

Property Division

Covid19 Service Position
Statement

Policy & Resources
Scrutiny Committee

2nd December 2020

carmarthenshire.gov.uk

1. What is the purpose of this report?

The purpose of this report is to provide the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee with a summary of the impact COVID 19 has had on Property Division's Services over the last 8 months

The Report covers the Non-housing Maintenance function of the Property Division which is the only area of the Division covered by the Community & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

A position statement on other Property Division functions has been reported to other relevant Scrutiny Committees.

2. Introduction

The Property Division 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.

It should be noted that the dedication, commitment, flexibility, and personal resilience shown and applied by the Division's staff deserves 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 Division'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.

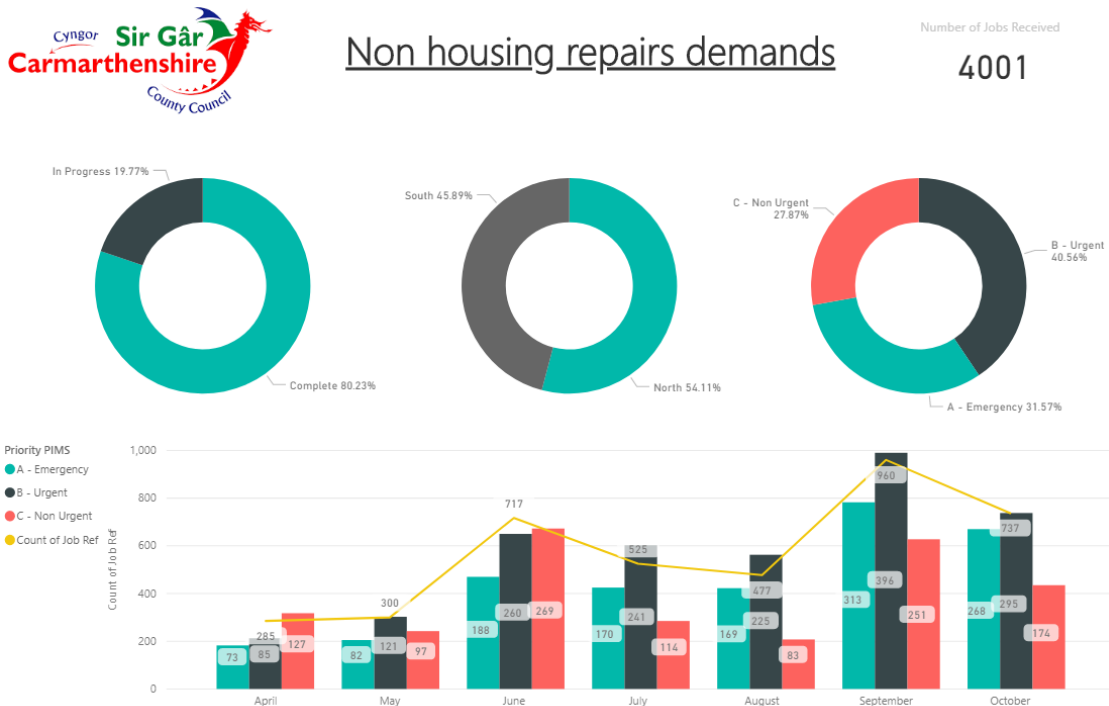
3. What has been the impact of Covid on Property's services?

The Covid restrictions, in particular the Wales-wide lockdowns and Llanelli Health Protection Zone (HPZ), have had a significant impact on the Property Division's activities. A range of functions were impacted over recent months, as set out below:

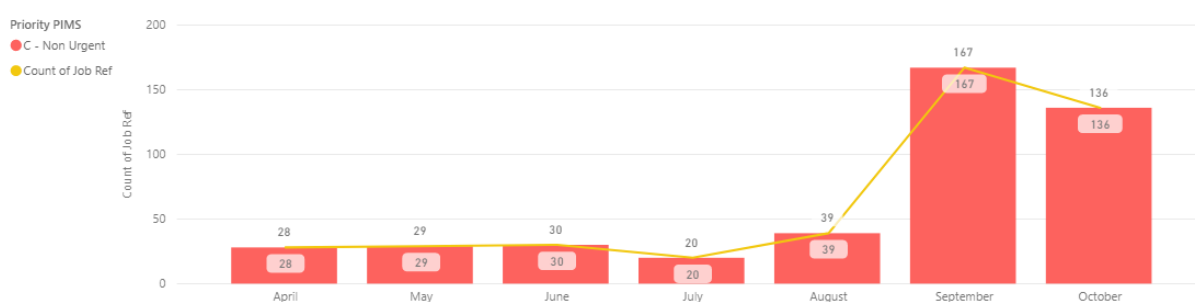
Responsive Maintenance

All non-essential maintenance works were suspended in March to reduce the risk of Covid infection. Only essential or safety maintenance works were undertaken, and Property Maintenance collated any non-urgent works for future implementation. Given the temporary closure of a number of establishments there was a significant reduction in requests for responsive maintenance.

