

IMPACT OF COVID-19 on Carmarthenshire

September 2020

PARCHU·DIOGELU· *Mwynhau*

Yn cadw Sir Gâr yn ddiogel

RESPECT·PROTECT· *Enjoy*

Keeping Carmarthenshire safe

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County Council



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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN CARMARTHENSHIRE



Introduction by the Leader of the Council Councillor Emlyn Dole

These are without doubt unprecedented and challenging times. Never in my time as Leader did I think I'd see the Council setting up temporary hospital facilities to support our colleagues in the NHS.

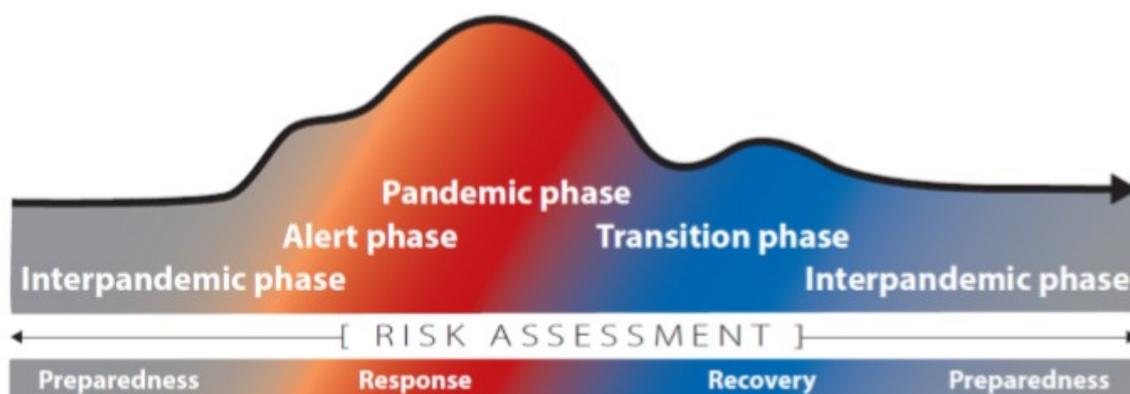
It is unsettling for all of us who are trying to adapt to a new 'normal', at least for the time being, to help protect ourselves, the people we love, and the communities where we live.

What I will say, is that in the face of huge challenges I have seen remarkable community spirit. Neighbours helping each other, colleagues supporting each other, and strangers finding a common ground.

In this document we aim to better understand the community impact of the pandemic as we currently see it. Then we will be reviewing the key priorities we set out in 'Moving Carmarthenshire Forward - Our 5 Year Plan' to ensure that our short-term focus fully supports recovery from the pandemic and that plans are developed for medium and longer term recovery.

Finally, a word of caution. We still do not know what phase we are at in this pandemic.

The World Health Organisation Pandemic advice is be prepared.



COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT



There are four interlinked categories of impact that individuals and communities will need to recover from. The nature of the impacts – and whether and at what level action needs to be taken – will depend in large part on the nature, scale and severity of the emergency itself.

THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

COVID RECOVERY – The Future Generations Commissioners Office

As this Assessment is being published we are living through very difficult circumstances. Many of our responses are in line with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (See page 52). The partnership working, engagement with the private sector to find innovative solutions, new ways of working and increased use of technology in delivering services, the decrease in carbon emissions, and the programmes which are working with communities to provide services, are particularly notable. The Act gives us a framework and the ways of working to ensure that in meeting the needs of today we do nothing to inhibit the needs of future generations to meet their own needs.

As the impacts of COVID-19 continue to demonstrate, Wales is part of a global community and is susceptible to trends experienced across the rest of the world such as our declining natural world, climate change and resource scarcity, evolving population and demographic changes, poverty and inequality, and technological change

Our recovery from the pandemic is a once in a generation opportunity to enact change and build back better (see Reset on page 51).

IMPACT AT A GLANCE



COMMUNITY



24 Childcare Hubs
with an average of
450 Children attending daily
280 Staff present daily



1,840 laptops, Chromebooks & dongles etc. distributed to pupils



FSM (Free School Meals) entitlement increased by 13.5% (643 pupils) (since Jan 2020)



No significant increases in the number of Children Looked After or on the Child Protection Register



ECONOMY



2,100 business & resident callers supported through our Call Line service



108 businesses supported with £270k Welsh Government Business Start Up Grant



4,086 payments made under the business rates grant, totalling over £46 million



18,000 people furloughed



ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE



Improvement in Air Quality



Kerb-side waste collection up 20%
54% increase in fly-tipping



60% increase in rat complaints



150 extra cleaners, 600 retrained



HEALTH & WELFARE



8,389 Food Parcels distributed to help support those Shielding



We maintained contact with 563 of our National Exercise Referral clients, 1,439 hours spent calling and 2,878 phone calls



600 food hygiene & standards combined visits and 200 animal feed visits postponed



Homeless placements up 430%



BUILDING A BETTER COUNCIL



701,000 people visited our website with 15,539 new sign ups to My Account



Compliments are up by 150%



20% increase in the number of Telephone calls



Complaints are down by 47%

COMMUNITY



Faced with a situation nobody had encountered before with the lockdown, one of the more encouraging acts seen across all of Carmarthenshire was the community and volunteer response. Carmarthenshire has always had a strong sense of community and this became even more apparent during the lockdown as a number of community groups were established, mainly online through platforms such as Facebook, with the aim of supporting vulnerable people in their communities. This could provide a platform for community support going forward but will need to be supported and encouraged.

CHILDREN

As part of the response to COVID-19, Carmarthenshire established **13 childcare hubs** at the start of lockdown **increasing to 24** just before all schools re-opened in July. These were available Monday to Friday between 8am - 6pm, across the county providing much needed childcare for the children of key workers during the pandemic. *4 specialist settings* remained open. During the crisis a **daily average of 450 pupils**, including over **250 vulnerable learners** accessed the hubs and specialist provision, these pupils were looked after by **280 staff members a day covering two half day sessions**.

By the end of June, *1,603 devices including laptops, Chromebooks, etc.* as well as **240 4G MiFi dongles** were supplied to support families with remote learning across Carmarthenshire.

Flying Start Carmarthenshire became the first Flying Start in Wales to use a mobile app to help keep in touch with families. The team developed the app as a way to increase engagement, and to signpost families to important information and promote events in the local areas.

Flying Start re-purposed childcare hubs to provide care for vulnerable and pre-school critical worker children. During one week in July, **632 critical worker** and **37 vulnerable** pre-school children were supported in **93 private settings** including Childminders, Cylchoedd Meithrin, Day nurseries and 3 re-purposed Flying Start Childcare Hubs.



Summer holiday clubs remained open to fee paying parents throughout the Summer. This has been challenging due to needing to operate on a reduced capacity basis due to social distancing requirements and challenges including PPE, additional cleaning etc.

What is the short, medium and long term impact?

It is difficult to predict at this stage what the impact of the pandemic will be on the childcare sector. We already know that two local day nurseries and four childminders have closed to date and are in the process of de-registering with Care Inspectorate Wales. This is just under 100 registered places, and we may see a further reduction in the number of registered childcare providers and childcare places available in Carmarthenshire in the near future. We anticipate the sector will continue to need significant support to 'bounce back' from what has been a very challenging and uncertain period. We know the crucial role childcare plays in enabling parents to return to work and re-starting the economy. Longer term viability will be determined by demand for childcare and parents' ability to pay for this service. With increased concerns in relation to job insecurity and rising unemployment, the childcare sector remains a fragile sector. Continued hardship and start up grant funding, as well as advice and support from Childcare Development Officers with sector specific knowledge, from the Local Authority will be vital to enable providers to remain sustainable. As a Local Authority we have a statutory childcare sufficiency duty. We have worked hard over the last ten years to increase provision, particularly Welsh Medium childcare provision. This ongoing support and commitment will be critical as we continue to move forward.

Helping a business start-up – Buttercup Day Nursery



Directors of *Buttercup Day Nursery* Michelle Howell and Jacqueline O’Flynn started the business in September 2019 when they identified an unused building on the outskirts of Llanelli to be the ideal location to set up a new bilingual Childcare Nursery.

The help and support of a *Carmarthenshire Business Start-up* grant of £10,000 awarded in September 2019 meant that renovations could start in the building in New Road Llanelli. The grant aided the purchase of a new kitchen, flooring, plumbing/heating, and IT equipment to bring the building

back to use and meet the requirements to open the nursery. The business completed all works and received the go ahead from CIW to open in April 2020.

Lockdown in March meant that the planned opening had to be delayed indefinitely. As a new businesses Buttercup Day Nursery was not eligible for many of the support schemes offered, so sought support through the Council’s newly set up COVID helpline for business support and advice.

Upon the launch of the COVID Start Up fund introduced by Welsh Government in June and being delivered by Carmarthenshire County Council, Buttercup Day Nursery was contacted and advised to apply as they met the criteria. Through this scheme, they have received £2,500 and due to recent Welsh Government guidelines, the Nursery has been able to open its doors as of the 29th June and welcome their first group of children.

Directors Michelle Howell and Jackie O’Flynn are hopeful that they can welcome many more children soon. They are open throughout the summer for children aged 0-8 and are currently looking to recruit staff ready for when they can take on more children. Opening in June 2020 has meant they have managed to create 2 jobs in this climate but are hopeful to create more by the end of the year.

Directors Michelle and Jacki said *“We are so grateful to Carmarthenshire County Council for the support they have given which has allowed us complete works and open the nursery. We have managed to keep afloat in this difficult time and to be able to our first children in June has been hard work but fantastic. Their assistance has been invaluable and allowed us to create jobs in this climate and hopefully soon to welcome lots more children to our nursery”*

WELL-BEING OF PUPILS AND STUDENTS

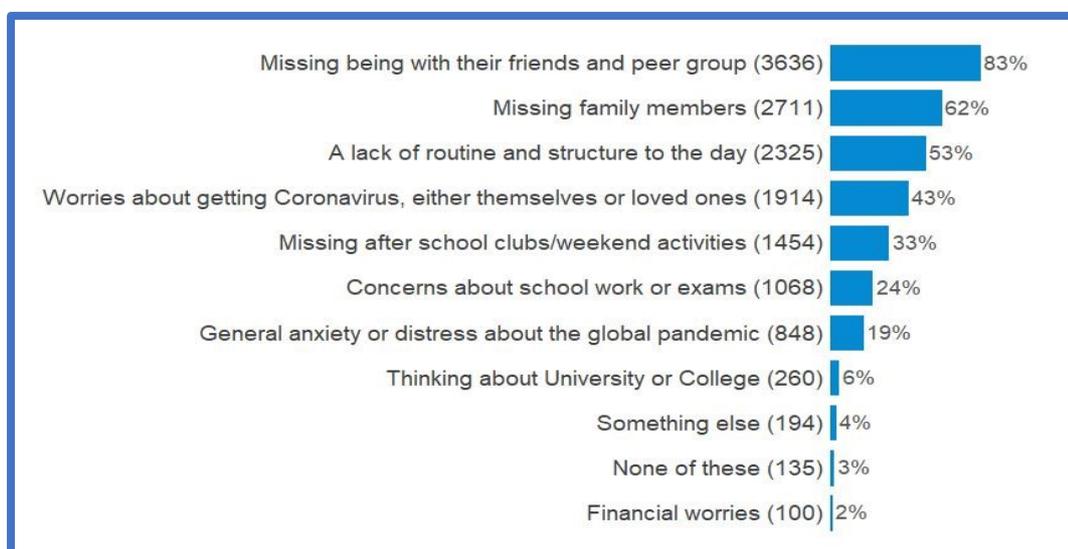
As the pandemic progresses a mixed picture is emerging of the effects that lockdown, media coverage and disruption to normal routines are having on the well-being of children and young people.

The number of counselling referrals have dropped quite dramatically since the outbreak of COVID-19. There were 167 referrals received between 23rd March – 17th July, including 15 primary school children, with 206 children and young people engaged in active counselling compared to 620 April – June 2019.

Following consultation, it was agreed that counselling should be offered remotely via video/ audio conferencing or via telephone. We have been able to take enquiries from parents/ guardians, school staff, health professionals and others, which has been useful and has enabled us to facilitate referrals in the easiest way possible.

To ascertain the current short-term impact a **Parental Survey** conducted with parents, carers and guardians of pupils, with **4,433 responses**, were asked what they think is having the biggest impact on their child(ren)'s well-being and mental health. The results are displayed in the bar chart below.

An overwhelming majority of respondents noted that the issue which is causing the biggest impact on their child(ren)'s well-being is that they are **unable to be with their friends and peers (83%)**.



Parents/carers/guardians also noted that children missing their family members (62%), lacking routine and structure to the day (53%), worried about getting COVID-19 themselves or loved ones (43%) and missing after school clubs (33%) were the top five most reported issues. The least reported issues were financial worries (2%) and thinking about university or college (6%).

What is the short, medium and long term impact?

