

Report

Cabinet



Part 1

Date: 24th June 2020

Subject COVID-19: Test, Trace & Protect – Creation of a Contact Tracing Cell in Newport

Purpose To ensure that the Cabinet are aware of the current situation and to seek endorsement of the approach going forward for the delivery of Contact Tracing in Gwent

Author Regulatory Services Manager (Environment & Community)

Ward City Wide

Summary The Welsh Government have required local authorities to work together on a regional basis, with support from Local Health Boards, to establish regional Contact Tracing Services, to operate on Health Board footprints. The requirement was for services to be developed 'at pace', to be operational from 1 June 2020. Newport City Council met this requirement and our Contact Tracing Cell is operational

Proposal That the Cabinet note the operational decisions taken to date and endorse the approach going forward

Action by Head of Law & Regulation

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Head of Law & Regulation
- Head of Finance
- Head of People & Business Change

Signed

1. Background

On 13th May the WG published their Test, Trace and Protect overarching plan which is supported by the Public Health Wales (PHW) Public Health Protection Response Plan. These plans clearly outline that Councils are required to set up local community contact tracing cells, in partnership with the Local Health Boards. The main purpose of the cells is to “find, prioritise, act and report”.

People who are diagnosed as Covid-19 positive will be asked to advise on all their contacts. These contacts will be traced and monitored to determine if they display symptoms. If they do, they will be treated as a case in their own right, and their contacts traced. Depending on level of risk and exposure, self-isolation could be advised to stem the spread of the virus to keep it beneath the all-important R rate of 1.

The Welsh Government have purchased a Microsoft Dynamics Data Management System (DMS) which is cloud based and will be available to all Gwent regions from the 8th June. This includes the telephony system and a training schedule is already in place to ensure all current staff are equipped to use it.

2. Timescales

Mass population Contact Tracing was commenced on 1 June 2020. The programme will iterate over time, as the scale and success of contract tracing is monitored, and there will be rapid developments in the early stages:

- Phase 0: Pre-1st June: learn from trials and ensure appropriate testing is available for future phases
- Phase 1: 1st – 7th June: Contact Tracing on a small scale, using local data management systems
- Phase 2: 8th June onwards: move to an all-Wales data management system and expand the operation. To include a Wales-only web service to allow the public to self-service where possible.

3. Requirements

The advice provided by Public Health Wales (PHW) in the Gwent Contact Tracing Operational Plan is that Newport will need a significant resource to undertake this function locally.

This includes:

- 12-20 Contact Tracers to conduct the initial tracing work and:
- 40-60 Contact Advisors to complete the follow-up monitoring phone calls.
- 6 Coordinators/Team Leaders

It is expected that the Tracers operate at a higher level than the Advisors and that they are employees who have experience of working at an appropriate level e.g. Technical Officers and Investigators from Environmental Health and Trading Standards (Regulatory Services). This work will be supported by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) Clinical Leads and is in addition to the expertise of Environmental Health Officers that will be required to work at the ‘higher’ Regional level (the Regional tier of the PHW Public Health Protection Response Plan).

Public Health Wales expect the service to operate from 08:00 hours to 20:00 hours, 7 days a week once it is fully developed.

It should be noted that Contact Tracing may need to operate in Wales for the next 9 to 12 months.

4. Implementation

Initially all staff will work from home although Newport has been asked to investigate the viability of premises for further phases of the programme and this is in hand. The service will be operated from 08:00 hours to 17:00 hours, Monday to Friday initially.

For the Contact Advisor roles in Newport, the proposal is to start with a small team of 10 Customer Services Officers from City Services and then expand the numbers week by week to include redeployed staff who have volunteered for the role, following a call out to all staff.

For the Contact Tracer roles, 10 no. officers have been identified from Regulatory Services (Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing) who can be redeployed to deliver this in the initial phase. This resource is largely available because the current social distancing restrictions have severely curtailed routine regulatory inspection work and licensing processes. These officers will deliver this work remotely i.e. working from home, as a number of them are currently 'shielding' due to underlying health conditions.

The Regulatory Services Managers have reviewed existing workloads and functions and identified what work has already been scaled back, and what functions could be scaled back further should further resource be required for this Contact Tracing work. A summary of this work has been provided to the Cabinet Member for Licensing & Regulation and the Head of Law & Regulation (such operational decisions are delegated to the Head of Service).

