



CABINET – 1ST SEPTEMBER 2021

SUBJECT: MANAGING BUILDING AND SERVICE RISK AT ALERT LEVEL ZERO

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES



1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The move to Alert Level zero in Wales in early August along with the new universal guidance released by Welsh Government has provided an opportunity to assess whether any Council buildings that are currently closed to the public can be reopened with any risks suitably minimised.
- 1.2 The report seeks Cabinet's endorsement for an evidence-based risk model to be adopted as a basis for undertaking these building assessments in a consistent and methodical manner, while also enabling the different risk factors, and therefore overall risk, at individual settings to be considered.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 On the 7th August 2021, Welsh Government moved Wales to Alert Level Zero and introduced a set of Universal Guidance for businesses, employers, activity and event's organisers as a result.
- 2.2 While Wales is now at Alert level zero, coronavirus has not gone away and it remains a serious health risk. We have a collective responsibility to help minimise risks to protect ourselves, our employees and customers
- 2.3 The Universal Guidance has been designed to provide the 'responsible person' at businesses, workplaces, public places and events with a framework of controls through which a set of reasonable measures can be defined that minimise risks to people on premises being exposed to, or spreading, coronavirus.
- 2.4 In determining those reasonable measures the guidance provides a hierarchy of control model. The model is a widely accepted system promoted by numerous safety organisations as a way of "determining how to implement feasible and effective control solutions, leading to inherently safer systems where the risk of illness or injury has been substantially reduced".

- 2.5 The Council has continued to deliver many 'critical services' from locations such as residential care homes throughout the pandemic. Some non-critical services such as Libraries and Leisure have been made available to the public via conditional building access supported by Risk Assessments. Other premises, however, have been closed to the public since the beginning of the pandemic as part of the Councils stated aim to protect our people and place.
- 2.6 Where buildings have been completely closed to residents, services have been successfully provided through a range of alternative methods such as by telephone, online, click and collect, the use of post office cards or through staff operating an outreach service within the community. These alternative methods have enabled services to remain accessible to the public either in full or in part while appropriately balancing the risks associated with the pandemic.
- 2.7 The move to alert level zero and the revised guidance from Welsh Government includes a number of relaxations and, as such, provides an opportunity to reassess whether the previous risks associated with delivering services from those buildings closed to the public can now sufficiently mitigated, or whether the closures should remain in place.
- 2.8 This report sets out a potential framework against which all such risks can be assessed and proposes a process for managing and monitoring the potential reopening of certain Council premises that are currently closed to the public.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Cabinet agree to:
- 1) Endorse the Hierarchy of Controls Template set out in Appendix 1 as the mechanism by which the reintroduction of in person services can be assessed
 - 2) That the planning for the reopening of Reception and Customer Services at Ty Penallta can now begin in accordance with the controls set out in Appendix 2 under the elimination and substitution controls
 - 3) Task relevant Heads of Service, in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member, with assessing all remaining Council buildings currently closed to the public using the template at Appendix 1
 - 4) Receive a supplementary report at its meeting of the 29th September 2021 that sets out which of those council buildings should now be reopened and under what conditions and controls
 - 5) To receive reports that outline any further changes that need to be made should the guidance or risk level change again.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The change to Alert level zero in August has provided an opportunity for the Council to assess whether the risks associated with delivering non-critical services from council buildings that are currently closed can now be sufficiently mitigated. With a legal responsibility to ensure that reasonable measures are introduced that minimise risks to people on premises being exposed to or spreading coronavirus it is important that a

consistent framework is agreed and utilised. It is equally important that these risks and reasonable measures remain under review as future changes to the guidance or local situation emerge.

