IMPACT OF COVID-19
on ICT & CORPORATE POLICY

December 2020

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Cyngor **Sir Gâr**
Carmarthenshire
County Council

KEY SERVICE STATISTICS DURING COVID-19
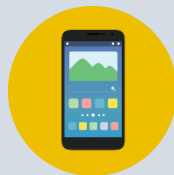
Supported over **2,000 STAFF WORKING FROM HOME**

…rising to support for over **3,000 REMOTE CONNECTIONS ON NETWORK**

Rolled out **MICROSOFT TEAMS to ALL HOME-WORKING STAFF (2,400)** by end of March

Rolled out **over 400+ SMARTPHONES** And

deployed **over 300 WORKS DESK-PHONES**

Assisted NHS with the **SETUP OF 4 FIELD HOSPITALS**

Provided the following equipment to students at home:

1,603 DEVICES

240 4G MIFI DONGLES

241 MOBILE CONNECTIVITY DEVICES

80 IPADS TO CARE HOME RESIDENTS

470 COMPLIMENTS received

451 COMPLAINTS received

627 FOIA/EIR REQUESTS received

431 RESPONDED to

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Our Digital Technology Strategy set out a new approach that would underpin just about everything we do as a Council and when the pandemic struck we were in a good state of preparedness.

We had been taking advantage of new digital platforms so that our residents and businesses could find information or complete their dealings with the local authority in ways that are convenient to them and also saved public money. This vision and investment put us in a favourable position at the onset to move services on-line and to facilitate home working.

Our Digital Transformation Strategy Aims & How It Was Put Into Practise During The Pandemic:

A Cloud First Approach

The Authority's decision to spend £1.9m of investment in agile working initiatives, including providing staff with the right equipment to allow them to work in a more agile and flexible way, together with improvements to the resilience of the IT network, has helped support an almost seamless move to homeworking. Having the right equipment in place meant that staff could be operational from home immediately with no disruption to customers.

Staff appear to have adapted well to the greater reliance of technology and many services are embracing the opportunities and benefits that this can bring to the way that services are delivered in the future.

- Has allowed the *rapid development* of cloud-based solutions during the pandemic
- A number of projects that were identified already within the Authorities Digital Transformation Strategy were fast tracked *to assist front line service delivery* during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Has enabled staff to work from the best possible locations
- We procured and rolled out *over 400+ Smartphones* by the end of April and deployed to primarily Social Care staff that allowed them to work in a more agile, efficient manner without the need to visit Council buildings to collect work rotas etc.
- *'Bring Your Own Device'* (BYOD) was useful to enable non office-based staff to have access to systems and the intranet

Resilient Data and Voice Network

- The *network is the foundation of everything we do* in terms of technology
- Ensuring we had a *digital infrastructure to cope with over 2,000 members* of staff working from home was critical and to facilitate this we installed an additional firewall to handle the huge demand from home working. This work was completed before the end of March and we can now safely support over 3,000 remote connections to our network
- Assisted the NHS with ICT Support for the *setup of 4 field hospitals* across the County. This work focused on the Digital Infrastructure required within these temporary field hospitals

Modern Digital Workplace

Our work on empowering our workforce to be as efficient and effective as possible in the right place, at the right time based on the needs of citizen service delivery paid us dividends in the pandemic. The use of technology, and especially the use of Microsoft Teams, has been a vital component of the Council's response to the pandemic, and is helping to support the adoption of a far more dynamic and productive way of working. It has facilitated improved communication and team working at a local, regional, and national level.

There has been a significant shift to digital learning solutions which has supported the upskilling of staff across the organisation, and this has been vital in ensuring continuity of staffing resource to our critical services and facilitated the effective implementation of online service delivery options.