Existing Covid -19 responsibilities must continue in Regulatory Services: care home monitoring and support, business restrictions/closures and social distancing in the workplace enforcement. Officers, including Environmental Health Officers, will continue this work as well as delivering on the PHW Regional level work set out in the Response Plan, but to do so will require careful balancing of resources and support from PHW.

As mentioned previously the requirement is to deliver Contact Tracing on a regional, Health Board footprint. The Newport operation is therefore part of the Gwent Contact Tracing Service.

At the Regional level Environmental Health Officers who have expertise in Communicable Disease work are expected to respond to outbreaks and clusters of the disease, which are expected as the 'lockdown' restrictions are eased. There is a requirement for close collaboration with the other local authorities in the Gwent/ABUHB area and sharing of resources may be appropriate, especially to provide Regional cover at EHO level at weekends.

5. Operational Arrangements and Governance

The Covid-19 pandemic has been declared as a national emergency and therefore emergency procedures and structures have been put in place under the Gwent Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) e.g.

- a Community Testing and Contact Tracing and Testing Sub Group
- sub groups covering Workforce and Premises, IT / Digital and recruitment in the longer term.

Newport has developed a Contract Tracing Operational Delivery Group (CTODG), Chaired by the Head of Law & Regulation and made up of staff from across relevant service areas. This group reports into CMT and Gold by the Head of Service.

Appropriate Governance arrangements are to be developed and agreed for this work for the future when it is no longer being directed by the SCG.

6. Financial Summary

Currently efforts have been made to keep the cost of the Contact Tracing Cell to a minimum by redeploying existing staff from across the Council into the Contact Advisor roles and utilising staff in Regulatory Services who currently have capacity due to the 'lockdown' and its impact on normal regulatory activity. However despite this, the costs are significant. Some staff are being paid more than their substantive post because the Advisor role has been graded at a higher grade. Others will work more hours than they would normally for example.

However, the use of redeployed staff will not be sustainable in the longer term when staff will need to be returned to their substantive posts as business begins to return to a new normal, and new staff will need to be recruited, at significant additional cost. Equipment including laptops have been purchased in order to ensure that new starters have timely access to essential equipment.

In addition there will be a need to remunerate staff to enable a 7 day a week service required by Public Health Wales, again at significant cost.

Recently the ABUHB has started the process to undertake recruitment of Contact Advisors and Tracers, and it is understood that these may operate at a physical location in Newport in future, possibly from September onwards.

The WLGA and other LAs have made strong representations to WG that Contact Tracing requires specific funding and the WG have indicated that they agree they need to establish funding for this but the specific details have yet to be confirmed.

7. Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
That the local Contact Tracing Service in Newport is not able to operate effectively	High	Low	Service Areas have worked tirelessly to establish Contact Tracing in Newport, to be part of the Gwent Service, over a very short timescale	Head of Law and Regulation
That Contact Tracing at both the local and regional response (EHO) level is not resourced adequately to support it to operate over the hours/days required by Public Health Wales	High	Low	Service Areas are working to identify adequate resources	Head of Law and Regulation/ Head of Finance
That the financial expenditure to establish and deliver the new service is not fully covered by the WG	High	Medium	Initial expenditure has been kept to a minimum by careful use of redeployed staff and equipment from across the Council. Correspondence from the WG confirms that funding will be made available for Contact Tracing	Head of Law and Regulation/ Head of Finance

8. Links to Council Policies and Priorities

As noted above, this is an emergency response to a public health pandemic, however the work links with the following plans/policies:

Newport City Council's Corporate Plan (the most relevant theme is "A thriving city" and the most relevant Well-being objective is "To enable people to be healthy, independent & resilient.

Well-being Plan 2018-2023. The most relevant Well-being objective is: "Newport has healthy, safe and resilient environments".

9. Options Considered/Available

9.1 Option1

To note the decisions taken to date and endorse the approach going forward to deliver a Contact Tracing Cell in Newport as part of a Gwent Contact Tracing Service.

9.2 Option 2

Not to endorse the approach going forward to deliver a Contact Tracing Cell in Newport as part of a Gwent Contact Tracing Service.

10. Preferred Option and Why

10.1 Option 1 above.

To note the decisions taken to date and endorse the approach going forward to deliver a Contact Tracing Cell in Newport as part of a Gwent Contact Tracing Service. This will meet the requirements of the Welsh Government and protect public health.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

The cost of this initiative is very significant. It is estimated that across Wales, staffing and related costs are c£50m itself and the testing costs additional to that then.

