

Environment Department

Covid19 Service Position
Statement

Environmental & Public
Protection Scrutiny
Committee

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carmarthenshire.gov.uk

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1. What is the purpose of this report?

The purpose of this report is to provide the Environmental & Public Protection Scrutiny Committee with a summary of the impact COVID 19 has had on the Environment Department's services over the last 8 months

The Report covers the following functions of the Environment Department which are covered by the Community & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee:

- “Waste and Environmental Services including Refuse Collection, Street Cleaning, Grounds Maintenance, Public Toilets
- Building Cleaning (including Schools, where relevant),
- Transport and Streetscene including Highways, Street Lighting, Bridges, Traffic Management, Parking Services, Cycle paths and Rights of Way
- Environmental Enforcement including Litter, Dog Fouling; Abandoned Vehicles etc
- Planning Enforcement
- Biodiversity”

A position statement on other Environment Department functions will be reported to other relevant Scrutiny Committees.

2. Introduction

The Department has a range of operational and office-based staff.

To adequately continue providing essential key services, all our risk assessments and safe working practices have had to be reviewed. The scale and amount of work involved in undertaking these amendments should not be underestimated. This work has been led by the Corporate Health and Safety team, working with service managers to implement new working practices in a very short time to allow services to continue or recommence. In addition, a comprehensive training programme, for new or redeployed staff was designed and provided by the Environment Department's in-house training team.

It should be noted that the dedication, commitment, flexibility, and personal resilience shown and applied by the Department's staff deserve to be recognised and their aptitude and contribution cannot be overstated. Without such a team and their collective efforts, services would simply not have been delivered.

The pandemic has significantly impacted on the Department's budgets, both in terms of additional costs and loss of income. Some of these have been covered by Welsh Government grants but there remain many unfunded areas which will impact on the Council's future budget.

3. Waste & Environmental Services

The services covered by the Division are all front-line public facing services, many of which usually appear on a list of key services provided by the Council. Those elements relevant to this Scrutiny are:

- Household waste and recycling collection, garden waste collection and bulky waste collection
- Household waste recycling centre (HWRC) infrastructure and provision
- Waste strategy and policy development, including waste education and awareness
- Street cleansing and de-littering services
- Environmental enforcement and local environment quality issues.
- Grounds maintenance (schools, housing, and internal assets)
- Parks and playground operations (Parc Howard, Llanelli)
- Public convenience operation and servicing
- Operation and administration of Ammanford Cemetery
- Flood and coastal defence works and investigations
- Sustainable drainage approval, inspection, and advisory services

It is not intended that this report covers every area of the Waste and Environmental Services provision; instead it will focus on some of the key issues:

A. What has been the impact of Covid on services and what changes have we seen?

Recycling and Waste:

The collection of household waste is a key front-line service affecting all households in the County (over 90,000) each week. Waste sector workers were deemed 'key workers' by the Government. The service provided by Carmarthenshire's refuse collection teams did not cease due to the pandemic.

The public support for key-waste service workers has been noted and we have received messages of gratitude from householders.

Clearly, it was essential to keep most aspects of the waste collection service operational to safeguard public health and protect the local amenity as best we could. In terms of primary waste service provision, the biggest negative impact on the Council was the closure of our household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) during the first 7 weeks of the pandemic. This was the case throughout Wales at the direction of Welsh Government.

The Garden Waste service remained operational throughout. The customer base more than doubled from the beginning of the season to now. More householders had more time to tend to their lawns and gardens.

Servicing of community bring sites remained functional throughout the pandemic.

Waste amnesties remain suspended due to the inherent risks in holding what is effectively a pseudo-public event. The risks presented in terms of potential effects on our front-line crew resource base and ongoing resilience are simply too great.

Waste education and awareness through face to face engagement programmes were suspended and remain so currently. Staff are redeployed to other duties within the Division, with only essential works being undertaken in this respect.

Environmental Enforcement services were also suspended to limit contact with the public and amongst teams due to potential Covid-19 risks. The undertaking of manual sifting through waste and fly-tipped materials, in searching for evidence was ceased. Consequently, investigations into waste non-compliance matters were suspended as were routine investigations, save for some high priority cases.

This service is only reinstated to approximately 30% to 50% of its normal capacity at the current time due to the need for the enforcement team to continue to help with Covid-19 related work for the Communities Department.

Street Cleansing: Non-essential street cleansing services were suspended in the main and cleansing staff were redeployed to help with refuse collection. Aspects of the service continued with respect to emptying of litter bins in our town centres. although most of the mechanical sweeping services were scaled back to high priority works only.

