

RECOVERY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 3 rd March 2022
Report Subject	Position statement on risks for each Portfolio
Cabinet Member	Collective Cabinet
Report Author	Chief Executive
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Portfolio Recovery Business Plans were developed for exiting the first response phase to the pandemic in 2020.

This Committee has had oversight of the Recovery Business Plans for all five service portfolios during meetings in 2021 (June – August). During each of the meetings the relevant Chief Officers were asked to highlight significant areas of risk. This report today presents progress and updates on those areas of risk for each of the portfolios.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To review progress of the highlighted areas of risk within all five portfolios reported at earlier meetings of this committee.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE RISKS AND ISSUES WITHIN PORTFOLIOS
1.01	In the following sections updates will be provided for the highlighted areas of risk from each of the service portfolios.
1.02	<p>The following portfolio risks were identified as highlighted areas of risk and reported at recent meetings of the Recovery Committee:</p> <p><u>Education & Youth</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Managing uncertainty around operational changes which may need to be implemented for the start of the new term. Schools continue to face significant challenges in managing the impact of Covid-19 cases on pupils and staff. There is still very limited availability of supply staff again this term for a range of school posts and continues to stretch schools' operational capacity. This is keeping anxiety levels amongst staff and school leaders at an elevated level. Guidance for the TTP process has been reviewed and updated to streamline information sharing and reduce workload for both TTP and schools and this has helped headteacher workload- The Education Portfolio, Environmental Health Officers and the TTP team continue to provide high levels of support to schools. However, the resilience of school leaders is stretched and the ongoing risk of disrupted education for learners remains high. A small number of class closures for short periods of time during the first half of the Spring Term have been put in place when there was insufficient staff cover to operate safely and pupils moved to remote learning. The reporting of staff absences to Welsh Government on a weekly basis has remained at Amber for the duration of this half term. <i>The Education, Youth & Culture OSC considered a report at its meeting on 16th September and a verbal update from the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) at the Committee meeting on 21st October. The outcome of the discussion was presented to the Recovery Committee in the report considered at the 4th November, 2021 meeting.</i>The impact the pandemic has had on children and young people, specifically on their health and emotional well-being and their ability to engage with learning. Feedback from schools continues to be that many learners are demonstrating the impact of having missed long periods of teaching. Schools are regularly reporting higher levels of pupils struggling to re-engage and conform to appropriate behaviour expectations whilst in school because of the lack of structure for a long period of time. Schools report that these behavioural challenges, are taking a great deal of time to manage and resolve, and this coupled with staff absences, are adding to the current pressures. There has also been an increase in the levels of anti-social behaviour in the community. Portfolio services such as the Integrated Youth Provision and Youth Justice Team are working

with North Wales Police and other partners to provide appropriate interventions.

Schools have funding from WG to employ more staff and deliver intervention programmes but staff absences from Covid-19 and the need to cover/rearrange classes is sometimes disrupting delivery. The Inclusion Team continue to offer training to school staff on a number of intervention programmes that are proven to be successful in supporting pupil emotional health and wellbeing, however this risk remains high.

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) at the Committee meeting on 21st October. The outcome of the discussion was presented to the Recovery Committee in the report considered at the 4th November, 2021 meeting.

- **The resilience of schools in managing a significant number of changes i.e. the new curriculum, Additional Learning Needs transformation and the introduction of school inspections.** This is a long term issue. Schools are being supported by the Education Portfolio and by the regional school improvement service, GwE, to help them balance the demands of these significant changes, but feedback from Headteachers is that balancing all the priorities whilst dealing with Covid-19 cases and staff absences continues to be hugely challenging. The reality of life in schools continues to be fed back regularly at regional and national meetings and Headteachers have also recently shared their issues directly with the Minister for Education in a national conference. The challenges of releasing staff to access training as a result of staffing challenges from the pandemic has been acknowledged with schools able to be involved at their own pace and flexibly when needed. A pause period of a fortnight was added during January 2022 as a result of significant staffing challenges across the system. This risk remains high.