In broad terms, Local Government is starting this process using already budgeted re-deployed staff and when these return to their substantive posts, will be replaced with new additional staff for the period this initiative will go on for. The costs of current re-deployed staff will not be funded as they are not 'additional costs' and this follows one of the guiding principles for WG financial support for Local Government Covid-19 costs incurred.

The Welsh Government have indicated / acknowledged that funding is required for this over the 9-12 month period but have not yet confirmed a fund or grant scheme for it at time of writing. To date, Newport City Council have incurred IT/related costs for new laptops etc for when additional staff are recruited.

In this context, the Council should look to ensure that unavoidable additional costs are kept to a minimum until funding is confirmed and terms known.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the report. Contact tracing is a key element of the Welsh Government route plan for relaxing the Coronavirus lock-down in Wales, in order to reduce the community transmission of COVID-19. In Wales, councils have been tasked with the

responsibility to establish local community contact tracing cells in each of their areas, in partnership with the regional Local Health Boards. A three-tier governance structure has been established with the local cells reporting into a Regional co-ordination group and the contact-tracing being overseen at a national level by Public Health Wales. Because of the short time-scales for implementation, the programme will be phased and will increase gradually over a period of time. Initially all staff will work from home, as many of them are currently “shielding”, but ABUHB are considering the availability of premises for a contact centre type of operation for the longer term. Because of the urgency, the Council has utilised existing staff for the first 3 months, with employees being seconded from other services and other volunteers agreeing to be redeployed. However, this is not sustainable in the longer term, as the current staff return to their normal duties, and replacement staff will need to be recruited in partnership with the Health Board. This will be dependent on Welsh Government funding to pay for the additional costs of delivering the service, which has not yet been confirmed. Because of their experience in dealing with contagious diseases, the work at both a local and regional level is being led by Environmental Health Officers, who will continue to have an advisory role and will also be involved at a regional level in dealing with outbreaks, both in care settings and within the wider community. The Regulatory Services Manager (Environment & Community) is the Council’s representative on the Gwent Regional Overview Team. Other staff from within Public Protections have been seconded temporarily to the contact tracing Team as Contact Tracers. Therefore, these interim arrangements will have a significant impact on the delivery of other Public Protection services and other statutory and regulatory work will have to be scaled-back to accommodate this. A raft of data sharing and information protocols have been put in place at a regional and national level to allow for the transmission and security of the personal data being transferred as part of the test, track and protect process, to ensure compliance with Data Protection and GDPR requirements.

Comments of Head of People and Business Change

The impact of the service on current staffing is mainly around flexibility and ability to be released from their roles for a temporary period to get the service up and running. The Council has been asked to provide around 80 staff, of which half have been released from their current roles. To complement this, we expect health board staff to support and plug the gap. At the end of this temporary period NCC staff supporting the service will gradually return to their substantive roles and be replaced by recruited individuals. There is a possibility that the Tracers, provided by Public Protection may be required for the whole 12 month period.

Longer term recruitment solutions are being sought in partnership with the five Local Authorities, Public Health Wales and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB). It is likely recruitment will be led by ABUHB with the Health Board being the employer. Currently it is anticipated the Council will continue to support and deliver the service using ABUHB staff. It is unclear at this point how this resource will be funded.

This report is in line with the Strategic Recovery Aims report, particularly in terms of promoting and protecting the health and well-being of local people.

The work is also in line with the sustainable development principle in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Scrutiny Committees

No consultation with Scrutiny Committees has been undertaken.

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

No Equalities Impact Assessment is necessary.

Children and Families (Wales) Measure

The proposal set out in this report has no more impact on children or families than any other group or individual.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Well Being Assessment:

- **Long term:** The response to the Covid-19 pandemic is a short-term measure but one which will have long-term impacts.
- **Prevention:** The Test, Track and Protect strategy has Contact Tracing as a fundamental part, which aims to reduce the spread of the disease and prevent many people from becoming ill and significant numbers from dying.
- **Integration:** The strategy will have a major impact on our Well-being Objectives and the Well-being Goals.
- **Collaboration:** Work to deliver the strategy relies heavily on collaboration between local authorities, the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Public Health Wales. Significant support (including financial support) is required from the Welsh Government to deliver this successfully.
- **Involvement:** The process of Contact Tracing is public-facing and can only have the desired impact with cooperation from the population it is striving to protect..

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

The proposal set out in this report has no impact on crime and disorder.

Consultation

No consultation is necessary.

Background Papers

The Public Health Protection Response Plan

<https://phw.nhs.wales/publications/publications1/public-health-protection-response-plan/>

Dated: