

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Adults Select Committee held at Remote Microsoft Teams Meeting on Tuesday, 29th September, 2020 at 10.30 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor S. Howarth (Chairman)
County Councillor L. Brown (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: R. Edwards, M. Groucutt, P. Pavia, M. Powell, S. Woodhouse

T. Crowhurst

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
David Jones, Head of Public Protection
Richard Drinkwater, Community Hub Manager
Linda O'Gorman, Principal Licensing Officer
Gareth Walters, Trading Standards & Animal Health Team Leader

APOLOGIES: County Councillors L. Dymock and R. Harris

1. Appointment of Vice-Chair

Councillor Louise Brown was proposed by Councillor Maureen Powell and seconded by Councillor Sheila Woodhouse. Councillor Brown accepted the nomination.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Public Open Forum

No members of the public were present.

4. Monmouthshire Track, Trace and Protect Service Position report - Scrutiny of a position report following scrutiny on 2nd July 2020

Officers David Jones and Richard Drinkwater presented the report and responded to the members' questions.

Challenge:

How much difficulty is there in reaching people, when trying to trace them?

Our rates are extremely high, in excess of 80%. It is different in England, as they tried to do it through a form of call centre arrangement. We have approached it more locally. The initial call therefore, where the person answering knows the locations very well, is more constructive. We have utilised our own staff with those skills to make it successful.

There is a concern, mainly in restaurants, that people can give false information. Is there the possibility of people showing I.D.?

This requirement is a legal one. There are QR codes now, which are effective. We are making proactive visits to ensure places are doing this. There is the possibility of false information being given, unfortunately. There have been very few cases of people being obstructive (e.g. in Newport); in those rare cases, the Police are to intervene.

Pupils aren't allowed into school if they have a symptom, until they have had a test. But in Monmouthshire we don't have a testing site.

We are liaising with schools directly. Testing is certainly done as a priority but sometimes it is too much, based on a very mild 'symptom'. Testing locations is a big problem. Arranging testing through the UK portal does tend to send people in lots of different directions, which has been reported as an issue. Cluster events are tending to be prioritised, with individual cases therefore being pushed back, and individuals potentially being sent far afield. We have fed back that the process could be more streamlined and user-friendly. We are nowhere near the point at which Welsh Government would impose a local lockdown.

Does 'contact' not have to be for 15 minutes?

If someone is within 1 metre of someone else for 1 minute, that is a contact, then 2 metres for 15 minutes. We are asking with tracing whether people have been in this type of contact. Tea breaks and car sharing often trigger a 'contact'.

What if not everyone has a phone capable of using the app, whether because of bad signal or the hardware?

10m people have subscribed across the UK, but it doesn't replace TTP. That system is still in place for anyone without a smartphone who becomes a contact.

What turnaround should we expect on testing for someone in Monmouthshire?

It can be as quick as 24 hours. They are prioritising residents in Care Homes (not so much the staff.) There have been some difficulties with staff, with delays of perhaps 3 or 4 days, which causes a staffing problem and knock-on effects, especially as the contacts also have to isolate until the result comes back. Gwent is struggling with particular clusters, which exacerbate the problem. Aneurin Bevan is aware of the situation and doing what they can to speed things up.

Is it correct that people have been paying for their own tests?

I'm not as sure what's happening on the private side, though I suspect that that is indeed the case. We don't see everything on the public side, either: if, for example, people contract the disease within Nevill Hall, then Aneurin Bevan will deal with track

and trace themselves, and we won't be aware of the details. Something different now is Lighthouse Labs, which are private labs but contracted by the NHS.

Regarding the need for mobile testing, when people don't have cars, how is this organised?

This is set up to address local demand, as needed. For example, Caerphilly installed one in a leisure centre, rapidly. When something happens in one of our towns, health colleagues would rapidly provide a mobile testing station. Agency carers are covered, and regularly tested so that they are not inadvertently spreading the virus when they go out to their work.

Will Public Health feed into planning, and the lessons to be learned from this pandemic, particularly in terms of future plans for population-dense living?

We can speak to Mark Hand about that. We know that Public Health is keen to be more involved in planning and licensing applications. It's not a surprise that some cities have been badly affected, given their population densities. We will certainly refer to Planning colleagues.