Also, community volunteer litter picks and general litter clearance work (other than town centres) were suspended. Volunteer groups were of course keen to help, but the restrictions around Covid made this difficult and hence the decision to suspend works.

Grounds Maintenance works were suspended in the main during the initial period, except for any work that was deemed an emergency. Parks and playgrounds were closed, including Parc Howard in Llanelli. When grounds

work recommenced, priority was given to Council owned housing estates and popular amenity areas.

Public Conveniences were closed in all town centres, apart from two (Llanelli and Llandovery) as these were deemed as key transport hubs with no alternative facilities. The facilities were reopened as soon as possible with appropriate measures being introduced to reduce risks from Covid, recognising that these facilities were key in the effort to attract football to our towns.

Flood and Coastal: The team have been functioning throughout the period, working remotely from home in the main. Nonetheless, site visits, investigations and inspections have been undertaken in accordance with revised safe working practices. The team have continued to respond and react to storm events and emergencies as required, despite the difficulties posed by Covid-19. Sustainable drainage applications have continued to be assessed and processed.

The main service/facility closures and restrictions are summarised as follows:

Household Waste Recycling Centres	Closed for 7 weeks.
Community Waste Amnesties	Suspended and continue to be so
Bulky Waste Collection	Suspended during the early part of the pandemic, but now fully reinstated
Parc Howard	Adverse effect on availability of public open spaces to exercise and keep fit. Facility closed in the early stages, but now fully open.
Public Conveniences	Basic amenities closed to public, except for key transport hubs
Ammanford Cemetery	Restrictions on the numbers attending burials, potentially impacting on families and communities.

Service Impacts and Statistics:

Municipal Waste collected has fallen by 18.5% (compared to the same April-June period last year). The reasons are likely to be that HWRC were closed and this accounts for a reduction overall.

However, the waste collected at the kerbside has increased by about 20% overall due to more people being at home. Approximate breakdowns are set out below:

- 14% increase in kerbside residual waste
- 34% increase in kerbside dry mixed recycling (blue bag)
- 35% increase in kerbside food waste
- 83% decrease in HWRC residual waste
- 77% decrease in HWRC Recycling
- The number of garden waste customers has grown from around 4,200 customers at the beginning of March to just under 9000 at the current time
- Incidents of fly-tipping has increased by 54%, with reports of waste coming in from outside the County

B. What have been the workforce implications?

Refuse Collection and Garden Waste:

The primary focus for the Division in the early stages of the pandemic was to keep the front-line kerbside refuse collection services running. This was the highest priority for the WES Division. The operational crews and management staff have shown an unfaltering dedication in keeping the waste collection services going and have operated in the most flexible and cooperative way to ensure continuity of service throughout the pandemic thus far, often in challenging circumstances. This has meant juggling staff to accommodate normal and Covid-19 related absences whilst trying to maintain crew integrity.

In the early stages of the pandemic, up to 30% of refuse staff were absent at any given time, yet from a public perception, services continued as normal. This is testimony to the dedication of the management team, collection crews and support from within the Division and Department.

Certain constraints have made the organisation of crewing arrangements more difficult. Additional support vehicles have had to be brought into operation under certain circumstances. However, managers, supervisors and work crews have shown a professional approach in managing through the crisis. To achieve service continuity, arrangements were made to vary the normal working hours, with crews commencing work in a staggered fashion from 4am to 6am each day. This allowed crews to effectively manage care responsibilities for dependents, considering specific domestic arrangements where appropriate. Collections were also undertaken on bank holidays throughout the period to reduce the burden and potential confusion relating to delayed collections for the public and to provide more flexibility for crews and managers.

As a contingency measure, we trained additional staff to work on refuse collection from other services such as Cleansing, Grounds and Highways. In

addition, direct support in terms of drivers and loaders was provided by CWM Environmental Ltd and by means of staff sourced from agencies.

Waste Strategy: Even though door to door engagement and education and awareness work was suspended, staff were deployed in redesigning waste services in response to Covid-19, dealing with waste related communications and queries throughout the pandemic. Systems had to be adapted and amended at very short notice and a significant amount of work occurred behind the scenes to allow services to the public to continue. Waste assets continued to be inspected and managed, staff continued with essential maintenance works. Some staff were also redeployed to other duties within the Division, or on occasion in undertaking work for other departments. Similarly, when household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) reopened, the staff within this section, working with CWM Environmental and the Council's IT and Communications units redesigned the service to accommodate customer booking slots to enable safe operation of the HWRCs.

