

**SUBJECT: PUBLIC PROTECTION 2020/21 PERFORMANCE REPORT & Division's response to the Coronavirus pandemic**

**MEETING: Special Strong Communities Select Committee**

**DATE: 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

**DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All**

**1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 To undertake scrutiny of service delivery across Public Protection services for the financial year 2020/21, with comparison to previous years. The Public Protection division comprises of Environmental Health, Trading Standards & Animal Health and Licensing.
- 1.2 To recognise the emphasis on dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic over last 18 months, as a concerted public health response, and how this has impacted on the day-to-day work of Public Protection Services.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 To consider and comment on the contents of the attached report – Appendix One - entitled 'Public Protection Performance Report 2020/21'.
- 2.2 Members understand how the Division's service priorities have had to be rapidly reassessed in response to the on-going Coronavirus pandemic. An addendum report, Appendix Two, specifically outlines the types of work Officers have been engaged in since April 2020, in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. As there is some recovery to return to 'business as usual', determined by the longevity of the need to control the spread of the virus remaining a national public health priority, Officers welcome Members views on priority areas going forward. Members to consider whether they would like to scrutinise a specific area of Public Protection work in 2022/23.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 In January 2015 Cabinet requested that Public Protection performance was reviewed regularly by this Committee to assess any negative impacts. Initially six-monthly reports were provided to Strong Communities Select committee, but for the last two years this has been presented annually as agreed in 2019.
- 3.2 The attached report, Appendix One, summarises performance for the twelve month period of 2020/21, and highlights the following -
  - The four service teams have been diverted from normal service delivery by the need to respond to the on-going pandemic. Where services have been maintained, often physical

visits have been replaced by virtual meetings and resolving problems remotely. All service requests have continued to be risk assessed and physical visits made when deemed essential, eg. to respond to a complaint from a vulnerable housing tenant, and checking compliance with Covid Regulations when national restrictions were in place. Such activity cannot be undertaken remotely.

- As detailed in Appendix One, reactive work has continued with some noticeable increases in demand. Two examples – statutory nuisance complaints rose from 471 19/20 to 602 20/21, representing a 28% increase; Trading Standards experienced an increase from 547 advice/complaint inquiries in 19/20 to 1,018 in 20/21, a 86% rise.
- Due to the focus on reactive responses, inevitably there was slippage in our proactive activity – note drop in food safety inspections, housing visits, private water inspections and animal health visits.
- External Governing Bodies will be aware of Public Protection’s prioritisation of the response to Covid, including Commercial EH staff being almost entirely diverted to Track and Trace and investigating clusters in schools, care homes, local workplaces, etc. Senior Leadership are fully aware of the service’s switch in prioritisation over the last 18 months, so we will be able to provide a robust response to any Governing Body queries on why proactive activities have dropped so significantly.
- Annual reports will continue to be made to this Committee to assess performance over time, and help inform future priorities noting the competing demands. Officers will endeavour to bring the 21/22 annual report before this Committee earlier in 2022, preferably May or June 2022.
- Services may struggle to take on any new statutory duties that protect the public and the environment, and therefore funding must be sought to support any new work.
- Future strategies for sustaining Public Protection services will be developed, (to include further income generation and collaboration), locally, regionally and nationally.
- A budget pressure mandate has been submitted within the Authority to secure further Public Protection funding from April 2022. This will go through corporate procedures and progress via the Council’s new budget pressures process in readiness for 2022/23.
- Services will improve linkages to the Authority’s Corporate Business Plan 2017/22 and other key drivers, for example the Chief Medical Officer Wales’ priorities.

3.3 Appendix Two outlines some specific actions in direct response to the pandemic. It also provides a comparison of six months performance across 3 time periods –

1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019, pre-pandemic

1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020, first six months of pandemic

1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021, 12 to 18 months later

Officers across the Division have provided timely and professional advice to all enquirers on how to protect themselves, others in their settings (for example schools and workplaces), and their customers. Keeping up with the various Welsh Government guidance, both generic and service specific, has been challenging and Officers have done well in reducing viral spread whenever possible.

#### 4. REASONS:

4.1 The Cabinet decision log from 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015 stated:- 'Noting the continually changing legislative landscape in the future, it was decided Strong Communities Select Committee would receive six monthly performance reports on Public Protection services'. As stated in 3.1, it was agreed in 2019 to report annually to allow Members to scrutinise performance across the Division.

4.2 It is important Members are aware how typical Public Protection services have been affected by the pandemic.

**5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

None as a consequence of this report.

**6. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS, (incorporating Equalities, Sustainability, safeguarding and corporate parenting).**

Assessments were previously completed for the Cabinet report 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2015. This report serves to update the position in relation to performance, and therefore does not require a further assessment.

**7. CONSULTEES:**

Public Protection service managers (& contributors)  
Chief Officer, Social Care, Safeguarding & Health

**8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Report to Cabinet, 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015, entitled 'Review of Service Delivery in Public Protection Department'.

**9. AUTHOR:**

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