

Economy, Residents, Communities and Governance Scrutiny Committee

Meeting Venue
By Teams

Meeting Date
Monday, 18 May 2020

Meeting Time
10.30 am

For further information please contact
**Wyn Richards, Scrutiny Manager and
Head of Democratic Services**
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County Hall
Llandrindod Wells
Powys
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12/05/2020

Mae croeso i chi siarad yn Gymraeg neu yn Saesneg yn y cyfarfod. Rhowch wybod pa iaith rydych am ei defnyddio erbyn hanner dydd, ddau ddiwrnod gwaith cyn y cyfarfod.

You are welcome to speak Welsh or English in the meeting. Please inform us of which language you wish to use by noon, two working days before the meeting.

AGENDA

1.	APOLOGIES
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To receive apologies for absence.

2.	DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS
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To receive disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

(NB: Members are reminded that under Section 78 Members having been given a prohibited party whip cannot vote on a matter before the Committee.)

3.	DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST
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Any disclose of interests by Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting.

4.	SCRUTINY OF BUSINESS CRITICAL ACTIVITIES
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To receive for information details of the business critical activities subject to scrutiny.
(Pages 3 - 4)

5.	SCRUTINY OF BUSINESS CRITICAL ACTIVITIES - ECONOMY, RESIDENTS, COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
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5.1. Briefing Reports

To receive the attached briefing report as background information:
(Pages 5 - 12)

5.2. Verbal Updates and Scrutiny of Business Critical Activities

To receive a verbal update on the briefing note circulated with the agenda and scrutinise any matters arising from that update.

6.	SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
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The next meeting of the Committee will be on 1st June 2020 (11.00 to 12.00)

The Committee is asked to consider which items it wishes to include in the work programme for the next and forthcoming meetings which will be on a 2 weekly basis.

As meetings will be an hour each, it is suggested that only 2 topics per session should be selected.

Scrutiny of Business Critical Activities.

Activity	Scrutiny Committee
1. Adult Services – services as outlined in the Social Services Business Continuity Plan	HC
2. Homelessness Service	ERCG
3. Public Protection (enforcement, public health, Temporary Body Storage Facility)	ERCG
4. Childcare Hubs and Early Years provision Key Workers and Vulnerable Children	HC
5. Continuity of Learning Plans	LS
6. Supporting Extremely Vulnerable residents	HC
7. Support for Businesses	ERCG
8. Refuse Collection	ERCG
9. Emergency Housing repairs and maintenance	ERCG
10. Highways – essential repair and emergency response	ERCG
11. Children's Services – all services, including Safeguarding	HC
12. Financial Management and Reporting	Audit / FP
13. Corporate Support Services (including Customer Services, Communications, Workforce and ICT, including support for WCCIS)	ERCG
14. Recovery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing for Recovery phase Retention of Good Practice and new ways of working 	Joint Committee ??

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5.1

Homelessness Service

Homelessness Cell – Meets 3 times a week with representation from Housing, Police, Probation, Pobl, PAVO, Social Services and other key partners.

- There are 86 households in temporary accommodation and 16 households in Bed and Breakfast. 49 additional temporary accommodation units secured. Housing Association stock also being considered.
- Welsh Government issued guidance (28th April) regarding the assessment of vulnerable households and those we have accommodated in accordance with COVID19 duties. It is probable that the majority of cases accommodated will become priority need cases and PCC will have to find long term accommodation options for them.
- Welsh Government issued guidance on dealing with difficult cases, the guidance refers to outreach support and assertive support. Homeless Cell has been asked to consider specification for the provision of outreach assertive support, as this is not currently available in Powys.
- Homeless Cell considering longer term strategy for households accommodated. Request has been made for Powys County Council to be included in the Welsh Government Private Sector Leasing scheme pilot.
- PCC will need to consider purchasing additional accommodation and reconfiguring existing accommodation to accommodate the additional households.
- PCC to review the Allocation Scheme for Homes in Powys and consider awarding additional priority to homeless in order to move on households from temporary accommodation.

Public Protection (enforcement and public health, including Temporary Body Storage Facility)

- Work is being undertaken by the Environmental Health team on infection control in residential care, nursing homes and other care settings.
- Consideration is now being given to the plans for contact tracing in conjunction with our PTHB colleagues.
- The team continue to work on enforcement of the restriction regulations in conjunction with the Police. Proactive checks have been carried out in relation to caravan sites and holiday lets, takeaway premises. Other premises have been contacted and/or visited on a reactive basis. The service continue to respond to complaints and requests for advice. To date, 3 Prohibition Notices and 2 Fixed Penalty Notices have been served.