Environmental Enforcement staff were redeployed to other work during the first phase of the pandemic. Half the staff volunteered to undertake food deliveries and the other half volunteered to be trained as trainers for the building cleaning service; this was required to provide sufficient training capability to allow new cleaning staff to be recruited in order to deal with the additional building cleaning requirements.

Normal environmental enforcement services are only at about 30% to 50% capacity at the current time because the team are helping with the enforcement of Covid-19 regulations in a support capacity for the Communities Department (retail outlets and licensed premises).

Other Services: Office-based staff have been working from home undertaking a mixture of normal duties and Covid-19 related duties, with some volunteering for work in other areas completely outside the Division's normal suite of services e.g. care home support.

Some staff have continued with site inspections and investigations as part of normal duties with additional safety precautions being taken.

Operational staff who could not undertake normal duties were deployed elsewhere within the Division, or simply remained at home if additional support was not needed on a given day.

C. What have been the key financial issues identified?

The main financial implication has been due to additional resources required to keep the waste services going in the initial period and of late the resources required to bring back other services into operation.

Examples of additional resources include:

- More staff on our HWRC sites to effectively implement Covid-19 restrictions and entry controls associated with our newly developed on-line booking system (security and advisors).
- Additional infrastructure works to provide effective traffic management arrangements at our HWRC sites to allow necessary entry checks to be undertaken in a safe manner.
- Additional refuse collection staff as contingency to cover sickness and holidays.
- Additional refuse collection vehicles as back up if we suffered abnormal breakdown incidents and to cope with additional volume of waste on occasions.
- Additional support vehicles to allow effective social distancing to take place.
- Additional resource to deal with fly-tipping matters.

Additional costs to the service that are identified up to the end of August amount to £345k.

D. How have we approached Communication and Engagement?

Communication and engagement with staff have continued using remote meeting technology for office-based staff. Meetings with the workforce have continued on the normal principles, but the method of delivery adapted to take into account revised ways of working to ensure social distancing. This has proved challenging, given that our depots are not set up to accommodate such arrangements, but we have adapted accordingly, through making better use of space and staggering start times when possible and only meeting in restricted crew bubbles.

General communication and public messaging relating to service provision have been undertaken through the Corporate Communications team and through on-line facilities.

E. What are the key implications moving forward?

Clearly there will be budget pressures in maintaining the Covid-19 related systems and levels of contingency required to ensure adequate business or service continuity.

Other implications will include delays to reviewing, refining, and developing strategies and implementing service reviews and service changes.

Normal winter service pressures will add to those pressures already brought about by Covid-19.

Some services will remain suspended for the immediate term – examples include waste amnesty and face to face waste education and awareness programmes.

Some adaptations that we have made may be adopted as permanent measures. An example of this is the online booking system introduced specifically for household waste recycling centre appointments.

Another key consideration is the effect of the pandemic on our recycling performance in the medium term, given that HWRCs make a significant contribution to our overall recycling performance. At this time, we are predicting that we should exceed the statutory target of 64%.

4. Property

From the range of services undertaken by the Property Division, only Cleaning Services is covered by the Environmental & Public Protection Scrutiny Committee. The Environment Department's arrangements for distribution of cleaning products and personal protective equipment are also included in this Report for information.

A. What has been the impact of Covid on the Cleaning Services Team?

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions placed on the country, especially with the all-Wales lockdowns, the building cleaning service has been significantly affected.

With the closure of schools on March 23rd, 2020 during the first lockdown cleaners were redeployed to help keep our school hubs, food distribution centres, depots, offices, and sheltered housing open. Given that these were operating over the school holidays and bank holidays this required dedicated cleaning staff giving up their usual holidays to work.

The demand for cleaning services soared and the number of cleaning hours has almost doubled during the pandemic to date. Prior to Covid-19 cleaning was only provided during the afternoon / evening after all buildings were vacant but the virus required the introduction of daytime cleaning across all council buildings.

To reflect Government advice on Covid cleaning and in liaison with colleagues in Public Protection the Cleaning Service developed an enhanced standard of cleaning across all settings. The enhanced cleaning standards were essential to reduce the transmission of the virus and build and maintain confidence and reassurance that the working environment was as safe as possible.

As infection control and cleaning in schools played a significant role in enabling schools to reopen at the end of June, we launched a significant recruitment drive in May and June. Within a short window of 4 weeks we employed and trained over 150 new employees to increase the team of cleaners from around 500 to 650.

