

# GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



## Report to a meeting of the Cabinet

<b>Date of meeting:</b>	13 October 2020
<b>Report by:</b>	Dyfrig Siencyn, Leader
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Dilwyn Williams, Chief Executive
<b>Title of Item:</b>	Covid-19 – Preparations for a second wave

### Decision sought

To accept the update on the arrangements that are in place in preparation for a possible second wave of Covid-19

### Background

1. The latest data demonstrates that there are many areas in Wales facing an increasing number of Covid-19 cases, which has led to further restrictions in those areas.
2. The figures for cases in Gwynedd remain comparatively low (20 cases in the previous 7 day period at the time of writing this report) but they are higher than any time since June. We must also be alive to the fact that the situation can change extremely quickly once we see an increase. It is therefore important that we do not become complacent, and that we ensure that we have appropriate arrangements in place to cope with the situation should we encounter a second wave of the virus.
3. The Government has drawn up several models to try and illustrate what could happen in future, and they have developed a "reasonable worst case scenario" to enable public agencies to plan for the months ahead.
4. They have published a paper on what this scenario would mean, in which they emphasised that it is not a prediction of **what will happen** but rather an assessment of the worst situation **that could** happen. Members may view a paper on these assumptions published by the Government by clicking on the following link.

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-09/technical-advisory-group-new-worst-case-scenario-for-winter.pdf>

5. Naturally, we have received more detailed information on what lies behind the rough figures in the paper, which our research and information unit is using to provide services with the information they need so that they can consider how we would cope with such a scenario.

### **The Council's Working Arrangements**

6. Should we face a second wave, obviously the fact that we coped with the first wave means that we are more prepared to face a possible second wave.
7. The Heads of Departments within the Council are reporting that a number of lessons were learned during the period from February to June of this year, and that they have already incorporated any lessons that were learned during the first wave in our working arrangements. Those adaptations should therefore make us more resilient should we face a second wave.
8. Since we haven't removed some of the adaptations that were made to established working arrangements, this will also help us. For example, since we are continuing to operate by requesting that staff work from home, those arrangements are already in place and we can continue to run services effectively through home-working.
9. One of the greatest hurdles we encountered at the onset of the first wave was the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the significantly higher demand for it. Corporate distribution arrangements were put in place so that we could ensure a structured system for doing so. At the beginning, this meant having to use Siambur Dafydd Orwig as a warehouse for PPE, but by now, we have a bespoke storage area for this and we have also managed to stockpile the essential materials which puts us in a much stronger position to be able to face a second wave.
10. Evidently, one of the greatest risks for us in terms of the impact on our residents is the care sector which includes children's services, adults' services and homelessness. These departments have certainly learned many lessons during the first wave and have adapted according to what they learned. In particular, within the adult services sector we provide services to over 3,300 vulnerable individuals which is an area of significant risk. The department has been working alongside the Health Board over the past few months to secure our resilience in the event of a second wave.
11. Despite this, one aspect which is of particular concern to us is the risk that we might witness an increase in demand and a substantial reduction in resources simultaneously (as staff become ill or have to self-isolate).

12. There is a service continuation plan in place which is based on the figures behind the worst case scenario mentioned above, but whilst the physical resource that we might need can be secured, the key restriction might be staffing.
13. Another report will be submitted to address this matter, for consideration by the Cabinet.
14. There is work going on as well to ensure that we will have the appropriate provision, should it be necessary, to move staff from carrying out the lower-priority functions to the higher-priority areas should we find ourselves facing a genuine crisis.
15. One aspect that worked particularly well during the first wave was the team that was assembled to support those who were shielding and to respond to individuals who contacted the Council seeking general support.
16. This team was put together by transferring officers from various services within the Council, and while most of those officers have since returned to their normal areas of work, there are arrangements in the pipeline to ensure that we have a clear plan to be able to reinstate that Unit smoothly should we need in future.
17. One aspect of new work which is responding to the need to control the spread of the virus is the Track, Trace and Protect service.
18. The Environment Department is running this service in Gwynedd and the Unit was funded through a grant application which we made jointly with other North Wales councils. At the moment the Unit is operating effectively, with the numbers of positive cases having increased from single-figure weekly totals in August to weekly figures of around 15 by now. However, the number of "contacts" that are linked to each case have increased significantly, which of course increases the workload.
19. Nevertheless, should we witness a situation such as the one depicted in the reasonable worst case scenario above, we will need to ensure that the Unit still remains resilient.
20. The Health Board jointly with the local authorities in North Wales are required to draw up a Local Prevention and Response Plan for North Wales - this is in progress. This plan states that local authorities will establish Prevention and Surveillance arrangements to monitor what is happening within the individual counties and to discuss possible responses.

21. In Gwynedd, a group was established which is chaired by the Head of Environment Department. The Group also includes officers from the Environment, Education, Adults and Corporate Support Departments, together with representatives from Public Health Wales, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, North Wales Police and Bangor University. The group has just started to meet once a week, and from this week onwards a report on the situation will be provided to the Chief Executive, myself and the Deputy Leader.
22. Should we reach a situation where we would need to consider additional steps to the rights we already have, this would be discussed in this Group with the Chief Executive and the Leader and Deputy Leader, where this discussion would then be fed through to the Regional Incident Management Team (this is a collection of officers who have responsibility for responding to cases and advising Welsh Government Ministers on what action should be taken locally).
23. Ultimately, in accordance with the provisions of the Government's Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales, it is the Ministers in Cardiff who are responsible for deciding what additional steps to take.
24. Of course, another aspect of any response work is the ability to enforce any rules. Without a doubt, the financial cuts we saw to local governments' budgets over the past 10 years have adversely impacted on local authorities' ability to respond to all the demands that were put upon us during the first wave.
25. Even if we were to receive more funding now, of course we cannot possibly train Public Health professionals overnight. However, in collaboration with other North Wales authorities, we have applied for a resource which will enable us to employ more officers who could work under the supervision of professional officers to reinforce the work attached to enforcement, and we are awaiting the outcome of this application.
26. The visitor industry was obviously a huge burden on us during the summer, and we hope not to experience such intense pressures during the winter months, but the Environment Department and others will be monitoring the situation and taking appropriate action where necessary.
27. With all this in mind, the Chief Executive is confident that we have taken all the steps we can take to prepare for any second wave, but time will tell if this is adequate.

---

**The Statutory Officers' observations:****Monitoring Officer**

The report is an appropriate and timely update for the Cabinet in preparation for a second wave of COVID -19. From a governance perspective, the legal frameworks which have been developed now mean that our arrangements are more resilient to respond to the situation. However, as highlighted in the report, the precise nature and scale of the challenge is yet to be revealed

**Head of Finance**

During the period from February to June this year, the Council has given an unfettered priority to safeguarding the health and lives of the people of Gwynedd. There has been an additional cost involved, and the relevant figures are outlined in the 2020/21 Revenue Budget Review report on the agenda for this Cabinet meeting. If we are to face a second wave, obviously protecting people's health is again a priority and some additional costs will continue. However, as stated in the report above, a lower cost is expected in a second wave, as some of the adjustments to working arrangements have not been undone, and equipment is now in place to operate in an extended emergency.