- Requests for businesses to open are being considered and issued in line with the restriction regulations. These are in exceptional circumstances to accommodate homeless and key workers. The level of work in this area is increasing as the number of people returning to work increases.
- Social distancing work has been extended to the smaller retailers to provide them with the necessary support and guidance to ensure they understand and are able to apply the social distancing requirements.
- Advice has been shared with businesses in relation to the potential legionella risks as a result of the stagnation of water supplies.
- The more critical statutory functions are continuing such as infectious disease control, issuing new licences and renewals along with food registration and approvals that are required by businesses. This work is critical to ensure the businesses that are permitted to continue can do so with our support and without any significant risks.
- The team continue to manage intelligence on scams and potential threats.

Unit 1:

- Standard Operating Procedure for Unit 1 adopted by PCC/PTHB.
- Staffing arrangements in place for Unit 1.
- Unit 1 will only become operational if Funeral Director capacity is exceeded.

Support for Businesses

Powys CC Administered Business Rates Grants

The Council has paid out £39.3M in grants to 3,293 businesses across Powys. Retail, leisure and hospitality business occupying a rateable value of between £12,001 and £51,000 have received grants of £25,000, and a £10,000 grant has been paid to firms eligible for small business rates relief and have rateable value of £12,000 or less. There are still businesses eligible for the assistance under the scheme that have not yet responded and further communications are underway to encourage them to contact the Council's Covid-19 financial support helpline on 01597 826345.

UK Government Bounce Back Loans

Small businesses will benefit from a new fast-track finance scheme providing loans between £2,000 and £50,000 with a 100% government-backed guarantee for lenders. The new Bounce Back Loans scheme announced this week will help bolster the existing package of support available to the smallest businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The

scheme launched for applications on Monday 4 May. Firms will be able to access these loans through a network of accredited lenders.

Welsh Government Economic Resilience Grant Fund Update

The Economic Resilience Fund offers financial support to help businesses, charities and social enterprises deal with the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Since it opened to applications two weeks ago, the second phase of the fund has received almost 9,000 requests for support across Wales. Due to the scale of demand, Welsh Government increased the amount of funding for this phase to £300 million. Applications are currently being processed and businesses are starting to receive grant payments. The fund has now been paused following the very large number of applications received, to give Welsh Government an opportunity to consider what further support businesses, charities and social enterprises need.

Gaps in Financial Support for Businesses / Self Employed

Despite the significant financial support being made available for businesses from the UK and Welsh Governments, there are still many Powys businesses who have been unable to access help. The eligibility criteria of the current schemes mean that not all businesses are eligible for assistance or are still waiting to access payments. An example are the challenges facing self-employed and freelance businesses resulting from Covid-19. This is a significant issue for Powys where 26% of the workforce is self-employed compared to a UK average of 15% (Wales 14%). While it will not help all businesses, last month the UK government introduced a new grant to help support self-employed workers who have lost income during the COVID-19 crisis. The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) allows self-employed workers to claim a taxable grant worth 80% their monthly profits, up to a maximum of £2,500 a month with payments starting from the beginning of June.

Impact of Covid-19 on the Powys Tourism & Events Sector

Tourism and events are vital to Powys. The visitor economy provides significant employment and generates much needed income for businesses and communities. Covid-19 is having a particularly devastating impact on the sector and the Council is working closely with businesses, destination partnerships, Visit Wales and other stakeholders. A recent survey of 317 tourism businesses in Powys has highlighted the major challenges facing the industry with businesses struggling financially and low levels of confidence about their future survival. The sector is working collaboratively to plan for recovery and the Council will continue to provide support.

Personal Protective Equipment

Issues with the supply of PPE have been headline news over recent weeks. Many businesses in Powys are contributing to the supply and manufacture of PPE and other medical products to support the Covid-19 response. T.S Henderson in Hay on Wye, Select Products in Brecon and Laura Ashley in Newtown are examples of companies who have taken up the challenge.

