

REPORT TO STRONG COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE**PUBLIC PROTECTION COVID RELATED RESPONSE to 30th SEPTEMBER 2021****(1) Environmental Health – Commercial**

Work streams for Commercial team during pandemic	Initial workload	Ongoing
Commercial work moved towards being more reactive than proactive, noting surge in inquiries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early reactive work to pick up complaints of social distancing and open premises • Advising on changing business types and diversifying for business to remain open 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All service requests continue to be dealt with • Higher risk food safety visits slowly being resumed from October 2021
Contact Tracing (TTP)	<p>Setting up a tracing service from scratch, working with Health partners & 4 LA's in Gwent</p> <p>Setting up working procedures for all tracers and advisors in TTP service</p> <p>Initially entire Commercial EHP's, with some from the other 3 PP teams</p>	<p>Getting capacity right for current number of Covid-19 cases, contacts of those cases, and ensuring balance right in team for winter/spring 2021/22</p> <p>Various update training, scripts for telephone service, data management, reports to WG, etc.</p> <p>Challenge in providing a 77 hour a week service, 9am to 8pm, 7 days a week</p>
Key workers accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacting all know holiday accommodation providers, informing of requirements of closing and availability of business grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with others to get list of premises taking key workers • Setting up procedure, protocol and templates for approval – sharing with Gwent LA's
Legionella	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers attended on-line training on risks of legionella from water systems in premises that have closed. • Identification from database of all premises that will be affected and need to carry out safety procedure before opening up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacting all premises to advise of risk of legionella in water systems through e mail, phone contact, social media – this is virtually every premises that has water on premises • Respond to enquiries received
Business grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All businesses recorded on data base contacted via e mail (707 identified) on availability of grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to call backs for advice and signposted to Enterprise section
Care Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New admissions guidance and working with PHW to raise awareness in care homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closely working with Commissioning Officers in SCH • Regular Q and A sessions set up on Teams with care home providers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 Officers up to speed on guidance and attend on-line training from PHW • Information sent out to Commissioning (SCH) Officers • Regular contacts set up with care homes • Liaison re PPE provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular contact with care home providers • Investigation of all cases and contacts • Liaison with PHW/ABHB on cases in different closed settings (including assisted living and private hospitals)
Domiciliary Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold meeting with a number of Dom care agencies providing advice on PPE with SCH Commissioning Officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All EHO contacts send to Dom care agencies for support • Providers forum attended by officers to answer questions
Diversification of businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses that had to close turned to delivery of meals and/or fruit and veg takeaway service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses have now reopened, guidance and advice provided on Covid risk assessments and 'reasonable measures'

Service Request type	1st April to 30th September 2019 – pre pandemic	1st April to 30th September 2020 – start of pandemic	1st April to 30th September 2021 - 12 to 18 months later
Food	401	229	236
Health, Safety & Welfare	59	66	52
Covid	0	558	324
Misc. inc. events & TEN's	349	53	104
Other	76	12	93
Total	885	918	819

The global pandemic has had an unimaginable effect on the operation of the team. Communicable disease control for the county sits within the team but we are also responsible for the enforcement of the WG Covid-19 regulations. The implementation, resourcing, structuring, training and running the Track & Trace team in Monmouthshire has taken massive effort. At its' height we had 87 staff added to a team of 9. The Commercial EH response has been recognised by PHW and ABUHB partners, together with excellent feedback from recipients of the T&T service, which is a huge credit to the team. The pandemic continues and Officers are still fully involved in T&T work and responding to identified clusters in a range of settings.

Due to the pressures on the team unfortunately the 21/22 business plan for the year was only started in October. The team has been down to 30% capacity at times during 2021 due to unavoidable sickness. Officer sickness absence was below 20 days last year, but since April this year it has amounted to 273 days. This has had an enormous impact on any recovery or normal statutory work, due to minimal staff needing to deal with the Covid response in schools and care homes, and creating significant strain on remaining Officers.

From Sept 20 –Sept 21 1,741 service requests were recorded of which 951 were Covid related, (prior to Covid around 1,400 pa.). However, it is estimated that only a third of Covid service request were actually recorded on the system so the figure could easily be nearer 2,500. Currently 2 out of the 4 Officers available in the team are on care sector work continuously.

To get back on track, methods of carrying out block inspections, taking into account risk and service request demand, are being planned.

Any inspections that the team have managed to carry out have had to have follow up enforcement action in far greater frequency than prior to the pandemic, adding to existing workloads. It is estimated that 80% of hygiene visits now need follow up enforcement action.