The number of non-essential maintenance requests increased in June and September linked with school reopening. Despite the long periods of lockdown, Property Maintenance has been able to complete 80.23% (3210) of job requests. This leaves a remaining backlog of 19.77% (791), the majority of which are non-essential in nature. The graphs below set out the number and category of repairs requested from April to October, for information.



Despite the significant impact of Covid on our ability to deliver work, response times to completion for non-housing maintenance currently stands at 5 days. We are, however, likely to experience a significant increase in turnaround times in coming months due to the delivery of backlog maintenance. The graph below shows the non-essential works still in progress and the month they were received. The number of non-urgent jobs is also expected to further increase as buildings are brought back into use. The ability and timescales to reduce the backlog will be dependent on the availability of contractors, any future restrictions, and the level of demand for responsive maintenance over the coming winter months.



Planned Works

All planned non-essential works were suspended in March to reduce the risk of Covid infection. Only essential or safety maintenance works undertaken. During the time works were suspended the Planned (Minor Works) team developed and procured works in readiness for the easing of lockdown, as well as assisting other Property Maintenance teams with school re-openings and supplier safe working practice reviews. Additional measures were implemented within health and safety documentation to ensure works could be delivered in accordance with government guidance.

Given the pre-emptive work of the Property Maintenance Minor Works team was still able to continue with the programme of school improvements during the summer holiday period, although Covid restrictions meant that some works took longer than usual and work was extended into the half term break. A total of £1.3m of works within school premises during the summer holiday and half term period. In total £3m of planned works have been delivered by the Property Maintenance Minor Works team.

Legionella

As sites were working at reduced operating capacity due to social distancing and containing the spread of Covid-19, some of the measures that were implemented involved 'flushing' of parts of the water system that were not being adequately used, or closing off parts of systems not being used.

If these outlets were left to stagnate when the ambient temperature were high during the summer period, there was a significant risk that the legionella bacteria could proliferate in the pipe work and those who were first to use these outlets when the buildings came back into use would have a high risk of being exposed to legionella bacteria.

To manage the risk of legionnaires in schools we ensured attendance at each school on a weekly basis to undertake flushing arrangements. We also attended monthly to monitor the hot and cold-water systems.

Whilst every effort was made to implement flushing regimes in all schools, there were some where access couldn't be facilitated. In these circumstances, and where flushing regimes couldn't be verified, we introduced a chlorination programme and testing to enable the safe re-occupation of schools.

Hand washing and sanitising stations

To facilitate school re-opening Property Maintenance Responsive and Minor Works Teams, Environment Business Support and the Environment PPE Hub worked in collaboration to source and install hygiene stations within Carmarthenshire's Schools. As well as installing during the working day, staff across the teams worked evenings and weekends to install suitable provisions to facilitate the re-opening of Carmarthenshire schools. In total 301 handwash stations and 3,155 sanitising stations were installed within schools. The ongoing repair and maintenance of these are undertaken within Property Maintenance Responsive Team and the Environment PPE Hub.

Essential servicing

Over the period we continued to deliver essential servicing within non-housing properties. This included the servicing of boilers, fire safety appliances, electrical installations, security systems, water systems, portable appliance testing and catering equipment. Contractors' safe working practices were reviewed to ensure appropriate measures were implemented as part of the service delivery.

4. What have been the workforce implications?

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.

Staff have been outstanding throughout the pandemic, in continuing to support people in our communities, and take on challenges that they would never previously have foreseen. For example, Property staff not able to continue with their usual work have been redeployed to help with delivery of food and personal protective equipment (PPE) and in the PPE distribution centre

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.

It should also be noted that service users have been very understanding during this period, accepting the challenging times we all have faced and the impact this can have on the delivery of the service.

5. What lessons have we learnt?

An assessment of the lessons learnt is currently underway across the Division 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.