It is difficult to ascertain the medium, and long-term impact on children, young people and education staff, as a result of the pandemic. We know that some parents and carers are finding it difficult to support direct learning at home for any length of time, especially where they as parents and carers are also working from home. However, some of those living in a rural setting combined with the warm weather, have said that their experience has been very positive. Schools re-opening from 29th June gave pupils a chance to check in, catch up and prepare. Anecdotal evidence suggests that those children attending appreciated this opportunity. This may help to minimise the impact on pupils and staff when schools reopen fully in September 2020. The longer impact on well-being and possible knock on effects for behaviour, attendance and attainment is an unknown but will need to be monitored closely.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Free school meals (FSM) entitlement can be an indicator of deprivation, where family's income can have an impact on children's attainment. As a result of COVID-19 many families may now find themselves in financial hardship with parents being furloughed, made redundant or becoming unemployed, as a result we are likely to see an increase in children eligible for free school meals and the take up of free school meals increase.

In 2019/20, Carmarthenshire had 17.4% of children (4,771 pupils) who were eligible for free school meals in Wales (18%). However, as of 14th July 2020, there was a **13.5% increase** with an additional **643 eligible pupils** in Carmarthenshire since January 2020.

**Data was taken on census day during January 2019 and 2020, source: PLASC, Pupil Level Annual School Census, Welsh Government. July data taken from central School Management Information System.*

The take up increase may be attributed to the way that free school meals have been distributed since schools closed due to lockdown. After an initial period of 5 weeks when Food Packs were provided for collection by FSM families, a BACS payments system was introduced (direct payments), with some families deemed to be vulnerable or self-shielding and any pending payment applications continuing to receive weekly Food Packs delivered to their homes.

As of July 14th, 2,558 BACS payments are being issued fortnightly for 4,615 pupils. This equates to an 85.3% uptake. A total of 4,643 weekly Food Packs have been delivered during the period May 4th to July 14th. Prior to May 4th (from March 23rd) a total of 7,487 Food Packs were delivered and a further 10,100 Food Packs collected. There were 563 families with active FSM claims that we have not been able to contact. These families have not contacted us or have said that they do not need payments or Food Packs.

What is the short, medium and long term impact?

In the short and medium term, it is expected that the number of children eligible for free school meals will increase. As we see unemployment rise more families will face financial hardship. In line with the furlough scheme ending there may be a rise in eligibility through August, September, and October.

More children will be eligible for free school meals in the long term. Family income is known to be linked to children's educational attainment, with children from less well-off backgrounds, on average, less likely to achieve well at school than those from families with higher incomes. A need to reduce the attainment gap between free school meal pupils and non-free school meal pupils will be important over the long term.

CONTINUATION OF LEARNING

School buildings were closed from 23rd March until 29th June 2020. In order to minimise the impact on pupils learning a Continuation of Learning Plan was rapidly put in place, covering:

- The curriculum and teaching and learning
- Staffing and professional learning
- Well-being
- Connectivity
- Sharing and Collaborating

What is the short, medium and long term impact?

The evidence regarding learning regression and any losses is currently qualitative and relatively anecdotal and varies from one learner to the next and from school to school. Attendance figures have been variable as has engagement with distance learning. When almost all of our learners are back in full-time, an important part of schools' approach in September will be to implement a purpose-driven learning approach, which will build learning experiences around:- well-being check-ins for the full cohort; re-establishing relationships; gauging pupils' learner fitness and what is important for them to learn, attuned to their prevailing and emergent needs at this time.

Adopting a research-informed approach, we're also looking at how we can focus on key aspects of the three cross-curriculum competencies (literacy, numeracy, digital competence) and how accelerated learning methodologies can be sustainably deployed. The main attributes of the new curriculum for Wales will be considered for early adoption as will a review of other 21st century learning competencies and how key principles can assist with ensuring that learners catch up and no one is left behind. More formal teacher and externally examined and moderated assessments in the new academic year will assist us in building up a firm picture of the impact of the pandemic on learning, which will help to focus on remedial action for individuals, groups, classes and the wider year and school cohorts.

We have commissioned an independent external review of our Education & Children Services department in response to the pandemic. Estyn are also conducting a Wales wide review with different terms of reference.

MODERNISING EDUCATION SERVICES

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, all members of the Modernising Education Programme (MEP) team were fully redeployed to other critical areas within the Department for Education and Children and as such were only able to complete very limited amounts of project work. The MEP team are analysing the effect that this postponement may have on the investment programme.

With regards to our investment programme, all education projects with contractors on site at the time of initial lockdown closed by contractors. As lockdown has eased, we have worked with contractors to ensure safe working arrangements are in place to enable re-commencement of each project as quickly as possible, given supply chain, sub-contractor, and other factors. It is expected that there will be delays to the completion date of projects in addition to an increase in total project costs. As a result, it is expected that the pandemic will have significant impact on the MEP programme in terms of funding and timelines.

What is the short, medium and long-term impact?

During the autumn term, the MEP team will now be undertaking all of the work planned prior to the pandemic and will be working on developing the MEP Review and developing new timescales for the postponed statutory consultations. It is hoped that all relevant project related matters can still be undertaken within the timescale as close to the original as possible.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The number of new Contacts to Carmarthenshire Children's social care has seen an increase of 19.2% since lock-down began (i.e. 23/3/20 - 30/6/20) when compared to the same period last year. The number of safeguarding contacts also increased, by 26.6%. The number of requests for Assessments has remained the same.

While there have been no significant increases in the number of Children Looked After or on the Child Protection Register, this is anticipated in the longer term to increase due to the wider socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

What is the short, medium and long term impact?

As the service has continued throughout the lockdown; the most concerning cases continued to get support. Less so for other cases. The reality is that the absence of support may well mean that in the longer-term cases that could have remained in lower end preventative services will require the intervention of the statutory service. This is supported by evidence of the increase in domestic abuse referrals.

Social workers rely a lot on informal and formal direct contact with the families and children that they work with and colleagues, both internal and external. The lack of this direct contact is likely to lead to less effective intervention and greater pressure on the social work staff.

YOUNG PEOPLE

COVID-19 has caused significant disruption to family life. We are aware that families are struggling with emotional and mental health issues and referrals into welfare services are on the increase.

While face-to-face teaching has ceased for the time being, [colleges and universities](#) are moving to online delivery wherever this is possible. It is anticipated that it will be possible for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to reopen their learning environments, campuses and other facilities while adhering to the physical and social distancing guidance restrictions and other Government guidelines which HEIs must have regard to. [Keep Wales Safe guidance for HE](#)

WORKING AGE

Analysis of the demographic of those working in 'shutdown sectors' indicates that the majority are female, aged between 25-34. With an inevitable increase in unemployment.

See further information under Economy

BLACK AND ASIAN MINORITY ETHNIC (BAME)

Analysis recently published by the ONS shows that **the risk of deaths involving COVID-19** among some ethnic groups, in England and Wales, is significantly higher than that of those of White ethnicity. This difference is partly explained by socio-economic factors, geographical location, and other circumstances, but part of the difference remains unexplained.

This data is on an all Wales basis and is not available at Carmarthenshire level - it shows that people from all minority ethnic groups, with the exception of Chinese and Mixed, are at a greater risk of death from COVID-19. In particular, black people are nearly twice as likely to experience a COVID-19 related death, taking into account different social and geographical factors. They are followed by the Bangladeshi/Pakistani community who are more than one and a half times more likely to die from coronavirus. Gypsies and Travellers are also an ethnicity and also have a relatively high risk of coronavirus in terms of underlying health issues and cultural factors. It may be worth highlighting sectors as well, for example greater risks for people from minority ethnic backgrounds who work in a range of sectors: health and social care, meat processing, taxi drivers, etc. [Stats Wales - COVID-19 and BAME](#)

According to the 2011 Census, 1.9% (around 3,500) of Carmarthenshire's population are from mixed or other ethnic groups.

COMMUNITY WIDE

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, loneliness and isolation at all ages has been a major issue.

Several countries affected by COVID-19, have seen [increases in levels of violence occurring in the home](#), including violence against children, intimate partner violence and violence against older people. This needs a multisectoral response to prevent and /or mitigate. However, this has not been the case locally or seen across Wales. Our local VAWDASV (Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence) service providers have not reported any increase in demand, with sexual violence services seeing a significant decrease. From a National perspective, Welsh Women's Aid have reported similar circumstances across Wales. Dyfed Powys Police have also reported a reduced recording of domestic abuse incidents across the region with numbers slowly returning to pre-COVID numbers in recent weeks.

[Digital literacy and inclusion](#) - arguably the most to gain from using digital services are the least likely to be able to do so. Research by Welsh Government shows 13% of households do not have access to the internet. 51% over 75 years do not use the internet.

We need to support local communities to become more self-resilient with sustainable local supply chains.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Throughout Carmarthenshire, communities and businesses have come together to help wherever they can, offering both practical and emotional support.

The [website set up for Community Support](#) shows the breadth of businesses going the extra mile and COVID-19 community Support Groups. Over a 1,000 in Carmarthenshire signed up to the *Volunteering Wales website*, with many more volunteered in their local community, too many to count. There are over 300 Facebook groups and over 100 Phone Befrienders.

Some of the work undertaken by the Area Teams:

- Created an online food and community initiative directory to support rural residents
- Maintained regular contact with town and community councils in order to ascertain volunteer levels, aid those most vulnerable and act as a liaison
- Co-ordinated drivers to assist grocery stores with their capacity to deliver goods to those most vulnerable with over 1,300 deliveries undertaken up to the end of July
- Contacted over 90 food and drink producers to discover capacity in supplying local food stores - a list was produced and circulated to local stores
- Worked with CAVS to administer COVID-19 response fund
- Conducted a third sector COVID-19 impact survey
- Supported rural key workers who were experiencing digital connectivity difficulties through deploying 4G routers via a WG pilot scheme
- Supported rural communities to increase digital connectivity through actively promoting [Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme](#), and encouraged residents to register their interest for broadband upgrade





Trap WI and Llandyfan Sew Good applied for funding to extend their production of facemasks to include the communities of Derwydd, Llandyfan and Trap

Youth Worker *Lorna Hoskken-Thomas* who was supporting local vulnerable people through collecting their grocery orders from local stores and delivering goods



ECONOMY



By March 2020 after the COVID-19 pandemic spread to the United Kingdom in late January, the scale of the outbreak had already led businesses to change their working practice, such as sending staff to work from home. On March 23rd the UK government imposed a lockdown, banning all 'non-essential' travel. The resulting impact on businesses, jobs and the economy was severe with a significant number of businesses either being required, or choosing, to close - notably in the *retail, hospitality and leisure sectors*.

Businesses in Carmarthenshire are typically smaller (up to 9 employees) than businesses throughout Wales and the UK. They account for 91.4% of all businesses in Carmarthenshire, which is around 2% higher than the equivalent in Wales and the UK. The *Health and Retail* sectors are particularly important to Carmarthenshire, accounting for more than 30% of all employment together (25% in Wales). Whilst *Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing* represents one of the smaller sectors in terms of total employment, but the proportion working in the sector in Carmarthenshire is *almost double* the national average (2.9% vs 1.5%).

The sad reality of the situation is that many businesses will fail, and others will take a significant length of time to get back to where they were. By contrast, some areas of the economy have seen employment growth including distribution, online retail and healthcare. To what extent this is short term growth is unknown and evidence indicates that this temporary employment may be slowing.

There will be economic challenges for Carmarthenshire, the effects of which will be evident long after the pandemic ends. It may take months for household income to recover to pre-pandemic levels resulting in lower levels of disposable income which feeds the local economy. In this situation, individuals are less likely to purchase items that they deem non-essential, it would therefore be sensible to promote a 'buy local' message for essential items. This would stimulate growth at a local level, resulting in a steadier economic future for local businesses and their staff. Through acting together with our partners, we can take action to restore consumer and business confidence to stimulate investment in our economies, which will create employment and help the unemployed find new jobs.

With many organisations and businesses being able to ensure their staff could work from home during the initial lockdown and during the on-going partial easing, some businesses in those home communities such as food suppliers have seen an economic benefit. If home-working is enabled longer-term this could have a positive impact on local community businesses. However, this will not directly replace the business lost by some companies as a result of the lockdown and restrictions through reduced visitor numbers and usual passing trade. In addition, many businesses have had to adapt their ways of working and those who have been able to develop their online offering have seen a benefit in terms of increasing their audience and customer base with many using virtual platforms to promote and sell their produce. This could be used in future to complement physically located shops and businesses in our towns and local communities.

In some areas there will be a need to challenge current ways of working and regulations to maximise opportunities for local businesses, and to make it as simple as possible for business to open and expand in Carmarthenshire. Now is the time to make real change, to make a difference we must have the courage to challenge the norm. There will also be a need for some financial resource to be made available to support some activities and initiatives to respond to the identified challenges.

UNEMPLOYMENT IN CARMARTHENSHIRE



Area	Level April 2019	Level April 2020
Carmarthenshire	2,420	5,495
Wales	53,770	104,305
UK	1,106,610	2,117,360

The table shows a breakdown of claimant levels in April 2020 compared with the same time last year, which helps to indicate that the substantial increases seen in Carmarthenshire is most probably as a result of the pandemic.

