

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY:

A LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL, 10TH JUNE 2020

INTRODUCTION

1. Councils, with partners in the national health service, other public bodies and third and independent sectors, are providing a front-line response to the rapidly changing national emergency of COVID-19.
2. Councils have worked closely with partners in planning ahead of the crisis, through Local Resilience Forums (LRFs), during the current response phase through the Strategic Coordinating Groups (SCGs) and will continue to do so in the transition to recovery and the setting up of Recovery Coordinating Groups (RCGs).
3. National leadership has been provided by the Welsh Government and complemented by community leadership through local government.
4. The Welsh Government and local government have a shared commitment to work in partnership. This shared leadership has been demonstrated and strengthened during this crisis and there has been an unprecedented level of dialogue and engagement and openness, with regular bilateral meetings between Ministers and WLGA spokespersons and weekly meetings between all 22 leaders and Ministers.
5. These channels of communication have ensured Ministers can communicate national priorities and strategy directly with leaders and has also ensured that local issues and risks are rapidly escalated to Ministers and allow local intelligence and innovation to shape national strategy. This degree and regularity of central-local engagement is not seen in other parts of the UK.
6. While much of the strategy is set nationally, the crisis has demonstrated the importance of ensuring local delivery partners are engaged in its development; it is not only important to allow flexibility to interpret strategy and respond according to local circumstances and capacity but that organisations with service delivery experience and operational expertise and responsibility help shape the strategic response.
7. Councils have demonstrated flexibility, innovation, resilience and responsiveness. The crisis has demonstrated councils' ability to respond irrespective of scale and reaffirmed the WLGA's stance on the importance of subsidiarity and localism, with elected members and officers rooted in their local communities.

8. Councils have demonstrated that they are uniquely placed at the heart of public service delivery and their communities and are often the first port of call for the most vulnerable or those in need of support or assurance.

RESPONSE

9. Councils' immediate response was decisive; within days and weeks, councils redesigned and reprioritised essential local services, closing down some services and introducing new operating models, with thousands of workers working remotely and many thousands of workers in other services volunteering to temporarily change roles overnight to help contribute to the emergency effort.
10. Councils have had to restructure around essential services such as social services and new support services such as shielding and key worker hubs, this has involved staff being redeployed, undertaking of skills audits and in some instances the furloughing of staff. Council workers should be commended for their flexibility and their compassion and commitment to the communities they serve.
11. Councils have introduced rapid service reform and transformation and have been relied to deliver under the most challenging of circumstances, responding to rapidly changing local and national priorities, plans, guidance and regulations:
 - Social care in particular is at the frontline working in some of the most challenging, testing circumstances alongside colleagues in the NHS. The public support for care workers is well deserved and the contribution of care staff has been recognised by the Welsh Government's decision to award a £500 extra payment;
 - Councils have also played a central part in responding to the health emergency crisis, working through SCGs and with their Local Health Boards, in setting up temporary field-hospitals. This emergency response, requiring extensive partnership, planning, staff and financial resources and the rapid transformation of several council properties has seen councils and their staff widely commended for their efforts and expertise. Councils managed significant logistical challenges and turned round major infrastructure developments in a matter of only weeks;
 - Councils have been central to coordinating support for the most vulnerable in our communities, working with volunteers and partners in the third sector, through the shielding scheme, providing food boxes and supporting food banks and other vital services, including responding to significant increases in demand for welfare advice and support;
 - Working closely with Welsh Government, councils have transformed homelessness services, providing emergency temporary accommodation and putting in place vital support for hundreds of homeless people, laying the

foundations for a future approach which could lead to the achievement of the goal of ending homelessness in Wales;

- Councils have prioritised household waste/recycling collection to ensure this vital service continued uninterrupted throughout the lockdown period. They have redeployed staff from other areas to ensure sufficient numbers on the front line and introduced measures to ensure workforce safety. As conditions have allowed, councils have been reintroducing bulky and green waste collections, alongside the reopening of Household Waste & Recycling Services, carefully managed to ensure site and road safety for residents and workers.
- Councils have worked with Welsh Government and bus operators to find ways of supporting the sector through a very difficult period when fare box income has plummeted. Whilst the funding sources for operators are many and varied, continued payments by local authorities have helped keep the industry afloat, alongside other measures that have been taken (such as the furloughing of some of their staff). This will be crucial as lockdown eases, including assisting the return to school, which relies heavily on provision of home to school transport.
- Councils and their schools have played a central role, providing childcare for key workers, vital free school meals service (and meeting increasing demand) as well as ensuring learning and wellbeing support continues via online resources and teaching;
- Councils have responded with pace and flexibility to support businesses in need, to date making 54,000 business support awards totalling £661m as well as developing innovative proposals for flexible local bursaries to support smaller businesses outside of national business support arrangements; and
- Councils have piloted and are an integral part of the Test, Trace and Protect programme – outside of the development of a vaccine, this will provide the most significant contribution and foundations for any widespread containment of the virus and any wide-scale easing of the lockdown. Councils' local knowledge, operational flexibility and public protection experience and expertise will be critical in ensuring the trace and protect elements are successfully delivered.

12. All these new or revised services have been introduced at pace whilst continuing to ensure other core services continue as much 'as normal' as possible.