The revised cleaning regimes and recruitment required a huge retraining programme for the 650 cleaners which required significant support and redeployment of additional staff from other services. The retraining of staff was Department's Training Team and supported in the field by the

redeployment of staff from a range of services including Public Protection, Highways and Planning Services. This enabled the cleaning management team to continue with the daily running of the service to ensure all required daytime cleaning was being provided to a high standard.

For the start of the new term in September the Service needed to enter a new phase of recruitment following a reduction in the summer new recruits from 150 to 50 as a result of the economy reopening and others returning to higher and further education. Additional recruitment was also supplemented with agency staff and cleaning companies.

During the past 8 months the Cleaning management team has completely transformed with several employees in different posts including a new Cleaning Services Manager, 2 permanent Area Cleaning Managers, and 1 permanent Monitoring Officer. With the increase in demands on the service an additional Temporary Area Manager and Monitoring Officer roles were created until the end of March 2021 to manage the new additional staff and ensure cleaning standards were maintained.

Once schools reopened in September a surge of symptomatic cases required to be addressed with further enhanced cleaning, with more than 900 symptomatic cases in September alone.

B. What have been the key financial issues?

The cost of the enhanced cleaning arrangements is currently being reclaimed from Welsh Government's Hardship Fund until the end of March 2021.

- The daytime covid-19 cleaning is an additional cost of around £40,000 per week.
- In all secondary schools, the evening cleaning has been increased to ensure all classrooms are being fully cleaned daily at an additional cost of approximately £78,000 from September 2020 - March 2021. Pre-Covid all general classrooms were cleaned every other day

C. What are the key implications moving forward?

- We have learnt how critical cleaning services are to enable other services to restart and ensure they are Covid safe. The service has been under enormous demand from across the authority whether for advice and guidance or to introduce cleaning in their service areas.

- Communication with the very dispersed cleaning staff has always been challenging but is even more so during the lockdown periods with reduced face to face interaction. The additional monitoring resource is essential to improve communication and maintain standards.
- The one team approach has been clear and consistent throughout this crisis. The way in which staff from all levels and grades from different divisions and services have worked together shows that as an authority we have dedicated and loyal employees. This needs to continue after normality resumes. Staff resilience has been remarkable during the pandemic with staff willing to work extremely long hours during the early parts of the lockdown phase

D. Personal Protective Equipment

On behalf of the Council the Environment Directorate has been operating a Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), hygiene and cleaning stores for all non-social care settings. The stores were established, at very short notice at the end of March, as a new service to enable the storage and advance purchase of essential items. This enabled the Directorate to procure and coordinate a distribution framework for all non-social care settings across the Council, including schools.

More recently we have been working on securing what we considered would be the optimal level of contingency stock for each item of PPE to enable us to be prepared to meet ongoing needs, whilst ensuring that all products are compliant in terms of effectiveness.

Procurement of some PPE items was originally very difficult to source, with numerous suppliers and/or products failing to meet our due diligence and/or compliance requirements. This difficulty was experienced over several weeks, but after much research and investigations all essential items were sourced and procured once confident that quality standards were achieved. The situation with availability and supply chains is now much improved and there is no imminent risk of supply chain failure.

The non-social care PPE stores is based at Trostre depot and has been key to:

- Procurement, to ensure value for money wherever possible
- Ordering goods to maintain stock levels

- Working closely with suppliers to ensure supply chains are stable
- Ensuring all products purchased are compliant, working in conjunction with IC and PP; (there is also a specific requirement from Trading Standards to review product information for all brand/types/sizes of hand sanitiser, as part of an ongoing National survey, therefore it is essential that any hand sanitiser is ordered through the PPE General inbox)
- Working with colleagues to undertake due diligence where required
- Provide a review, advice, and challenge process for PPE requests
- Working with colleagues in H&S to ensure RA compliance
- Distribution of items throughout the County

This new service has been resourced through deployment of some operatives and apprentices and through colleagues reprioritising current work demands to ensure this key function is delivered as efficiently as possible.

In recent months, in response to new corporate guidance, the team has also set up a new service that has been coordinating, processing and delivering office equipment to the County's home working staff, where a need has been identified through a management assessment.

5. Highways & Transportation

A. What has been the impact of Covid?

At the onset of Covid 19 a number of Highways & Transportation Operational Services were suspended with only 'critical' services continuing on the ground. All other services were suspended or undertaken remotely wherever possible.

As restrictions were then eased and demand increased other services were brought back online with appropriate Risk Assessments and Safe Working Practices in place.

