

Committee	COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date	25 February 2021
Job Title	The work of the Public Protection Services during the pandemic
Cabinet Member	Councillor Gareth W Griffith
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Purpose	Provide an explanation on the work of the Public Protection Services, including the Test, Trace and Protect Service, during the pandemic

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The period of the pandemic has highlighted the importance of the work that the Council, through the Public Protection Services, is doing to protect the health of our residents and to support the area's businesses. The purpose of this report is to explain to the Scrutiny Committee and receive their observations, on how the work of the Public Protection Services has had to adapt in order to give priority to responding to the pandemic and the public health crisis.
- 1.2 The report also refers to matters that have been raised by the Cabinet in relation to the need for the Council to ensure the resilience of our Public Protection Services in the future, as well as the Environment Department's response to this.

2. THE PRE-PANDEMIC PERIOD

- 2.1 Before the pandemic struck, there were three Public Protection Services in the Department, namely:

Pollution Control and Licensing Service
Trading Standards and Animal Health / Animal Feed Services
Food, Health and Safety Service (including infectious diseases)

- 2.2 The day-to-day work fields of the **Pollution Control and Licensing Service** generally relate to protecting the public in relation to a range of environmental and health matters, including:
- Responding to air, land and water contamination and noise pollution
 - Inspecting businesses with industrial processes
 - Assessing the safety of private drinking water supplies and quality of bathing waters
 - Dealing with licensing matters in the fields of alcohol, entertainment, gambling, vehicle, driver and taxi operators, pet shops, caravan sites, scrap metal dealers
 - Arranging funerals when the deceased has no family
- 2.3 The day-to-day work fields of the **Trading Standards and Animal Health / Animal Feed Services**, relate to promoting, maintaining and ensuring a fair and just environment whilst protecting the interests of the residents and businesses of Gwynedd, as well as protect animal and public welfare by ensuring that animal feed meets specific standards. The work includes:

- ensuring fair trading, safety of goods and preventing the sales of age-restricted goods
- raising awareness of scams and illegal money lending
- dealing with legal estate agent and property descriptions matters
- licensing and enforcing petroleum and explosives/fireworks conditions
- holding programmed and responsive animal welfare and animal feed inspections
- weights and measures - ensuring that customers receive the correct amount of goods they purchase
- dealing with markets and fairs

2.4 The day-to-day work fields of the **Food, Health and Safety Service (including infectious diseases)**, includes programmed and responsive inspections in order to:

- Ensure that food and drink sold that is manufactured, stored, distributed, treated or used in the County, is free of any risk to the health and safety of the consumer and is in compliance with constitutional and labelling requirements.
- Prevent deaths, injuries and conditions that are associated with workplaces.
- Protect residents and visitors to Gwynedd against infectious diseases and harmful chemicals.
- Assist and support Gwynedd businesses to meet with the required statutory requirements.

3. THE PERIOD SINCE THE PANDEMIC STRUCK

3.1 In light of the pandemic, Public Protection duties involving infectious diseases have clearly become one of the Council's main priorities, and therefore a new Service has been created to undertake the relevant work, namely: **The Test, Trace and Protect Service - Covid**.

3.2 The Test, Trace and Protect service (TTP) was established in May 2020 and came into operation on 1 June 2020. By now, the Service employs 103 workers. The aims of the Test, Trace and Protect Services in Gwynedd are to:

- Reduce the spread of COVID-19 across our communities by supporting people infected with the virus to isolate during their infectious period;
- Identify the people who have been in contact with a positive case of COVID-19 and support them to isolate until the symptoms or the incubation period have elapsed;
- Support people with symptoms to get access to a COVID-19 test;
- Work with specialist partners in the risk management area to control any risks for people who are isolating together with wider communities and businesses in Gwynedd.

3.3 The Service includes the following functions:

- **Tracing Officers**, namely the initial point of contact for individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19. The tracing officer will discuss the symptoms, date of the outset of symptoms, the people who have been in contact with them, identify any risks, and work with the relevant support partner to manage these risks.

