

Meeting of the Workforce Partnership Council (WPC)

Wednesday 25 March 2020 – (10:00-11:00am)

Skype Meeting

1. Introduction and Opening Remarks

1.1 As the meeting was being delivered via Skype and to aid the effective management of the WPC meeting, Karen Higgins introduced attendees and outlined the protocol for members to raise questions during discussions. She then handed over to the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government to formally Chair the WPC.

2. Covid 19 – Coronavirus

2.1 The Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government invited Fliss Bennee Welsh Government Health and Social Services Deputy Director for Technology and Digital to deliver her presentation on Covid 19 – Coronavirus to the WPC. She provided an update on the spread of the virus in Wales outlining some of the regional pressures facing the NHS and the measures being put in place to address these. Following the presentation Mike Payne asked three questions:

- I. What is the Welsh Government doing to prevent private companies from undertaking work previously carried out by local authority staff that have been laid-off without using the furlough scheme
- II. What measures are being put in place to ensure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is being made available to front line staff that require it
- III. What are local authorities doing to ensure social distancing is being implemented to protect staff that are working in close proximity to one another such as vehicle drivers and depot workers

2.2 Judith Cole answered question 1. She asked Mike Payne if he could provide her with specific examples outside of this meeting so they could discuss these further. Chris Llewelyn asked to be included in these discussions.

2.3 Fliss Bennee answered question 2. She explained that the provision of PPE to frontline staff has been escalated and that the Welsh Government's Chief Medical Officer (CMO) has allocated people to work with them to ensure they receive the equipment they need. The Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government explained that the Minister for Health and Social Services is issuing a written statement on this subject today and that the WPC Joint Secretariat would ensure this is circulated to members.

2.4 Chris Llewelyn answered question 3. He confirmed that this had already been raised with him as an issue and again offered to discuss this with Mike

Payne outside of the meeting, proposing its inclusion in the discussion planned to address issues relating to question 1.

- 2.5 Shavanah Taj explained that delays in the provision of PPE and the lack of adequate child support are key areas of concern for frontline workers, many of whom are exhibiting signs of depression and anxiety over the impact of Covid 19. The provision of PPE was being left to each individual health board and she felt the current situation could impact on the decisions of former NHS staff considering whether to return to assist the effort against the virus.
- 2.6 Helen Arthur confirmed the Health Welsh Partnership Forum would be meeting tomorrow and would specifically consider both the long and short term effects of Covid 19 on the mental health of NHS workers, especially those experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She added that some guidance being circulated on Covid 19 does not reflect the clinically recognised position. Official guidance is being compiled to address this which should be ready within the next couple of days.
- 2.7 Kelly Andrews referred to social care workers in the independent sector not receiving pay if they have to self-isolate or take sick leave. She asked what the Welsh Government can do to support them. Judith Cole offered to take up this point and discuss with colleagues in the Welsh Government and feed back to the WPC.

Action: Judith Cole, Chris Llewellyn and Mike Payne to progress a telephone discussion to address the issues raised regarding the local government workforce

Action: WPC Joint Secretariat to circulate the Minister for Health and Social Services Written Statement on Personal Protective Equipment to the WPC.

Action: Judith Cole to investigate with Welsh Government colleagues the position with regards the provision of sick pay to social care workers and feed back to the WPC.

3. Social Partnership and Fair Work in the Context of Covid 19

- 3.1 The Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government explained that this item would allow members to have a short discussion on what social partnership can deliver during the fast moving situation presented by the Covid 19 outbreak.
- 3.2 Jo Salway confirmed there would be a longer timeline in place for delivering the Social Partnership Bill due to the impact of Covid 19 and that a draft would be produced for the end of the calendar year. She added that discussions at a sectoral level were continuing and would be grateful for any assistance the WPC can offer in progressing these.