- *Roll-out of Microsoft Teams* corporately by the end of March ensured that all staff working from home (nearly 2,400 staff) could communicate with each other and meetings could progress efficiently. The individual channels within MS Teams proved an excellent way to share meeting notes and reports
- Our *Agile Working programme* had already seen 80% laptops and 20% desktops – an agile workforce must be able to work from the most appropriate location at the most appropriate time. The implementation and installation of Microsoft Teams and the move to paperless meetings all made business sense but when 'side-lined' by the pandemic proved crucial preparedness
- We deployed *over 300 of our works desk-phones* that were equipped with additional technology to staff who needed to take calls from members of the public and included the Authorities Contact Centre. Work is currently underway on upgrading our telephony infrastructure so that we can deploy smartphones for all staff across the Authority if required. This work is nearing completion and we hope to go live in December. This means that staff will be able to receive calls from members of the public to their laptops. This will remove the need for desk phones and will facilitate greater remote working
- We made sure *all Members could attend virtual Council Meetings*

Secure and resilient data centres
- The consolidation of servers, data and applications, improved overall performance through the adoption of the latest high-speed storage, making best use of technology and preparing us for cloud migration

> **We did not foresee some of the demands required by the pandemic**
> **but were in a very good position – nevertheless staff stepped up**
> **and demonstrated great creativity and commitment**

How Our Broadband and Mobile Networks Have Coped & What We Have Done To Help?

Although more people are working from home, home schooling and streaming on-line entertainment providers have explained that networks are built with ''headroom" to withstand increases in use. The increase in day-time use is still only half of evening use*.* Mobile UK, the trade body for UK mobile operators, states that networks *"have more than enough capacity"* to handle the added demand.

Everybody needs sufficient broadband speeds in order to work efficiently but data from the Open Market Review 2019 claims that there are **12,838 premises in Carmarthenshire with speeds under 30mbps.**

➢ We supported rural key workers who were experiencing digital connectivity difficulties through deploying 4G routers via a WG pilot scheme.

Residents and businesses in rural areas of Carmarthenshire will have access to more funding for better broadband. Welsh Government recently announced it has topped up the value of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme to those with less than 30Mbps.The vouchers have doubled in value and those eligible can now claim £7k for a small to medium sized business and £3,000 for residential premises*.*

➢ We supported rural communities to increase digital connectivity through actively promoting the Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme, and encouraged residents to register their interest for broadband upgrade

## Impact of ICT on Other Services:

Schools

- The *digital equity agenda* has also been a challenge for officers and for schools. The provision of IT equipment and internet access to vulnerable learners or those children who live in areas with poor broadband coverage became a much more complex task than had first been imagined and led to delays in many children receiving equipment and some confusion between schools, parents and LA officers over how the process should be managed
- Although it is estimated that *around 98% of all children now have access to digital resources at home* that will be available for them in any further period of closure, there is a feeling that any future work on the digital equity agenda should be managed centrally by LA officers who are able to have an oversight of the whole system and control over the use and distribution of devices. This would remove some of the inconsistencies in the operation of this strategy which arose between distribution hubs in different school catchments.

The following equipment has been provided:

- 1,603 devices to students at home, including laptops, Chromebooks, etc. as well as 240 4G MiFi dongles were supplied to support families with remote learning across Carmarthenshire
- 241 mobile connectivity devices to students at home

Children's Services

Flying Start Carmarthenshire became the **first Flying Start in Wales to use a mobile app** to help keep in touch with families. The team developed the app as a way to increase engagement, and to signpost families to important information and promote events in the local areas.
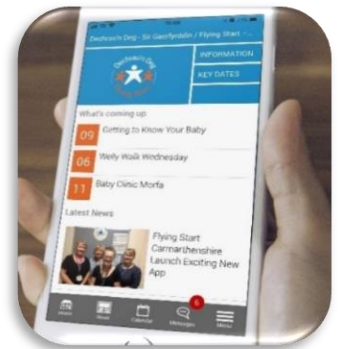
Social Care

Service specific initiatives, such as the issuing of smart phones to Social work teams has also boosted productivity.