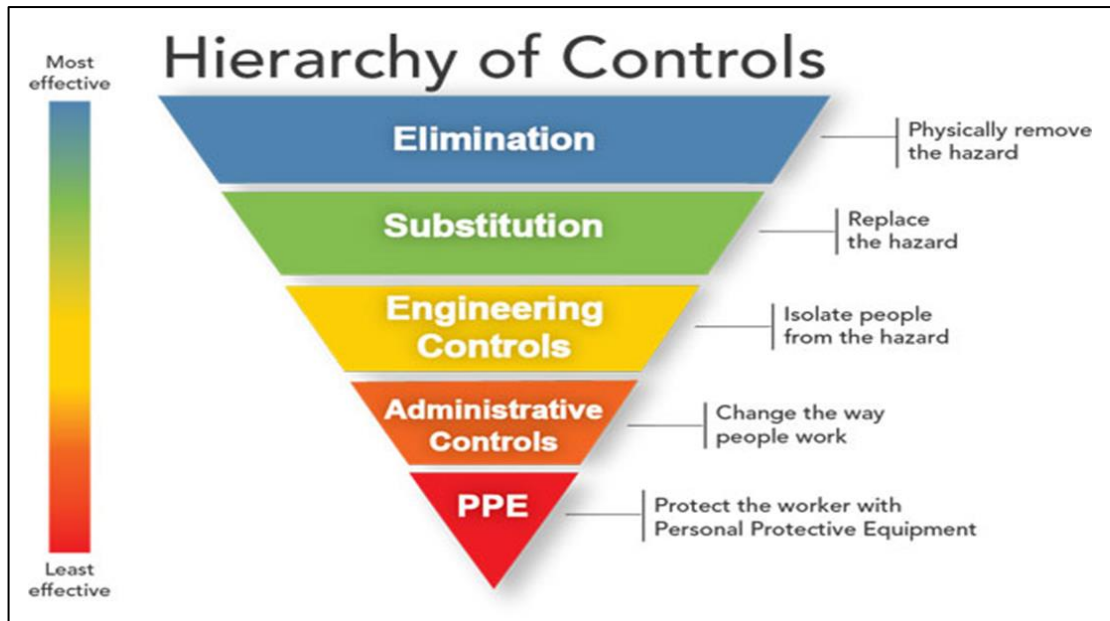
5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Wales moved to Alert level zero early in August, but coronavirus has not gone away and remains a serious health risk. As a result, Welsh Government has also introduced Universal Guidance for businesses, workplaces, public places and events.
- 5.2 The Council has a legal responsibility to protect workers, visitors, clients and face to face customers who attend our premises from risks to their health and safety and must do everything reasonably practicable to minimise those risks.
- 5.3 The risks attached to COVID-19 are significantly reduced when premises and buildings are closed. Moving from a closed setting to one that is accessible by workers, visitors, clients and face to face customers naturally increases that risk.
- 5.4 Each setting will also differ in terms of available space, required staffing levels, ventilation and the ability to support separate access and egress. As a result the risks of reopening buildings that are currently closed will differ depending on a range of local factors.
- 5.5 As a result, each setting will need to be individually risk assessed, with only buildings that can support effective controls and the implementation of reasonable measures to minimise risks, ultimately being reopened at this point.
- 5.6 The hierarchy of controls presented within the Welsh Government Guidance is widely accepted as an effective way of determining how to implement feasible and effective control solutions that lead to inherently safer systems where the risk of illness or injury has been substantially reduced. These are explored over coming paragraphs.
- 5.7 Hierarchy of Controls:

The model includes five levels of control which range from Elimination as the most effective method of managing the risk to PPE as the least effective.

Elimination	-	Physically remove the hazard
Substitution	-	Replace the hazard
Engineering Controls	-	Isolate people from the hazard
Administrative Controls	-	Change the way people work
Personal Protective Equipment	-	Protect the worker with PPE

Within each control a range of scientifically evidenced measures are proposed that could be applied to each setting and situation in order to minimise risk



5.7.1 **Elimination: aim to avoid or remove the risk.** (most effective intervention) to stop people becoming exposed and infected. There are different ways that this can be done but they should include:

- Stopping an infectious person being in an environment by, for example, prohibit people from attending if they feel unwell, and advising they should get tested and ensuring that all employees follow self-isolation advice if they are a contact of a possible confirmed case.
- Ensuring that accurate records are kept of which employees (and, where applicable, customers/visitors/clients) have been present so that they can be contact traced if necessary.
- Closing high risk environments in your work setting as much as possible, such as areas where social distancing cannot be maintained.
- Staff takes both vaccine doses as soon as recommended.

5.7.2 **Substitution – aim change the risky activity for a less risky one.** There are different ways that this can be done but they could include:

- Reducing the time that people come into face-to-face contact.
- Changing work patterns so that people work in a fixed group or cohort or arrive at and leave work at staggered times. This limits the number of people that the virus can potentially spread to.
- Moving to working outdoors to reduce how much the virus can spread through surface contamination and aerosol transmission.
- Using other technologies to replace face-to-face interactions, for example using 'click and collect' technologies, remote working, phone/video consultations.
- Installation of partitions at appropriate places (e.g. reception desks or between work stations) to separate staff etc. If used ensure they are cleaned and disinfected in line with cleaning procedures. Cleaning, hygiene and handwashing to make your workplace COVID-secure ([hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk))

5.7.3 **Engineering controls – aim to try to lower the risk by changing the way the activity takes place.** Different approaches can be taken to do this such as:

- Using anti-microbial surfaces
- Reduce shared surfaces, where this cannot be avoided altogether
- Using no-touch (contactless) technologies
- Providing additional hand wash stations
- Regular handwashing and sanitising, including providing facilities and signage to encourage regular handwashing and sanitising
- Increasing fresh-air ventilation in poorly ventilated spaces
- Limiting or controlling movement of people, for example one way systems, or limiting number of people accessing confined areas such as lifts, toilet facilities, kitchens or meeting rooms at the same time
- Provide clear signage (eg signs, floor tape or paint) for physical distancing, queuing systems, one way systems etc.
- Encourage vaccination take up of your workforce
- Physical distancing of staff and customers/children
- Limit time spent and/or numbers in rooms before ventilation
- Workforce planning and teams to maintain operational capacity
- Effective communications and feedback on improvements for community safety
- Remove unnecessary restrictions when it is safe, in order to promote adherence to necessary ones