Further information on how businesses can contribute can be found on the Business Wales web site: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/news-and-blogs/news/provision-critical-equipment-and-personal-protection-equipment-ppe>

Further Covid-19 Business Information and Support

For further information on support and advice for businesses please visit the Covid-19 business support section of the Council's website <https://en.powys.gov.uk/coronavirus/helpforbusinesses> or email economicdevelopment@powys.gov.uk

Refuse Collection

Services operating:

- Currently able to cover all domestic and trade waste and recycling collections.
- Trade customers who are not operating have been able to put their service on hold.
- Green waste collections as normal with many new customers signing up to the service
- Bulky waste collections are currently on hold, but consideration now being given on how these can be safely re-introduced over the coming weeks.
- Boxes and bin deliveries being undertaken through redeployment of staff at higher risk following robust risk assessments.
- No household visits by Awareness Team to minimise social contact, but some flytipping investigations being carried out were safe to do so.
- Household Waste Recycling Centres are currently closed as it is still not clear if this is classed as an essential journey for residents. Much has been made in the media regarding an increase in flytipping, but this is not currently the case in Powys. It is also unlikely that closing these sites would result in residents resorting to criminal behaviour. There is a working group with Welsh authorities and Welsh Government to have a coordinated approach across Wales to safely open these sites both for the staff and the public.
- Transfer stations and haulage operating as normal.

Staff issues:

- Significant numbers of staff off due to underlying health conditions. Where possible some have been brought back into work, but only on agreement of a robust risk assessment so that they carry out functions with no need for any social contact.
- Highways staff have been redeployed to cover gaps in service.
- Following an initial recruitment drive, some staff have been taken on with Zero Hour Contracts. There are more available should they be required.
- Agencies also have staff available as another option if required.
- The updated WISH (Waste Industry Safety and Health) guidance continues to be implemented for our operational staff and incorporated into the risk assessments.

WLGA are working on a standard set of guidelines for all Wales authorities following input from Unions.

- Continuing to stress the need with crews for social distancing – the WISH guidance as well as Welsh Government clarification recognises that it will not always be practical to only have two in a cab on larger rounds, but nonetheless we are still adopting the two in a cab policy.
- Washing facilities and hand wipes are available for crews, hand sanitiser is now being provided as some crews have requested this, but not strictly necessary if they use the facilities they do have.
- Staffing over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend didn't present any problems with crews going the extra mile to get the rounds completed. The May Bank Holidays will also be suitably covered.

Liaison with Welsh Government, NRW and other authorities:

- Liaising regularly with colleagues in other authorities and the WLGA.
- There are weekly meetings called with Welsh Government to coordinate an all Wales approach. There are also regular CSS meetings to discuss operational issues.
- Welsh Government have now produced their guidance on collection priorities, which includes collecting all streams separately if possible. All authorities other than Cardiff, are still continuing with residual and recycling, with most authorities now reintroducing services.

Publicity:

- We have a page on the website which is being kept updated with information for residents
- We have a regular social media presence with much positive feedback from residents. This is being fed back to the crews which is helping enormously with morale.

Emergency Housing repairs and maintenance

General

- Contractors continuing to work according to government advice, their own risk assessments and procedural guidance issued in respect of Covid-19.
- Tenants have the right to refuse access which will be respected by contractors.
- Service requests that cannot be completed due to non-access continue to be recorded as Works in Progress and will be attended to when the Covid-19 event abates.

Repairs and Maintenance

- Urgent and critical repairs continue to be progressed by HoWPS.
- Service requests now at 55% of normal demand.
- No major problems experienced securing materials needed to maintain services.

Compliance and Statutory Testing

- Compliance service visits are continuing but significant numbers of tenants are refusing access as part of their response to government request for people to maintain high levels of social distancing.
- HoWPS continuing to record all non-access details, advising PCC accordingly. Housing officers are continuing to contact people to try and arrange access.

Void Management

- Housing Service is no longer undertaking lettings, other than for homelessness cases, social service requirements and other exceptional needs. Pre-allocations continuing to allow for as rapid return to normal service as possible.
- HoWPS prioritising void work to increase the availability of temporary accommodation for homeless and other needs.

Highways – essential repair and emergency response

Winter Maintenance - activity has drawn to an end and Winter Gritting standby ceased as from 19th April 2020 . Hired gritters will be returning to ECON at the end of the month.

Emergency Out of Hours Works - from April 20th 2020 there are 7 No Emergency Response gangs on standby in the county - these are 2 man gangs.

HGSS currently have 21 Operatives absent from work either work either Shielding, are in the at risk group or they consider themselves vulnerable.

