

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE</b>
<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>29<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2020</b>
<b>DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>

**1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet with an update of the arrangements the Council is continuing to have in place to identify, manage and mitigate risks in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorse the arrangements the Council continues to have in place and the risks that are being actively managed in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 The Coronavirus pandemic has posed an unprecedented challenge to our way of life and the way in which we provide services. The need to preserve life and stop the spread of the virus, while continuing to support communities, has meant that we have paused or re-purposed a lot of our usual work as capacity was directed towards the emergency response effort. The Council has continued to rise to the challenge by adapting, innovating and establishing service delivery that supports residents and businesses, assists community activity and supports council staff well-being.
- 3.2 Monmouthshire County Council has a long-standing purpose of building sustainable and resilient communities. Earlier this month Cabinet evaluated progress against the purpose and strategic aims that had been put in place for the response phase of the pandemic and used this to inform the future shape of service delivery. As a consequence Cabinet revised the purpose and strategic aims established during the early weeks of the outbreak to reflect the council's transition from response towards recovery.
- 3.3 The pace of change over the past three months has been unrelenting, with hundreds of staff re-deployed, new services created almost overnight, and tens of millions of pounds re-directed towards preserving life and helping local businesses remain viable.
- 3.4 Of course, these are exceptional times and there are some things that we haven't been able to do. This has also come at a financial cost with additional costs incurred in responding to the emergency response effort and significant losses of income as services have ceased to operate as a consequence of the lockdown restrictions in place. Coming so soon after the emergency response to the recent flooding our finances have been

stretched to breaking point. Despite the many challenges, these efforts have resulted in new ways of doing things, some of which can form part of a lasting legacy of transformation with needs being met in new ways.

- 3.5 Our role in the coming months will be to create the conditions for residents and businesses to take those first steps, while recognising that coronavirus remains an active threat to life and one that will cast a long shadow for many in our communities.
- 3.6 The Council has continued to maintain and adapt the structures and mechanisms in place to co-ordinate the emergency response whilst also tracking progress and ensuring we remain focussed on our purpose.
- 3.7 When Cabinet reconvened in early May it received an update on the risk management arrangements the Council had in place to identify, manage and mitigate risks in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The risk management arrangements have also been maintained and adapted as we transition from the response to the recovery phase.
- 3.8 The Council's Emergency Management Plan is operating and business continuity arrangements remain in place to deliver and coordinate the response, working across Council services along with our external partners such as the emergency services, neighbouring local authorities and Welsh Government. These continue to operate in a dynamic rapidly changing environment, evolving and adapting to manage and mitigate, as far as possible, a variety of risks to Council service delivery and the well-being of our staff and residents.
- 3.9 As the Council transitions from response to recovery the Council has also adapted the internal response structures that link into wider formal Gwent structures and directly into regional, Welsh and Central Government. A diagram of the structure and arrangements in place can be seen in Annex 1 of the report.

### **Updated Internal Arrangements**

- 3.10 In the immediate response phase this was co-ordinated internally via the Emergency Response Team (ERT). The ERT was formally stood down on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and the Council's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) took on the ongoing responsibility to oversee the ongoing response. SLT continues to meet twice a week currently.
- 3.11 A COVID-19 Coordinating Group has also been established, chaired by the Chief Officer for Resources, and that comprises the Head of People Services (as Vice Chair of the Gwent Local Resilience Forum) and the Council's Emergency Planning Manager. The Group meets on a weekly basis. The role of this group is to maintain oversight of the ongoing emergency response and where it:
- Receives updates from the Gwent Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG);
  - Ensures announcements and guidance issued by UK Government and Welsh Government are being acted upon as required;
  - Records decisions and tracks progress against actions required;
  - Identifies and monitors risks needing to be managed and mitigated, and ensures that they are appropriately assigned and acted upon; and

- Determines any matters needing to be reported on weekly Welsh Government returns.

