

Official Sensitive – Cabinet
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COVID 19 – Core Group meeting:- Wednesday 10th June 2020 (08:30)
Caerdydd 1 & 2 / Skype VMR meeting

Present -

Ministers: First Minister; Rebecca Evans; Vaughan Gething; Jeremy Miles; Julie James; Lesley Griffiths; Ken Skates; [NR] Eluned Morgan; Jane Hutt; Hannah Blythyn; Julie Morgan; Lee Waters; and Dafydd Elis Thomas.

Local Government: Cllr. Andrew Morgan – Leader, WLGA.

WCVA: [NR]

Opposition party leaders: Paul Davies MS; Adam Price MS.

Officials: Permanent Secretary; Andrew Goodall; Frank Atherton; Reg Kilpatrick; Albert Heaney; Huw Morris; Carys Evans; Toby Mason; Chrishan Kamalan; Will Whiteley; Jo Trott; Christopher Morgan; [NR] Jonathan Scourfield.

Special Advisers: Jane Runeckles; Ian Butler; Dan Butler; Paul Griffiths, [NR] Sara Faye; Clare Jenkins.

NHS and Public Health Update

1. The Chief Executive of the NHS reported that the number of people entering hospital settings with COVID-19 was stabilising.
2. All Health Boards were continuing to report Green / level one as an indicator of capacity and response, apart from four hospitals which were reporting level two, given the hospitals concerned this suggested a return to normal activity.
3. 27% of acute hospital beds were currently unoccupied and available for use. There were now 897 confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients in NHS beds across Wales. Around 60% of critical care beds were unoccupied and available. Of the 137 in use, 40 were occupied by patients with COVID-19 symptoms.
4. There would be a need to continue to monitor occupancy levels to maintain the resilience of the service. The Ambulance Service had reported that COVID-19 related calls to the 999 service had increased slightly.
5. Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board was also reporting a reduction in cases of the virus and that it was now over its peak. Overall, the Health Board had reported the second lowest number of COVID-19 related deaths.
6. The recent ONS report on registered deaths in Wales up to week ending 29 May highlighted that for the latest week the numberrate was around 40 deaths a week above the five year average for the past five years.
7. The Health Boards were continuing to upscale services in line with the operational frameworks, while preparing for another virus peak during the Autumn or Winter months. Some Boards were also upskilling their workforce to increase critical care capacity.
8. The Test, Trace and Protect system, which had benefited from early pilots, was fully operational as of last week. The highest number of positive cases in any one day

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was 82 and the lowest 35. These cases generated 651 people for follow-up by the contact tracing teams, of whom 619 had been successfully contacted and advised to undertake a test.

9. The first phase of testing all residents and staff in care homes in Wales was due to be completed by the end of that week, with all care home workers being tested each week for a further four-week period.
10. The CMO reported that around 300 – 400 new cases of the virus were being reported each week and community transmission rates were low, which demonstrated that the lockdown had worked. The 'R' rate was estimated as being between 0.5 and 0.8 in Wales.
11. The CMO referred to advice on the use of face coverings, which had been updated following the revised guidance from the WHO. Face coverings should be of three layers and it was recommended they should be worn in situations where social distancing was not possible, such as public transport. This would not be mandated, and the use of such coverings by the public was a matter of choice. Hospitals would continue to use surgical face masks to protect staff and help save lives.
12. Health professionals from across the world were still learning about the transmission of the virus, particularly amongst asymptomatic people. However, people did appear to be most infectious between 24 and 48 hours in advance of displaying symptoms.
13. The Group discussed the report from Public Health England on the virus impact for BAME communities and noted that no recommendations had been made. In contrast, the Welsh Government had undertaken a review, established a BAME COVID-19 Advisory Group and created a Self-Assessed Risk Assessment Tool that had been rolled out across the NHS, having been trialled in Aneurin Bevan Health Board.
14. It was noted that the sub-group established to consider the socio-economic and social impacts of Covid-19 in BAME populations was due to report shortly. It was agreed that officials should provide a note to outline the work of the Sub-Group and its chair, Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna, should be invited to a future meeting of the COVID-19 Core Group.

Local Government Update

15. Cllr Morgan reported that the planning work for the reopening of schools and the provision of school transport was ongoing across all Local Authorities. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency had agreed that screens could be inserted into school coaches, thereby increasing capacity of each from eight to 28 pupils.
16. Local Authorities were continuing to undertake Test, Trace and Protect, and the numbers had been lower than expected, so there was still capacity in the system.
17. Future funding pressures were likely to emerge if Local Authority income did not begin to increase soon, particularly in relation to lower Council Tax receipts, increased applications for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the cost of Test, Trace and Protect.

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18. The process of allowing sufficient time to prepare for the reopening of services had been welcomed by Councils and had allowed them to put sufficient precautionary measures in place. Domestic recycling centres were now open and the companies that received materials from Local Authorities had recommenced activity.
19. There would be further discussions on the re-opening of libraries and the Partnership Council would be discussing the recommencing of other services later that morning.

