath. As this is a new disease, there is no immunity in the population and no vaccine or anti-viral medication. As a result, the potential exists for the disease to spread extensively. This rapid spread has been witnessed in recent weeks and recently, Western Europe has been referenced as being the epicentre for the disease. As of Wednesday 18 March 2020, 1950 cases have been confirmed in the UK, the vast majority in England with 71 recorded deaths where COVID 19 has been detected. 124 Covid 19 cases have been confirmed in Wales, with 2 deaths where Covid 19 was detected. On the weekend of the 14th and 15th March, the first case was recorded in the Vale of Glamorgan. These figures need to be treated with

caution as the Government approach to testing is such that data is not being captured effectively at this time.

- 1.3** Evidence indicates that the majority of people who become infected will experience a mild self-limiting illness, similar to seasonal flu. Some will show no symptoms at all. A proportion of those infected will develop complications and require hospital treatment, most often pneumonia. In a small proportion of these cases, the illness may be severe enough to lead to death.
- 1.4** The risk of death increases in older people and people with an underlying health risk condition or those who are immuno-compromised. Illness is less common and usually less severe in young people. Children can be affected but illness is rare in people under 20 years of age. All the above facts have been highly publicised in recent weeks.
- 1.5** In terms of planning at the strategic level, the following is relevant.
- 1.6** The UK action plan (Coronavirus: Action Plan - a Guide to what you can expect across the UK) published on the 3rd March 2020 sets out what the UK has already done, and plans to do further to tackle the Coronavirus outbreak. The objectives of the action plan are to contain, delay and mitigate the outbreak, using research to inform policy. The overall phases of the plan are:
 - Contain:** detect early cases, follow up close contacts and prevent the disease spreading for as long as is reasonably possible.
 - Delay:** slow the spread, lowering the peak impact.
 - Research:** better understand the virus to plan and act to lessen its effect on the UK.
 - Mitigate:** care for those who are ill, support hospitals and support people in the community to minimise the overall impact of the disease.
- 1.7** On the 12th March the UK Government officially moved from the Containment phase into the Delay Phase, the intention being to slow the spread of the virus and lowering the peak impact. Since that time there have been various telephone meetings between Welsh Government and Local Authority Leaders and similar telephone meetings at service level. Key decisions taken as a result of moving into the Delay Phase included the need for any person exhibiting a new cough or new high temperature to self-isolate, initially for 7 days and subsequently as of 17 March for 14 days and that isolation should extend to all household members, even if others within the same household are not displaying symptoms.
- 1.8** Since the 12th March, the Welsh Government has taken the decision to suspend all non-emergency or routine hospital operations. This approach has now also

been taken by the NHS in England. Since 13 March, the Prime Minister of the UK Government is holding regular briefings and advice and guidance is changing daily. Recent advice included measures to promote social distancing and advice was to avoid theatres, clubs and large venues. On 17 March the Briefing involved the Chancellor who outlined economic support measures as a result of the situation. Cabinet will appreciate that between the finalising of this report and the holding of Cabinet on 23rd March, the advice is extremely likely to have changed again. Indeed, at the time of writing, it has just been announced that schools in Wales will close from Friday 20 March <https://gov.wales/statement-minister-education-kirsty-williams-school-closures-wales> The most up-to-date advice from the UK Government on social distancing can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

- 1.9** The South Wales Resilience Forum Major Infectious Disease Framework indicates that in a major infectious disease emergency, a Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) will be convened to consider the emergency in its wider context; determine longer term and wider impacts and risks with strategic implications; define and communicate the overarching strategy and objectives for the emergency response; establish the framework, policy and parameters for tactical and operational levels; and monitor the context, risks, impacts and progress towards defined objectives. South Wales Police chair the SCG. Such a meeting was held on 12 March when all key partners were able to outline the current position, relevant to their organisation and outline their Business Continuity arrangements.
- 1.10** A joint meeting of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Public Service Boards was convened on 13 March when all partners were able to share information and plans in relation to their respective organisations as well as how the organisations could work together in relation to support.
- 1.11** There remains a great deal of uncertainty around the planning assumptions; however, the following well publicised reasonable worst-case scenario based on no behavioural interventions can be used to inform planning and response arrangements:
- People infected - 80% of the entire population.
 - People showing symptoms - 50% of infected population.
 - Fatality Rate – 1% of those infected.
- 1.12** New cases are expected to peak at around 11 weeks from the start of the epidemic and demand for services is likely to peak between 12 to 14 weeks from the start of the epidemic. There is however likely to be considerable variation between UHBs based on local timings, size of the resident (and non-resident) population and proportion of vulnerable people population.