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) at the Committee meeting on 21st October. The outcome of the discussion was presented to the Recovery Committee in the report considered at the 4th November, 2021 meeting.

Housing & Assets

- **Rental Income collections continues to be impacted by the pandemic.** To support tenants during the pandemic, Welsh Government introduced a package of measures to protect tenants from debt enforcement action which could ultimately result in evictions. These measures have now been lifted but there remains, up to at least 24 March 2022, a requirement to give an extended period of six months (instead of three months) when issuing 'Notices of Seeking Possession'. This is the statutory process we must follow before starting court proceedings for non-payment of rent. Rent arrears

currently remain £95k above levels seen in 2020-21 and £400k above pre-pandemic levels. Resource levels are being increased to support the improvement of rent collections as part of the Covid-19 recovery strategy. In addition to this, two Accommodation Support Officers have been embedded into the Rent Income service to ensure tenants receive the right level of support at the very earliest opportunity.

This will continue to place further pressure on the HRA Business Plan.

The Community, Housing & Assets OSC considered a detailed report and received a detailed presentation on Housing Rent Income at its meeting held on 8th December, 2021. The Committee were concerned around the level of debt but thanked the Officers for the work they were doing to mitigate this. The Committee will continue to receive regular update reports.

- **Homelessness presentations increase as current protections around evictions and furlough end and landlords take measures to commence and follow through on stalled evictions.**

Presentations for homelessness continue to be strong and the numbers of evictions and expirations of notices within the private rented sector are increasing following lifting of many of the Covid-19 protections for housing. Numbers of households in emergency and temporary accommodation has grown steadily during the year with a significant increase in the 2nd half of the 21-22 year.

Financial protections through the emergency hardship grant from Welsh Government have covered a significant amount of the increased costs associated with the greater demand for emergency accommodation during the pandemic. Further access to funding is available for 22-23, but there is likely to be an increase financial pressure as we move further into the post pandemic period, due to increased homelessness and fewer opportunities for people to secure long term settled housing in an expensive private rented sector. Potentially more people will need emergency housing and opportunities for exiting homelessness are fewer.

The significant pressure point for homelessness continues to be for single people who require 1 bed homes. These are not in plentiful supply within the local social housing supply and the private rented sector is expensive with many benefit dependent residents priced out of the market. This can also be said for many other household types including families, but the scale of the challenge is greatest when considering the limited 1 bed supply and the high levels of single people in emergency housing.

Additional funding through discretionary housing payments is being utilised to protect people from housing related debts and reduces the potential for homelessness, but it should be noted that a significant number of residents are being issued notices within the private rented sector due to landlords wishing to sell their property,

not always due to poor tenancy conduct through issues such as rent arrears.

A significant uplift in Housing Support Grant in 21-22 plus a 3 year settlement from 22-23 onwards enables us to deliver and commission more housing related support services. These services are aimed at solving housing problems before they escalate to a risk of homelessness, or focus on helping people exit homelessness promptly. The housing support and homelessness sector, like other public service areas is however experiencing challenges around recruitment and workforce retention. We are working with partners to look at ways to overcome these challenges nationally, regionally and locally.

- **Raw material supplies shortages lead to increased costs, programme delays and increased cases of contractual disputes.**

Whilst we continue to identify alternative suppliers or source stock and hold for future use the situation continues to be challenging. Since the last update the labour position has not improved with skilled trades people increasingly difficult to source and recruit. As noted previously those that have historically been engaged in construction activity have left the UK and remain in Europe

The situation is regularly under review due to wider international impacts a direct result of the Pandemic and the ongoing residual impacts of Brexit.

The Community, Housing & Assets OSC considered a verbal update from the Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) at the Committee meeting held on 13th October. The outcome of the discussion was presented to the Recovery Committee in the report considered at the 4th November, 2021 meeting.

Planning, Environment & Economy

- **The resilience of various teams due to unprecedented demand to services during the emergency situation.**

In September Cabinet supported the Business Cases to recruit into the following areas which were under particular pressure: Planning Enforcement; Environmental Health; Drainage and Flood Protection and Town Centre Regeneration.