EASING THE LOCKDOWN AND TRANSITION

13. The 'Framework for Recovery' and 'Unlocking our society and economy: continuing the conversation' outlines the Welsh Government's approach to

recovery and the evidence and measures underpinning any decisions to ensure the R rate remains below 1.

14. Councils individually, and with partners, are undertaking comprehensive service reviews to plan for the phased return or revision of services as lock-down is gradually eased or as local needs or priorities evolve.
15. In addition to the phased return of council services as lock-down is eased, local authorities play a critical enabling role for the wider easing of lock-down of the economy and society and supporting other public services. The current consideration of a return of non-essential retail is heavily dependent on local authorities preparing public spaces and streets for social distancing, preparatory work of trading standards and environmental health and plans to facilitate return to work via active travel enhancements. A more widespread return to work will be underpinned by the reopening of schools and provision of essential day time child-care.
16. Given the unique nature, scale and remaining uncertainty around the crisis, the transition phase to recovery will be an extended period, with possible local variations in approaches and restrictions. Transition will be prolonged and may be disrupted as there remains a need for readiness to revert to a dedicated response phase should there be localised spikes or a second peak later in the year.
17. There remain several ongoing challenges or risks that will need to be monitored and mitigated throughout transition and in advance of recovery including:
 - The R rate locally, regionally and nationally across Wales;
 - The successful roll-out of Test, Trace and Protect;
 - The continued compliance with social distancing as lockdown is gradually eased or is re-introduced, if necessary;
 - The supply of PPE for public services, particularly as public consumption of PPE is likely to increase as lock-down eases and in line with Government guidance;
 - Effective communications and messaging, particularly managing any differences and divergence of approach between England and Wales;
 - Protracted civil restrictions (lockdown and social distancing measures) leading to an increased risk of community tensions and public disorder;
 - Organisational capacity to manage responses to easing of lockdown, notably enforcement;
 - Workforce health and wellbeing and the capacity and resilience to introduce prior or new services, particularly given staff self-isolation, shielding or redeployment into other roles such as contact tracing;

- Adaptability of organisational workplaces to ensure social distancing and of organisations to maintain wholesale remote working;
- Ensuring learning continuity and providing educational and wellbeing support to a cohort of children and young people experiencing a uniquely challenging and disruptive period in their pedagogical and personal lives;
- Significant localised and national socio-economic challenges given the immediate economic impact and likely recession, including increased unemployment and take-up of universal credit and other benefits;
- Health and social care capacity, particularly as 'routine' health services are reintroduced and contingencies for local spikes or future peaks are planned; and
- Precarious public service finances, with significant short and medium-term pressures faced particularly by local authorities along with future uncertainty around the UK Government's budgetary response to the economic fallout of COVID 19 and the impact of Brexit.

RECOVERY AND RENEWAL

18. COVID 19 will have deep, long-lasting public health, economic and societal impacts within Wales and across the world.
19. The challenges have been unprecedented and, as outlined above, the Welsh Government and public services remain in the response phase, whilst planning for a longer-term recovery.
20. The public service expectations and needs of Wales' communities are likely to be significantly different to those pre-COVID 19 and there is wide recognition that recovery will require 'renewal' rather than a 'return' to what was before.
21. The Welsh Government's plans for recovery, coordinated by the Counsel General, are being informed by a series of round-table discussions with a range of international experts in the field of economics, the labour market, climate change, public services, and business.
22. Others, such as the Future Generations Commissioner, are encouraging conversations encouraging a radical, sustainable recovery and proposing reforms such as a Universal Basic Income and a 4-day working week to tackle social inequalities and improve quality of life.
23. Local government is committed to building on the innovations and learning to date and is keen to engage with the Welsh Government and help shape plans for a sustainable and transformative recovery.

24. During recent Ministerial meetings, leaders have highlighted several opportunities or priorities for recovery. The following are some of the ideas that have been put forward but is not an exhaustive list:

- **Locking-in the transformation of organisational working and service delivery**, the scope for increased use of digital, new more agile and multi-disciplinary ways of working with consequent impact on office usage, the environment and workforce well-being;
- **Building on community resilience, co-production and the role of citizens** - building on new behaviours, commitments and contribution of communities and volunteers;
- **Opportunities to embed or expand modal shifts in transport**, through active travel, public transport and alternative ways of working;
- **Recognising the primacy of and reinvesting in sustainable social care** given its interdependence from the NHS;
- Sustaining the rapid improvement and transformation of homelessness services and **achieving the goal of ending homelessness in Wales**;
- **Rebuilding and reinvesting in modern local economies** through local procurement frameworks, prudential borrowing for public sector construction (including strategic housing developments) and boosting the construction sector, through renewable/low carbon energy projects and flood alleviation schemes, investing in industries of the future and rethinking the jobs and skills that will be needed in the future;
- **Investment in preventative health measures** and the role of public health, including active travel and healthier lifestyles in terms of the food and drink offer and supply chain;
- **Preserving and sustaining environmental improvements** experienced during the lockdown, due to reduced emissions, footfall and traffic; and
- **Promoting and sustaining the renewed political and public recognition and respect for public services and front-line workers**, settling a lasting shared commitment to and mutual responsibility for community and public service outcomes.