- 1.13** Up to 20% of workforce may be absent from work during peak weeks, and for the Vale of Glamorgan Council, this could and in all likelihood will have significant implications for service continuity. This amounts to approximately 1000 individuals. That number could more than double if one takes account of the need for self-isolation if symptoms are displayed. At the time of writing, a number of Council staff are working in a more agile manner, with others working from home. Others are self-isolating as a consequence of symptoms that relate to Government advice.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** On 12 March 2020, CMT considered the implications of the outbreak on the Council and immediate decisions were taken, as summarised below.
- 2.2** To increase the pace of the Business Continuity Planning work that has been underway in recent weeks. Emergency Planning colleagues are supporting all Directorates to develop action plans informed by workforce reduction modelling and considering the content from Business Continuity Plans. This work has commenced in earnest in Social Services given the nature of the particular risks and challenges that will be experienced acutely within that area. These plans include issues such as external communications, availability of supplies, essential level of service, interface with partners.
- 2.3** In terms of managing the workplace, immediate action has been taken to increase cleaning hours in corporate offices; the provision of additional supplies of soap, paper towels and hand sanitiser have been ordered and are being distributed (including to schools). Hand sanitiser has already been placed in entrances to all offices with wipes in the Council fleet along with additional signage within offices.
- 2.4** In terms of working practices, the following decisions and advice has been provided to all staff:
- Planned Management Development Programme for week commencing 16 March 2020 has been postponed;
 - Attendance at non-essential regional/national meetings has been suspended as a practice;
 - Digital meetings are being encouraged wherever possible;
 - All Council meetings have been cancelled until further notice, with the exception of Cabinet for 23rd march which is essential to put measures in place to ensure that the council can continue to operate during this unprecedented time. A separate report on the agenda is presented so that Cabinet can consider matters relating to the constitution and governance arrangements that will need to be deployed during the weeks and potentially months ahead;

- Information provided to all staff on the need to self-isolate in accordance with UK and WG advice;
- Advice given on the ability to work from home for those with underlying medical conditions or caring duties.

2.5 In terms of Internal communications, our response has been swift and decisive, as summarised below:

- Staffnet+ information portal: latest updates, HR information on self-isolation/absence reporting, wellbeing, travel, symptom checker – all updated frequently;
- Letter (hard copy) sent to all non-school staff and also cascaded by email;
- Letter (hard copy) sent to all social services staff with service specific information and also cascaded by email;
- Letter sent to schools, followed by further specific guidance for headteachers and parents;
- All Chief officers are receiving regular updates so that all are sighted on the challenges that lie ahead;
- Posters have been distributed throughout offices and the estate, including schools;
- CMT and Cabinet Members are receiving daily updates via Emergency Planning from Public Health Wales and Councillors have been informed of action taken to date;
- Regular communication to all staff as guidance changes and develops.

2.6 In terms of external communications, again the response has been swift and includes:

- Letters sent to families of residential care service users, recipients of direct payments, carers for day centre/opportunities users, adult placement providers, external domiciliary care, residential care and travel providers;
- Letter sent to all Town and Community Councils;
- Social media feeds promoting Public Health messages and 'Do It Online' messages and are scheduled for frequent release;
- Webpage and front- page banner deployed, giving up to date information on availability of services, including schools;
- Preparations underway to create C1V2 at the Civic Offices (Former Members' Room) to provide for continuity of service given advice on social distancing. It is anticipated that this facility will be 'live' from 19 March.

2.7 In terms of ensuring effective management of the response to ensure timely decisions, the following is relevant:

- CMT is managing the overall response;
- Directorate Management Teams are responsible for Directorate Action Plans;
- HR are providing daily absence information, health & safety advice, well-being advice and policy support;
- A Corporate Coordinating team has been co-located at Civic Offices bringing together Communications & Emergency Planning colleagues, supplemented

with others as required to coordinate the overall response and to ensure consistency.