- 80 iPads to care home residents to keep in touch with their loved ones

"Well done, distributing iPads to care homes in Carmarthenshire. I applaud you."
Compliment received

Impact On Our On-line Services:

15,539 new sign ups to My Account during the period mid-March to mid-June 2020.
(This enables our customers to manage recent requests, their Council Tax and make bookings and payments etc.)
https://myaccount.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/en

This is a *186%* increase on the same period last year

Additional on-line services that have been made available due to operating differently due to COVID-19:

- Development of *Household Waste Recycling Centres Appointments System* to allow the re-opening of the Recycling Centres/Sites. This online appointment system has ensured that members of the public could be allocated a slot and for the social distancing measures to be adhered to within the various HWRC sites across the Authority.

- Development of an in-house *Contact Tracing Database* (to assist the Central / Welsh Government Track and Trace Process and CRM System and App).

- An on-line form and Workflow for *'Application for Business Hardship Rent Relief'* was developed to allow business to apply for this Welsh Government rent relief.

- An online form and Workflow for *'Free School Meals Direct Payments Requests'* was developed ensuring accurate details and evidence was captured from families in receipt of FSM. This was also integrated with our internal financial management system allowing payments to be made to those families

- *Pembrey Country Park*:
  - *Parking Permits* and with 1- and 7-Day Online Passes/Payments (with full integration into the ANPR Car Barrier System). Minimise Cash handling and customers using the physical 'pay' machines.
  - An *on-line event booking system* was procured and is currently being implemented to ensure that on-line booking can be taken for all outdoor activities being held at Pembrey Country Park. This will eventually be extended to other areas of the Authority.

- ICT Service played a key role in *hosting and the Webcasting of Democratic meetings* from June onwards. Prior to COVID-19 democratic meetings were webcasted by an external company called Public-I but they did not have a solution in place to allow a Virtual democratic meeting to be webcasted. Microsoft Teams was used to host the virtual meeting whilst staff from ICT Services setup and facilitated the webcasting of the meeting via Vimeo and the Authorities website. A work around solution was put in place with colleagues from the Translation team to facilitate simultaneous translation but this will be simplified moving forward with the use of ZOOM for all democratic meetings.

- *QR Codes* for signing in and out of buildings and linked to a back-office database that can be accessed by the TTP team

- The Council has operated a redeployment hub run centrally by Human Resources which has matched volunteers, many from closed services. This approach has cut through the historic boundaries of different departments or constraints imposed by rigid job descriptions as Job

Evaluation criteria. *A Staff Hub Database* was developed within the 1st two weeks to add flexibility and effectiveness to the process together with clear Dashboards to present the information to senior managers.

- Prior to lockdown, both treasury management and grants processes were heavily paper based requiring either mailing or hand delivery of documents for signature to directors and heads of service. Working remotely, the Council has put in place *electronic authorisation* instead, and quickly implemented secure submission processes for grant returns to WG which have subsequently been advised as best practice by the WG grants centre of excellence. We are currently exploring technology solutions to further enhance this area of work.

- Library Collection Bookings online system was developed allowing residents to book a slot to collect their library books.

What Challenges Did We Face? (Service Feedback – TIC Report)

- Whilst there is a general recognition that the increased use of Microsoft Teams as a mechanism for supporting home-working, has had a positive on effective on organisational working and productivity, there are also some challenges presented by its use, which will need to recognised and addressed if the Council is going to be able to fully optimise the benefits associated with remote working.
- Members of staff have reported that they the use of Teams almost allows one to be too accessible, and hence will receive video/telephone calls even we engaged in other Teams meeting, often for non-urgent issues.
- Other public sector partners were not in same position with the use of technology.
- Managers and staff were concerned about the risk that remote meetings would come to be regarded as the 'go to' option when the Council returns to more normal time, as there is still very a much a place for 'face to face' meetings.
- The response to the pandemic has re-enforced the long-held view that some of the Council's back office IT systems are not fit for purpose and do not lend themselves to supporting the delivery of modern, flexible ways services

What Is The Short, Medium And Long-Term Impact?