Successful recruitment has been undertaken into the majority of those areas, with the exception being the Drainage and Flood Protection team where recruitment for the vacancy of the Team Manager role has been advertised for a third time with no success. With another member of that small team now leaving, work is on-going to identify how this area of work will be able to be delivered in addition to having to update our Strategic Flood Risk Consequences Assessment following the deferral of Technical Advice Note 15(Drainage).

Fortunately, the pressures of the Omicron variant did not detract from our Food Hygiene and Environmental Health teams who are continuing to catch up with significant backlogs of work. We have been fortunate to employ colleagues with expertise in acoustics who will assist us in addressing an increasing number of noise complaints. In a very competitive labour market, we have done well to successfully recruit into these posts.

- **The delivery of the Local Development Plan**

By mid-November the LDP Examination in Public (EIP) had a single, outstanding issue to address, the implications of new guidance from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) on phosphate levels in rivers. Following an exchange between the Inspector and the Council in relation to this issue, the Inspector has now confirmed that she is happy with the approach which the Council is proposing. Frustratingly, that agreement was received at a time which prevented the opportunity to undertake the six week consultation on changes arising from the EIP prior to the pre-election period commencing on 18th March. As a result, that consultation will have to be undertaken following the election in May. A briefing on the LDP will form the basis of an all-Member briefing as part of the induction of Councilors in May.

The proposed changes will have to be endorsed for release by Cabinet in June and the consultation triggered thereafter. Responses to the consultation will inform the Inspector's binding report which will then need to be endorsed by Council to adopt the Plan.

- **Back Office System**

This significant project will introduce a new back office ICT system (AGILE) for the whole Portfolio increasing the opportunity for our customers to access key data themselves and improving case management, performance management and record keeping. The progress of this project has been reported to Environment & Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September of last year. The Development Management function will be delivered first, before moving on to other sections of the Portfolio. Training of key staff has been undertaken in November and December with training of other users across the Portfolio scheduled.

The Environment & Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive another demonstration of the system on 8th March. Training will be provided to all Members following the elections so that they can maximise the benefits that the system offers.

Social Services

- **Recruitment of staff to work in the sector, encompassing social work, occupational therapy and direct social work.**
- **The fragility of the market around Elderly Mentally Infirm (EMI) nursing and the recruitment of staff.**

- **Funding and fees linked to market stability.**

The three identified risk areas for social services are closely linked and require responses at a national, regional and local level. The challenges are within the context of wider health and social care pressures arising from Covid-19, demand for services rising higher than pre-Covid levels and reduced workforce capacity. We have instigated focussed and co-ordinated activity with partners to deliver actions to alleviate the pressures on the service. Our drive to keep services functioning and able to meet demand are being led professionally with a focus on meeting the needs of children and adults with most critical and substantial needs.

Locally, specific challenges in recruiting experienced level 3 childcare social workers have necessitated the implementation of a time limited market supplement to ensure we have sufficient capacity and resilience to effectively support children and families. This forms part of wider strategic approach to the recruitment and retention of the operational social care workforce across adult and children services within the local authority and the independent sector. This approach will require national investment and support both for pay and fee rate increases.

We are working regionally and locally with independent sector colleagues to develop a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to recruitment and managing our collective response to supporting people in need of care and support. Market supply in the independent sector continues to place pressure on sourcing domiciliary support, there is a waiting list for domiciliary care services across Flintshire.

We have increasing challenges in the provision of residential care, dementia care and nursing home care placements. We are working jointly with health colleges to respond to specific issues that require an integrated response.

Due to the increasing demand and lack of capacity in adult social work and occupational therapy services, there is as a result a waiting list for assessment in operation, this is particular affecting older people services, including occupational therapy, where there is increasing demand and complexity of need. We are closely monitoring the waiting lists and are currently meeting our statutory duties, by meeting critical need only.