2.8 In terms of the next immediate steps and priorities, the following summarises the position at week commencing 16 March 2020:

- Directorate Action Plans are being developed for continued discussion at CMT, although the focus is on those high priority services, to ensure that high priority services can continue to operate;
- Critical workforce issues are being mapped and additional resources identified to train/deploy as required, so that we can ensure Business Continuity in high priority services;
- Working from home potential for critical posts (secured by IT kit deployment) has been identified;
- Identification of services which could be scaled back to free capacity for priority ones has been undertaken and is summarised below as part of this report;
- Work has progressed to re-profile critical work on a reactive basis. For example, Green waste collections have been temporarily suspended so that the Council can fulfil its obligations in terms of food waste, recycling and food recycling services. This is as a consequence of the availability of specialist staff given the need to self-isolate. With more residents staying at home, as a consequence of Government advice and guidance, there will be a relaxation on black bag collections from Monday 23rd March, albeit with communications requesting that where possible residents should still aim to restrict domestic refuse and focus on recycling for obvious environmental reasons.
- For the same reasons, the roll out of source segregated recycling to Barry will be delayed, as resources are directed and targeted to service continuity.
- Securing the ongoing provision of further handwashing facilities and information across the estate;
- Securing necessary PPE for our front line staff where necessary and appropriate. This is an issue that has been raised with partners and at Welsh Government level by many authorities;
- Work is underway to provide up-to-date advice and support to businesses, virtually via the website and through the provision of dedicated advice by key council officers.
- Welsh Government has announced measures to match those in England providing a much needed boost for small businesses struggling to cope with the impact of the Coronavirus crisis. The new package provides retail, leisure and hospitality businesses in Wales with a year long business rates holiday. A grant of £25,000 will also be offered for businesses in the same sector with a rateable value of between £12,001 and £51,000.
- It also provides a £10,000 grant to all businesses eligible for Small Business Rates Relief with a rateable value of £12,000 or less. This situation is currently changing very fast and this was the position at the time that this report was finalised.

- Discussing potential alternative use of our assets and the assets of our partners and businesses. By way of example we are in discussion with businesses and organisations regarding the use of assets for providing play schemes and care for children of essential staff both within and beyond the organisation;
- Similar discussions are taking place with the University Health Board about potential capacity to support the Health Service in terms of ensuring sufficient capacity;
- Trade union briefings will continue throughout;
- Continued liaison with partners - building on the work of the SCG and the discussion held with Cardiff and Vale PSB partners;
- The need to consider a move from 'encouraging' certain practices to 'mandating', particularly in light of changing government advice.
- As of the afternoon of 18 March, work is progressing quickly on how we can provide services within our schools given the decision of Welsh Government to close schools from Friday 20 March. This includes a consideration of how to provide creche and play care facilities for essential staff, free school meals and breakfast club provision. On-going communication with all our schools is vital to provide clarity as far as possible to all our staff, parents and children.

2.9 Accordingly, a number of measures have already been put in place. As the situation develops on a daily basis, these measures will be continuously reviewed and updated. The measures that have been put in place are designed to ensure effective and swift decision making on the operational side of the business. They are also designed to protect the health and well-being of our staff, which is our most important resource.

2.10 In terms of **Business Continuity** to ensure the protection of the most vital services. In response to the potential significant impact on the availability of the Council's workforce due to infection or isolation, it is imperative that a plan is put in place that can respond and over a sustained period.

2.11 This plan is intended to identify:

- What are the most essential front-line services and what could be done to support these in terms of staff resources?
- Which areas of the Council's back office operations are critical and how can these be supported to function?
- How to support a more general move to homeworking in line with the latest advice to 'avoid the office' if possible?