There are several factors that could have had an effect on our unemployment levels:

- our economy has a higher than average proportion of self-employed individuals (12.4% compared with 9.6% in Wales), with many forced to claim unemployment-related benefits.
- those sectors that have suffered ‘shutdowns’ as a result of the pandemic offer employment to approximately 25,000 people (accounting for 37% of the total workforce). It is realistic therefore to suggest that whilst a proportion of those have been furloughed, July 2020 HM Revenues & Customs figures show that 18,000 people have been furloughed in Carmarthenshire, the shortfall are likely to be those individuals accessing these benefits. With likely significant increases over the coming months.

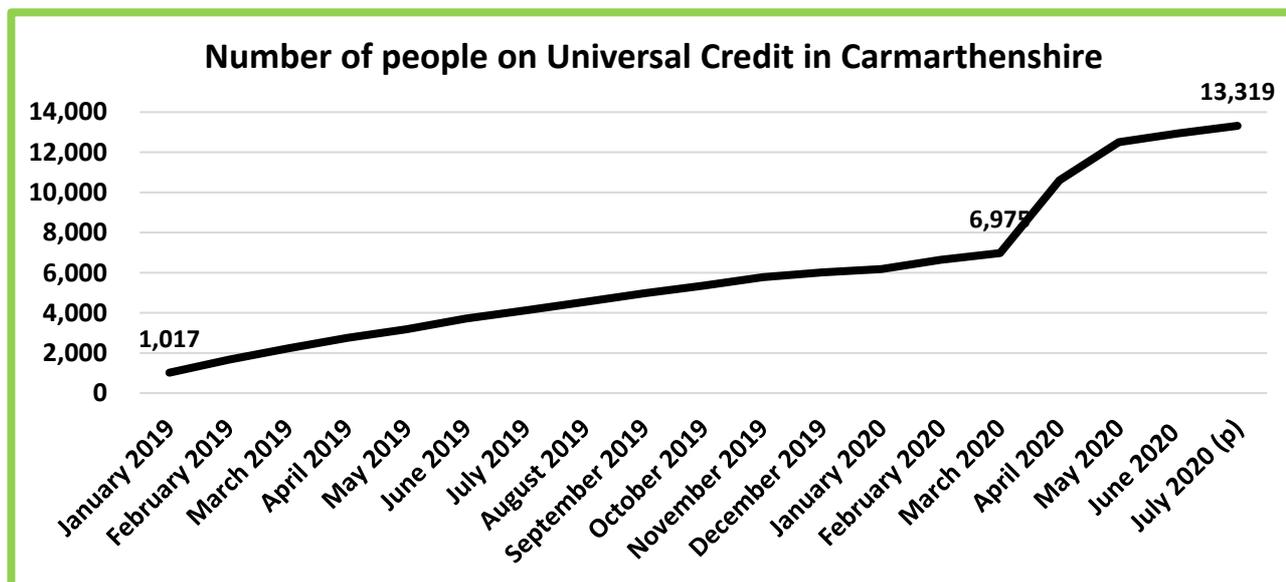
Number furloughed per 1,000 population		
Area	Number Furloughed	Number Furloughed per 1,000 population
Neath Port Talbot	12,700	88.6
Ceredigion	6,500	89.4
Isle of Anglesey	6,400	91.4
Swansea	23,000	93.1
Blaenau Gwent	6,600	94.5
Carmarthenshire	18,000	95.4
Monmouthshire	9,100	96.2
Rhondda Cynon Taf	23,400	97.0
Cardiff	36,000	98.1
Vale of Glamorgan	13,200	98.8
Caerphilly	17,900	98.9
Powys	13,100	98.9
Merthyr Tydfil	6,000	99.5
Denbighshire	9,800	102.4
Pembrokeshire	12,900	102.5
Bridgend	15,300	104.0
Torfaen	9,900	105.4
Gwynedd	13,300	106.8
Newport	16,600	107.3
Wrexham	15,100	111.1
Conwy	13,200	112.6
Flintshire	18,800	120.4
Wales	316,800	100.5

The number furloughed within Carmarthenshire per 1,000 population is less than the national average

Jul-20

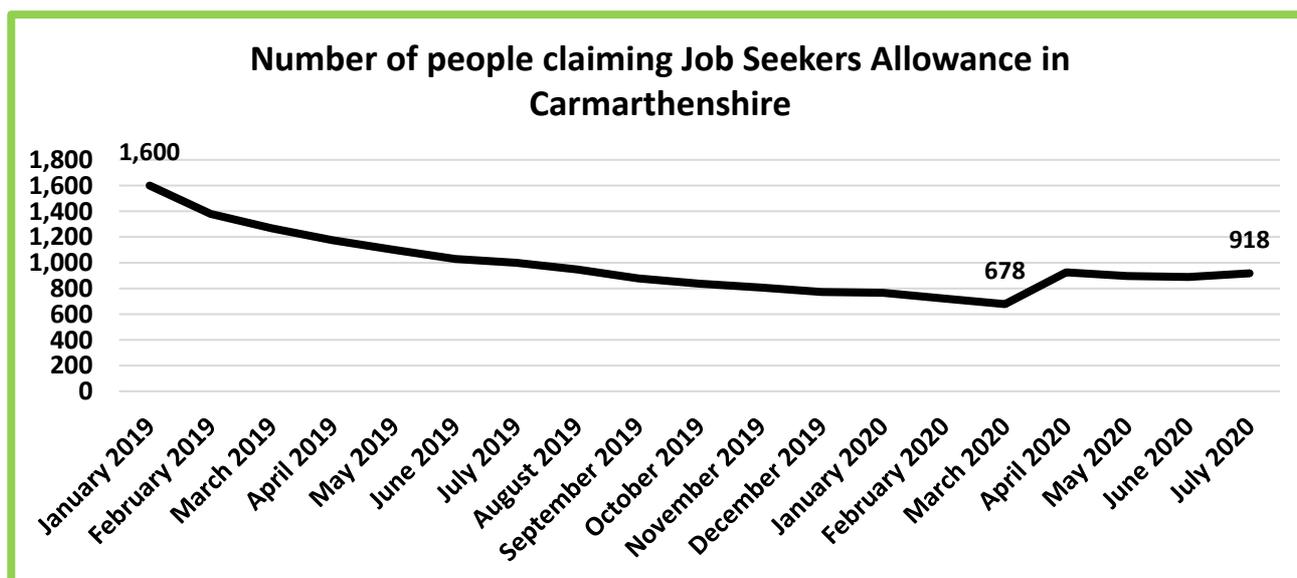
1,200% Increase in Universal Credit claimants in 19 months

The number claiming Universal Credit in Carmarthenshire has taken a steep curve upwards during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 1,017 claiming Universal Credit in January 2019, there is a gradual increase up to March 2020 to 6,975 increasing to 13,319 in July 2020 (provisional figure).



58% Reduction in people claiming Job Seekers in 15 months

The number claiming Job Seekers Allowance in Carmarthenshire has seen a steady reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 1,600 claiming Job Seekers in January 2019, reducing to 678 in March 2020 at the start of the pandemic. Since the end of April 2020, the figures increased slightly to 918 at the end of July which is still 43% lower than they were in January 2019.



HELP AND ADVICE

We provided additional support to help and advise Carmarthenshire businesses and residents throughout the on-going Coronavirus crisis. A help line was established and was available seven days a week.



2,100 callers supported with their queries through our Call Line service

Council officers were on hand to provide guidance and signposting on areas including:

- Financial support and other help for businesses
- Assistance available for the elderly, vulnerable and isolated
- Linking the needs of communities with volunteers

This service built on work that had already been carried out in our communities, with council staff helping volunteers on the ground.



4,086 businesses have received business rates grants amounting to over **£46 million**

We have helped 4,086 businesses to receive Welsh Government's business rates grant payments of between £10,000 and £25,000 with a total amount of over £46 million

IDENTIFYING THE ASSISTANCE BUSINESSES' NEED



A questionnaire (574 businesses responded) and telephone survey (422 businesses were contacted) were conducted in May to find out more about the impact that COVID-19 had on Carmarthenshire businesses, to identify what was important to them in the short, medium and long-term, so that going forward we can provide them with the assistance they most need. Plus, a *dedicated business team* was established to speak to businesses directly.

We found out that:

- The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been significant and wide reaching for our businesses - **171 businesses are completely closed presently with many indicating that they are in a state of 'hibernation'**. A large proportion (**166**) are partially operating but at a reduced capacity and a reduced range of services, with the majority having placed a significant number of staff on furlough.
- There has been significant reduction in income, reduced access to customers, problems with supply chains and the possible cessation of trading
- Many of the businesses *worst affected* are within those sectors deemed of significant importance to Carmarthenshire in terms of employment and/or GVA - *visitor economy, food & beverage sectors are worth almost £169m to the economy; plus Agriculture challenges*
- Many businesses (mainly those that are self-employed or freelance), have been unable to access any financial support - *barriers in accessing support and been deemed ineligible for the current offer*
- The most sought-after type of support (short and longer term) is financial (grants, loans or payment deferrals/holidays) - *sustainability of this may require supporting businesses to diversify their operations i.e. moving to online selling, re-training staff, product development, etc.*
- Businesses need support: to enable collaborative procurement of supplies i.e. PPE and safety protection equipment; for us to take the lead on a 'buy local' message and protection of local supply chains; and for us to help them with promoting and advertising
- There are areas of deprivation in the county where the effects of the pandemic could be felt more acutely, therefore *Community support initiatives should be focussed first and foremost in the areas highlighted as experiencing increased levels of deprivation*
- Some businesses foresee that they will experience skills challenges as a result of the pandemic, with the majority stating that this lack of skills relate to digital and IT skills. Skills in general will undoubtedly suffer as a result of the pandemic. The majority of job losses are likely to be at a lower skills level as these jobs tend to be part-time, low paid and more unstable

What is the short, medium and long term impact?

Business Support

In the business survey many local businesses outlined they faced an uncertain future with issues such as cashflow, uncertainty about customer confidence and the need to change their business delivery models being highlighted. Direct engagement with businesses will be essential so that business support can be targeted at the areas of most need.

Procurement

Many businesses were unable to source high demand products such as PPE so supporting businesses moving forward with collaborative procurement or subsidised deals will help keep the impact to a minimum. There will also be a need for us to take the lead on a 'buy local' promotional message and protection of local supply chains.

Communities

There are areas of deprivation in the county where the impact of the pandemic will be felt more acutely. Analysis across the UK has shown that deprived areas have experienced higher death rates, seeing more severe financial effects, and experiencing the largest negative effects to over-all well-being. Within Carmarthenshire attention should be paid to these areas to ensure that interventions meet the needs of these communities as they are more likely to be hit hardest. Reprioritising community support and grants will help COVID-19 community resilience increase and that in turn will help them become more self-resilient together with sustainable local supply chains.

Skills

Skill demand fluctuations have been seen over the last year. Nursing has consistently remained the most sought-after skill in the county, together with increased demand relating to personal care with this trend likely to continue given the current pressures on the National Health Service. How the skills landscape on the whole will be affected as a result of the pandemic is not easily identifiable. Many job losses are likely to be at a lower skills level as these jobs tend to be part-time, low paid and more unstable. This could result in a further widening of the skills gap between the highest and lowest skilled in the labour market. Crucial to addressing this skill gap is understanding exactly what skills people have as well as understanding how these skills are transferrable to other sectors. Employers and businesses need to be able to identify the skills that they need, and providers need to define the skills that they need to teach.

Tourism, Leisure & Hospitality

Arguably the impact on Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality businesses are some of the most adversely affected by the pandemic, with many of them indicating that the impact on them has been significant. Restrictions on movement have meant that most establishments have been forced to completely shut down their operations. There has been very little opportunity for them to diversify within this sector due to the very nature of the services they offer. Public confidence is a further issue, with many indicating that a sector wide approach in response to the pandemic is required which would serve to instil confidence in the public regarding the safety of using their services following the lifting of restrictions. In accordance with this there is further concern from the sector that in a post-COVID world people may be less likely to spend money on 'luxury' or 'nice to have' activities and services.

PRIMARY TOWN CENTRES

Currently, the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis are highly uncertain which makes it difficult to draw a clear picture of immediate impact on our primary town centres - *Carmarthen, Ammanford and Llanelli*. When the UK and Welsh Governments initially imposed restrictions on the operation of businesses which specifically targeted the retail sector, jobs in these businesses are particularly affected. Retail businesses are vulnerable due to shop closures and a strong drop in demand from consumers.

It was crucial that to help as many of our town centre businesses back operating safely as soon as possible, we needed to create safe town centre environments and enable sensible movement throughout that will give users, residents and businesses confidence to resume activity and business. Priorities include: Signage; Communications with businesses; Public Conveniences; Bus Stations; Car Parks; and Street Furniture issues (e.g. benches)

The Centre for Towns, an independent non-partisan organisation dedicated to providing research and analysis on a range of issues affecting our towns, has recently reviewed the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on towns and cities throughout the UK. The [report findings](#) identify Llanelli as being in the top 20 towns in the UK for absolute deprivation and therefore lacking in resilience with regards to COVID-19.

What is the short, medium and long term impact?