Long term, the massive increase in the incidence of working from home provides a valuable testing ground for the adoption of flexible working solutions and service delivery beyond the current emergency.

Digital Solutions will play an ever-increasing role in our planning and delivery models.

CORPORATE POLICY

Impact On Our Service Areas:

PARTNERSHIP

PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD:

- *Virtual Carmarthenshire meetings* held in May, July and September and regional meeting with Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys PSBs held in November

- *Re-prioritisation of PSB objectives* undertaken in line with changing requirements as a result of COVID-19. In May, partners discussed their organisation's key learning points from the response phase, including links with partners, their plans for recovery and possible collaboration opportunities as part of recovery. Key areas of learning noted in terms of value of relationships built through partnership working enabling emergency response, local resilience and data sharing. Re-prioritisation to be confirmed at the December PSB meeting.

- *Foundational Economy Challenge Fund* project focusing on public sector food procurement. Project officer appointed (through virtual arrangements) to work with the Council, Health Board, University of Wales Trinity Saint David and Coleg Sir Gâr. The project has secured Welsh Government funding to look at current two key areas: procurement arrangements and the local food supply chain. Findings will be reported at the end of March 2021.

COMMUNITY SAFETY:

- *Liaison with Police* - good communication seen during response period with CI Chris Neve briefing Council on an on-going basis and increased collaboration between partners sharing information on service re-opening and closures. The good communication continues with proactive engagement with partners on police activity relating to arrests of organised crime group members involved in drug dealing in Llanelli, resulting in intelligence sharing and partnership approach to impact of arrests on local drug supply.

- *Safer Streets* - The Council was one of the partners in a bid by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys to the Home Office 'Safer Streets' funding. A grant of £195,673 has been awarded to deliver a project in two specific areas in Llanelli within the Tyisha and Glanymor wards. All funding to be spent by end March 2021. Other key delivery partners are Llanelli Town Council, Pobl Housing Association and the Community Safety Partnership. The

project will be concentrating on delivering initiatives to reduce acquisitive crime, such as burglary, vehicle theft and robbery in the areas. This will include:

- two community wardens – including recruitment and training of community volunteers;
- street lighting and physical environment investment - foliage/tree removal, street cleaning, new bins and bin maintenance
- property marking and community crime prevention kits
- community crime prevention activity support – £10,000 funding administered by the Safer Communities Partnership for groups, charities and businesses to deliver community engagement events focussing on crime prevention and community safety

- *Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO)*
  o In order to address alcohol-related crime, nuisance and disorder in parts of Llanelli Town Centre, the Council introduced a PSPO in an area of the town on 1 October 2020. The Order will remain in place for three years and will be regularly reviewed. It was introduced following analysis of reported alcohol-related crime and disorder incidents and consultation with key stakeholders.
  o Awareness has been raised of the Order by installing signs in the locality to show the area covered by the PSPO and posters have also been put up. This piece of work was delayed due to Covid but has now been fully implemented.

- *Community cohesion tension monitoring calls* - Weekly briefing calls have been held since the week after lockdown began in March. These calls, run by the community cohesion team, include representatives from the Council's Youth Support Service, Police, Fire and Rescue Service, University Trinity St David, Victim Support, Community Safety Partnership, Race Council Cymru and Llanelli LGBQT+ Support Group. These have been well attended and provided good information sharing opportunities on any topical concerns.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT:

- Initial re-deployment of staff for three months to support Education on travel passes for teachers during lockdown and then supporting School Hub staffing rotas

- Preparation and publication of the *2019/20 Annual Report* – despite the challenges from COVID-19 we were able to deliver this report in line with statutory timescales which had not been relaxed

- Prepared the *Community Impact Assessment on COVID-19*, which was presented to Executive Board on October 19th, 2020

