

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**County Council
30th July 2020**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Rosemarie Harris, Leader

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor Sandra Davies

A lot of planning and preparation is currently underway to enable schools to open in September, for young people to return to schools.

What date will this Authority resume its routine business and when will the Council office be open to members of the public?

Response

The Coronavirus Act 2020 came into effect on 25 March 2020, giving Government emergency powers to deal with the pandemic; this is supplemented by the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020. Powys County Council's Corporate Business Continuity Plan was invoked on the 18th March, enabling Council Services to focus on key activities to respond to Covid-19. The Performance Report for Quarter 1, considered by Cabinet on the 28th July, provides a summary of the Council's activities in response to Covid-19 over recent months.

As the Welsh Government has undertaken its 21-day reviews, we have gradually re-opened many of our services, in line with Welsh Government Guidelines. At this time, emergency legislation remains in place. Covid continues to circulate locally, nationally and globally. Whilst schools are reopening, this is being undertaken in accordance with Government guidelines, based on scientific advice from the Welsh Government's Technical Advisory Cell. At this time, Welsh Government advice remains that,

"Workers are only allowed to return to the work place if it is **not** reasonably practicable for them to work from home. For those that cannot work from home, it is important for employers to establish an initial assessment on whether it is safe for staff to work and where relevant, signpost them to appropriate support organisations"(1)(2).

Whilst we are preparing our buildings to enable staff to return to our offices, this must be planned carefully in accordance to Guidance prepared by Welsh Government and the Health and Safety Executive; this currently requires strict social distancing, hygiene, a risk assessment for each work-space, as well as arrangements to record attendance, in case Contact Tracing may be necessary. We are not therefore currently in a position to publish a date when Council offices will be open to members of the public.

Over 2,000 staff are currently working from home, utilising our investment in digital technology. They are providing a wide range of services, which are available to members of the public through our web-site and via the telephone. Over 3,350 of our staff are front-line workers, and as far as possible they continue to provide services in our schools, care settings, and provide a range of services from our depots; a risk assessment has been made at each of these settings, and appropriate measures put in place to ensure the safety of our staff and customers.

The Council's routine business has gradually been re-established remotely via the use of Teams, and further developments will take place from September. However, this will remain subject to the progress of Covid as officers from across the Council continue to respond to the virus, which remains active within the County. Officers have maintained the arrangements that have been put in place since March, and are able to respond to any localised or wider outbreaks of Covid within the County; at this stage, and in the absence of a vaccine or wide-spread immunity, it is not known how long these arrangements will need to be maintained.

- (1) Welsh Government Guidance Keep Wales Safe at Work, published 2 June 2020
<https://gov.wales/keep-wales-safe-work>
- (2) HSE Guidance Working Safely During the Coronavirus Outbreak
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/assets/docs/working-safely-guide.pdf>