Town Centre Economy

The impact on the Retail sector is one that has been widely publicised as being one of the worst hit sectors in terms of the adverse effects of the pandemic. We saw a complete shutdown in March. Whilst there have been upsurges in online purchasing many businesses in the county (being independent and smaller) have not been able to capitalise on this trend. Perhaps those businesses will need support in alternative trading ways moving forward. This lack of access to customers has resulted in many businesses facing challenges in terms of finance. The impact on supply chains, as well as the availability of staff has been significant. With social distancing becoming more of the 'norm' measures would need to be put in place to ensure people are able to feel safe in town centres, together with better access to the town's public transport link.

RURAL TOWNS

Prior to the current crisis we were undertaking work to develop growth plans to revitalise our 10 towns under our [Moving Rural Carmarthenshire Forward Strategy](#):

1. Llandovery	2. St Clears
3. Whitland	4. Newcastle Emlyn
5. Laugharne	6. Cwmamman
7. Llanybydder	8. Kidwelly
9. Llandeilo	10. Cross Hands



These growth plans were to look forward 10 years with new ideas and priorities agreed in partnership with businesses. The need for these plans is even more important by the economic whirlwind brought about by the pandemic.

The likely economic impacts of COVID-19 on 5 of the 10 Towns (shown in bold above) has been considered by *Owen Davies Consulting* – but these initial key findings would equally apply across all our rural towns:

- Impacts on *agriculture* are likely to have a greater impact on rural towns because there are a higher proportion of people employed in agriculture.
- Across our rural towns, 35% of the workforce are employed in occupations considered at most risk (administrative, leisure, customer service).
- If one in five of the most at-risk workforce lost their jobs, *unemployment would increase by 70%*.
- *A few towns (Whitland and St Clears)* have been found to have the *highest levels of managers and professionals* which offer more capacity to work from home and are considered to be less risk occupations.
- 20% of employees across the towns are in *self-employment* and are considered more vulnerable to abrupt and, in some cases, total loss of income.
- *Over 40%* of businesses in the towns are in *shut down sectors* (restaurants, pubs, café, non-food retail etc).
- Food & drink businesses and accommodation providers are likely to have closed across the towns, with *Laugharne* most likely suffering more significantly than others.

A review of the COVID-19 impact on the remaining 5 towns is currently being progressed.

What is the short, medium and long term impact?

Rural Economy

A significant proportion of the workforce are employed in occupations considered at most risk and the self-employed are even more vulnerable to the economic downturn. A number of agricultural businesses within the county appear to be facing challenges related to bringing their product to market. This is especially true for milk producers who indicate that the price at which they sell continues to fall with the devaluation of produce continuing at pace. This is resulting in significant levels of wastage with some having to sell at a lower price than it costs to produce. This is also true for beef and lamb produce. These issues are made worse by supply chain problems and reduced access to customers which culminate into significant issues with finance and income. On a positive note many agricultural businesses are family owned, and the impact has made it simpler to continue to operate throughout the lockdown period, with many farms having seen family members move home for the lockdown period therefore resulting in the availability of additional labour.

DEVELOPER / INVESTOR CONFIDENCE

Some 15 local, regional, and national Developers were contacted in respect of their businesses and how they have been impacted by COVID-19. The discussion with developers revolved around 4 main themes:

1. *Short term impacts (current and in the next 6 months)*

Generally, most developers were surprisingly positive and see the current crisis as a challenge but in some instances an opportunity.

2. *Key constraints anticipated moving forward*

Planning process (needs to be more responsive); Increasing costs; Lack of Gap funding schemes; Public sector too strong need to revitalise private sector; WG withdrawal from Housing association bond scheme

3. *Key opportunities moving forward*

Demand still exists for high quality properties; Opportunities to market stock / development sites to companies in key cities across UK looking to lower costs and increase quality of life to employees; Residential market strong plus relocations as above; Local and consistent procurement; Retirement villages vs care homes

4. *Key public and private sector interventions required*

Gap funding support scheme / Property Development Fund; Higher intervention rates to assist with growing development gap figure; Forum of developers; Support to assist with deferring private sector tenants rent; Rental guarantees from LA

What is the short, medium and long term impact?

The impact of home working and its transformational effects on work/life balance will have to be considered in Local Development Planning. The economic impact will require further consideration for the creation of additional employment areas particularly for small business start-ups. Survey feedback suggested we need to review and simplify planning support for key economic development applications (small & large).

There has been a considerable impact on the construction sector so it will be essential that we continue with significant regeneration capital infrastructure investments to boost demand in the construction sector and stimulate confidence.

The impact of the pandemic on office staff has been lessened by IT systems providing a relatively seamless transmission to home working. The *Digital Transformation Strategy* and *Agile Working* programme that was underway stood us in good stead at the onset of the crisis. Our current accommodation plans will need to be reconsidered.

HOW WE HAVE HELPED OUR BUSINESSES



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-ND](#)

Having been made redundant from his former employer, *Ryan Jones* set up his new business, *Pentre Plumbing & Heating*, in April 2019.

With the help of a grant of almost £3,000 from the *Carmarthenshire Business Start Up Fund* operating at that time, Ryan purchased all the tools and equipment necessary for delivering his services and very quickly won contracts with clients such as Leekes and Ammanford Town

Council, as well as building a reputation as a domestic plumber and heating engineer. This venture has not only created and secured a full-time job for Ryan going forward but has also laid the foundation to possibly creating another job within the business in the near future.

Having become much in demand as a reputable plumber, the arrival of COVID-19 and the closure of Leekes, Ammanford Town Council's facilities and cancellations from domestic clients not wanting any trades people in their homes, meant that unfortunately Ryan's work all but stopped.

Ryan sought support through the Council's newly set up **COVID helpline** where he was referred to a business support officer for advice. Being a start-up business with no business rates liability meant that, unfortunately he fell through the net of many of the business support schemes which were being introduced at that time, but he was held on a reserve list and advised to apply for Universal Credit to help him through the lockdown period.

Upon the launch of the *COVID Start Up fund* introduced by Welsh Government in June and being delivered by Carmarthenshire County Council, Ryan was contacted and advised to apply as he met the criteria. Through this scheme, Ryan received £2,500 to help keep his business afloat until he can fully resume his services.

Ryan said *"I am grateful to Carmarthenshire County Council for the support they have given me in establishing Pentre Plumbing & Heating. From starting up last year to maintaining support when all went quiet during lockdown, their assistance has been invaluable to keeping the business going and sustaining my job"*.

[Discover Carmarthenshire this summer](#)



AIR QUALITY

Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) levels have fallen during April to June 2020

As a consequence of lockdown, a drastic reduction of road vehicle movements has been observed within Carmarthenshire. The main pollutant of concern for Carmarthenshire has been identified as Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) from road vehicles. We have 91 locations throughout the County where NO₂ is measured and we have 3 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) where levels exceed annual statutory limits in “hotspot” locations.

[Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on Air Quality Report](#) / [Executive Board 21st September 2020 Webcast](#)

MUNICIPAL WASTE

Municipal Waste collected has fallen by 18.5% (compared to the same April-June period last year) from 21,181 tonnes to 17,252 tonnes. The reasons are likely to be that HWRC were closed and this accounts for a reduction overall. However, the **waste picked up at the kerbside has increased as a result of more people being home by nearly 20%**.

- Up 595t -14% increase in kerbside residual waste
- Up 975t - 34% increase in kerbside dry mixed recycling (blue bag)
- Up 591t - 35% increase in kerbside food waste
- Down 1,606t - 83% decrease in HWRC residual
- Down 4,974t - 77% decrease in HWRC Recycling
- The number of garden waste customers has almost doubled during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

*“Gratitude to the hardworking crews who are still carrying out an excellent service in trying times”
Compliment received*

Housing Waste Recycling Centres were closed for 7 weeks. With many residents at home undertaking DIY projects the demand upon the service on re-launch in June was unprecedented. We set up an online appointment system and reopened the sites in a compliant and managed way.

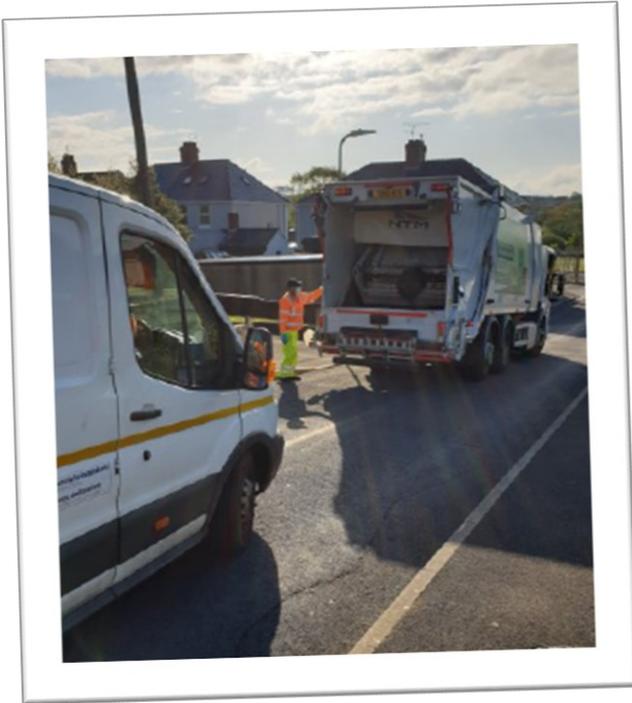
“Went exceptionally well - whoever put this together deserves a huge pat on the back.” Compliment received

FLY TIPPING

Fly tipping has increased by 54%

During the 4 months of April to July 2020 there were **1,089 fly tipping incidences** reported compared to 706 for the same period last year. This has had an effect on communities in terms of local blight. Also, suspension of some community volunteer litter picks and general litter clearance work (other than town centres) that add to the blight. In addition, our Environmental Enforcement work was suspended which meant that investigations into fly-tipping and waste non-compliance issues could not be undertaken.

OUR HI-VIS HEROES!



Waste and recycling collections were crucial to public and environmental health during the COVID-19 crisis, and *waste workers were deemed 'key workers'* by the government' and have continued to carry out essential services during the epidemic. Much like frontline NHS workers, waste workers have been receiving thanks and gratitude from householders.

Non-essential street cleansing services were suspended in the main and cleansing staff were redeployed to help out with refuse collection.

Highway operatives from our Trostre depot were also redeployed each day to the Waste / Refuse Unit as drivers of support vehicles on refuse rounds.

Environmental Enforcement staff and Highway Roadworkers also assisted with food deliveries to

our schools and assisted with food packages being delivered direct to homes. Others in the Environmental Enforcement team volunteered as trainers in the building cleaning service.

FACILITY CLOSURES

FACILITY	
Household Waste Recycling Centres	Closed for 7 weeks.
Parc Howard	Adverse effect on availability of public open spaces to exercise and keep fit.
Closure of Public Conveniences	Basic amenities closed to public, and no real alternative available elsewhere. Except for key transport hubs.
Ammanford Cemetery	Restrictions on the numbers attending burials, potentially impacting on families and communities.

CLEANING SERVICE

600 Cleaners retrained
150 additional Cleaners employed

Cleaners have helped keep our school hubs, schools, food distribution centres, depots, offices and sheltered housing open. We developed an enhanced standard of cleaning across all settings in discussion with colleagues in Public Protection. These enhanced cleaning standards were essential to reduce transmission of the virus and to build confidence and reassurance that the work environment is as safe as we can make it.



The enhanced cleaning arrangements played a significant part in ensuring that schools could reopen in July, with preparations underway to support cleaning arrangements for the additional numbers in schools returning September.

*“Spotless due to her constant energy & diligence - huge impact on the confidence of the staff”
Compliment received for a School Cleaner*

STREETWORKS

Increase in processing of **utility company street works notices** to ensure that all services such as power, water, gas, phone and broadband services were able to be maintained. The number of works notices during this period increased to 2,600 a month. The noticing system doesn't allow us to break it down into work categories, but *Openreach* were particularly active carrying out works to reinstate services to customers – not necessarily just broadband, but probably also for vulnerable people etc.

Skip licences increased by 50% during April and May due to residents clearing out homes and gardens

A range of other highway licencing functions saw increases including **street cafes (100% increase)**, licences to install apparatus (10% increase) and form vehicular accesses which has increased by 15% (an application to drop the curbs to give access to a property).

TRANSPORT

Public transport was significantly reduced during lockdown, and in fact usage has plummeted even before the formal lockdown. This created an issue for operators where there was significantly reduced income on those routes which they managed to maintain a service on. This has created a funding issue going forward. It could take a considerable amount of time to restore patronage levels, and with many having grown familiar with home working there could be long term adverse effects on service levels. Despite the challenges there may be an opportunity to re-visit and re-prioritise provision according to need.

School transport was provided during the period that schools reopened in late June and July. Transport was available in accordance with our usual policy but only to those who specifically requested it. Transport will operate as normal from September. The need to provide social distancing between driver and passenger is creating quite a challenge as it means that some

seats nearest the drivers will need to be left unused, creating loading issues and the need for additional vehicles. There is also concern that there may be a shortage of drivers and passenger assistants, bearing in mind the elderly nature of many of these.