(2) Environmental Health – Public Health

The reactive work undertaken by the team has continued throughout the pandemic. As previously reported, the early stages of Q1 and Q2 20/21 saw an increase in some areas of work. These have been maintained in 21/22 in the noise, fly tipping areas and the recent trend of year on year increase in overall service requests continues, as illustrated below:

Comparison of service requests 1st April to 30th September 2021 with same period 2020

Service Request Type	1st April to 30th September 2019 – pre Pandemic	1st April to 30th September 2020 - start of Pandemic	1st April to 30th September 2021 - 12 to 18 months later
Noise nuisance complaints	197	252	266
Smoke nuisance complaints	41	113	47
Fly tipping	110	187	213
Rats and mice	38	70	56
Total service requests types	1018	1231	1284

The easing of the movement restrictions has enabled the team to catch up on certain aspects of work such as the annual inspection programme of our industrial/commercial permitted sites and petroleum sites.

The 3 month public consultation on a proposed Public Spaces Protection Order for dog controls (dog fouling, dogs on leads and dog exemption areas), endorsed by Strong Communities Select on the 12th March 2020, was suspended in 2020 because of the pandemic. However the consultation commenced on the 26th July 2021. Over 1300 completed surveys have been returned and these will help inform a further report to this Committee early 2022.

Workload remains very high and the team has not been able to commit time to recover lost ground in other proactive areas. These include private water supply investigations, inspections of potentially high risk residential accommodation situated above fast food outlets and our inspection programme of the 18 licensed holiday caravan sites in the County.

In June 2021 the team was successful in recruiting an EHO to fill a temporary post. The new recruit, however, has been providing a leading role for the authority in Track & Trace throughout the pandemic and has had to continue with these duties because of the continuing high Covid numbers.

(3) Licensing

The Licensing team has strived to keep businesses running throughout this difficult time. Guidance was provided to the trade immediately on receipt from Welsh Government via e-mails and website updates. Licensing continues to play an active part in Monmouthshire's Business Forum and Re-Opening Town Centre projects, with the aim of keeping businesses as successful as possible during a pandemic.

This year the hospitality sector had to deal with a number of changes and adapt quickly in order to keep their businesses viable. Licensing played an active part in giving advice through every stage through bulletins and visits to ensure each premises was clear in how they should keep their staff and public safe. The team have worked closely with our partners in Gwent Police, visiting not only the hospitality sector such as restaurants, pubs and clubs but also shops and takeaways. The hospitality sector had 3 legislative changes content with since April. Initially permission was granted to open outdoors and Licensing worked with Highways as a consultee for pavement licensing, providing guidance on safe measures to put in place such as screens and sanitisers. In May 2021 they were able to open indoors with live music, although discos were not permitted noting it would encourage dancing. Again advice and visits were made to ensure social distancing measures, face masks being worn, table service and screens were in place. The third change during this period was in August when Wales changed to Alert Level zero (AL0) lifting most restrictions. This sector still had to carry out a risk assessment on the 'reasonable measures' they would put in place to prevent the spread of Covid. Licensing attended Pubwatch meetings to encourage good practice during the on-going pandemic.

Many events returned after AL0 and the team guided event organisers to ensure safe working, correct licensing permissions were in place and they had a robust Covid risk assessment. Licensing worked with 30 event organisers that included the Shire horse show, Balter Festival, Abergavenny food festival and the Usk show. Not all events that would normally take place occurred in 2021, but they are likely to return again next year.

As well as working hard to assist people at such difficult times, the team had to continue issuing licences and check on compliance. A number of businesses changed the way they operated and varied their licence to accommodate this. The team dealt with 18 night time economy premises that required action dealing with breach of licence conditions, anti-social behaviour, noise issues and drug taking at some venues.

The taxi trade were able to continue during the pandemic, but they too had to ensure face coverings were worn by both drivers and passengers. Advice was given by Licensing on sanitisation and wiping down of hard surfaces such as door handles that passengers would touch after every journey. We put a policy in place to ensure that should a screen be fitted in a vehicle it met with safety standards in the case of a collision. It was recognised that the classroom environment for safeguarding training and knowledge test, a requirement to get a drivers licence, would no longer be possible, so on-line training and testing was provided. This was gratefully received by the taxi trade and will be retained going forward.

A comparison of 'service requests' and 'inspections' for the six month periods indicated is provided below –

	1st April to 30th September 2019 - pre-pandemic	1st April to 30th September 2020 - start of pandemic	1st April to 30th September 2021 12 to 18 months later
Service Requests	456	340	406
Covid Service Requests	0	130	98
Routine inspections	112	4	18
Covid Inspections	0	56	144

(4) Trading Standards and Animal Health

Our Trading Standards and Animal Health service has maintained its' key functions including responding to consumer issues especially where victims are vulnerable, or the issue is high risk such as scams/fraud, product safety or animal disease control.