How reassured should we be about the turnaround time for testing in Care Homes? Is there a way for us to help with this?

Priority has been for where there are cases, sometimes to the detriment of the proactive testing. The proactive testing is still happening, but through a Portal arrangement, in which the delays are sometimes 4 or 5 days. I go to a regional meeting three times a week, so with the Chair's agreement we are happy to feed back that this committee is concerned about Care Home testing, and can it continue to be a priority going forward. I think that will be helpful.

What is the ability, capacity and funding to keep this work going?

The arrangement takes us to 31st March at which time, if nothing has changed, we are sure Welsh Government will continue the funding. There is a particular problem with schools, in terms of being ultra-cautious with testing. All we can really do is feed that back to our health colleagues, and communicate with schools for that not to happen, to try and reduce that burden. But parents and teachers are naturally very concerned, making it very difficult.

Are those from the adviser team returning to their original posts able to re-join in the event of a spike?

We have 16 staff, some of whom are still redeployed from their substantive posts, providing the backbone of our service. The other staff pulled from the community hubs are working 4 hours in TTP. This gives us the confidence that should we need to scale

up, we have experienced staff who are trained in the protocols and policies, to enable us to mobilise and meet a demand, if and when it comes.

School absences are a problem at the moment. Is it possible to work with education welfare, who can visit families where parents are keeping their children away unnecessarily?

This is a good point. We liaise as best we can with education departments, to have a consistent message. Environmental health colleagues attend meetings three times a week with education colleagues. Yes, some parents excluding their children from school because they are overly worried about exposure is a real concern. Will Mclean and his team are keeping abreast of that. We need to perhaps link with the education welfare arm, as suggested; there is a capacity issue for us, but be assured that as and when we receive concerns from schools and parents – we are something of a conduit for everyone, at this point – we encourage everyone to enter those safe environments. We will certainly take this point forward and do the best we can.

Is there no one from the educational welfare side who can liaise with the four secondary schools to look at these cases?

We are not clear on this point but can relay it to Will Mclean. Our colleague Diane Thomas, who deals directly with Education, might have more information.

Chair's Summary:

The members expressed their gratitude and admiration for the work performed by officers during this time. Councillor Brown proposed that when public housing is planned, density of the living arrangements needs to be strongly considered on a public health basis.

5. Monmouthshire County Council's Public Protection response to the Covid-19 pandemic - April to September 2020 - Scrutiny of the progress report and any implications arising

Officers David Jones, Linda O'Gorman and Gareth Walters presented the report and responded to members' questions.

Challenge:

Have animal markets now reopened, and was the Council reimbursed for feed during the period when we were caring for cattle?

Yes, we stopped attending the markets early on, out of health and safety concerns for our staff. Gradually, complaints came through, with the number of animals that normally wouldn't have got through creeping up (not necessarily at Raglan), so Welsh

Government was quick to approach us on an all-Wales basis for buyers and sellers to resume attendance. We ensured that proceeds from the sales came to us, and we deducted costs of the time for the officers who looked after the animals.

Since pubs re-opened, the safety and security has differed amongst them, with some not enforcing social distancing. Is your team able to discern where your efforts are needed more?

There will always be variety between good and bad venues. We now have a programme to target town centres in the coming weeks, with visits to all establishments. Any which are deemed to be not meeting the requirements are issued improvement notices, and we have Closure powers after that. There has been a learning curve in terms of getting the message out, but we have ensured that every licensed premises is aware of the requirements, and knows that there are no grey areas. We follow up every complaint, so we will certainly target those places that aren't following the procedures.

Would it be useful if there were pressure on other places selling alcohol to also close at 10pm, or even slightly earlier? Could politicians help to pressure Welsh Government on this point?

Initially, off-licenses and home deliveries were going to continue but, following much lobbying from officers, shops and off-licenses cannot now sell alcohol after 10pm. This also applies to home deliveries and hotels offering room service. Mingling outside is a problem. Wales introduced a 20-minute 'drinking up' period, to try to stagger people gathering when they leave. There could in fact be more gathering *because* of the 10pm curfew. We raised that with the Gwent Regional Group last week; it has been escalated to the Strategic Coordinating Group, and has gone back to Welsh Government. The Licensing Act of 2003 was brought in precisely to avoid people congregating at the same time. House parties are another concern, as some will want to continue the night after 10pm in this way.