“Bwcabus drivers have gone above and beyond...assisting key workers... they are wonderful and are so very appreciated”

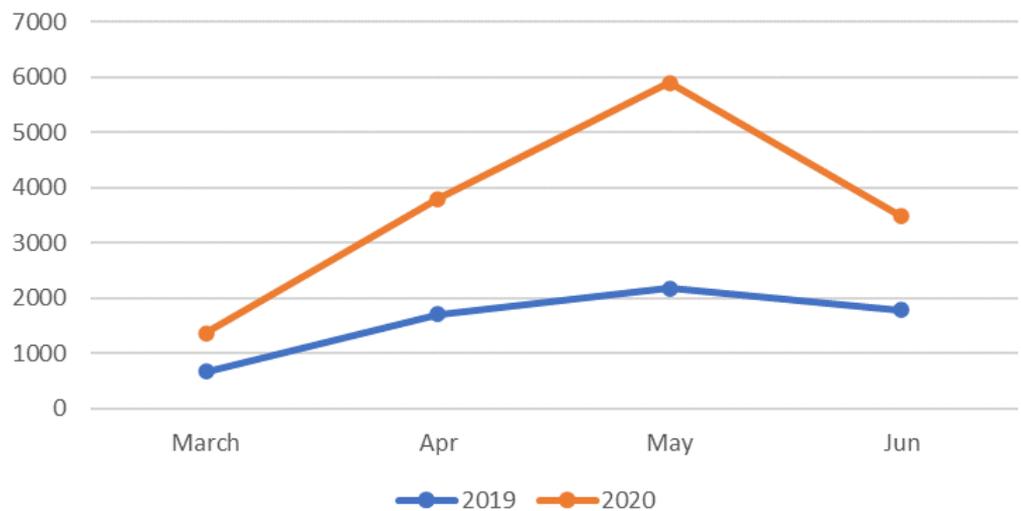
COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

Demand on the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network for community usage significantly increased during the height of the pandemic phase. Telephone calls and emails from the public and from landowners saw dramatic increases, a great deal of staff resource was used to keep the community fully informed and reassured on the status of public access. Between March and June use of the PRoW webpage (excluding use by CCC staff) increased significantly, webpage sessions increased by 237%.

There were 49 attempts to close PRoWs without lawful authority during the height of the pandemic phase which would have had adverse effects on the communities using those routes for their daily exercise were dealt with.

Active Travel (Amman Valley Cycleway) - Cyclists

Monitoring of our cycleways in May has shown a 5.3% increase in walking and 166% increase in cycling during the pandemic.



HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

Cessation of capital maintenance works meant that preventative maintenance has been delayed and may mean that timely intervention to ensure the preservation of the highway assets was not possible. Essential safety works continued as did out of hours safety and emergency response.

Due to the risk posed by affected trees, our management of trees alongside our road network that have been affected by Ash Dieback has been continuing throughout the pandemic. Trees removed within highway limits in the Llanelli area in August, and further worked planned for the Llandeilo area in September.

PLANNING SERVICE

Planning enforcement services suspended resulting in potential planning infringements that impact upon adjacent properties and communities.

PROPERTY MAINTENANCE SERVICE

The Property Maintenance Team continued to deliver essential urgent and safety maintenance works across our housing and non-housing property, which required additional measures to ensure the safety of our staff and tenants. This included legionella, gas safety and electrical testing to ensure that properties remained safe. Non-urgent works, however, were suspended during lockdown and records kept of work requests for future implementation. A review of this backlog in mid-August suggested that around 1,500 maintenance jobs were impacted by COVID-19 and needed to be undertaken, once it's safe to do so. It is anticipated that these will be completed over the autumn/winter period, subject to continued easing of lockdown and tenants (where applicable, being happy for us to access).

The Building Inspection Team has not been undertaking non-essential inspections so it is anticipated that there will also be significant latent maintenance work, particularly in closed buildings.

PROPERTY DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

The majority of our construction sites were closed by our contractors during lockdown as a result of staffing and material supply constraints, although some sites continued. We have been working with the range of contractors to restart each site as soon as possible, to ensure delivery of the projects for improved services to the community, but also to support contractor cashflow.

Delivery of our Carmarthenshire Homes Standard works were suspended by the Council and have not yet recommenced. The delay in completing these improvements will continue to have an impact on those occupying our homes.

PROPERTY INFRASTRUCTURE

As lockdown was imposed, a range of Council buildings were closed to the public and staff to encourage home working in accordance with Welsh Government guidelines. Some staff continued to require access to buildings to undertake their work, but this has been closely monitored to ensure access is limited only to those requiring it. To support re-opening of services we introduced an internal independent verification process to ensure that social distancing and other safety measures were in place before any building was reopened, to ensure the safety of our staff and public. The closure of buildings has significantly reduced the availability of face-to-face service delivery to the public, which has shifted to phone and internet communication.

A range of buildings continue to remain closed and we will be reviewing our property needs for the future. The new ways of working from home are likely to provide an opportunity to reduce our office requirements and focus more fully on buildings that deliver direct services to the public.

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

BROADBAND AND MOBILE

Although more people are working from home, home schooling and streaming on-line entertainment providers have explained that networks are built with “headroom” to withstand increases in use. The increase in day-time use is still only half of evening use. Mobile UK, the trade body for UK mobile operators, states that networks “have more than enough capacity” to handle the added demand.

Everybody needs sufficient broadband speeds in order to work efficiently but data from the Open Market Review 2019 claims that there are **12,838 premises in Carmarthenshire with speeds under 30mbps.**

Residents and businesses in rural areas of Carmarthenshire will have access to more funding for better broadband. Welsh Government recently announced it has topped up the value of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme to those with less than 30Mbps. The vouchers have doubled in value and those eligible can now claim £7k for a small to medium sized business and £3,000 for residential premises.

What is the short, medium and long-term impact?

AIR QUALITY

Our monitoring before and during the lockdown period has demonstrated that the reduced number of road traffic movements has resulted in a corresponding reduction of NO₂ levels. This is a welcome finding but is no surprise; it is important that we continue to monitor Air Quality as restrictions relax and vehicle movements increase again. Lockdown has taught us that effective use of available technology and improved / safer modes of sustainable travel such as walking, or cycling can have a significant impact on our reliance on road vehicles. It is hoped that we can continue to retain these practices as much as possible and embrace new ways of working to help protect and improve Air Quality for residents and visitors to our County.

ENVIRONMENT

More than ever before we have realised that our natural environment is vital for our well-being. Wild and natural landscapes sustain us; they give us clean water to drink and fresh air to breathe, they store carbon and protect our homes from flooding, and they can help make us happy and healthy. Nature gives us the foundations for our economy, energy system and our food and farming. Biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people are our common heritage and humanity’s most important life-supporting ‘safety net’.

We are also in the midst of an ecological and biodiversity crisis on par with the climate emergency. It’s not just wildlife that’s losing out; it’s us too. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide. Nature’s health and people’s health are linked, and the path to recovery starts with a plan for putting wildlife back in our lives.

During lockdown people have rediscovered the environment. Our Net Zero Carbon plan is our flagship plan to deliver for the environment. We will also need to ensure that our Environmental Act and Biodiversity goals are continued to be met.

During the pandemic we were awarded a Welsh Government grant that will fund the planting of two small new woodlands on council owned land in Llanelli and Llandybie. The woodlands will be designed to offer multiple benefits including access for local people, wildlife habitat and improvements in air quality. Pending the award of further grant aid, it is hoped that additional woodlands will be planted by us in future years.

WASTE AND RECYCLING

We have experienced more volumes of recyclable materials at the kerbside (food and dry mixed and garden waste) in the general sense, but we have also seen more contamination of waste. Households may have got into behavioural poor habits that may be difficult to reverse, or at the very least it will take a significant effort in the medium term to counter. In the short term, contamination levels may increase, thereby diminishing our recycling performance. On the positive side, the green waste service customer base has almost doubled.

Household Waste Recycling Centres – the medium and long-term effects will be around how we manage the service. The appointment system is popular with the public, but of course throughput is reduced. Future systems will need to balance these two aspects.

LOCAL ENVIRONMENT QUALITY

We have seen an increase in the incidents of blight in communities and natural landscapes in terms of fly-tipping. There has been reports of unlicensed waste collection and complaints of fly tipping in both urban and rural areas. There has been an increased frequency of environmental crime, this is both a health and an environmental hazard (including littering, fires). These habits may again take some time to address, so is a medium to long term process.

PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

Short and medium-term impacts will mean that the full suite of activities and play equipment will not necessarily be available at our parks and playground facilities. This could be the situation in the medium term e.g. swing seats removed from a swing set in playgrounds to ensure social distancing can be achieved. Another example is that the bowls changing rooms in Parc Howard will remain closed, but the greens are open, hence participants will need to arrive already changed for the activity.

PROPERTY

We will need to continue with significant capital infrastructure investments to boost demand in the construction sector, to assist in the recovering economy and to stimulate business.

PLANNING

We need to create safe town centre environment plans to enable sensible movement throughout that will give users, residents, and businesses confidence to resume activity.

Our town centres need to fully support local businesses, retailing, social and leisure activity – with immediate priorities, followed swiftly by more strategic infrastructure projects.

Planning process needs to improve; with consideration in the LDP in terms of home working and the concept of live / work.

The Council, working with PSB partners, should adopt a town centres first principle with a focus on creating public sector offices and community hubs. Wherever possible, investment will be prioritised in town centres, bringing back into use vacant properties, and generating footfall and spend to support town centre economies.

TRANSPORT

Mobility is an important part of everyone's lives. If we get it right for our most vulnerable citizens, we will get it right for everyone, with a positive impact on our ability to reduce air pollution and meet carbon reduction targets.

Our planning system will need to ensure we create places which embed active travel infrastructure, such as cycle lanes, enabling people to walk or cycle for all short journeys, fully integrating with public transport for longer distances.

- There needs to be improved access and connections between town centres, out of town sites and public transport links
- The pandemic has led to major changes in commuter travel patterns. Many workers stopped travelling to a workplace either because they were furloughed, began working from home or in some cases lost their jobs. The amount of people travelling to a workplace therefore declined sharply.
- As people return to work public transport and car sharing may not return to previous levels. The impact of staycation will also need to be understood. Journeys to school and education will need to be reviewed.
- With more people walking and cycling during lockdown, consideration is needed for footways will be upgraded, routes better signposted and road space reallocated so cyclists and pedestrians' have safer social distancing

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Digital connectivity, particularly in rural communities, will be important as it will reduce the need to travel, enabling access to jobs away from where people live, helping to improve their work-life balance. Therefore, with increased home working it is likely to lead to increases in house prices in Carmarthenshire. Therefore, an increased demand for rural and coastal properties.



ADULT SOCIAL CARE/INTEGRATED SERVICES

Throughout this emergency our priority has been to continue to support those who receive services and their families, to do this safely, to protect staff and the people of Carmarthenshire.

In Carmarthenshire we have not experienced the infection rates or deaths that some Local Authorities have, but we are remaining vigilant with our governance processes and infection control to ensure this position is sustained.

All day care provision was suspended in March, those accessing services have been supported in other ways and limited respite services have continued. Within Learning Disability Services, virtual activities have been arranged via skype or teams and individuals have accessed buildings on a one to one basis where this has been necessary. Activity packs have been delivered to people's homes and home visits have also been facilitated to support families.

Within Adult Social Care and Integrated Services staffing has remained relatively stable with minimal impact. In order to ensure service provision and minimise impact on service area we have kept a core social work and OT and management presence. In relation to safeguarding of adults it is business as usual, we have set up a regional multi agency COVID-19 response group. The regional Safeguarding Board and associated subgroups are continuing to meet virtually via Skype or Microsoft Teams.

Our Care Management Teams have kept in touch with those in receipt of services regularly and have undertaken essential visits where necessary. Technology such as iPads have been used to keep in touch with people.

All other staff have been working from home and have the IT resources to do so, along with PPE, in case they need to undertake emergency home visits.

A robust regional approach to managing new and existing Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard authorisations has been agreed in the light of us being unable to visit care homes. This approach ensures the principles of the Mental Capacity Act are upheld and is consistent with the guidance received from Welsh Government.

Business continuity plans have been updated to cover COVID-19 and updates are provided to staff daily along with a central resource for staff to access regarding any service change in relation to WG guidance and legislative changes.

We created a central deployment hub where services can make requests for additional staff and also offer staff that can assist with front line operations, such as residential and domiciliary care. Staff from leisure services have moved into domiciliary care and staff from day services have helped out in domiciliary and residential care. Staff in administrative roles have provided support in a central PPE store and in administrative roles in front line service provision.

Management oversight, team meetings, supervision and support continue remotely using Skype and staff have access to a well-being service and support.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

One of the positive outcomes of the pandemic is the collaboration within the council and with external organisations. Attendance at multi agency meetings has improved and regular governance forums have enabled decisions to be made quickly and identified risks responded to swiftly.

Communication between partners and within the council has been critical as guidance has changed regularly.

DOMICILIARY CARE

We have been able to maintain an effective domiciliary care service in extraordinarily difficult circumstances and front-line staff have demonstrated resilience and courage.

The adequate supply and provision of protective equipment to the sector, has made a profound difference in the feeling of safety and security for staff. Without this change in national policy the service would have been unsustainable – the original guidance, rather than policy, stated when we didn't have enough equipment *we should undertake a risk assessment for PPE*. When we then had adequate supplies, we were able to provide our domiciliary care staff with enough PPE to wear at all times.

