

RECOVERY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 6 th January, 2021
Report Subject	Risks and Issues within Portfolios and Feedback from Overview & Scrutiny
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 recent meetings (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	<p>In the following sections updates will be provided for the highlighted areas of risk from each of the service portfolios.</p> <p>It should be noted that at the point of issue of this report services are being impacted on a number of levels, through Covid, Flu, levels of sickness and some initial impacts of the new virus of concern, Omicron, although at this moment the Delta virus remains the dominant strain. This position is likely to move substantially in the New Year.</p>
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. The autumn term has presented significant challenges in managing the impact of Covid-19. Many schools have experienced high case numbers in both pupils and staff which has resulted in a small number of class closures and learners having to switch to remote learning for a short period of time. Sourcing supply staff for a range of school posts has become virtually impossible as the term has gone on and has contributed to class closures. The availability of Welsh speaking staff to provide cover in our Welsh medium schools has been very problematic. Senior leaders in schools have had to resort to covering classes and in secondary schools there have been occasions where specialist teachers in some subjects have not been available for short periods of time. This is particularly stressful for examination year groups who have already missed a considerable amount of school based learning over the course of the pandemic. The HR Business Partner for the Education Portfolio collates sickness absence returns and provides a twice weekly update to the Chief Officer and senior management team on the levels of staff absence in the school and central portfolio workforce. <p>All Flintshire schools have received their supply of CO2 monitors provided by Welsh Government with guidance on how to use them effectively. Schools are becoming more confident in monitoring CO2 levels and taking appropriate action to improve ventilation. The challenge is sometimes the nature of individual classroom spaces and this is being considered by the Property Maintenance team as WG are providing some funding to improve ventilation in schools, so any spending decisions will be evidence based. In light of the recent decision to reintroduce the wearing of face coverings by staff in schools and by secondary aged pupils in classrooms, the Council has ordered a new supply of disposable and washable facemasks for all schools and will claim the cost back from the WG Hardship Fund.</p>

The streamlined TTP approaches have worked well and there have been very few concerns raised by schools who now receive a weekly list of Covid-19 cases in pupils and staff. Where a cluster of cases appears, there is higher involvement of the TTP team and Environmental Health Officers.

The reality of these operational challenges are regularly communicated to the Education and Welsh Language Minister and his officials through national network meetings. However, the resilience of school leaders is stretched and the ongoing risk of disrupted education for learners remains high, particularly around the uncertainties of the new variant of concern in recent weeks.

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.

- **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.**

This is an ongoing issue for schools and will be far reaching for many years. The situation reported at the last Recovery Committee has not really changed – a significant number of children and young people across all phases are presenting with health, social and emotional difficulties which can impact on their attendance and their behaviour. Schools are regularly updated with information about support and training available to them to upskill staff to manage these challenges. Wider use of services such as the Integrated Youth Provision and Youth Justice Service are also being planned for older pupils. Schools are being creative and co-operative to keep the most challenging learners within the mainstream school system – pupil exclusions are not out of kilter with previous data sets but the number of managed moves between secondary schools is rising. The number of children who are now being home educated by parents has also risen substantially during the pandemic which puts additional pressure on the Council to fulfil their statutory duties in this regard. A detailed report on this was recently presented to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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 remains a long term issue and the situation since the last report to the Recovery Committee has not changed. Feedback from

Headteachers is that balancing all the priorities whilst dealing with Covid-19 cases and staff absences is hugely challenging and is distracting them for preparing for the rollout of the new curriculum. Anxiety about the new requirements from the ALN legislation is also high as schools grapple with the new Code and approaches for learners. These pressures have been regularly fed back at regional and national meetings. 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 continues to be impacted by the pandemic and when furlough and other protections end the situation worsens.**

As part of the mitigation measures and to support tenants during the pandemic, Welsh Government have extended the Regulations whereby there is 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. Which may ultimately lead to eviction.

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.**

We continue to closely monitor demand and capacity for homelessness and housing support services. Extensions of Notice periods and delays to Court proceedings continue to offer protection to tenants but this is time limited. Evictions Ban came to an end on 30 June 2021. In terms of notice periods (Notice of Seeking Possession [NOSP]) this matter has been covered in the bullet point above.

Additional Funding announced for the Tenant Hardship Grant which is available to renters in the private sector who have accrued arrears and are at risk of homelessness during the Covid period.

Additional funding from Welsh Government through Housing Support Grant for 2021-2022 onwards (extra £1.87m) is enabling the service to increase staffing capacity and other commissioned support services. Recruitment for new posts has commenced and officers are being appointed into post.

The Facilitator for the Community, Housing & Assets OSC is currently liaising with the appropriate Officers in order to present a report on Homelessness to a future meeting of the Committee.

- **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 remains challenging. Since the last update the labour position is deteriorating with skilled trades people becoming 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. Furthermore, many of the recruitment companies utilised by the Housing Asset service are unable to provide the service with agency staffing due to a shortage of skilled tradespersons and increasing private sector pay attracting agency workers who traditionally may have worked for the Council.

There is clear evidence in other local authorities that economic pressures are leading to contractors handing contracts back as profit margins have been substantially eroded through labour and material cost increases.