Front line service delivery

2.12 The following have been identified through developing Directorate Action Plans as critical front-line service areas. These areas the Council needs to prioritise and identify sufficient resource. The services include:

All school based staff
C1V
Catering
Child Protection
Cleaning
Commissioned Social Care
Complex Needs Assessments
Corporate IT Support
Domiciliary Care
Emergency Planning
Finance
Fleet Management
Homelessness
HR (Health & Safety, Payroll)
Leader/Governance
Legal Services
Mental Health
Out of Hours/Emergency Repairs
Refuse & Recycling
Registrars
Residential Care
Safeguarding (education)
Safeguarding (social services)
Schools ICT Support
Sheltered Housing
Shared Regulatory Services

- 2.13** There are options available to the Council in identifying resource that could be deployed to support these areas if they are not adequately resourced. Work has been undertaken to assess the scope for redeploying staff to key areas as listed above. This includes having regular discussions within teams as to the availability of staff, subject to necessary skills and relevant checks. The caveat to this is that there will need to be an acknowledgement of a temporary reduction in service levels and standards in those areas not deemed to be a priority. A possible ramification, in the days and weeks that follow will be to consider services that will need to temporarily closed in their entirety due to social isolation measures/government policy decisions.
- 2.14** There is also scope to seek help and assistance from contractors working for the Council when services are reduced. A good example potentially relates to home to school transport providers who could, subject to appropriate skills, support the council's fleet operations. Work is in progress to also identify volunteers

from across the organisation to ask people to express an interest in being temporarily deployed to another service area either partially or full-time.

- 2.15** In all instances, there is a full consideration being given to Human Resources implications around payments at substantive roles, consideration of TOIL and overtime as well as training and appropriate checks. The way this is communicated to staff is also vitally important.
- 2.16** In addition to those services identified as being critical, Payroll and Finance (Banking) have been identified as critical back office functions. As with front-line service delivery, this plan needs to identify the potential resource implications of a reduction in available staff, but also the business continuity arrangements to enable them to function. Primarily it is considered that this will involve whether homeworking can be facilitated through the provision of ICT equipment.
- 2.17** In terms of Homeworking, the UK Government's latest advice is for people to 'avoid the office' if possible. For many staff this will be possible due to their current ICT equipment. For critical posts without this capability, we have identified the steps the Council will take to ensure that the capability exists. This work is progressing well.

The above paragraphs indicate all the work that is currently underway to respond to the challenges of the Covid 19 / Coronavirus. At the time of writing, most of the responsibility for the response to COVID 19 rests with the UK Government, Welsh Government and Health Services, although it is already apparent that the Council will have a vital role in ensuring priority services continue to be delivered as far as possible. The Council also has a role to ensure the health and well-being of the workforce and to act as a community leader for the communities of the Vale of Glamorgan. It is also clear that the Council will have a critical role in working with the UHB in ensuring our essential services continue to be provided to the most vulnerable in our communities.

- 2.18** It is for this reason that plans have already been developed to respond effectively to the potential impacts of COVID 19, continue to deliver essential services and protect local communities and our staff. It is impossible to plan for every eventuality, but this report seeks to provide an update and a direction of travel as to the work undertaken and being undertaken as well as the decisions needed in the immediate term.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The continuity of Council Services is clearly closely aligned to all Five ways of working. The Council will need to work closely in partnership and collaboration with other organisations at a strategic and local level. We will also need to

collaborate and integrate our service delivery across the organisation to ensure that the most vital and essential services continue to be provided.

- 3.2** Much of the work underway seeks to prevent the spread of the virus amongst the staff base. Promoting home working where this is appropriate and sensible is one way of seeking to avoid further absences. Working remotely and in an agile manner also helps with this issue.
- 3.3** A key element of our approach is to involve all our Chief officers in the decisions that we take as an organisation. In the same way we need to involve key partners in the decisions that we take.
- 3.4** In situations such as this it is often difficult to consider long term implications, but much of the continuity planning that is being undertaken is designed to ensure that our communities and residents are as resilient as possible into the future. The same will apply with local businesses.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** There are a number of financial implications that relate to this issue and the majority of those are addressed above. There will be financial implications that arise as various initiatives are put into place to secure continuation of vital services. These will only become clear as and when actions will be undertaken. They will all be documented for auditing and reporting purposes.

Employment

- 4.2** All Human Resources implications are being considered and are outlined within the body of this report

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** A separate report is presented to this Cabinet dealing with issues relating to constitution and governance. This is a fundamental issue to enable the Council to continue to function as matters progress, to allow decisions to be made on day to day and operational matters.

5. Background Papers

Various press releases and correspondence to staff and partners.