We responded by:

- Redeploying day service officers to deliver care.
- Reconfiguring larger packages of care based on risk assessments.
- Introducing fast track training and rolling recruitment. General sickness was substantially down and many staff who work part time were willing to do additional hours.
- A recruitment and retention package for in house care staff. This is reviewed monthly.
- Increasing commissioned domiciliary care rates temporarily by a pound an hour.
- Introducing an advanced payment for commissioned hours for domiciliary care agencies to ensure cash flow is maintained in the sector.

A RISK MANAGEMENT AND ESCALATION POLICY for care and nursing homes was established which has been critical in managing the pandemic.

The purpose of the policy, which has been highlighted as an area of good practice is to:

- Ensure that there are robust contingency plans in place.
- Mitigate the risks of harm to care home residents and/or care home quality of care.
- Prevent avoidable deaths.
- Ensure timely, appropriate interventions to support recovery from an escalation in their Risk Status.
- Minimise the impact of care home failure on the whole health and social care system.
- Provide additionality to the existing Regional West Wales Escalating Concerns Policy for provider performance and support analysis of further risk escalation related to COVID-19 and implementation of escalation protocols and processes.
- Provide a process that allows us to assess the level of risk for every care home contracted by Health Board or the Local Authority and provide a daily overview of that risk.
- Provide a process that allows organisations to analyse the level of risk and implement appropriate and necessary escalation processes to mitigate the risk and timely de-escalation.

RESIDENTIAL CARE

The impact of the virus on residents in care homes has been a serious and ongoing concern in Carmarthenshire as it is across much of Wales.

Again, we acted swiftly, we were among the first to put a no visitors policy in all homes and subsequently to cease admissions without a negative test.

Actions to support homes included:



- **The issuing of PPE** – We now have the guidance and the equipment we need to protect staff and residents.
- **Increased Testing-** The Hywel Dda University Health Board has successfully co-ordinated systematic testing in care homes. Where there is an outbreak in a home a mobile unit test all staff and residents in these homes on a weekly basis. Whilst there were substantial delays in getting adequate testing in place our Local Health Board has been among the most proactive in Wales.
- **Revised Admission Criteria-** No admissions to care homes are allowed without a negative test in

place. When discharged from hospital the guidance now requires a further period of shielding after a negative test.

- **Improved Infection control-** Substantial work has been done by the Health Board advising and supporting homes with infection prevention and control, the use of PPE, enhanced cleaning regimes and the separation of infected and non-infected residents into red and green zones within settings.
- **Financial Support** - Substantial financial support is in place with a premium being paid to all homes of £50 per placement per week and support in relation to voids where homes are unable to take placements because of infections. We have received confirmation from Welsh Government that this support that we initiated in March 2020 can remain in place to the end of 2020-2021(Our approach has become national guidance). To date we have seen no homes fail although a small number are under significant financial pressure.

Tribute should be paid to our remarkable care staff and managers whose commitment in dealing with the most difficult of situations has been outstanding. Sickness levels in this staff group are now lower than they have been prior to the National emergency.

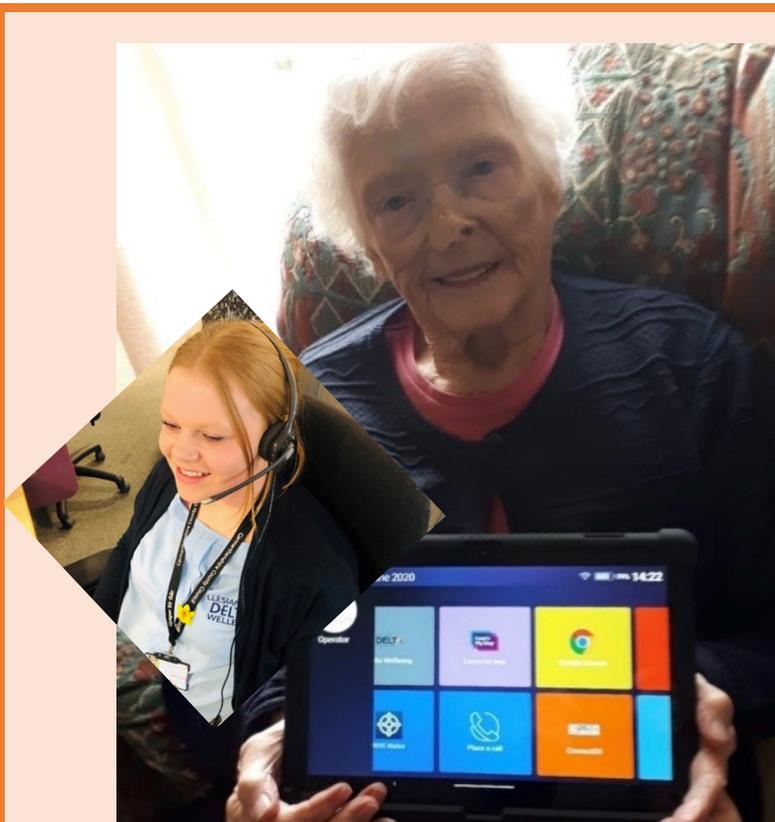
I think it's remarkable how we have adapted the way we work to continue to offer services despite the current circumstances. Feedback from clients has been positive.

Staff Survey May 2020

Personal Protection Equipment

- In March there were also widespread concerns across the sector at the guidance on the use of PPE that had been re-issued at the end of March.
- Whilst supplies were not initially adequate to meet the guidance in full for the whole care sector, they have since progressively improved with supply from Welsh Government now enough to enable providers to comply with the guidance. We have also seen successful procurement of protective equipment direct by the authority. **At the time of writing we have distributed over 1.5 million items of protective equipment to the care sector.**

- Locally we have a well-resourced centralised distribution system that can deliver PPE 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. When we have identified a small number of providers not following the guidance all have complied after intervention and support from our commissioning team.



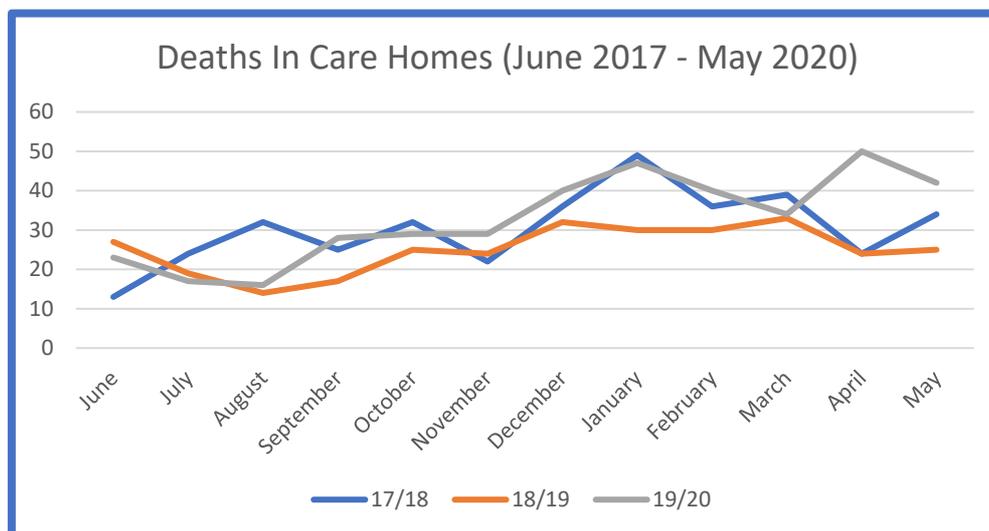
Staff at **Llesiant Delta Well-being** are going the extra mile to make sure extremely vulnerable people in Carmarthenshire are supported during the COVID-19 pandemic. Coming into work every day throughout the national emergency, staff have worked tirelessly 24/7 behind the scenes to support vulnerable people across the county. Llesiant Delta Well-being, formerly Carmarthenshire Council's Careline Service, has conducted approximately 5,000 calls to residents in Carmarthenshire that have received shielding letters from Welsh Government to ensure they have everything they need to stay safe during these difficult times.

80 iPads were supplied to care home residents to keep in touch with their loved ones

Accurately recording the impact on residents in care homes is difficult with some residents infected but asymptomatic and many whose health was severely compromised prior to infection. The most reliable measure is the number who die in residential care in excess of what we would have ordinarily expected.

This is broadly consistent with the most recent national ONS figures for much of South and East Wales although our figures are calculated differently so caution should be taken before reaching conclusions at this early stage. Whilst there may be some natural variation in the data, our early analysis indicates this increase is largely down to COVID-19 related disease.

Of those residents who have tested positive since monitoring began approximately 60% have since become symptom free. Thus, we can see that whilst the virus is devastating to this population many frail and elderly residents can and do recover. Early evidence locally is that the likelihood of recovery has a strong correlation with the general health of the resident before the infection. Moving forward ensuring we can evidence that all residents receive the highest quality of health care based on their needs as individuals will be a priority for us.



OTHER KEY SERVICES

The following were also put in place to mitigate the anticipated impact of COVID-19

- We increased reablement capacity in domiciliary care by 150 hours per week provided by a 3rd sector organisation and an independent service provider.
- We have increased domiciliary services by 468 hours per week, by block booking hours with two independent providers.
- We can use the field hospitals for recovery periods before discharge home.
- We have step-down and step-up facilities within residential care.
- We have flats that can be used by people recovering from COVID-19 but cannot return home as they live with people who are shielding. These flats are for people who do not have care needs but will have support from the departments housing team with shopping and any other issues that should arise.
- The Out of Hours Service has been enhanced to respond to anticipated additional demand
- Social work response from integrated services to meet the needs of adults with physical disabilities and older people, with dementia related requirements on a 24/7 basis
- Additional Social Work capacity to respond to Learning Disability or general Mental health emergencies.
- We have a rolling recruitment advert for social workers and domiciliary care
- Senior Management Response on a 24/7 basis to Social Care and Health board enquiries.
- The local authority has undertaken a staff skills audit and set up a central redeployment hub to realign staffing resources into critical posts.
- A volunteer survey identified circa 500 persons, including around 100 for care roles.
- Care related training resources now available online, with additional mobile technology sourced to support additional staff in these roles.

COMMISSIONED SERVICES

During the pandemic the relationship with our commissioned services has been very positive, we set up a COVID-19 advice/ helpline with a dedicated hotline and mailboxes. This has enabled providers to directly report suspected cases and act as a support line for any issues /concerns. The Commissioning Team also made proactive calls to keep in touch with providers.

We have implemented guidelines for all discharges from hospital across the care sector to ensure safe discharges and ensure there are measures in place to mitigate risks.

We have ensured a continued supply of PPE and access to advice concerning infection control.

FIELD HOSPITALS

We have converted Carmarthen and Llanelli Leisure Centres, the Selwyn Samuel Centre and the Parc y Scarlets barn, Llanelli, into temporary hospitals to provide additional bed space for the NHS. [See Leaders vlog](#)

More than 360 people volunteered to help set up furniture and equipment at Carmarthenshire's four field hospitals.

What is the short, medium- and long-term impact?

- In the short term COVID-19 Recovery Groups have been set up and we are focusing on recovery plans to sustain services following the crisis.
- We will need to change and adapt the way we work, for example, we will not be able to reopen our day services buildings for some time in order to comply with social distancing and minimise risk of infection.
- We will continue with virtual activities and provide a service to those most at risk safely. This will impact on families and carers who will continue to need support so we will need to do this creatively.
- COVID-19 has provided us with an opportunity to work innovatively and we will capitalise on this in our quest to continuously improve services.
- The impact of COVID-19 will result in us escalating our modernisation plans for some services e.g. less building-based services, agile working.
- Staff will need to return to undertake home visits so there will need to undertake risk assessments to do this safely.
- Staff will need to be prepared to be flexible and adaptive in the long term in the event of future uncertainties.
- We are already seeing an increase in referrals to mental health services, safeguarding and substance misuse because of the pandemic. This will have a significant demand on our resources, so we need to prioritise and transform services to respond to those who are most vulnerable.
- Loneliness is one of the feelings people have been experiencing during the current COVID-19 pandemic. which will impact on the mental health and wellbeing.
- In the medium and longer term, the economic downturn itself will have persistent negative health effects, with these effects being worse for some groups than others. For example, recent estimates suggest that the employment loss associated with the 2008 recession could have resulted in an additional 900,000 UK people of working age suffering from a chronic health condition, including mental health <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14800>
- There is an impact on the health and well-being of our staff and increased referrals to Occupational health with anxiety and stress associated with the coronavirus.
- There will be an impact on the budget as much of the activities for service improvement have been suspended during the pandemic.
- We will need to maximise the use of technology going forward as this has proved critical.
- Pressures in the health acute sector are likely to increase as we enter the autumn/winter months, this will have a significant impact on social care community services and in particular the care home and domiciliary care sector.

HOUSING

Stay Home Stay Safe. During the pandemic the importance of a safe and secure home has been more evident than ever before. The home has been our sanctuary and our community's safety has depended on our housing being of a good standard and fit for purpose.