- 3.3 Shavanah Taj referred back to the previous agenda item and expressed concerns over the amount of detail coming from the UK Government regarding the construction industry around Covid 19. She explained that greater clarity was needed and that further guidance was anticipated but had not been published yet. Specifically she referred to the lack of detail regarding what is considered a priority building project or essential maintenance. She felt this lack of clarity failed to address the specific Covid 19 health and safety issues facing construction workers.
- 3.4 Mike Payne added that the lack of clarity was being experienced in other sectors such as manufacturing where companies are staying open because they are uncertain of how to access Government support. He felt Welsh Government could play a more pro-active role in this.
- 3.5 Fliss Bennee responded, recognising the challenges facing construction workers including the risk of working in close proximity and for people to operate and touch the same machinery regularly. Nonetheless she emphasised the importance of social distancing being employed as a means of preventing the spread of the virus.
- 3.6 The Trade Unions raised a couple of other issues. Tanya Palmer asked for trade union representatives to be recognised as key workers during the Covid 19 outbreak. Mike Payne outlined the ambiguity companies are facing in accessing support and off-setting the impact of business rates. The Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government offered to take these issues back and investigate.
- 3.7 A discussion followed regarding the provision of child care to frontline workers. Shavanah Taj addressed the uncertainty for those on the frontline and what constitutes a key worker for the purposes of qualifying for childcare. She explained that currently schools are only providing care if one parent is a key worker within the NHS. Chris Llewelyn emphasised that child care was a new and different service for schools and was only intended to be accessed where there was no alternative, the need for child care provision would only escalate as the weeks commenced and it would be difficult to develop guidance to suit all service areas.
- 3.8 Huw Owen explained that the Welsh Government had tried to develop a consistent definition with the UK Government. He confirmed the provision of childcare would be applied flexibly in Wales against the guidance that is already in the public domain, working with local authorities to ensure local care issues are addressed effectively. Huw Owen agreed to circulate the guidance he had issued last week on this issue to the WPC.
- 3.9 Shavanah Taj confirmed that the Trade Unions have been compiling a detailed list of their concerns across all public service areas and that she would make this available to the WPC.
- 3.10 Karen Higgins asked WPC members to email their questions to the WPC mailbox (wpc.mailbox@gov.wales) so they can be compiled by the Joint Secretariat and circulated back out to members.
- 3.11 The Deputy Minister confirmed the next meeting of the WPC was scheduled for the 11 May but emphasised the importance of members staying in communication in the meantime.

Action: Welsh Government to investigate the issues of trade union representatives being recognised as key workers and a reported ambiguity for businesses wishing to access support and off-set the impact of business rates.

Action: Huw Owen to provide the WPC with the guidance issued regarding child care provision to key workers in Wales.

Action: Shavanah Taj to provide the WPC with a full list of trade union concerns regarding the impact of Covid 19 on public service workers.

Action: WPC members to email their questions from this meeting to the WPC mailbox so they can be compiled and circulated to all members by the WPC Joint Secretariat.

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Attendance List – WPC – 25 March 2020

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| Cabinet Chair - Hannah Blythyn AM – Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government |
| Trade Unions Tanya Palmer – UNISON Shavanah Taj – PCS Mike Payne – GMB Kelly Andrews - GMB |
| Devolved Employers Richard Tompkins – NHS Wales Employers Chris Llewelyn – WLGA Peter Kennedy – Welsh Government |
| Welsh Government Reg Kilpatrick – Local Government Helen Arthur – Health and Social Services Jo Salway – Social Partnership and Fair Work Judith Cole - Local Government Fliss Bennee – Health and Social Services Huw Owen – Education and Public Services |
| Workforce Partnership Council - Joint Secretariat Karen Higgins – Head of WPC Joint Secretariat |
| Observers Natalie Stewart – Welsh Government Mark Lewis – WPC Joint Secretariat |

Actions Log

| WPC Actions 25 March 2020 | | |
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| No. | Action | Owner |
| 1 | Judith Cole, Chris Llewellyn and Mike Payne to progress a telephone discussion to address the issues raised regarding the local government workforce | WPC Members (referenced) |
| 2 | WPC Joint Secretariat to circulate the Minister for Health and Social Services Written Statement on Personal Protective Equipment to the WPC. | WPC Joint Secretariat |
| 3 | Judith Cole to investigate with Welsh Government colleagues the position with regards the provision of sick pay to social care workers and feed back to the WPC. | Welsh Government |
| 4 | Welsh Government to investigate the issues of trade union representatives being recognised as key workers and a reported ambiguity for businesses wishing to access support and offset the impact of business rates. | Welsh Government |
| 5 | Huw Owen to provide the WPC with the guidance issued regarding child care provision to key workers in Wales. | Welsh Government |
| 6 | Shavanah Taj to provide the WPC with a full list of trade union concerns regarding the impact of Covid 19 on public service workers. | Trade Unions |
| 7 | WPC members to email their questions from this meeting to the WPC mailbox so they can be compiled and circulated to all members by the WPC Joint Secretariat. | WPC Members |