

Report to	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of report	1st July 2021
Lead Member / Officer	Julian Thompson Hill/Steve Gadd, Head of Finance and Property
Report author	Head of Finance and Property
Title	Denbighshire County Council Coronavirus Response: Infrastructure – Council Buildings

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To update the Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the Infrastructure – Council Buildings recovery theme as set out in the ‘Denbighshire County Council Coronavirus Response: Planning for Recovery’ report agreed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Cabinet. This is a follow up report to the initial update presented to your meeting on the 3rd September.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 To outline progress around:

- Office Building working arrangements
- Building Maintenance update

2.2 To enable Members to fulfil their scrutiny role by examining these issues.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 For the contents of the report to be discussed.

4. Report details

4.1 The paper does not include Schools or Housing Stock in detail as these come under separate Recovery Themes. Although briefly mentioned below the New Ways of Working (NWOW) programme is a wide ranging programme that is being led by Alan Smith and is now not part of the initial recovery themes. The updates below show that we are in a good position going forward and will be able to adapt to the changing national and local situation.

It should also be noted that the Facilities Management Team have now transferred from Highways and Environmental Services to Finance and Property which should improve efficient working going forward and help with the delivery of the NWOW project, briefly mentioned below.

4.2 Office Buildings Working Arrangements – reiteration of current guidance

Appendix 1 is a report that has been developed by Tom Booty in consultation with the Business Continuity Group. It details:

- The offices the guidance will apply to (although the guidance includes good source of advice for other properties also)
- General Advice and Principles including advice around staff displaying symptoms
- Basic infection prevention measures
- Detailed work guidelines

4.3 Health and Safety

A sample / template Risk Assessment has been developed and is included as **Appendix 2**. However, it needs to be stressed that the contents of the template are not exhaustive but can be used to help develop a risk assessment relevant to each Service, Teams and / or activities. Each Service needs to undertake their own risk assessment in relation to the work activities of their staff to prevent or reduce any potential risk of exposure to Coronavirus.

It is important to note that Health and Safety is a **statutory duty** and needs to be taken seriously for the health of all our staff and residents.

4.4 Latest Position Statement

The current position on returning to work in Denbighshire is that we are following the current Welsh Government (WG) guidelines, and where staff can work from home they should continue to do so. Although rates have dropped significantly the coronavirus is still present in our communities and the risk of infection remains, and there is a particular concern about some of the new variants as recent events have shown. Working from home rather than in a communal office environment clearly reduces the risk of infection.

There is an existing provision for staff to attend the office workplace in circumstances where there is a compelling business need, or for wellbeing issues. In these cases, approval from the relevant Head of Service is required, and once given the individual attending the office should inform the Facilities Team when and where they are attending by contacting FMU Facilities Team. Staff who do attend the office workplace should adhere to the guidance and ensure they sign-in and out of the offices in the log books provided at the entrances.

When WG guidelines change, in the medium-term we are looking to put in place arrangements for a rota system for attendance at the office workplace, so that when WG do relax their work from home message, we are prepared and will manage attendance. The agreed system is that all Heads of Service/Middle Managers will schedule which of their staff can attend the office workplace on which days, so for example one team may be allowed to attend on Mondays and Wednesdays, and an alternative team on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This should ensure no more than 50% of staff are in attendance at any one time and allow adequate social distancing. A form for all Heads of Service/Middle Managers to complete will be circulated shortly to enable this timetable to be put in place.

The Service is involved in three aspects of the New Ways of Working Project which, as a programme, is led by Alan Smith.

- Finance – ensuring the project is resourced properly ensuring that opportunities for efficiencies are maximised
- Strategic Assets –aligning the emerging corporate priorities over the next 5 years including:
 - Climate & Ecological Change Strategy

- 21st Century Schools (Band B)
- New Ways of Working (NWOW)
- Regeneration

From a Workplace Design and Facilities Management perspective (which is now under Finance and Property), it is expected that attendance post-COVID at the office workplace will be far lower than pre-COVID levels, with perhaps between 20% to 40% of staff attending the workplace on any working day. Furthermore, the reasons people attend the workplace is more likely to be driven by the need to meet and collaborate with others rather than to undertake day to day transactional operations which can be undertaken at home. From a property perspective, these changes have implications that mean we need to reconsider what we provide in terms of office accommodation.

4.5 Buildings Infrastructure

Building Maintenance (Corporate)

Business as usual was maintained throughout the Pandemic and lock-down periods. Reactive repairs reduced as a result of decreased building utilisation which enabled more focus on larger planned and capital maintenance projects. Contractor and materials availability were impacted for a short period initially while suitable measures were put in place following risk assessments and clarification of Welsh Government guidance.

Design & Construction

Business as usual was maintained throughout the Pandemic and lock-down periods. Initial disruption was minimal due to remote working options already being established within the team. Minor disruptions were experienced shortly during the initial uncertainty surrounding the unknown impact of the pandemic and emerging measures and while remote working practices were established in the private sector and appropriate measures developed for safe working on construction sites. Fortunately, on site activity at the start of the pandemic was relatively low with the majority of schemes being in the design/tender stages.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1. Enabling staff to carry out their roles efficiently and effectively will help ensure that the Corporate Priorities can continue to be delivered and achieved.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. The short term costs have involved the purchasing of signage and personal protective equipment (PPE) items such as hand sanitiser. Most of these initial costs were able to be claimed from the WG Covid 19 Local Authority Hardship Fund. No major works have been necessary to date.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1. It is felt that a Well-being Impact Assessment is not required for this paper.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1. The contents of the report were discussed with the Lead Member, SLT, Informal Cabinet and Trade Unions during May 2020. Informal Cabinet (June 2020). Regular updates have been provided to CET and SLT during the year as required. Further discussions and consultation will be carried as and when new guidance is required.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. Financial implications are set out in Section 6.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 The risks of not getting this right could have huge impact on the health and well-being of staff and visitors. Specific risks are detailed in the appendices and the specific risk assessments for each service area will identify and mitigate service specific risks.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1 Scrutiny's powers in relation to the matter are set out in Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and Section 7.4 of the Council's Constitution.