

Mid Wales Joint Committee - Recovery in Mid Wales report: Ceredigion County Council

COVID-19 Response in Ceredigion

Predictions for Ceredigion from PHW at start of Pandemic 60,000 infected and 1% would die. A Gold Command structure was initiated in March 2020 which enabled timely key decisions and actions to be completed

Ceredigion County Council identified a clear vision that every single person, business and service could understand and agree upon in order to ensure Ceredigion succeeded in not only reducing predicted deaths through the first peak but more importantly for any future predicted peaks.

- Phase 1 - Preparedness – Closing down of all non-essential services
- Phase 2 - Implementation – Delivering services under lockdown conditions
- Phase 3 - Adjustment and long term resilience
- Phase 4 - Recovery

To date number of cases in Ceredigion is 1771 (as of 26/4/21)
Rate per 100,000 = 2,436.2 - lowest in Wales

Strategy and decision-making during the pandemic

- Adjustment & long term resilience plan
- Winter strategy –
 1. Protection of the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable, including care services for the elderly and those whose medical conditions make them particularly at risk from COVID-19.
 2. Protection of the education provision within schools, colleges and universities.
 3. Enable the local economy to survive the winter months.

Gold Command structure and decisions

The Gold Command structure and process has enabled the following key decisions to be made and initiated:

- Support for most vulnerable – food boxes, welfare calls
- Contact tracing – early stages
- Safeguarding reports to GC whilst emergency powers in place
- Care homes – effective guidance, negative test on discharge, no visiting, no mixing of staff, restricted visits by professionals
- Business grants/funding - prevention of hardship
- Silver command groups set up specifically, Residential care, Contact tracing/TTP, Economic Adjustment, Vaccination/Testing,
- Senior representation at local and regional IMT's

- Senior representation on Covid specific local and regional forums including the Ceredigion Covid Response Group, Regional Safeguarding Covid Group, Sub groups of the RPB/PSB,

Adjustment and Recovery planning

It must be recognised that all essential services have been maintained throughout the pandemic albeit with an element of restriction to minimise risk of infection and to keep the public, service users and staff safe and minimise risk of spread of the infection. Those restrictions are now being considered across all service areas within the Council.

A 3 phase recovery plan approach has been adopted across all service areas. Each plan is presented to Gold Command for discussion and approval and is then provided to Leadership Group/Cabinet meetings for information.

The Council has a public facing road map which outlines the key milestones in relation to service changes and the phased reinstatement of services.

Recovery plans presented to date have included areas such as:

- Residential care homes (staff sustainability and visiting arrangements)
- Learning Disability and Older Peoples day services
- Respite care
- A wide range of Early Intervention/Prevention services including Organised outdoor vocational, learning and work, Employment Support Team to restart paid Work and Volunteering Opportunities, Organised and approved outdoor children/young people's group activity, Outdoor Health Intervention Classes / Exercise Classes for Adults
- Mental Wellbeing school counselling

Workforce Challenges

A redeployment programme of staff was implemented in the early stages of the pandemic to assist key services including care homes and school hubs caring for vulnerable children. There has been a continued focus on recruitment with a number of campaigns both internally but also supporting external providers with campaigns.

Some of the current challenges include the recruitment and retention of key staff including Social Workers and Occupational Therapists, however it is acknowledged that this is a National trend and opportunities around regional working has been explored. The Council has a strategy for meeting this challenge including the following approaches:

- Social Work traineeship reviewed 2019
- Offering academic opportunities
- Swansea University placements
- Reviewing job roles and evaluations
- Refreshing advertising - intensive campaign to join Ceredigion

Supporting Staff Wellbeing

We have committed to providing responsive, accessible and inclusive support to staff throughout the pandemic, this has included:

- Employee Health & Wellbeing Officer
- Employee Assistance Package
- Occupational Health
- Responsive approach including, wellbeing surveys/questionnaires, discussions with managers & teams, streamlined appraisal process, drop in sessions
- Organisation wide activity and support including, information on intranet, Wellbeing Wednesdays, Activities, Wellbeing Webinars, Shielding staff
- Social care workforce specifically - Dedicated health and wellbeing webinars, regular meetings with Corporate Manager/Registered Managers, Individual support within care homes

New ways of future working

The last 12 months has meant a significant change in the way that the Council and its staff has had to work and meet the daily demand of the services it provides. With all staff working from home (unless their role requires them to be front facing i.e. residential care home staff, enablement etc.) there has been a reliance on digital technology and remote working.

A silver command group was agreed to consider how the council could work in the future with the learning from the pandemic taken into account. The vision is to provide a modern, flexible work environment that supports agility and encourages collaborative activity. The aim to create workplaces that are not only cost effective, but strengthen our corporate culture, increase engagement with our Ceredigion community and improve service delivery. A staff survey and focus groups have been held to determine what the 'new ways of working' will be and this will then inform an estates strategy for the future. It is proposed that this will promote the health and wellbeing of the workforce, encourage and support agile and flexible working, increase public facing spaces whilst also reducing the carbon footprint and promoting environmental resilience.

Financial and business recovery

The Council has enabled and empowered a range of services and initiatives via various funding streams from Welsh Government during the pandemic. These have included the Hardship fund that has specifically provided support for residential and front line care services. This fund will continue in the short term to allow internal and commissioned services to focus on their recovery plans. There has been grant funding for businesses and support for the reopening of the visitor economy which is so important to the general economic recovery within Ceredigion.

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