The Social & Health Care OSC considered the stability of the social care market (to include fees and funding) and Social Care workforce pressures and responses at the special Committee meeting on 30th September. Assurance was given that work was ongoing locally, regionally and nationally to respond to the challenges faced.

Welsh Government have committed to find the Real Living Wages for front-line care staff, however work continues around a sustainable care fee model.

Streetscene and Transportation

- **Reduced numbers of frontline workers and contractors to deliver services safely due to the requirement for self-isolation and increased sickness absence levels.**

The service continues to experience high numbers of frontline workforce needing to self-isolate and this is still impacting on effective service delivery when combined with general sickness absence and annual leave requests.

Frontline services are continuing to be delivered through agency and overtime; however, some areas of the service are under increasing pressure, such as waste and recycling with collection rounds having to be “doubled up” in order to complete rounds. Resources have been deployed from other areas of the service, such as street cleansing and grounds maintenance. The current risk rating remains at “red” due to continuing high sickness absence levels. Additional risks have been introduced to the HGV driver shortage and difficulty in recruiting and/or retaining skilled staff and workforce. Risk trend remains static currently.

The Environment & Economy OSC considered a report on the above risk at its meeting on 9th November 2021.

- **Unable to progress with key infrastructure improvement projects due to lack of resilience in staff, contractors and supply chain.**

Supply chain issues are continuing to hamper progress on some major infrastructure projects, which is resulting in delays to schemes, which are largely funded by external grant schemes. Each grant funded project is given a project team to control delivery within specified timescales. Additional partners (e.g. consultants; WRAP Cymru) are continuing to support us with delivery of key projects. The current risk rating continues to be red due to ongoing disruption in the supply chain. Early discussions have been held with funding award bodies regarding potential risks to grant funding not being expended within the specified timescales and confirmation of carry forward of funding obtained. Risk trend remains static currently.

The Environment & Economy OSC considered a report on the above risk at its meeting on 9th November, 2021.

- **Unable to gain regulatory approval (planning; drainage; environmental permitting) to progress key infrastructure projects in a timely manner due to delays in processing applications.**

A number of large infrastructure improvement projects are still in progress and continue to be monitored through the relevant Project Boards. The development of these projects does rely on regulatory approval to move forward, such as planning consent, drainage (SUDs) and environmental permitting. Any undue delay in the approval processes could lead to delays for the projects and impact on available grant funding. Also, the impact of having to redirect services to alternative locations can be costly (e.g. recycling

	<p>collections). The project teams continue to work with the relevant regulatory bodies to ensure that all aspects are progressed to deadlines. External partners (e.g. WRAP Cymru) are continuing to provide industry-related expertise and support to assist with progress and mitigate against further delays to projects. Risk trend remains static currently.</p> <p><i>The Environment & Economy OSC considered a report on the above risk at its meeting on 9th November, 2021.</i></p>
1.03	The risks identified above have all been included in the 'Council Plan & Governance Risk Mapping' document to ensure that they are reported to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None specifically.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	This report specifically covers highlighted areas of risk for each of the service portfolios and they continue to recover from the pandemic emergency situation and is based upon a framework of risk management.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	The plans have been developed with wide consultation with officers within and across portfolios.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	<p>Appendix 1: Education & Youth Risk Register</p> <p>Appendix 2: Housing & Assets Risk Register</p> <p>Appendix 3: Planning, Environment & Economy Risk Register</p> <p>Appendix 4: Social Services Risk Register</p> <p>Appendix 5: Streetscene & Transportation Risk Register</p>

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Jay Davies, Strategic Performance Advisor</p> <p>Telephone: 01352 702744</p> <p>E-mail: jay.davies@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	Risk Management: the process of identifying risks, evaluating their potential consequences (impact) and managing them. The aim is to reduce the frequency (likelihood) of risk events occurring (wherever this is possible) and minimise the severity of their consequences (impact) if they occur. Threats are managed by a process of controlling, transferring or retaining the risk. Opportunities are managed by identifying strategies to maximise the opportunity or reward for the organisation.