With people working from home, on furlough, children being schooled from home, shielding or self-isolating, the home has been a crucial factor in the pandemic.

Sustaining Tenancies

Homes and Safer Communities have supported the 9,000+ council tenants, as well as offering advice and support for the private sector and those in need of urgent housing during this time.

- Profiling of our tenants took place early on to target the most vulnerable with welfare calls. Making critical links and referrals to various support services, to ensure tenants had adequate food and financial support during lockdown
- Supported tenants to claim for Universal Credit for their rent where there was loss of employment/income to ensure no council tenant fell into avoidable arrears.
- Continued to support tenants to make payments via electronic means. Payment of rents have been carefully monitored during this time to ensure tenants do not fall into arrears and maintain their security in their home.
- No court action has been taken at this time, the focus has been on support, help and to encourage tenants sustain their rental payments when there may have been greater temptation to spend on non-essential items during lockdown.
- Continue to contact our over 70`'s tenants throughout this period to ensure they have access to services and reduce loneliness
- Promote Welsh Governments "Connect "scheme to reduce Social Isolation and improve health and well-being
- Delivered Food Parcels to tenants in need
- Made hardship payments to tenants in fuel poverty and tenants with no recourse to public funds
- Sourced white goods and furniture for new tenants in financial hardship
- Worked closely with Housing Benefit to access Discretionary Housing payments to mitigate effect of welfare reform
- Partnered with Welsh Water to reduce tenant's liability with average savings in excess of £250 pa per household
- Voluntarily agreed to extend our Notice period from 3 to 6 months in line with Welsh Government recommendations
- Developed personal housing plans around our prevention fund to reduce rent arrears for tenants affected by COVID-19
- Committed £100k to our Prevention Fund to specifically target tenants who have lost income during this time.
- Worked closely with third sector partners including Shelter Cymru to offer debt advice, maximise income and reduce our tenant's liability.

There is some evidence that more people are interested in rural properties. There may be more community displacement because houses will become unaffordable for local people so they may have to move out to find more affordable options. This may erode welsh speaking communities because prices will rise for products and services to accommodate more affluent people.

HOMELESSNESS

430% increase in homeless placement in Temporary/Emergency Accommodation (32 to 170 between April and July compared to last year)

A change in the Welsh Government Homelessness Policy days prior to lockdown meant that anybody presenting as homeless, would have the right to accommodation through the Council. It was to limit the number of people that were street homeless or those sofa surfing, to control the spread of COVID-19. Carmarthenshire experienced a significant rise in single people requesting housing assistance through the council, they had no fixed residence or could no longer live with family due to the risk to others due to underlying health issues. In addition to the general demand, there was a significant increase in the number of prison releases during this period and a considerable amount of work was required to manage the risk and place them in safe environments. There were 54 prisoners released to Carmarthenshire and 31 were rehoused in temporary accommodation.

The demand on Temporary Accommodation significantly increased, there was an average of 11 placements being made a week compared to 3 placements a week last year. The council was also unable to move people out of temporary accommodation into other council accommodation, social landlords or the private rented sector. Hotels and B&B establishments had closed and the council re-designated some existing temporary accommodation houses as shared accommodation and commissioned 3 B&B establishments that provided 42 additional units of single person accommodation that were manned throughout the day by a security team and meals provided to all occupants.

Officers have been re-distributed within the service to assist with the overwhelming demand at the front end as well as managing the demand on temporary accommodation and focusing on moving people on to other more suitable accommodation to free up emergency accommodation. In addition, the voluntary sector including the Soup Kitchen and other commissioned services were called on to assist with homelessness provision and support for vulnerable people often suffering from other problems such as mental health. The number of people accessing the service meant that we had to introduce an out of hours service and be open on a Saturday to receive and assist with homelessness enquiries. During lockdown we were answering as many as 3000 calls a week, very few were missed, and we maintained a 96% answer rate. People were able to get through to us and receive the assistance they required. To ensure that we continued to meet the increasing demand, provide assistance to those most vulnerable and manage the risk in temporary accommodation a Homeless Coordination Cell was formed to include all key partners including Public Health and the Police.

During lockdown the number of families seeking help from the council dropped because of the Government's decision to place an embargo on all possession proceedings. As lockdown measure relaxed the number of people requesting housing assistance continues to increase. During the first week of July the number of people requesting housing assistance in a single week had increased to 60 in comparison to an average of 31 per week between April and June a 94% increase in demand.

Housing Advice & Tenancy

"How Much I Appreciate Your Help... I really am grateful for the time and help you are giving me"

LEISURE

We have **maintained contact with 563 National Exercise Referral clients** throughout the lockdown period, offering support and advice on how to keep themselves active and healthy. This has required 2,878 phone calls taking nearly 1,500 hours and 668 home programmes have been sent.

'Your messages have made me feel less alone'

'We are most grateful for the care and concern that has been shown us since the fitness classes have been put on hold'

- We have created a number of [online fitness classes](#) for our Actif Leisure members to access free of charge during the period that our leisure facilities have been closed, whilst developing a new Actif Anywhere offer to deliver online memberships and activities in future
- We Supported Sport Wales on 66 Sports Club Applications for the Emergency Relief Fund, totalling over £40k of funding to protect Clubs during lockdown
- We consulted with over 55 Clubs in 6 weeks on applications for the Be Actif Wales Fund
- We held 3 Club Webinars with a total attendance of 87 Sports Clubs and Organisations (1 Welsh Only Session)
- We worked with National Governing Bodies every 3-week cycle on their Return to Play Roadmaps and supporting clubs in response to these changes by assisting them with risk assessments, COVID-19 Coordinator appointments, Implementing Test Track and Trace Procedures etc
- We are preparing to launch Actif Communities Ambassadors programme in early September to increase informal physical activity opportunities in the community.
- We are supporting the School Holiday Hubs by providing activities for the entire 3-week timetable.

Dozens of Leisure, Culture and Outdoor Recreation staff were re-deployed to support other services or furloughed to mitigate unnecessary costs to the authority, with many staff using the time to undertake online training and to broaden their general employment skill-set.

Our Library services continued to provide access to our [online Library](#) offer to tens of thousands of residents throughout the lockdown period, whilst developing a new 'click 'n collect service as part of their phased recovery plan.

The public have rediscovered their love of walking, nature and the great outdoors whilst using the authority's vast network of public rights of way and footpaths. Outdoor spaces such as Pembrey Country Park and parks across the County were amongst the first spaces to re-open allowing people to maintain their physical and mental well-being.

TEST, TRACE, PROTECT

We have been successful in following up in our Test, Trace and Protect service.

Public bodies and hospitality businesses in West Wales are working together to test and trace anyone with symptoms of Coronavirus in a continued effort to protect our communities.

[📄 Test, Trace, Protect](#)

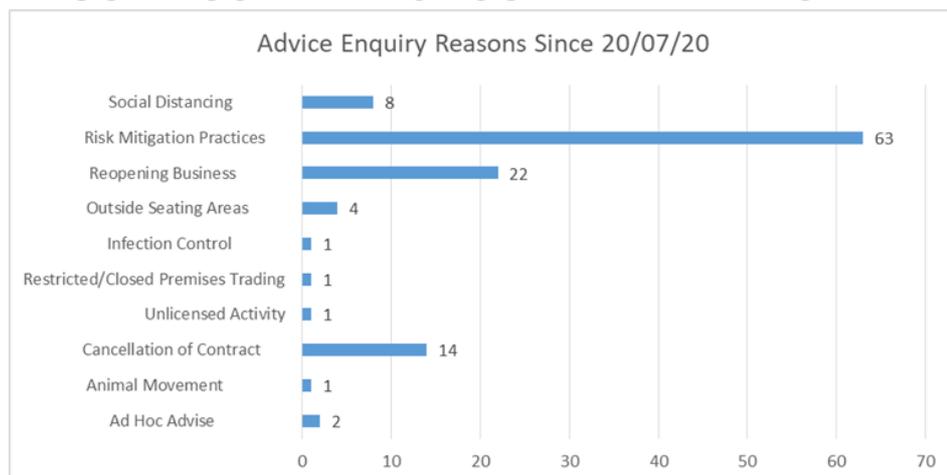
As well as undertaking the contact tracing of confirmed cases of COVID-19, identification of contacts and following up of those identified contacts there is a team of Environmental Health Officers who have been supporting Care Homes throughout the pandemic with advice on Infection Control and the use of chemicals when undertaking cleaning.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

600 food hygiene and standards combined visits and 200 animal feed visits are in arrears. 60+ new businesses are to be seen.

There has been a 60% increase in the number of complaints about rats, due to more people being at home and being able to spot them: together with waste back-log and an increase in fly-tipping incidents. However, this is being managed.

BUSINESS AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS



1,408 enquiries and intelligence-led visits were made to premises in breach of closure requirements often outside working hours. Businesses were generally compliant, with just one closure notice issued. Extensive advice was provided to the licensed trade. At the start of the emergency period new a stream of enquiries from

business relating to diversifying to be able to offer takeaways and food delivery services saw big impacts on the team. As lockdown restrictions have eased there are more enquiries related to how businesses can practically comply with social distancing and Track, Test, Protect requirements

55 welfare calls were made to vulnerable consumers who have call blocking devices installed. The initiative highlighted where additional support was needed (e.g. access to food deliveries, prescription collections etc.) and sought to combat loneliness

Working with banks we made *third-party cash withdrawals* on behalf of shielding/self-isolating people who needed cash to pay for shopping being done by volunteers.

1,825 properties were visited to warn against *rogue trading and scams* during the emergency period. Joint visits with Dyfed Powys Police were carried out at No Cold Calling Zones as part of a multi-agency response to the reported increase in rogue trading, fraud Informative flyers were used to transmit essential information to residents.

1,500 businesses were e mailed advice on COVID-9 related scams.

Extensive research was undertaken into the safety and suitability of PPE being supplied to the authority, including face masks, sanitiser and body temperature scanning equipment. Responding to enquiries received from traders and internal departments, we provided advice and support on a variety of product safety matters.

We also facilitated the testing of hand sanitiser through liaison with a laboratory and expedited the process to achieve a result within 48 hours. Labelling advice was given, and we examined certifications and test results provided by prospective suppliers. We helped many local suppliers maintain their ability to trade by ensuring that the products they were offering were safe which allowed them to remain competitive.

Given the unprecedented nature of these regulations, we maintained a proportional response to enforcement, we sought to advise and guide businesses while being sympathetic to the hardships that they were enduring. As restrictions are gradually lifted and we begin to ease out of lockdown, officers continue to work tirelessly to provide businesses with coherent advice and the most up to date guidance so that they can restart and rebuild while maintaining compliance with the necessary regulations to ensure continued public protection.

We are up and running, and business is good so far.

Thank you for passing my email on to Public Protection Dept, they phoned me and was most helpful and gave us lots of advice.

We are trading from the front door with a table and shield up for now. The interior of the shop has already been kitted out but for now we feel better serving from front door. We are also trying to work to timed appointments, so it limits the amount of people at the shop at any one time.

Thank you also with regards to this year's fee, that is a nice gesture. I have to say Carmarthenshire County Council have been brilliant in every way since lockdown.

We had our grant money within 8 days, and they have kept us informed with emails all the way through. Big thank you to you all.

The scheme has been brilliant for us and really makes you stand out from our competition.

Compliment Received from Carmarthen Electronics



GOVERNANCE

Local Government has traditionally held its democratic meetings as physical meetings in its Chambers. On 28th February 2020 the first COVID-19 case in Wales was confirmed. Democratic meetings continued for a while after this, with County Council meeting on the 10th March, and Executive Board on the 16th March, although in the intervening period 2 cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed in Carmarthenshire.

On the 12th March 2020 Officers moved into Gold Command mode and on the 18th March 2020 the Chief Executive had to take the decision to suspend most democratic meetings as a precaution.

On the 19th March a decision had to be taken to close the Authority's administrative buildings to the public to protect staff.

On the evening of the 23rd March 2020 the Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a '**lockdown**' in an attempt to halt the spread of the virus. He gave an instruction to the nation to stay at home except for limited purposes, including travelling to and from work, but only where absolutely necessary and the work could not be done from home.

On the [10th June, County Council](#) meetings were restored via digital means.

During the lockdown we have taken the opportunity to invest in new technology with enhanced audio and visual facilities in the Council Chamber at County Hall.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The internet dominates so much of what we do in life these days and it is having an increasing impact on public services too. We were determined to embrace the digital revolution and to ensure that we were in a position to take full advantage of the major changes brought about by new technology. Our [Digital Technology Strategy](#) set out a new approach that would underpin just about everything we do as a Council and when the pandemic struck we were in a good state of preparedness.

We had been taking advantage of new digital platforms so that our residents and businesses can find information or complete their dealings with the local authority in ways that are convenient to them and also saved public money. This vision and investment put us in a favourable position at the onset of the to move services on-line and to facilitate home working.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY AIM

A Cloud First Approach

- This allowed the rapid development of cloud- based solutions during the pandemic
- This enabled staff to work from the best possible locations

Resilient Data and Voice Network

- The network is the foundation of everything we do in terms of technology

Modern Digital Workplace

- Our work on empowering our workforce to be as efficient and effective as possible in the right place, at the right time based on the needs of citizen service delivery paid us dividends in the pandemic.