- 3.12 The ERT was guided by an established risk register. Subsequent to the ERT being stood down COVID-19 related risks are being assessed by the COVID-19 Coordinating Group. The residual risks have now either transferred to the Council's strategic risk register or where risks are operational in nature they have been transferred into service business plans. There is clear and identified accountability and ownership of these risks and they are being monitored on an ongoing basis.
- 3.13 COVID related risks are assessed on a weekly basis and as required by the COVID-19 Co-ordinating Group and reported into, considered and acted upon by the Strategic Leadership Team.
- 3.14 The Council's other established risk management arrangements continue to manage a range of strategic risks across service areas. The strategic risk register continues to be reviewed and updated and resulting from an assessment of potential COVID related impacts on the Authority, the wider Monmouthshire economy and its communities. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the updates made to the strategic risk register.
- 3.15 The high and medium risks previously identified by ERT in the 6<sup>th</sup> May Cabinet report are now considered to low risk, with the exception of the risk of the Council becoming financially unsustainable. These risks are still being actively managed through the arrangements highlighted above.
- 3.16 The COVID-19 specific sub groups that had been established to support the ERT have similarly been stood down and resultant activity embedded back into directorates as required. In addition key outputs from these groups – particularly around staff welfare, latest Covid19 updates and useful tools continue to be made available via the Support All Hub.
- 3.17 The ERT and any sub-groups can quickly be reconvened if the situation arises and will remain under constant review. However, the 'battle rhythm' has naturally slowed as we transition towards the recovery phase.

### **External Arrangements**

- 3.18 Monmouthshire links with external responding organisations via the Gwent Strategic Co-ordinating group (SCG). The SCG is chaired by Gwent Police and covers their geographic footprint. Representatives from the Emergency Services, local authorities, health organisations, military, Natural Resources Wales, utilities and Welsh Government sit on this group. Monmouthshire's representative is the Head of People Services. The SCG are responsible for setting the strategic objectives and coordination of the partner agency response to COVID-19.
- 3.19 There are specific sub groups that sit beneath the SCG that support this strategic group. The Council are represented on these groups as necessary. The Council now provides a weekly situation report to the SCG and these are collated and sent weekly to the Emergency Coordination Centre Wales (ECCW). The ECCW reports to Welsh

Government (WG) who then report to COBR – the Cabinet Office Briefing Room. The SCG can also escalate concerns directly to WG through the formal meetings in addition to the weekly situation reporting mechanism.

- 3.20 In addition to the above, the Leader of the Council also meets with other council leaders and Welsh Government ministers to discuss the response on a weekly basis.
- 3.21 SCG are now only needing to meet on a weekly basis, again resulting from the change in battle rhythm and as we see the move and transition towards recovery. The focus of SCG now is to both plan ahead and to ensure that robust arrangements are in place to respond to any further outbreak or second wave, and to ensure that all necessary criteria have met before it stands down. These criteria comprise:
- A Recovery Coordination Group being fully established with TOR and subgroups
  - SCG risks being either mitigated, accepted or transferred
  - An Outbreak Control Plan and protocols with SCG being in place
  - SCG stand-up triggers being agreed, to determine when the SCG might have to reconvene
  - SCG being satisfied that mitigation plans for risks to vulnerable groups are in hand
  - SCG having been de-briefed and lessons have been captured for the LRF to take forward
  - The SCG cost recovery plan having been discussed and implemented
  - A hand-over certificate being completed between SCG/RCG
- 3.22 The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths continues to decline in Wales and Gwent and why Welsh Government has been able to continue easing the lockdown restrictions that have been in place since March. The risk now concerns any resultant resurgence of COVID-19 cases, whether it be through a local outbreak or a second wave as we move towards the Autumn and flu season where the capacity of the NHS will be reduced.
- 3.23 In order to respond to these risks, the following measures continue to be essential to maintain a reduced level of transmission and avoid resurgence of COVID-19 cases and deaths:
- A robust monitoring framework to closely monitor the situation, rapidly detect increased transmission, assess the impact of the interventions in place and avoid a resurgence of COVID-19.
  - An expanded testing strategy aimed at comprehensive testing of all individuals displaying symptoms compatible with COVID-19
  - A framework for contact tracing, based on extensive testing, active case finding, early detection of cases, isolation of cases, quarantine and follow-up of contacts.
  - Prompt identification and investigation of clusters/outbreaks associated with specific settings, with implementation of tailored control and prevention measures to minimise onward spread to others in the setting and to the wider community.
  - Long-term sustainable implementation of essential NPIs (non-pharmaceutical interventions), irrespective of transmission rates, and the ability to amend strategies

rapidly in response to indications of increased transmission, if appropriate, only restricting those to local areas.