The situation is regularly under review due to wider international impacts and influences including Pandemic and more recently the early impact of Omicron as well as 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 of the Drainage and Flood Protection team where recruitment for the vacancy of the Team Manager role will be initiated for a third time. All Local Authorities

are struggling to recruit into this area which is a considerable concern given the additional duties which have been given to authorities in relation Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and the need to update our Strategic Flood Risk Consequences Assessment following the deferral of Technical Advice Note 15 (Drainage).

Prior to the pressures of the Omicron variant, staff within our Food Hygiene and Environmental Health teams had started to return to their “business as usual” work and catching up with significant backlogs. In particular, work is overdue on our Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) scheme as was reported in the mid-year Council Plan update. We are yet to see the full implications of Omicron on demand for these areas of staff, but early signs are that the need to isolate and a reduction of face to face meetings may impact negatively on our ability to deliver services. A further verbal update will be presented to committee given how quick this position is changing.

- **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 pollution levels in rivers. This was the subject of a supplementary session on 23rd November when the Inspectors requested further information in relation to the implications on the delivery of four allocated housing sites which would be impacted by the new guidance. We are preparing a response to the Inspectors to meet their deadline of 17th December. We would then expect a response from the Inspectors which would then prompt a six week consultation on the changes which have arisen from the EIP. Two steps would then remain. Firstly, the receipt of the Inspectors’ binding report and secondly the Council’s decision to adopt the Plan.

The Facilitator for the Environment & Economy OSC is currently liaising with the appropriate Officers in order to present a report on the LDP to a future meeting of the Committee. The LDP is driver by Planning Strategy Group advising Cabinet and the Examination in Public has not yet concluded.

- **Back Office System**

Work continues on the significant project to introduce a new back office system for the Portfolio with a presentation delivered to Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 September and further update to be provided to the Committee in March 2022. The project is concentrating on the migration of data from the existing system to ensure a smooth transition is achieved. As agreed, the project team are concentrating on delivering the Development Management function first, before moving on to other sections of the Portfolio. Training of key staff has been undertaken in November and December with commitments to train other users at the appropriate time.

The Environment & Economy OSC considered a report on Planning & Enforcement at its meeting on 14th September which provided an update on the performance of the planning enforcement service and demonstration of the new software system AGILE. A further update had been requested which would be considered at the February 2022 meeting to monitor progress.

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 in the regional Recovery Co-ordination Group. Contact has been made with Ministers' to raise the need for direct assistance with capacity and resources given the emergency we are facing in maintaining services and the risk of service failure this winter.

A time limited market supplement for children's social workers was implemented in November 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. It is too early to assess whether the market supplement has had any positive impact on recruitment and retention to date.

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 small waiting list for domiciliary care services across Flintshire, and we have increasing challenges in the provision of residential nursing care where direct work is taking place with health 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 we are continuing to

operate waiting lists for assessment, 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 ensuring that critical needs are met.

We are operating an action plan together with HR to support recruitment and retention, which includes the recruitment of some temporary business support to help us with our marketing strategy, a refresh of our social media campaign, more attractive advertising of posts, engagement with external agencies and planning for recruitment events and open days.

The Social & Health Care OSC considered social care workforce pressures and responses and supporting the stability of the social care market at their meeting on the 9th of December.

The outcome of the discussion was presented to the Recovery Committee in the report considered at the 4th November, 2021 meeting.

Streetscene and Transportation

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

The service has been experiencing an increase in the numbers of frontline workforce needing to self-isolate due either to testing positive for covid themselves or household members testing positive. This is now impacting on effective service delivery when combined with general sickness absence. Additionally, we are seeing an impact on the numbers of employees seeking PCR tests, which necessitates time off work and self-isolation until the test results come through. We are continuing to operate to the required standards currently by supporting through the use of agency workers and overtime; however, general sickness absence levels remain high and this is being compounded by HGV driver / agency staff shortages and an inability to recruit to vacant posts. 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 and resources are being deployed from other areas of the service, such as street cleansing and grounds maintenance. The current risk rating is red due to increasing sickness absence levels. Additional risks have been introduced to the HGV driver shortage and difficulty in recruiting and/or retaining skilled staff and workforce.

- **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;

	<p>WRAP Cymru) are continuing to support us with delivery of key projects. The risk trend is still red due to ongoing disruption in the supply chain. Early discussions are being held with funding award bodies regarding potential risks to grant funding not being expended within the specified timescales and potential carry forward of funding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to gain regulatory approval (planning; drainage; environmental permitting) to progress key infrastructure projects in a timely manner due to delays in processing applications. <p>A number of large infrastructure improvement projects are still impacted by delays in the application process and difficulties gaining regulatory approval. We continue to monitor progress through the relevant Project Boards; however, the development of these projects does rely on regulatory approval to move forward, such as planning consent, drainage (SUDs) and environmental permitting (e.g. Standard Yard). The delays in the approval processes outlined has led to significant delays for some projects and is impacting on available grant funding. Also, the impact of having to redirect services to alternative locations is costly (e.g. recycling collections). We are continuing 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 red currently.</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.
1.04	At the present time, there has been no escalation of risks from Overview & Scrutiny when considering the risks identified above.

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	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

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

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>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.</p>