

RECOVERY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 4 th November, 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	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 have now been open for half a term and continue to face significant challenges in managing the impact of Covid-19 cases on pupils and staff. Changes to Welsh Government guidance to allow learners to remain in school, even if they are a contact of a positive case, has resulted in high numbers of infections within both the pupil and staff population. The very limited availability of supply staff for a range of school posts is stretching schools' operational capacity and keeping anxiety levels amongst staff and school leaders at an elevated level. Changes to guidance for Specialist Schools has been particularly problematic. Guidance for the TTP process has also been recently reviewed and updated with a view to streamline information sharing and reduce workload for both TTP and schools but this is only just being introduced so too early to assess impact. 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.<p><i>The Education, Youth & Culture OSC considered a report at its meeting on 16th September which provided an overview of the revised COVID-19 measures for the safe operation of schools. The Committee were congratulatory of schools for the positive way in which they had re-opened in September and a letter of thanks to all school staff had been sent from the Chair on behalf of the Committee.</i></p><p><i>The Committee also received a verbal update from the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) at the Committee meeting on 21st October. The Committee noted the update but raised concerns around the shortage of supply teachers, teaching assistants and caretakers at Schools.</i></p>• 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 is that many learners are clearly evidencing the impact of having missed long periods of teaching. This is reflected in their knowledge, skills and concentration but also in their behaviour. Schools are reporting higher levels of pupils

struggling to re-engage and that some are also having difficulty conforming 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, which are an obvious exemplification of the impact on the pandemic on learners' emotional well-being, are taking a great deal of time to manage and resolve, and this coupled with staff absences, are adding to the current pressures. Schools do have the 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 regional pilot for the national framework for Emotional Health and Wellbeing is now underway with a small number of Flintshire schools involved. Schools not in the pilot continue to be supported to use the effective materials in the Health Schools Scheme alongside other mental health strategies. This risk remains high.

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) at the Committee meeting on 21st October. Whilst the Committee were concerned on the pressure being put on Officers and Schools, they supported and appreciated that the Chief Officer Team were doing everything in their power to manage the risk.

- **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 cases and staff absences is hugely challenging. The reality of life in schools this half term has been regularly fed back at regional and national meetings and Headteachers have also recently shared their issues directly with the Minister for Education in a national conference. This risk remains high.

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) at the Committee meeting on 21st October. Whilst the Committee were concerned on the pressure being put on Officers and Schools, they supported and appreciated that the Chief Officer Team were doing everything in their power to manage the risk.

Housing & Assets

- **Rental Income continues to be impacted by the pandemic and when furlough and other protections end the situation worsens.** Welsh Government announced that the extension of powers enacted under the Coronavirus Act 2020 relating to evictions ended on the 30 June 2021, in this context evictions can now proceed. In terms of notice periods (Notice of Seeking Possession [NOSP])

were to end on the 30 September 2021, however they have now been extended until 31 December 2021. This means that a further six month notice period will apply to notices issued on or after 24 July 2020 (except in cases of anti-social behavior or domestic violence).

The position is further compromised as Universal Credit additional £20.00 payments have ended and the implications of the new 'Breathing Space' measures are taken into account (60 day hold on all creditor activity).

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

The Community, Housing & Assets OSC will be considering the usual update reports on Housing Income and Welfare Reform at its meeting scheduled for 8th December, 2021. The Committee will also receive and consider the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2022/23 and the HRA Business Plan and its meeting scheduled for 12th January, 2022.

- **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 is becoming increasingly challenging. Since the last update the labour position is starting to deteriorate with skilled trades people now 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

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 Committee were assured that the risk was being adequately managed.

Planning, Environment & Economy

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

The Business Cases which were prepared to recruit into the following areas which are under pressure: Planning Enforcement; Environmental Health; Drainage and Flood Protection and Town Centre Regeneration were all supported when presented to Cabinet in September. A verbal update will be presented to committee on progress on recruitment.

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 March 2022 meeting to monitor progress.

- **The delivery of the Local Development Plan and the implementation of the back-office system.**

The LDP Examination in Public (EIP) was temporarily suspended to deal with two matters: the Strategic site at Warren Hall in Broughton and the implications of new guidance from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) on pollution levels in rivers. The former matter was addressed in a separate session on 8 September.

The latter issue has resulted in considerable additional work with colleagues in Wrexham CBC, who are experiencing similar frustrations with their LDP, NRW and Welsh Government. It is hoped that a Statement of Common Ground between ourselves and NRW will be submitted to the EIP in early November which will satisfy the Planning Inspector and allow her to finalise her report. The team are preparing a list of changes that have arisen through the EIP which will be subject to a statutory six week consultation period.

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. The project is still on target for the system to go live in December, with training events being planned for November.

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.

- **Public Protection service where resources had been in overwhelming demand during the emergency.**

Following some work being re-allocated to colleagues in the Track and Trace teams who can now provide general advice to clients, has allowed the Community and Business Protection teams to begin to address considerable backlogs within their “normal” areas of work. A restructuring of the Environmental Health teams has taken place with recruitment to vacant roles now well underway.

The above risk is to be added to the Environment & Economy OSC Forward Work Programme.

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. However, despite all that is being done, health and social care services are in a serious and deteriorating position. 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.

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 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, 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.

Streetscene and Transportation

- **Reduced numbers of frontline workers and contractors to deliver services safely due to the requirement for self-isolation.**
The service had been experiencing an increase in the numbers of frontline workforce needing to self-isolate. This was impacting on effective service delivery when combined with general sickness absence and annual leave requests over the summer holidays. Services continued to operate to the required standards through the use of agency workers and overtime. The situation stabilised for a period during August; however following the return of schools in September, general sickness absence levels have remained high and this is being compounded by HGV driver / agency staff shortages and an inability to recruit to vacant posts. 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 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.

The above risk is to be added to the Environment & Economy OSC Forward Work Programme.

- **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. Risk trend is increasing and current risk rating increased to red due to ongoing disruption in the supply chain. Early discussions to be held with funding award bodies regarding potential risks to grant funding not being expended within the specified timescales and potential carry forward of funding.

The Environment & Economy OSC will be considering 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 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.

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

- **Public bus services (commercial and subsidised) are financially unsustainable due to reduced passenger numbers**

Recent experience has demonstrated that bus operators are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain the commercial viability of some bus services without public subsidy. Passenger numbers on public transport has declined significantly over the last 18 months, which is impacting the financial sustainability of bus services. We are observing commercial services on the core bus network being withdrawn or reduced and replacement subsidised services being introduced as a result. In some cases, the subsidies provided to operators has increased by nearly threefold, which has had a knock-on effect on subsidised bus service budgets. A budget pressure of £100k+ has been declared since period four monitoring.

	<p><i>The above risk is to be added to the Environment & Economy OSC Forward Work Programme.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased transport operating costs due to reducing number of available transport operators to provide services Similarly to subsidised bus services, we are witnessing increased transport operating costs due to the reduction in the number of operators available to run services. The pandemic has seen some operators choosing to close their businesses or struggling to continue operating due to driver shortages and increased costs, such as fuel, driver wages and insurance. This is having an impact on transport contract prices when we have to procure routes. <p><i>The above risk is to be added to the Environment & Economy OSC Forward Work Programme.</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	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

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

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.