Most depots are operating above the “minimum” level and are carrying out numerous “essential” activities on both the Trunk and county road networks. These activities included: Cat 1 emergency work, Cat 1- 28 day, grave digging, weed control, gully emptying and some minor Capital works that need completing.

HGSS currently have in the region 26 Operatives assisting in the W&R service. There are also 6 HGSS Operatives that have volunteered to work in Unit 1 as porters.

Surface Dressing - This essential and seasonal activity will commence on the 4th May 2020. The process will start in the South of the county and work North. The activity will be delivered by RMS Ltd working for Powys CC.

Storm Dennis damage - works to repair this damage are ongoing around the county. The recent dry weather has helped with progress as a number of the repairs are near rivers.

Weed Control / Sign cleaning and repairs - works are commencing with this activity across the county

Gully emptying – work for our client NMWTRA is progressing as scheduled with 4 gully emptying lorries being utilised in the county.

Grass cutting - work has commenced cutting grass on our Housing sites, amenity areas and cemeteries although at the present this is a limited service.

Should our resource drop below the minimum required to deliver these essential services then we will consider using sub-contractors and/or agency staff to assist.

Update on Transport

Update for Passenger Transport Services: All local bus services provided by PCC have (as of the 30th March) been significantly reduced to a very basic service to enable key workers to travel to and from a key Powys settlement (with between 2-3 hours in between return trips). This also enables residents with no other means of travel to access a supermarket / pharmacy in our key towns. Messages and revised timetables were put on via social media on Sunday 19th April to inform passengers of the changes and referred to Traveline Cymru for travel advice. Messages have also been displayed via our interactive and real time screens across the county. We will continue to review. On bus and concessionary revenue has reduced by around 75%

Payments to contractors: In line with Welsh Government guidance, we will make payments to bus contractors as follows:

- Home to School Transport: 100% up to March 2020. Then, where School transport has been suspended, we will pay 75% of the agreed contract price as a retainer until June (to be reviewed if school closure extend beyond June). Where contractors are providing transport to re-purposed schools for emergency childcare, 100% of the contract price will be paid, not in addition to the 75% retainer. Operators will be asked to sign an Indemnity Agreement agreeing to make available all resource (staff and vehicles) during the retainer period should we require and not to furlough any staff. Payments will be set up to be paid direct into suppliers bank accounts on the last banking day of each month for the month they are invoicing.
- Public Transport: Again, in line with Welsh Government guidance, we will continue to pay local bus service providers 100% of the agreed contract price where we have reduced services. Where services are suspended, we will pay 75%.

Indemnity Letter to Suppliers: The Council sent the letter of indemnity to bus suppliers on 1st April setting out how and why we would pay suppliers. A further clarification message was sent on the 17th of April to clarify our position on a couple of matters in the letter. Effectively it said that in return for our payment of 75% of their agreed daily rates, they were advised that they should continue to pay their staff the full amount they would have normally accrued for operating the contracts. If suppliers subsequently claimed alternative sources of funding that duplicate the purpose of our payments, then the Council retains the right to cover the equivalent amount.

Whilst we cannot prescribe to suppliers what they should pay their staff, the purpose of the clarification is to make it clear that they can (and probably should) access whatever funding is available to them from Local, Welsh and Central Government to protect their businesses, but when we come to reconcile their contract payments at the end of this process, we will take the 'non-Powys CC' funding into consideration to ensure that the appropriate level of funding has been provided to our suppliers.

Emergency Child Care Transport: Generally, there have been relatively few issues involved with the operation of the emergency transport with the exception of the provision of hand sanitiser and PPE

Fleet Services: During the pandemic, we still have a duty to fulfil our duties on our Operators Licence, so it is business as usual in terms of day to day activities. Recently, we have applied to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner to increase the authorisation for Trailers at the Ffrwdgrech depot (for the refrigerated trailers) which was approved and to apply for a new Operating Centre at Abermule which is currently being advertised in the local press as required.

Property

- Core office building remain operational on a skeleton staff and are open to operational service requirements as and when needed/approved. Some issues remain with staff accessing buildings out of the core hours. This is being kept under review.
- We will need a programmed return to work scheme for services if and when services start being allowed back into workspaces over the coming months, considering social distancing etc. Managing team will need to consider this carefully with the H&S team.
- External contractors are now starting to approach the Property Team and returning to work on capital projects. Discussion has taken place with HOWPS to ensure any returning contractors provide suitable RAMS for their activities based upon COVID 19 guidance.