Critical Services

These services were deemed to be a critical necessity and stringent health & safety processes were put in place to ensure that they could continue. The services included undertaking emergency highway repairs and responses, highway safety inspections, weather response operations and maintaining the Council's vehicle fleet. A number of further services were partially closed to ensure essential services would continue with the services then ramped-up at a later date and these included highway construction & maintenance works, lighting works and necessary Street Works functions to allow utility works to continue.

Office staff were equipped to work remotely so that non-critical works could safely continue as far as possible.

During this time many H&T staff were tasked with assisting the Council's response to the pandemic and this included helping establish field hospitals, supplying drivers for the continuation of refuse collections, delivering food to schools and sourcing or redeploying additional vehicles to support other critical Council services.

Restarting Priority Services

As restrictions eased and demand increased other services were then brought back on-line with suitable Risk Assessments and Safe Working Practices in place. This was done on a phased bases with groups of priority services brought forward to the Tactical and Strategic Coordination Groups for approval to restart to aid the recovery of local communities and economies and to ensure public safety.

Once the Priority 1 services were safely re-established further services were then restarted on a prioritised bases as shown below:

Priority 1 Services	
Highway Planning Technical Advice	Road Safety Audits
Ash Dieback Tree Felling	Home to School Transport Assessments
Issue of School / college travel passes	Co-ordination of Wales Coastal Path Maintenance and Improvement Structures General Maintenance
Priority 2 Services	
CCC Vehicle MOTs over 3.5 tonne	Highway drainage surveys
Road Markings Maintenance	New traffic signs and maintenance of existing signs
Replacement of damaged lighting columns	Traffic Management & Parking site visits
Underground Cable Faults	Maintenance of electronic signs
Legal Orders	Site supervision
Constructions Schemes General	Replacing Pay & Display machines
School Crossing Patrols	Penalty Charge Notice Processing
Streetlight / illuminated sign repairs	PROW Inspections and maintenance
Priority 3 Services	
Vehicle (Public) MOTs up to 3.5 tonne	Mains Replacement of Solar Pay & Display Machines
Road Safety, Travel Planning Training and Safety Checks	

Office based staff are continuing to predominantly work remotely with only necessary office visits taking place. Feedback from staff indicates a number of benefits in this approach. Although Covid-19 has placed in many cases a significant increase in staff workloads, staff have nevertheless endeavoured to maintain 'normal' service delivery as far as possible. This has included also dealing with incidents and events such as the Llangennech oil tanker derailment and several named storm events.

A summary of impacts on specific services is set out in the table below.

Highways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All operational services are being delivered. Construction works to deliver grant funded schemes remains a challenge particularly through the winter months as service disruptions due to gritting will have an impact.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Working Practices in place to accommodate social distancing with mitigation measures such as 'bubble' working and single occupancy vehicles.
Street Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All operational services are being delivered • Community Lighting LED project was completed in the summer.
Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All structural inspections and maintenance operations are taking place. • A very full programme of Welsh Government funded capital improvements related to storm damage are also being delivered with tight timescales.
Traffic Management and Road Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work has continued with staff home working. • A programme of improvements, TROs and safety works are to be delivered before the end of the financial year. • Utility works have continued throughout Covid-19 and with it the demand for Traffic Orders has continued which the Traffic Team have met. • School Crossing Patrols are also in place at all but 3 sites where social distancing could not be maintained. • Working in schools to deliver training such as Kerbcraft and cycle training remains a challenge which the team are addressing.
Parking Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking enforcement and car parking charges were suspended at the onset of Covid 19. • On-street parking enforcement was restarted in June to manage the highway network following complaints of obstruction. • Off-street parking charges were reintroduced in September. • 14 new p&d machines were introduced in our main car parks which take electronic payments • 20 further machines are planned. • A number of solar powered machines are also being improved with mains electricity supplies to increase reliability and performance.
PROW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Public Rights of Way Team are now fully operational and continuing to inspect and maintain our PROW network. • The team are developing maintenance plans for the increasing cycle network • Service improvements are being developed to improve information systems and the development of volunteer networks. • Developed and implemented an assessment framework for the temporary suspension of certain PROW due to Covid threat.
Passenger Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The transport industry has been particularly impacted by Covid-19 and the Passenger Transport Team have