Another step is being considered in the coming weeks for take-away venues. The difficulty is that a take-away venue only requires a licence if they serve hot food and drink after 11pm. But as pub patrons are coming out at 10pm, we wouldn't have any powers in licensing to deal with those take-aways. Government would therefore have to rule on, say, take-aways also shutting at 10pm; this is something that they are considering now.

Are there enough staffing and resources to cope with the work that needs to be done? Will Environmental Health's extra work be included in our claim?

The matter of resources has been raised with WLGA and Welsh Government. TTP is on a separate funding stream: all the overtime is claimed back through the Welsh Government grant that runs until the end of March. WG appreciates the matter of

enforcement on the streets, which includes Gwent Police. There is £500k potentially coming forward to help. We need to follow that up, in terms of Covid marshals – we have seen these in England. They can do some of the additional work, much of which is out-of-hours (house parties, gatherings at take-aways, etc.) The question of what happens longer-term has gone back to Welsh Government, pointing out that we struggled pre-Covid, so there is a concern about staff overload and burnout.

On p11 of the report, could the heading of 'Businesses' be clarified?

003 is the number of premises actively advised. Early on, the conversation was around businesses that had to close, with very few able to open. Some were trying to re-categorise themselves, in order to stay open. It was very difficult, from an enforcement perspective, to interpret legislation which isn't fully defined, and for which the guidance can be vague. For example, some garden centres were able to stay open because they sold food. The definition in this case is businesses that had to close at that point.

Is it possible for us to put more relevant and important information on our website?

The difficulty is that the regulations change weekly, making it hard to give up-to-date guidance. Perhaps we can put something on the website that links directly to the wales.gov site. Often, people look at the English legislation, which is very different. A good example of navigating the differences, and informing the public, is the 10K run over the Severn Bridge: Welsh Government wouldn't allow it, but the English government would. We made an effort in licensing to get the email addresses for every establishment so that when new information emerges we can send it to the establishments immediately and directly.

How are the four major towns managed on the 10pm problem, with only four people in the team?

Yes, it is hard. The county is split into 3 areas, A-C. We have a very good relationship with the Police Licensing officers – they pass this information and send police out to venues. We prioritise the most problematic areas. We have an inspection programme now, in which we go to premises during the day if there's a tip-off that something happened the night before. Enforcement is a mixture of advising premises that perhaps didn't fully think through the requirements, and helping them to implement strategies, and doing a spot-check with Police if there are persistent complaints and tips from the public. In our case, we are stretched because we have taken the approach that it is environmental health and wider public protection colleagues that are taking forward the tracing, but the consequence is that we have fewer on the enforcement side. We are now in a position where we can't carry out two important projects because we are stretched by our Covid enforcement and advisory duties.

Are Covid marshals going to be the way forward, especially considering the approaching festive period?

We have a meeting this afternoon with HR on this subject. We put in a bid for 4, and the funding has been agreed, with a mutual support agreement (as with TTP) across county lines. This should give us some capacity to address particular instances of violation, while easing the pressure on existing staff.

Chair's Summary:

It is difficult because it is the landlord's responsibility inside premises, but not once people are on the pavement. Ultimately, if people want to break the rules, they can go to an off-licence at 9pm. People congregating in closed areas is going to be an extra concern in the winter months, with the poor weather and temperatures. Covid marshals might well be the way forward, long term. We will look to speak to the officers again on this topic in 6 months' time.

6. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 2nd July 2020 were confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

7. Adults Select Committee Forward Work Programme.

The Committee agreed that the Chair and officers would discuss the briefing report from Tony Crowhurst on the pandemic's impact on disability with him, bringing any salient points to the next meeting in October.

Councillor Pavia suggested that the committee include in the forward work programme a discussion with the Health Board about their Q3 and Q4 recovery plans, with an emphasis on possible harm from a reduction in non-Covid 19 activities.

On the topic of community 'champions', Councillor Brown suggested that a Health Board representative come to the committee.

Councillor Edwards raised the topic of the implications of a pneumonia vaccination on Covid-19, but direction will need to be given to Public Health Wales.

8. Council and Cabinet Forward Work Planner.

9. Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Tuesday 20th October. It was proposed that the start time be moved to 10:30am, with a pre-meeting at 09:45.