- Our **Agile Working programme had already seen 80% laptops and 20% desktops** – an agile workforce must be able to work from the most appropriate location at the most appropriate time. The implementation and installation of Microsoft Teams and the move to paperless meetings all made business sense but when ‘side-lined’ by the pandemic proved crucial preparedness.

Secure and resilient data centres

- The consolidation of servers, data and applications, improved overall performance through the adoption of the latest high-speed storage, making best use of technology and preparing us for cloud migration.

We did not foresee some of the demands required by the pandemic but were in a very good position – nevertheless staff stepped up and demonstrated great creativity and commitment

The following equipment has been provided:

- 1,603 devices to students at home
- 241 mobile connectivity devices to students at home
- 80 iPads to care home residents to keep in touch with their loved ones
- We made sure all members could attend virtual Council Meetings

“Well done, distributing iPads to care homes in Carmarthenshire. I applaud you.” Compliment received

15,539 new sign ups to My Account during the period mid-March to mid-June 2020.

(This enables our customers to manage recent requests, their Council Tax and make bookings and payments etc.)

<https://myaccount.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/en>



This is a **186%** increase on the same period last year

Additional on-line services have been made available due to operating differently due to COVID-19:

- Household Waste Recycling Centres slot bookings
- Free School Meals Direct Payments
- Library Collection Bookings
- Business Fiscal Stimulus Package applications

Due to more of the workforce working from home, Business mileage during April-June reduced from 1,037,697 Miles to 567,772 Miles (45.3%) and mileage payments over the same period reduced from £445,388.63 to £255,507.18 (42.6%). **A saving of £189,881.45 over the 3 months and 139 tonnes of CO₂ emissions (47%).**

What is the short, medium and long-term impact?

Long term, the massive increase in the incidence of working from home provides a valuable testing ground for the adoption of flexible working solutions and service delivery beyond the current emergency.

Digital Solutions will play an ever-increasing role in our planning and delivery models.

COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

COMPLIMENTS are up by 150%

During the period April – June 2020 we received **265 Compliments** compared to 106 in the same period last year. This demonstrates significant levels of customer satisfaction with services received, including those relating to COVID-19, as well as an appreciation of the Council's efforts to continue delivering core services during lockdown.

COMPLAINTS are down by 47%

There has been a significant decrease in the number of complaints, with 163 received during the period April – June 2020 compared to 310 during the same period last year (*although these two periods are not comparable due to the pandemic*).

COMMUNICATIONS

"Knowledgeable, informative, helpful and useful for residents of Carmarthenshire" Compliment

WEB SITE VISITS ARE UP NEARLY 50%



701,000 people visited our website between March and June 2020 compared to 469,000 for the same period last year with a 62% increase in the number of pages viewed.



20% increase in the number of telephone calls between the start of lockdown and the end of July compared to the same period last year.

Our Contact Centre staff dealt with almost **105,000 calls** during this 4-month period. Dealing with nearly 6,500 COVID-19 related enquiries from vulnerable and shielding customers and businesses, as well as queries on newly introduced processes due the pandemic such as the Household Waste Recycling Centre Appointment Booking. These types of calls can be lengthy with the average call taking longer than normal, despite this, the calls were answered far quicker than usual.

Freedom of Information requests are down 48% for the March/July period this year from 689 last year to 357 this year so far.



HOW WE WORK POST COVID-19

In May, **2,543 (32%)** of our staff across all departments took part in a survey on the new way of working following the COVID-19 outbreak, the results will help shape the future way of working.

How have you found the new way of working? (i.e. lockdown restrictions)

- **46% said good / 24% said very good**
- **25% said unsure**
- **4% said bad / 1% said very bad**

THE POSITIVES:

- Seamless transition due to the quality of IT communication systems which are available (Skype, Microsoft Teams, Email).
- No 'pointless travel' to a location of work every day.
- Improved work/life balance.
- Less distraction / more relaxed environment which boosted productivity.
- Improved level of trust given by managers
- Money saved on childcare
- Managers ensured adequate workstations
- Online/digital facilities eased the transition from teaching within classrooms to home.
- It has been easy to keep in contact with pupils and colleagues.
- More time to prepare resources and lessons, professional development and admin.
- Clear instructions from headteachers has been beneficial.

94% received communication from their direct line manager at least once a week and **79%** from other managers.

THE NEGATIVES:

- Missing face to face contact with colleagues.
- Can be lonely.
- Work and home life seem to blend into one.
- Some roles are not possible due to restrictions.
- Balancing childcare, home teaching and home working is stressful.
- Non home-working staff working in high risk conditions without PPE.
- Some inconsistency / insufficient information from managers.
- Workloads unfairly shared causing distress.
- Home working environment is not up to standard, causing musculoskeletal issues.
- Lack of PPE equipment for those working in Hubs.
- Difficult to ensure social distancing in some Hubs due to overcrowding.
- Difficult to ensure all pupils are engaging with lessons/work set.

53% said they faced barriers in their new way of working

WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT?

- We are currently looking at our longer-term working arrangements and will be involving staff in what the future looks like.
- We have created a number of online tutorials along with a range of other IT help and advice.
- All those working at home have been supported to undertake their own workstation assessments to ensure they are working safely and have been provided with additional equipment where necessary.
- We have set up a dedicated Infection Control post which aims to ensure all PPE requirements are provided in line with Government Guidance.
- Going forward we will be looking at providing digital solutions for a range of learning opportunities.
- We are working hard to ensure all our schools; office buildings and depots are ready for staff to return to.
- The Coronavirus pandemic has helped to reduce the silo working as we have worked together to ensure services continue throughout COVID-19. We are working to ensure this continues.

HOW OUR STAFF WORKED THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A number of our staff were re-deployed to various jobs such as Childcare Hubs, distributing food packs, working in our care homes and adult social care, refuse collection and supporting schools in on-line working.



EQUALITY

The Equality and Human Rights Commission have published a briefing on Education, Social Care, Open Spaces, Accessibility of Public Spaces and Employment to outline considerations in resetting services in recovery (- [Council File Plan link to be replaced by www link](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to inevitable widespread changes to the way in which services are delivered by local authorities. However, this means that it is even more critical that Local Authorities respect the needs of all service users.

FINANCE

Overall, we forecast an end of year **overspend of £7,605k** on the Authority's net revenue budget with an overspend at departmental level of £8,205k.

This unprecedented position is due to a combination of additional irrecoverable costs due to COVID-19 activity, foregone income from closed services which may not be fully recompensed by Welsh Government (WG) and planned savings proposals which have been undeliverable due to the pandemic.

This forecast does not include any allowance for a reduction in Council Tax collection. Whilst Carmarthenshire experienced a marked reduction in payments during the first quarter, it is not clear how much of this is due to financial hardship of residents versus the restrictions of lockdown. *This area is being monitored closely by the Director of Corporate Services as every 1% reduction in collection is worth nearly £1m.*

The full year forecast includes known financial positions up to the point of writing as well as assumptions of future levels of WG COVID-19 funding. As such, figures are acutely sensitive to changes in these assumptions. Currently the Authority is submitting a monthly hardship claim for additional COVID-19 expenditure. The majority of costs are being refunded, though some are deemed ineligible and it is not clear how long this funding mechanism will continue. Likewise, WG have confirmed recompense of some key areas of lost income such as *Waste, Leisure, Culture, Parking and School Meals* for April – June, though again the full picture is unclear at present.

On 17th August, WG announced *an additional £260m financial support for Local Authorities*, taking the total support to around half a billion pounds, however detail of what is included or deemed ineligible is not yet clear.

Broadly it is assumed that services will gradually return to normal activity levels over the course of the financial year and that WG support for additional costs reduces over time. Specifically, no provision is made for addition costs or further loss of income from either a localised lockdown or second wave over the winter months.

RESET



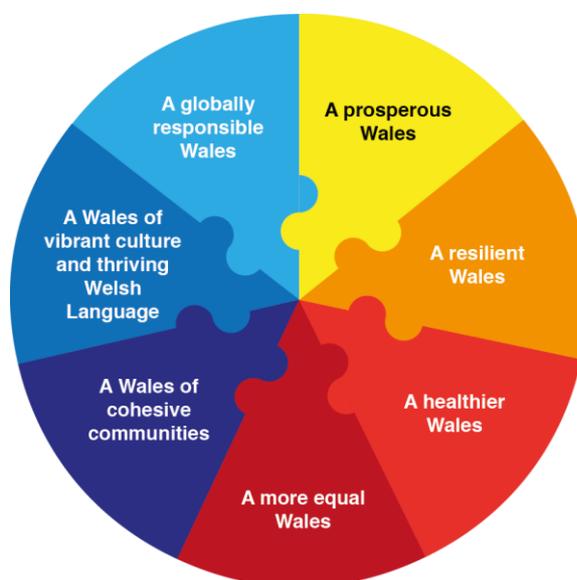
It is not going to be a case of restarting and getting back to the way we were. This is an opportunity to refresh and renew as we mean to go on. One thing is evident, we cannot and will not be returning to the pre COVID-19 “*status quo*”.

1. We must make sure that we learn from this unprecedented experience as we reintroduce our services and re-set our strategic and operational priorities. We must identify our key learning points at an organisational level and across the breadth of our services. To achieve this our Transformation and Innovation and Change Team is undertaking a strategic evaluation.
2. We will also need to reset our ‘*Moving Forward in Carmarthenshire 5 Year Plan*’, *Corporate Strategy* and revisit our *Well-being Objectives*.
3. We will need to reconsider our 2020-21 business plans, what we monitor throughout the remainder of 2020/21 and begin to shape our 2021/22 Business Planning approach.
4. Our pre-COVID-19 UK economy prioritised economic growth, forced many people into poverty, and in turn created an unhealthy population that is particularly susceptible to global crises such as pandemics. It’s vital that the reset addresses things we can’t afford to ignore – such as the current health crisis, the economic crisis the pandemic has triggered and the ongoing climate and nature crises. We have an opportunity to lead the way with visionary ideas and transformative investment, to a future based on well-being.
5. In May, the Future Generations Commissioner published her report on the progress of the future Generations Act and made a number of recommendations for the future that we must consider across all services. [Link to the Future Generations Report 2020](#)
6. The *Future Generations Commissioner* has made some post pandemic recommendations for public bodies in Wales:
 - I. Develop an economic stimulus package that leads to job creation and supports the decarbonisation of homes, through building new low carbon affordable housing and investing in a national programme to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes.
 - II. Invest in better ways to connect and move people through improving digital connectivity, active travel and public transport.
 - III. Invest in skills and training to support the transition to a better future, creating new greener jobs.
 - IV. Invest in nature and prioritise funding and support for large-scale habitat and wildlife restoration, creation and connectivity throughout Wales –including for natural flood defences, to implement the new national forest, and to ensure land use management and agriculture supports secure local food chains and distribution.
 - V. Invest in the industries and technologies of the future, and support for businesses that will help Wales to lead the low carbon revolution and lock wealth and jobs into local areas with investment in the foundational economy.
7. Digital solutions will play an ever-increasing role in shaping what we do.

WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT (WALES) 2015

This is an Act introduced by the Welsh Government which will change aspects of how we work. The general purpose of the Act, is to ensure that the governance arrangements of public bodies for improving the well-being of Wales, take the needs of future generations into account. The Act is designed to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Wales, in accordance with sustainable development principles. The law states that: -

- a) We must carry out sustainable development, improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The sustainable development principle is **'... the public body must act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'**
- b) We must demonstrate 5 ways of working:
Long term, integrated, involving, collaborative and preventative
- c) We must work towards achieving all of the 7 national well-being goals in the Act.
Together they provide a shared vision for public bodies to work towards.



For the first time in Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations Act, provides a shared vision for all public bodies in Wales to work towards. Each public body in Wales is required by law to set and publish Well-being Objectives that maximise our contribution to these national Well-being Goals.

In Carmarthenshire we have incorporated these Well-being Objectives into our Corporate Strategy 2018-23 which we refresh annually. Our approach is: -

'Life is for living, let's start, live and age well in a healthy, safe and prosperous environment'

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Keep Wales Safe:

- always observe social distancing
- wash your hands regularly
- if you meet another household, outside your extended household, stay outdoors
- work from home if you can

Stay at home and **get tested** if you or anyone in your extended household has **symptoms**

[Keeping Carmarthenshire SAFE](#)

World Health Organisation

[Pandemic Influenza Risk Management](#)

[A checklist for Pandemic influenza risk and impact management](#)

Children's Commissioner for Wales

[No Wrong Door: bringing services together to meet children's needs - June 2020](#)

[Coronavirus and me Survey Results June 2020 -June 2020](#)

Older Peoples Commissioner for Wales

[Leave no one behind Action for an age-friendly recovery](#)

Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Commissioner

Commissioner's response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: [Summary infographic](#) | [Full Report](#)

[Information Commissioners Office Regulation during COVID-19](#)

[Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)

[Link to Council File Plan – Equality briefing on COVID-19 Recovery Considerations by Service type](#)

[COVID-19 Health Inequalities slides](#)

[Welsh Language Commissioner](#)