- Reviewing Well-being Objectives in preparation for *Corporate Strategy refresh and Performance Management restart.* Liaison with Council departments and National Governing Bodies on data requirements and expectations. Timescales here have been impacted by COVID-19 with Departmental Business Plans now coming through to Scrutiny in the New Year.
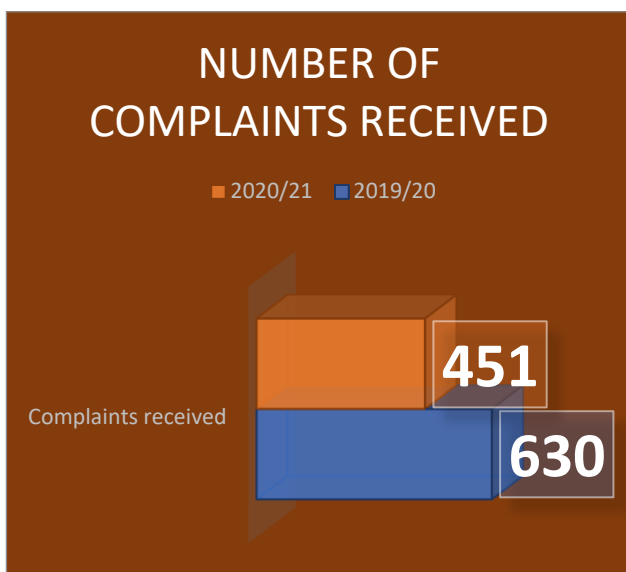
INFORMATION GOVERNANCE & COMPLAINTS

FOIA/EIR & DPA:

- **42** *Subject Access Requests* and requests for disclosure of personal data dealt with

- **627** *FOIA/EIR requests* received and **431** responded to

- Ongoing advice and assistance on *data protection compliance*, including conducting a Data Protection Impact Assessment and preparing other documentation for Test, Trace & Protect in Carmarthenshire.
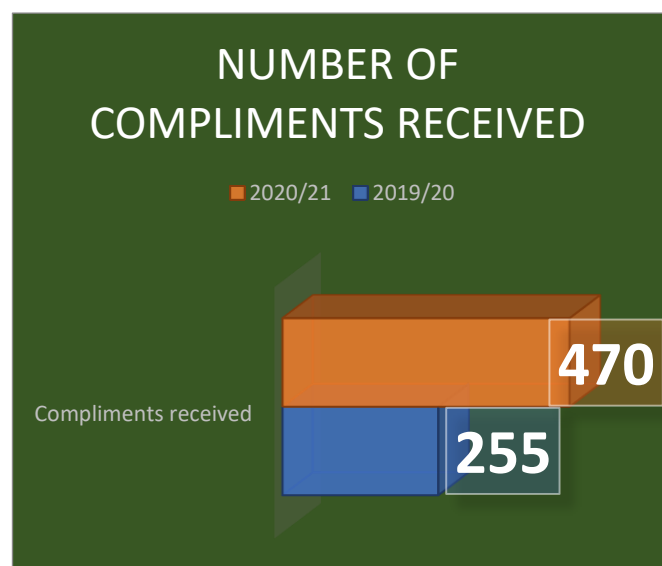
RECORDS MANAGEMENT:

- Assistance provided on the technical delivery of reducing users' U drives in preparation for *migration to OneDrive*

- Guidance produced for users on OneDrive

- *Archiving data* from the Council File Plan to SharePoint

- Continued delivery of Modern Records service

COMPLAINTS:

NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

■ 2020/21   ■ 2019/20

Complaints received

451
630

NUMBER OF COMPLIMENTS RECEIVED

■ 2020/21   ■ 2019/20

Compliments received

470
255

VARIANCE   ▼**28%**

VARIANCE   ▲**84%**

- Four training sessions on *Complaints Investigation Skills and Managing Difficult Behaviours* held/organised for around 60 members of staff