	<p>worked hard to support the operators, passengers and deliver services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home to school transport has adjusted to support the reopening of schools. • Considerable liaison with operators to implement Covid regulations. • Public transport networks have been redesigned to accommodate reduced capacities and social distancing requirements.
Fleet Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified as a critical function the Fleet Management Team have continued to work through the pandemic with appropriate safeguards in place. • The team have maintained the Council's Fleet during the pandemic to support critical services. • Managed the redeployment of vehicles to support critical services such as the delivery of food to schools. • Sourced additional vehicles required to address issues such as single occupancy vehicles which has been a challenge for a number of services.
Engineering Design Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Engineering Design Team have switched to working remotely and have continued to provide a professional design service throughout the pandemic. • The team have also worked with consultants and contractors to ensure that a very full programme of engineering projects will be delivered to comply with grant funding timescales.
Strategy & Infrastructure Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team have transitioned to working remotely and continue to manage a very full portfolio of work and contribute to regional transport discussions. • Worked to secure grant funding and the delivery of programmes.
Street Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team have continued to work remotely to facilitate utility works have largely continued throughout the pandemic.

B. What have been the workforce implications?

Frontline Highways & Transportation operations were largely identified as critical and have continued throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. This has presented challenges such as managing vacancies due to vulnerable staff shielding at home.

Civil Enforcement Officers stood down at the height of the pandemic. During this period officers assisted other services where possible.

Officer based staff were transitioned to work remotely and through the use of platforms such as Teams this has been very successful.

The response from the workforce has been excellent with a one team approach, the commitment has been excellent.

C. What additional services have or continue to be delivered?

The Highways & Transportation Team provide a significant resource to respond to emergency situations and this has proved to be invaluable during the Covid Pandemic.

A key challenge has been the rapid development and implementation of Public Realm measures such as the pedestrianisation of Nott Square, King Street and Cowell Street along with a raft of supporting measures and public health messaging designed to encourage people to safely return to towns. We were also involved in the delivery of the field hospitals at the onset of the crisis and in the response to the Llangennech rail incident.

A summary of these are provided in the table below which are in addition to the normal 'day job'.

Highways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing and maintaining Public Realm measures • Providing drivers and vehicles to help with refuse collections • Delivering food to schools • Installing Covid related signage in town centres. • Continued to deal with storm events. • Emergency response to the Llangennech rail incident.
Public Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisted with installing Covid signage in town centres.
Traffic Management & Road Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid-19 related Risk Assessments of all School Crossing Patrol (SCP) sites to ensure social distancing with additional measures put in place where possible to enable Patrols to continue. • Reorganised SCPs to match staggered start and finishing times in schools. • Heavily involved in developing the Public Realm town centre measures. • Drafted the Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTRO) for town centre changes in challenging timescales. • Road Safety staff have also helped in schools to release key workers • Assisted with highway surveys
Parking Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering food parcels • Managing traffic at HWRC sites.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicising car parking changes • Undertaking highway surveys. • Monitoring levels of compliance with wearing face coverings at schools.
PROW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff have assisted in training cleaners for schools. • As more people stayed local the level of public enquiries went up 237%. • Fielded landowner concerns relating to Covid spread on PROW and developed an assessment framework for closing particular high-risk routes. • Introduced temporary legal closures of high-risk PROWs
Passenger Transport	<p>Covid-19 has had a major impact on passenger transport and the team have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesigned networks and supported operators to accommodate Covid requirements such as social distancing. • Publicised revised timetables for public transport • Managed the financial support to transport operators • Arranged Home to School Transport (HST) to match revised school opening and closing times. • Worked with operators to ensure HST services included Covid mitigation measures. • Liaised with operators to provide additional services where capacity on vehicles has been reduced. • Maintained a database of school travellers for TTP.
Fleet Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognised as a critical service the team have continued normal duties. • Redeployed fleet vehicles to support critical services such as food deliveries. • Provided a prioritised service for maintaining critical vehicles. • Acquired and managed additional vehicles to ensure critical services continued.
Engineering Design Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued to deliver a very full workload. • Developed designs for town centre changes • Assisted with setting up field hospitals and test centres.
Strategy & Infrastructure Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful secured and now manage a £1.7M Welsh Government Grant to lock-in the sustainable travel benefits emerging from the pandemic.
Street Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input into a 'one-stop-shop' licencing panel to fast-track street trading licences. • Liaised with businesses to develop 'café-culture' in selected streets.

D. What are the key pressures on the Service going forward?

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly led to a backlog of routine work for operational and office-based staff. Contributing to this is a likelihood that local communities will have held back on submitting public enquiries in certain service areas. Dealing with this partially suppressed demand will place an additional strain on the Highways & Transportation Division.

