

MEETING	Cabinet Cyngor Gwynedd
DATE	4 August 2020
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Gareth Griffith
OFFICER	Dafydd Wyn Williams
TITLE OF ITEM	Test Trace Protect Project

1. DECISION SOUGHT

Cabinet is asked to approve:

- Entering into an Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) with the other local authorities of north Wales to govern the recruitment and management of extra staff to operate the Test Trace Protect project; and
- Giving delegated authority to the Head of Environment in consultation with the Head of Finance and Head of Legal to agree a final document and complete the agreement.

2. WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

To ensure that the Council supports the national and regional co-ordinated strategy to contain the spread of COVID-19.

On 13 May 2020 the Welsh Government (WG) published a national strategy to trace the spread of COVID-19 in Wales.

This would involve Council staff offering advice to those people who had been in contact with someone who had tested positive for the disease.

As lockdown measures are relaxed, this project will be critical in managing the rate of spread of COVID-19 and in providing a rapid response to help those who might be newly infected.

As part of the national strategy the local authorities of the North have established local contact tracing teams to assist the regional and national effort. Until now, this has been an interim measure as the staff currently undertaking this work have been redeployed from their substantive posts to which they will need to return.

As the Council starts to resume more of its services, these staff members will need to return to their normal duties, so staffing the contact tracing teams will soon become a critical issue.

WG has approved the funding of this project, initially for the remainder of this financial year.

Flintshire County Council has volunteered to coordinate the employment model which will ensure that there is no duplication of procedures or effort or unnecessary competition for workforce between councils.

The relationship between Flintshire County Council as the employing authority and the other 5 local authorities will be set out in an Inter Authority Agreement (IAA), and approval is sought to enter into this IAA.

3. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

The Test Trace Protect strategy is intended to enhance health surveillance in the community by undertaking effective and extensive contact tracing and by supporting affected people to self-isolate when required to do so.

It involves asking people to report symptoms, testing anyone in the community who has symptoms and tracing those with whom they have come into close contact.. These contacts are then advised to self-isolate.

Contact tracing is a long established effective public health approach to containing the spread of infections.

The regional approach to implementing the plan has been undertaken via a regional project team led by Public Health Wales. It has been established with representation from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), Public Health Wales and each of the Northern local authorities.

This regional project team has a number of work streams, including workforce, governance, finance, communications, ICT, regional cell and data reporting. Each authority is represented on these workstreams.

Since 1 June 2020 the Council has been deploying existing resources (workforce, ICT equipment, etc) into these new roles. The clinical lead roles are being provided by BCUHB, to provide expert clinical knowledge to the contact tracing teams.

A list of confirmed COVID-19 cases is sent to the local contact team. The tracers then contact each case (via telephone) and give them advice around self-isolation. There is also a provision to escalate issues to clinical leads.

It is important to be aware that the TTP project may be required to operate for up to 2 years and that our temporarily deployed workforce will soon need to return to their substantive roles. Therefore, the north Wales councils have been working on a single employment model to recruit and manage new staff to fulfil these roles and have been granted funding from WG to fund this additional area of work.

Flintshire County Council has volunteered to coordinate the recruitment model. An IAA is now being negotiated to govern these arrangements.

The advantages of this 'single employer model' are considered to be:

- a common set of terms and conditions of employment and remuneration to avoid competition for recruitment
- a single and high-profile recruitment exercise with no HR or payroll duplication across authorities
- a bank of retained workers (without contracted hours) to draw on if there was a sudden and unexpected increase in demand. This would be a flexible resource and allocated out as needed; and
- there would be a single partner for the administration of the WG grant.

The IAA will cover such matters as:

- the term of the agreement and its funding
- an exit strategy in 18 months to 2 years for whenever TTP ends, is reduced or replaced
- detailed issues around the employment provisions.

WG has confirmed that it will fund the employment model with sufficient resources for each council to operate at least 3 cells/teams. Of course, the number of teams recruited will be managed flexibly to meet demand.

In terms of policy framework, this key task in supporting regional and national efforts to control/prevent the spread of COVID-19, affects all aspects of Council policy and practice, including the objectives and priorities contained in the Council Plan and other partnership and departmental plans.

In terms of budget, WG have confirmed that they will fully fund additional costs incurred in relation to the TTP project.

In terms of legal matters, the Council has a statutory duty under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to respond effectively in managing emergencies and has a statutory duty under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 to manage communicable disease outbreaks.

In terms of staffing, after the interim deployment phase WG will fund the staff costs.

In terms of equality and human rights, this key task is required to control and prevent the spread of the virus and specifically aims to protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

In terms of risks, failure to successfully implement the plan and reduce the spread of COVID-19 will lead to further harm and excess deaths in our communities.

4. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

Should the Cabinet approve the decision sought the Council will proceed to complete the agreement.

5. OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

The Legal Service has had input into the agreement no comment to add in relation to propriety

Head of Finance:

Employing additional staff to implement the Test Trace Protect project is a financial commitment, and the Welsh Government will fund some of the additional costs. The Health Board has received the grant conditions and guidelines for the remainder of this financial year, and the Health Board will pass the money on to compensate the relevant local authority costs.

With regard to staffing, I understand that Welsh Government resources will fund newly recruited staff to undertake the Testing, Tracking and Safeguarding work, along with overtime, and honoraria for increased responsibility. The grant will not fund staff relocated from their main posts to undertake this work, unless the Council has recruited additional staff to backfill their substantive posts.

Therefore, I believe it would be prudent for Cabinet members to support the employment model and ensure progress with the recruitment plan to staff the contact tracking teams.