- A strong risk communication strategy reminding citizens that the pandemic is not over

3.24 Welsh Government and the Gwent SCG and its partners are co-ordinating this aspect of the response. The Council continues to play an active role on SCG and in ensuring that all necessary arrangements are put in place.

#### **4 OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

4.1 The risk management arrangements aim to identify and assess risks robustly, drawing on a range of evidence both internally across all service areas as well as well as externally through the Gwent SCG and other sources.

4.2 These arrangements form part of the emergency response and the aim is to put in place risk controls that are appropriate and proportionate to the issues they are mitigating. The legislation and the council's responsibilities in all these areas continue to remain an important part of our response and as it continues transition through to recovery.

4.3 The Council's other established risk management arrangements continue to manage a range of strategic risks across service areas. The strategic risk register continues to be reviewed and updated and resulting from an assessment of potential COVID related impacts on the Authority, the wider Monmouthshire economy and its communities.

#### **5 EVALUATION CRITERIA**

5.1 The strategic risk register remains a live document that undergoes ongoing and frequent review by the Council's Strategic Leadership Team. Audit Committee also maintains oversight and review of the Council's risk management arrangements and an update of the strategic risk register is being considered at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> July.

5.2 Operational risks are managed at a directorate and departmental level and where risks are contained within service business plans. These plans are updated on a quarterly basis and monitored through Directorate Management Teams (DMTs) and the Council's performance team. Where business plans are not undergoing frequent update as a result of services having to prioritise the pandemic response COVID related risks and issues are being managed and mitigated at a DMT level and escalated to SLT as required.

5.3

#### **6 REASONS:**

6.1 To ensure delivery of the Council's restated strategic purpose and strategic aims as the county transitions towards recovery.

*We want everyone to feel safe in their communities, to continue to support each other and to reach out to those who need help.*

6.2 There remains significant ongoing challenges that must be responded to. The arrangements ensure that risks are identified and assessed robustly by the authority, that accountability for risks are clearly understood and that risk controls are put in place that are appropriate and proportionate to ensure, as far as possible, risk reduction/risk management.

## **7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

7.1 Specific activity to mitigate/manage risks continues to have significant resource implications that includes:

- Increased costs to maintain current service delivery and demands in setting up new or amended services.
- Significant reduction in income generation as a result of the COVID-19 emergency response and where services have been reduced or closed entirely.
- An inevitable delay in budget savings plans in some areas and that adds to the financial challenges that were already being faced by the Council before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted.
- As the county transitions to recovery the impact that a sharp recession has on Monmouthshire communities and which in turn places increased demands on services that look to support those most vulnerable groups.

7.2 A specific risk on the financial impacts to the Council has already been identified and continues to be managed. A specific strategic aim has been identified to ensure the Council remains financially sustainable as an organisation.

7.3 A separate report is being considered by Cabinet at its meeting and that provides an assessment and forecast of the impact in the current financial year. The Council continues to work with the WLGA and Welsh Government to ensure that COVID related impacts are understood and suitably funded. Notwithstanding any funding and flexibilities afforded to the Council there is an expectation that there will be a significant in-year deficit to manage. A budget recovery plan is currently being developed and will be presented for consideration in the next couple of months.

## **8 EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):**

8.1 The risk management arrangements aim to identify and assess risks robustly, drawing on a range of evidence. These arrangements form part of the emergency response and the aim is to put in place risk controls that are appropriate and proportionate to the issues they are mitigating. The legislation and the council's responsibilities in all these areas will remain an important part in our response now and as it continues to transition through to the recovery phase.

## **9 CONSULTEES:**

Senior Leadership Team  
Cabinet

Emergency Planning Team

**10 BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Appendix 1 – Strategic Risk Register Update Overview

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# ANNEX 1: CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY RESPONSE STRUCTURE