- **Advisors**, who are responsible for tracing people who have been in contact with the positive case. They will support them to isolate for 10 days.
- **Business Support Supervisors**, who support the tracing officers and advisors in their functions in terms of welfare and technical issues, manage the flow of cases/contacts on our IT systems, ensure the quality of their work and manage the interface of the TTP Service with other Gwynedd Council departments and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board.
- **Business Manager**, who monitors and manages the operational performance of the team.
- **Head of Service**, namely the Lead TTP Officer for Gwynedd

3.4 The Service is a combination of Gwynedd Council colleagues who have been redeployed to work specifically on TTP, Gwynedd Council colleagues (with other jobs) who work as bank staff to provide additional resilience, and colleagues who are employed by Flintshire County Council (North Wales TTP host authority).

3.5 Since June 2020, TTP in Gwynedd has responded to:

- 8049 cases of COVID-19 in Gwynedd, total between 01/06/20-31/12/20
- 1420 cases (Index cases) of COVID-19 have been identified, 01/06/20-31/12/20
- 6513 contacts to Index Cases have been created
- On average, in Gwynedd each positive Index Case has 4.67 contacts.

3.6 The Service has a strong network of partners, including:

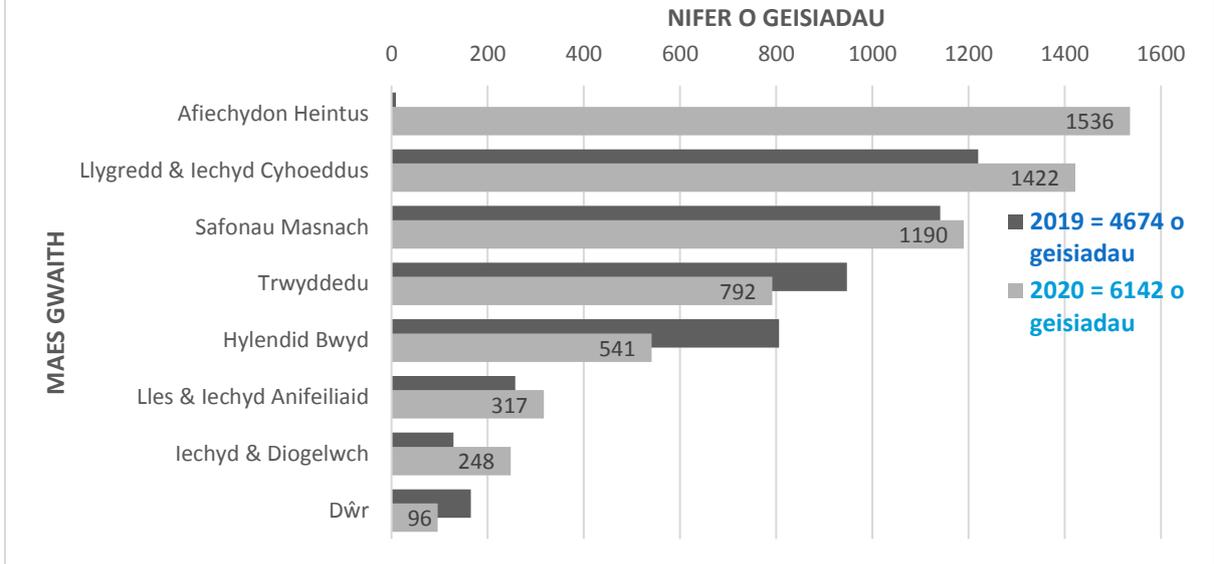
- The three Gwynedd Council Public Protection Services, who are collaborating to control the risks in businesses, pubs/cafes/restaurants, transport networks;
- Gwynedd Council Social Services, who are collaborating to manage the risks to residents of all ages when they isolate, as well as the risks in our care homes;
- Gwynedd Council's Education Service, who are collaborating to control the risks in our schools;
- Gwynedd Council's Human Resources Team, who are collaborating to support and manage our staff, and the staff employed by Flintshire County Council;
- Gwynedd Council's Finance Team, who are collaborating with Flintshire County Council (namely the host authority), to manage the budget for TTP;
- All North Wales Local Authorities, who are collaborating on cross-boundary cases, and offer support as needed at extremely busy times;
- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, who are collaborating to control and advise of any medical risks or complications;
- Public Health Wales, who are collaborating to provide strategic guidance and the operational systems we use;
- Welsh Government, who lead on TTP for Wales.