5.7.4 **Administrative Controls - aim to lower any remaining risks of exposure.** There are different ways that this can be done but they should include:

- Frequently cleaning surfaces that are touched a lot
- Increasing training on quality and effectiveness of cleaning
- Providing hand sanitiser
- Avoiding sharing of equipment such as 'hot-desking'
- Reducing how many people are working in a particular location by, for example, encouraging home working where possible
- Staggering shifts
- Ensuring people are maintaining physical distance between them,
- The use of face-coverings and or face-shields in indoors areas for workers and members of the public
- Covid-passport/Covid-certificate or PCR testing, encourage LFD at home

5.7.5 **Personal protective equipment (PPE) – aim to protect the worker from residual exposure through use of PPE. (Least effective intervention)** Attention must be paid to avoiding infection control during wear, removal, storage and disposal

- Fluid resistant surgical face masks (where indicated by guidance)
- Gloves and aprons
- Eye protection

5.8 Attached at Appendix 1 is a template that sets out the hierarchy of controls and a range of measures within that enable the risks of reopening a setting to be assessed. Appendix 2 includes a completed template undertaken by the Head of Customer and Digital Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance that supports the reintroduction of reception and customer services from the ground floor of Ty Penallta, which is currently closed to the public.

- 5.9 Subject to Cabinet approving the recommendations within this report, Heads of Service in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member or Members will use the template at Appendix 1 to complete an assessment of each Council building that is currently closed.
- 5.10 Having carried out the assessments, the template requires the Head of Service to make a recommendation as to whether the building should reopen or not, the level of control that should be applied and any considerations that need to be taken in to account.
- 5.11 Once these assessments have been undertaken across the Council buildings that are currently closed, a further report will be brought back to Cabinet and an approved position will be established. Further reports will also be delivered should new guidance be released, COVID case prevalence change, or Alert Levels are adjusted again in the future. Buildings will remain closed to the public until such time as the relevant assessments have been carried out and Cabinet approval has been received.
- 5.12 There will be instances whereby a closed building is occupied by more than one service and one Head of Service. In this situation it may not be possible to open the building to all services in order to maintain a Covid safe environment. Therefore, in these circumstances, the relevant Heads of Service that occupy the building will undertake a joint risk assessment and make a joint recommendation on opening the building and the appropriate services that could be provided in a covid safe environment.
- 5.13 While this report seeks to manage the safe reopening of Council premises to the public, it is also worth recognizing that the move to Alert level zero provides an opportunity to assess whether the current restrictions on staff access to Council buildings can also be relaxed.
- 5.14 Many staff are now routinely working from home and the Council is progressing an approach to Agile Working through a separate Corporate Review. As this review progresses, a 10% increase on the total building capacity has been proposed for staff access to the Council's main administrative buildings, subject to the necessary risk assessments being in place. This would take the capacity at Ty Penallta for example up from 100 (of 1000 desks) to 200 per day.
- 5.15 This additional capacity should enable those staff who find working remotely from the office a significant challenge to begin spending a greater proportion of the working week physically in the workplace while not departing from the agile principles that are being developed.
- 5.16 In addition, the Council is also in the process of procuring and implementing a technology solution for use across its Meeting rooms that will enable hybrid meetings (a mix of in person and remote) to take place. The work is on course to be concluded in September and, subject to relevant training then being undertaken, hybrid meetings should be possible in the very near future.
- 5.17 **Conclusion**

This report seeks to establish a consistent, evidence-based framework against which the risk of reopening Council's buildings that are currently closed to the public can be

assessed, and recommendations can be made on the reasonable measures and conditions that would support any future reopening.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 None.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 This report does not require an IIA as it seeks only to adopt a template and commission further work ahead of any change being implemented.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There should be no significant adverse financial implications attached to this report as budgets remain in place for the operation of core council buildings.

8.2 There may be adhoc expenditure required should recommendations be to open specific settings that require additional safety features (partitions, signage etc) to be purchased.

8.3 It is also possible that should the reopening of buildings require redeployed staff to return to their substantive posts, additional fixed term resources would need to be recruited.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Where reasonable measures include the deployment of staff that are double vaccinated there may be some personal implications that emerge if staff that are employed in front facing roles are not sufficiently vaccinated. Vaccinations remain a matter of personal choice, therefore there may be a need to redeploy staff in order to mitigate any risks highlighted, which will be worked through accordingly.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 The consultees are set out at the bottom of this report and any views received are set out below:

Author: Richard (Ed) Edmunds Corporate Director Education & Corp Services

Consultees: Cllr. Philippa Marsden, Leader of the Council
Cllr. Colin Gordon, Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance
Christina Harray, Chief Executive
Cllr Colin Mann, Leader, Plaid Cymru
Cllr Kevin Etheridge, Leader, Independent
Corporate Management Team
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
Steve Harris, Head of Corporate Finance & S151 Officer

Leadership Team
Cllr Gez Kirby, Chair of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Brenda Miles, Vice Chair of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Appendices:

Appendix 1 HOC Template Blank

Appendix 2 Completed HOC Template for Customer Services at Ty Penallta