The Covid pandemic has significantly increased the workloads of staff who have worked extremely hard to respond to the crisis whilst also endeavouring to maintain the 'day job'. Emergency events and incidents such as the Llangennech derailment and severe weather events further increase this pressure. It has required an extraordinary effort. We will need to consider how we build resilience going forward.

Office based staff are continuing to work from home and whilst this has been very successful it will place additional IT demands into the system should staff move to a partial home-working arrangement in the future. Technology investment will be a key enabler for the future.

Delivering grant funded works by the end of the financial year will be a challenge for a number of service areas and particularly our Engineering Consultancy and Highways Services.

Managing the Public Realm to support the recovery of our town centres remains an on-going theme as the pandemic continues.

Additional vehicles to allow single occupancy adds a financial pressure.

Some Road Safety training activities involve working in schools which will be a challenge to deliver in schools.

6. Planning Services

The purpose of this report is to provide Scrutiny members with a high level summary of the impact COVID 19 has had on those specific elements of the Planning Services covered by this Scrutiny Committee over the last 8 months from a service user, staff and Council perspective. Those elements relevant to this Scrutiny are:

- Planning Enforcement (incl. waste & minerals activities)
- Rural Conservation (incl. Biodiversity)

It is not the intention of this report to cover every area of the service but instead it will focus on some of the key issues

A. What has been the impact of Covid on services and what changes have we seen?

Some of the above elements of the Planning Service have remained fully open during the COVID period – however the staffing levels available to man those services may well have been reduced as a result of re-deployment. Other areas were operational in part or suspended.

All Officers in relation to the services listed above worked from home from the first day of lock down and continue to do so. All non-urgent site visits (urgent being those with risk to life and limb) were suspended and some but not all have been reconvening gradually from July onwards as per detail below with regards each Unit.

The efficiency of overall service delivery has also been affected as a large proportion of staff were partly/fully redeployed during the first 4 months of Covid. Services therefore remain in a position of catching up with a backlog of work that has built up during the Covid period to date – this affects both areas listed below.

In addition to these general points, the following provides a further update re both service areas listed below:

Enforcement (incl. waste and minerals activities)

Only high priority enforcement cases, where there is an imminent risk to life or the environment, have been progressed as normal during lockdown. Investigations in relation to medium and low priority cases as defined in the Enforcement Protocol were largely suspended but work on these has started to re-commence since late August.

What is clear is that during the pandemic there has been a very high level of land use activity and it will take considerable time for the division to be able to quantify the level of enforcement work generated as a result of developments taking place during the pandemic.

The Division has tried to be as lenient as possible in dealing with new cases in the full knowledge that those in potential breach of planning may not at various times have full access to the professional advice that they may need or indeed the professional assistance they may need to assist them in removing materials or reverting land to its previous state.

Although it is not yet clear, early indications would suggest that a great level of unlawful activity has occurred during the pandemic. This is putting immense strain on the Division as we now start to follow up these potential breaches. Many of these cases will be complex and require a multi-disciplinary approach in reaching a resolution. Teams continue to work cross-departmentally, and the role of the Multi-Disciplinary Group chaired by the Executive Member with the Portfolio for Public Protection (Cllr Phillip Hughes) will be crucial in effectively addressing the more complex cases.

Rural Conservation (incl. Biodiversity)

Most of the work of the Rural Conservation Section has continued despite the interruptions associated with Covid, i.e. we have been unable to carry out site visits and face to face meetings. Where possible all communications have been via Teams, and previously Skype. For what we consider to be emergency service - in particular dangerous trees and Ash Dieback, we have continued to progress site visits and surveys throughout the pandemic, following the necessary procedures and Safe working practices. Work on the Caeau Mynydd Mawr project was cut back over the spring and summer to the minimum necessary however we did continue to ensure the necessary animal welfare issues were covered.

B. What have been the workforce implications?

Staff have been outstanding throughout the pandemic, in continuing to support the service but also in their flexibility and enthusiasm in embracing new challenges and assisting with other essential services at the outset.

All Officers in relation to the services listed above worked from home from the first day of lock down and continue to do so. There isn't any office presence at present though some functions do now require minimal presence and work is underway to ensure that such access can be secured in a safe manner by the end of November.