3.7 In addition to dealing with cases in Gwynedd, the Service is undertaking substantial work on behalf of other local authorities across Wales - and this is called joint support. Since 1 June 2020, we have provided the following support throughout Wales to other local authorities:

- Approximately 550 positive COVID-19 cases
- Approximately 370 contacts to positive cases

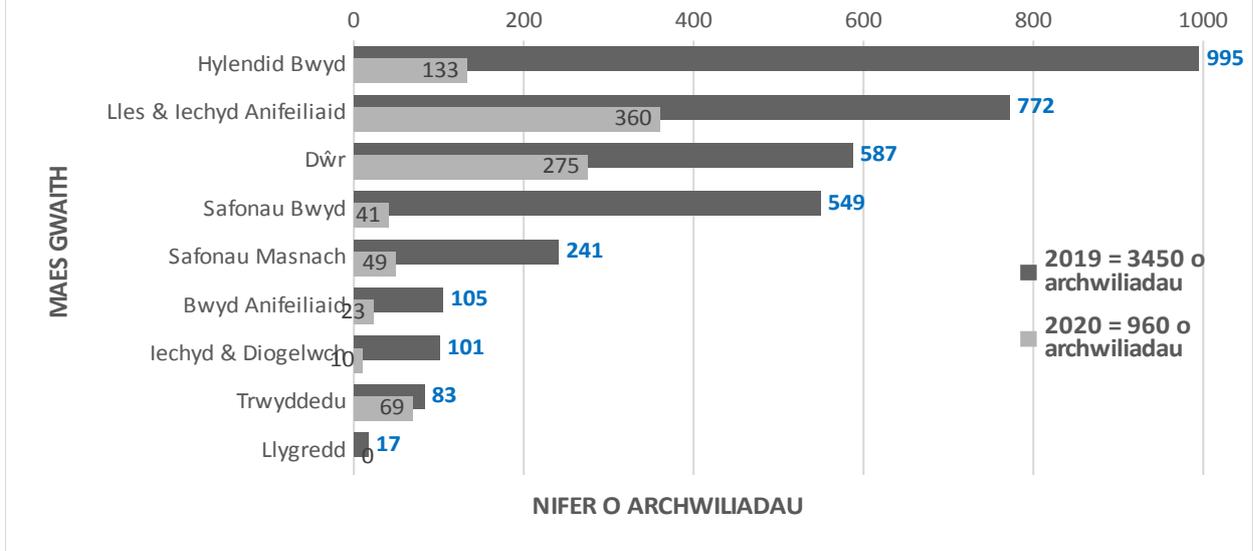
- 3.8 The flexibility of the TTP model enables us to be more resilient throughout the whole of Wales, to reduce the spread of the virus and ensure that we make the best use of public funding.
- 3.9 As well as initiate the need to create the new Service, the pandemic has had a direct impact on the day-to-day work of the three Public Protection Services referred to in part 2 of the report.
- 3.10 The majority of the duties in terms of enforcing the new coronavirus regulations have been implemented by Public Protection officers. Therefore, since March 2020, in response to the Covid pandemic crisis, the Public Protection Services have had to adapt and prioritise, in order to contribute to the spread of the virus as follows.
- 3.11 The Food and Health and Safety Service officers have been providing guidance to residential homes, businesses, schools, colleges and the university and individuals, in response to cases of Covid, and preparing specialist advice on hygiene measures and self-isolation guidance. The Food, Health and Safety Service officers, since their normal duties involve dealing with infectious diseases, addressed the task and initial challenge of establishing the Test, Trace and Protect Service.
- 3.12 The officers of the Trading Standards, Pollution and Licensing Services have been responding to requests for advice from businesses, and complaints from the public in relation to the Covid control regulations, and taking enforcement steps when appropriate in order to keep people safe. Officers have carried out inspections and support, advisory and monitoring campaigns in various business premises and sectors, e.g. supermarkets, garden centres, hairdressers, the taxi industry, etc. and have worked closely with other agencies as needed, for example, with the Police when carrying out proactive visits to pubs and restaurants over the busy summer period.
- 3.13 The Services have also been responding to an increase in domestic noise complaints and complaints about burning garden waste, which is likely to be associated with the fact that many are working from home.
- 3.14 The chart below shows the number of Service requests received by the three Public Protection Services during the same periods in 2020 and 2019, which provides the context for the impact on the type of work that has been done by the Services.

Siart i gymharu'r nifer o geisiadau am wasanaeth a dderbyniwyd yn ystod y cyfnod 1 Ebrill - 31 Rhagfyr yn 2019 a 1 Ebrill i 31 o Ragfyr 2020



3.15 The response of the services to the Covid crisis has meant that this work has had to be prioritised over many core duties - such as the food hygiene inspection programmes, animal feed hygiene, animal welfare inspections, sampling of private drinking water supplies, industrial processes inspections, trading standards visits, such as scam prevention, etc. Periods of national lockdown and social distancing regulations have meant that it has not been possible to hold inspections at a number of businesses over the period also, although some inspections have been held, based on risk. The chart below compares the inspections during the same period in 2020 and 2019.

Siart yn cymharu'r nifer o archwiliadau a gynhaliwyd yn ystod y cyfnod 1 Ebrill - 31 Rhagfyr yn 2019 ac yna yn 2020



- 3.16 Since the pandemic struck, the Department has been leading and contributing to work with partners locally, regionally and nationally, in relation to preventing the spread of the virus, and this continues.

4. THE RESILIENCE OF THE COUNCIL'S PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICES

- 4.1 The period of the pandemic has highlighted the key role that the Public Protection Services have in protecting the health of Gwynedd's residents, and in this case, in preventing the spread of the virus. It has also highlighted the impact of years of cuts on the resilience of the Public Protection Service, and this is an issue that the Cabinet has asked the Department to respond to.
- 4.2 The Department has already started to address resilience in the Public Protection Services in the short-term, as well as the long-term, and has had Cabinet support to appoint three Community Engagement Officers, for a period up to the end of March 2022, with grant funding contributing to the costs.
- 4.3 In the short-term, the purpose of the three Community Engagement Officers is to have a visual presence in our communities and towns, in particular as restrictions begin to ease, who advise and assist businesses and residents on Covid issues, as well as report back on issues that could arise at the time. It is intended for them to become familiar faces in our communities, and a direct contact between Public Protection Services (and other Council Departments where practical) and Gwynedd residents and businesses. This can then assist the Public Protection Services to focus more on issues that are more complex and contentious in nature.
- 4.4 It is intended to use the interim period as an opportunity to invest in these Officers in the short-term, but with an eye on the long-term. Therefore, as well as an initial training period (which will be held by the Public Protection Services) in order to prepare the individuals to go out to the towns and communities, a programme of more comprehensive training is drawn up for the full period, and this includes:
- Training and experiences of the Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) work and of work in the various fields across the Public Protection Services
 - Allocate officers from the Public Protection Services to mentor the Community Engagement Officers
 - The above will include shadowing Public Protection Services officers in their day-to-day work.
- 4.5 Appointing to the temporary posts would therefore not only contribute towards the work in the pandemic, but will also be an opportunity to attempt to develop careers for the individuals in Public Protection fields, which could assist the Council to create more resilient Services in the long-term. Recent experiences have shown that it is difficult to attempt to recruit officers for Public Protection Services, in light of the need for relevant qualifications, training and experiences, and the training programme could be a solution for this whilst recruiting for the long-term.
- 4.6 These officers were appointed recently and it is expected that a reasonable amount of time will be required for initial training and to familiarise with Council arrangements, before the new officers will be in a position to fully undertake their duties.
- 4.7 The Department will monitor the situation over the coming months, in terms of the service's provision and the staff capacity that is needed to ensure the resilience of the Public Protection Services in the future.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to accept the report and make any observations.