Contingencies / Resilience update

20. The Director of Local Government informed the Group that the Strategic Coordinating Groups (SCGs) were in discussion with National Parks and Local Authorities about the re-opening of car parks near beauty spots to ensure the Regulations were followed. It was important to have consensus on this while being mindful of road safety.
21. Police Forces were still discouraging visitors from across the border by using Engage, Explain, Encourage and Enforce.
22. There was ongoing engagement with partners in preparation for the next 21 day review of the Regulations. It was noted that the UK Government had introduced quarantine rules for people travelling into the UK. While border security was the responsibility of the UK Government, as the rules had been established through public health regulations, the Welsh Government had acted as the delivery agent in Wales.
23. The SCGs were reappraising plans to deal with the reasonable worst case scenario. ~~While~~ Local Resilience Fora were considering how to manage other emergencies, such as drought, while dealing with the pandemic. Another ~~potential concern risk~~ was having to deal with a further peak in transmission at a time when the UK would be leaving the transition period without a deal with the EU. It was noted that this had been raised at a recent meeting of the four UK Health Ministers.

Update from the Voluntary Sector

24. The First Minister invited NR to provide an update from the Voluntary Sector. NR of Community Housing Cymru had also been invited to attend the meeting to discuss housing matters but ~~there had been~~ IT issues ~~which~~ had prevented her from joining via video link.
25. The surge in volunteering was still noticeable and indications were that 40% of people were keen to stay involved in the future. There was a need to maintain contact with people who had volunteered, but might not have been placed, therefore there was a role to provide additional training and support.

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26. Evidence suggested that financial challenges were likely to increase in the medium term, with some charities / community groups closing and others being only able to offer reduced services.
27. The anticipated main needs in the ongoing response to the virus would be linked to health, poverty, reskilling and retraining. The potential of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was of great interest to the sector in relation to the latter points.
28. Good local partnerships had been developed and there would be a need to build on these for a good recovery and long term outcomes. This fitted well with the Social Partnership Model, community wealth building, foundational economy and the messages from [the](#) Future Generations Commissioners.
29. In terms of housing, Associations had been providing a great deal of support to their tenants and to the wider community effort to respond to the crisis. Given that it was a worrying and difficult time for many there was a need to ensure that tenants felt secure in their homes and were supported.
30. Housing Associations and Local Authority landlords had worked together to make a series of commitments to their tenants. These commitments were made at the start of the crisis and recently more details about the support on offer had been published. The commitments had been developed with the support of the Welsh Government and the WLGA and ~~sat alongside and~~ supported the wider work that Housing Associations were doing to ensure that homeless households had safe, appropriate and affordable homes over the long term.
31. Housing Associations would keep tenants safe and secure in their homes and nobody would be evicted as a result of financial hardship caused by COVID-19, and, in line with Government policy, Associations would continue to work towards ending all evictions that would cause homelessness.
32. They would help tenants get the financial support they needed, including supporting those who had difficulty paying rent. In addition, Associations would support the wellbeing of their tenants.
33. An example of one commitment being delivered in practice was that of Melin Homes, which was operating across Gwent and the surrounding areas. Their money advice team had been busy providing support and guidance whilst proactively checking in on residents. In the first week of the lockdown alone, the team helped residents save almost £400,000 after receiving 122 referrals for energy and money advice.
34. An individual example was that of a single person, with three older children, who was self-isolating due to being in a high risk category and who was also suffering with anxiety about how to cope with finances. The team arranged a Universal Credit assessment and applied for the relevant Council Tax Reduction, which left the individual in a much better position, which would endure following the pandemic.

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35. There were similar examples scenarios across Housing Associations in Wales, where staff and resources were being redeployed to support tenants through the provision of financial advice, phone calls to tackle social isolation and the delivery of food parcels using their available vehicles, in association with local food banks.
36. The Group welcomed the update and noted that the Voluntary Sector would continue to support shielded people for as long as it was considered necessary. It was reported that a number of new volunteer groups had been formed to help deal with the pandemic, such as the pensioners group in Rhondda Cynon Taf who had first come together to support each other during the Winter floods. They were now a fully constituted volunteering group and were helping to support others in their community. It was agreed that data on the profiles of those who had volunteered would be shared with Ministers.
37. The First Minister, on behalf of the Group, thanked NR for her contribution.

CABINET SECRETARIAT
June 2020

NHS and Public Health Update

- Officials to invite Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna to a future meeting of the CCG to provide an update on the socio-economic group's work and circulate a note on its work to date (**Heather Payne / Cabinet Secretariat**).
- A note to be shared on volunteer profiles data collected by the WCVA (**Cabinet Secretariat to share note once provided by NR WCVA**).