From the outset Planning was identified as a service with suitable customer skills to help with other services considered, at the time, far more essential. A Corporate decision was taken for as many officers as possible to be re-deployed with regards the food hub (packing and distribution) for families qualifying for free school meals and those who were shielding, delivery of essentials to vulnerable households and training of the fast growing requirements of the cleansing team. A number of officers were also engaged in training cleansing staff. Up until late June up to 50% were volunteering daily or part of the day and some continued up until shielding finished in mid-August. This meant that many of the planning service functions though still open to operate in principle, did not have the resources to continue a normal level of service. This is true across both service areas above.

The HoS and Business Managers have been engaged in various response and recovery groups/discussions/planning throughout and continue to work on a number of cross departmental groups on at least a weekly basis. The HoS continues to coordinate the recovery authorisation process for Capital Programme schemes which became the focussed priority in June/July with a large number of restarts and continues to require weekly input.

During the course of the crisis and as officers have returned more to the day job and moved away from the volunteering the work pressures and Covid resulting backlog issues on staff have become increasingly apparent. Well-being going forward will be a big issue and a driver for managing workloads.

We are conscious that this has been a hugely difficult time for staff managing both work and challenging situations at home, and staff have been exemplary in the commitment and dedication they have shown. Many have struggled with the work environment – and Managers have assisted where possible to ensure that appropriate standards exist for this temporary home working. Others have struggled with childcare and again Managers have assisted where they can in terms of signposting for additional help. Challenge moving forward will be managing well-being in the winter months which brings its own issues.

With a high % of staff on redeployment duties for the first 4 months staff have from August onwards been catching up with taking much needed and deserved leave. This again has affected and will continue to affect service delivery and is another factor to note in that service delivery is not back to normal levels it was pre Covid.

C. How have we approached Communication & Engagement?

Regular contact has also been maintained between the Head of Service and the Executive Board Member and Chair of Planning Committee, to ensure everyone is up to date on what is happening.

E-mail updates have been provided to Planning Committee Members.

E-mail updates have also been provided to Agents – which included passing on relevant information from WG.

Updates have been included on the Planning website and through social media with Marketing Team as to delays early on and this banner is kept up to date.

Weekly Business Managers meetings have occurred (daily in the first month or so) and updates sent to staff as appropriate of changes affecting the service during the pandemic.

D. What are the key implications on the Service going forward?

We must make sure that we learn from this unprecedented experience as we reintroduce our services and re-set our strategic and operational priorities. 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.

In terms of any future lockdowns, the toll taken on planning services generally the first time around have been Corporately acknowledged. The redistribution of resources to assist other essential services (although essential and the right move at the time) has left a new backlog of work to be dealt with. This will affect the Division's ability to respond in a timely manner to assist with economic recovery for a long time. The planning services listed above are therefore now seen as essential not only to keep operational for as long as possible but to also keep fully resourced for as long as possible.

In terms of catching up with the high level of potential breaches which have occurred particularly from March to August we will be seeking temporary additional resources as part of pressure bids for 2021/22. We will also need to look at prioritisation of enforcement activity and this may lead to some lesser breaches not being investigated freeing up time to deal with the high and medium cases at least in the short term.

We will continue with the reduced travel principle:

- Make more use of remote meetings or at least hybrid meetings
- Critically assess the need for site visits – exhausting all other means prior to that (social media walk through etc.) – in line with WG guidance.

We will further investigate making use of drones for complex enforcement cases. There is already a scoping exercise being completed and this will be looked at now at a corporate level.

7. What lessons have we learnt across the Department?

An assessment of the lessons learnt is currently underway across the Divisions and will feed into a departmental review. It is clear, however, that there is scope for the following areas to be reviewed:

- The application of modern technology and systems to manage data, communications, customer interaction, real time data and evaluation of suitable technology to aid efficient operational delivery. Also, the provision of links with management systems that will avoid duplication and allow easy extraction of management and performance data, access to real time data for customers and improve mobile working opportunities.
- Consideration of how we are set up as a department. Are there better synergies of services within and across other departments which may allow collaborative working across structures and reduce duplication? We are considering the potential for revised working patterns for all groups of staff e.g. operatives, supervisors and managers and the potential for a multi-functional workforce not necessarily confined to specific work types.
- A review of procurement arrangements, with a greater emphasis on performance and contract management.
- Improve current communication channels and identify improvements to enable timely and effective two-way communication with all colleagues across the Directorate.
- Review property needs in the context of home working and operational requirements
- Review managerial, supervisory, and operational resource levels and skills to allow sufficient resilience. Ensure skills and competencies match the service delivery and response expectations. Response to emergency project work and sufficient resource to ensure longer term delivery.
- A One Team approach and consideration of the disparity of work allocation during the Pandemic to resource projects.