Complaints and enquiries for the six month period 1st April to 30th September have seen a decrease from the same period as last year, as 2020 was the period where Covid enquiries from businesses were at their highest -

	1st April to 30th September 2019 Pre Pandemic	1st April to 30th September 2020 start of Pandemic	1/04/2021 – 30/09/2021 12 to 18 months later
Complaints/Enquiries	365	588	463

Protecting vulnerable residents, and prioritising high risk/harm issues - Several Coronavirus related scams, frauds and trading malpractices were identified either locally or elsewhere in the country.

Business advice e.g. supply chain issues, compliance, product safety etc.- This pandemic is affecting businesses very differently depending on their trade and has led to a number of approaches for advice.

Product safety, animal health, ongoing criminal cases and investigations - Several areas of work have continued to ensure the ongoing safety of people and animals. It would also be inappropriate to pull away from work to investigate and prosecute criminal offences as this might further encourage criminals as they feel they can 'get away with' crimes.

Due to the typically negative effect on businesses, many have diversified into products they do not normally manufacture or import, without due regard to PPE or biocidal controls that apply. For example, intelligence received resulted in hand sanitiser being sampled and submitted for analysis. This showed that the product did not provide the level of protection claimed putting users unknowingly at unnecessary risk. This led to a further six

products being submitted for analysis and, whilst the levels of alcohol were above the minimum required to be effective, all products had either warning, other labelling issues or were misleading in their description.

Examples of Coronavirus related scams –

Here are just some of the scams we are aware of, but it must be noted that fraudsters come in all forms and can contact residents or businesses at the door, by phone, post or online.

- People offering miracle cures for coronavirus – there is no specific treatment for coronavirus (Covid-19).
- The council DO NOT need to enter houses to do a deep clean
- Bogus healthcare workers claiming to be offering ‘home-testing’ for coronavirus
- Emails claiming that you can get a refund on taxes, utilities or similar are usually bogus and they are just after your personal and bank details.
- Fake products that say they can protect you or cure coronavirus. These will not help and are designed to just take your money
- New mobile phone apps that claim to give you updates on the virus, instead they lock your phone and demand a ransom
- People offering to do your shopping and ask for money upfront and then disappear

One incident included a lady in her 80’s who, despite self-isolating, was compelled to answer the door by a stranger who tried to demand £220 in cash to complete a health and safety check. The team have experienced complaints of fraudsters trying to steal people’s bank details by misleading families into believing they need to cover payments for school meals whilst the schools are closed, or business details being altered in order to obtain Government support funding by deception through multiple submission of false claims.

In addition the team have supported Environmental Health colleagues by allocating two Officers to support the Track & Trace effort during its’ peak, and responding to non-food/non-licensed premises for any Covid related enquiries.

Work unable to be delivered to date has included Minimum Unit Price inspections which would have brought in close to £5,000 in total, also the feed delivery work has been delayed. It is hoped that this will still be delivered by the end of March 2022 but additional opportunities to generate income though will have been missed due to lack of capacity. This also puts additional pressure on resources required to sustain existing capacity.

Animal Health and Welfare

Animal Health have continued to operate and deal with ongoing investigations and complaints despite the pandemic. Whilst there were some initial reductions in attendance at market, it was soon encouraged by Welsh Government as intelligence showed an increase in welfare problems both at market and in animals arriving at slaughter during that early period.

Most significantly was an ongoing farm welfare problem that resulted in the need to seize 128 cattle. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, there was a significant delay in the Court system and so the Order Hearing was unavoidably delayed for several months, now concluded. The associated prosecution was successfully concluded in June this year – guilty pleas were eventually entered for 12 charges and the sentence handed down was

12 weeks imprisonment, suspended for 2 years. Disqualified for holding cattle for 10 years, costs £5,239 to be paid within three months (collection order) and victim support of £122.

Following the execution of a warrant on an unlicensed dog breeder, a dog and her 8 puppies and two older puppies were taken into possession under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. A pre-trial agreement was reached for all the puppies to be signed over for rehoming and the mother returned but on the agreement that she would be neutered. All puppies were successfully rehomed with considerable costs of the operation recovered.

The Trading Standards Wales Dog Breeding Project, being led by Monmouthshire, underpins the delivery of some of the actions identified in the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales due to be launched this month. It will challenge illegal dog breeding, offer support to local authority animal health services to respond to assertions of animal cruelty and will allow local authorities some capacity to focus on wider animal health and welfare work. This is another example of local authorities turning policy aspirations into action and delivering much needed support and change.

November 2021