

Dear Colleague,

I hope you are all keeping well and remaining positive as we head out of February and start to see the early shoots of Spring.

I, like many of you, managed to enjoy a few days off last week for half term. It was great to spend some quality time with my family and, although we couldn't go far, it was an opportunity to stay well away from the laptop! I managed only to paint one panel of my fence last Monday before the rain came down and it didn't stop for the whole week thereafter. I'm hoping Easter is going to be a little kinder weather wise.

I certainly hit the ground with a bang on my return to work this week as it's been very busy, progressing a number of significant developments that will help shape the direction of our authority in future.

Firstly, after months of development and positioning, Cabinet agreed our ambitious Wellbeing Placeshaping Framework on Wednesday. This framework offers a package of investment totalling almost half a billion pounds. This includes £231 million of new investment over the next few years to support the community as we emerge out of the Covid pandemic, providing optimism and resilience for the future. For the first time, we have packaged all of our capital investment together, bringing together key areas such as education, leisure, employment, housing, social care and environmental infrastructure improvements. Looking through this wider lens we are able to make a great impact, from a socio-economic perspective.

Consultation and engagement will be fundamental part of this process, so we will ensure that residents are encouraged to have their say and help shape the plans. Watch this space and please make sure you get involved in this exciting piece of work over the coming months. Just to remind you that this workstream is a fundamental part of our Team Caerphilly transformation programme, which essentially has two objectives – to transform our communities and to transform how the Council works.

On Wednesday, we saw the 2021/22 budget agreed at a meeting of full Council. Again after months of work, the draft budget (having already been agreed by Cabinet) was referred to Council for decision. This is one of the major decisions the Council makes each year and, as expected, there was lots of debate and questioning, particularly around the proposed Council Tax level.

As I've outlined previously, this is a 'zero cuts' budget for next year that will not result in any new savings requirements for 21/22. It provides us with a firm platform upon which to accelerate the transformation programme, as our medium term financial plan highlights the need for major savings over the next few years. We don't want to salami slice our services to achieve this, rather more, we want to make what we do more purposeful and efficient. The service reviews that we are progressing, aim to achieve this in part, as well as the 10 corporate reviews we are commencing.

As both these important decisions have now been made, we now need to get things moving..

I recognise that staff at all levels across the organisation have been doing their bit to make savings and identify efficiencies, so I would like to thank you all for your ongoing efforts and I look forward to the great things that are yet to come. So, expect to see lots happening over the next 12 months

Now onto some other updates –

- Covid – the vaccination programme is going well and numbers are increasing, the capacity in our hospitals is increasing and our case numbers are reducing (90 cases per 100,000 population for us today) - everything is going in the right direction, but we have 7 variants of the virus that are being closely monitored across Wales, so the risk of the virus increasing rapidly is still very much with us, hence the very cautious approach to any relaxation of the restrictions that WG are taking.
Foundation phase children returned to school this week and it has been great to see lots of smiling and happy children at school via social media. The impact of this change is being closely monitored in terms of Covid case numbers and as long as there is no immediate surge in the R number, it is very likely that more children will return to school from the 15th March.
- Former Leader Ombudsman investigation - you will be aware that over the past 17 months the Ombudsman has been investigating a complaint about the conduct of the former Leader of Council. The Council has been awaiting the outcome of these proceedings, but yesterday we were made aware that the investigation has now concluded and the matter has been referred to the Adjudication Panel for Wales to make a determination. I don't have any further information at the moment, but I will keep you updated as appropriate as matters proceed.

Finally, I've attached a photograph of a fantastic gift that I received from a CEO colleague recently which reflects our 'be bold, be brave, be brilliant' mantra. I'd love to see photos of similar items that you have which reflect our ambitions and provide you with inspiration or motivation every day. So, let's see your mugs, teddy bears, t shirts or other similar items. Send your pics to communicationsunit@caerphilly.gov.uk.

Stay safe, keep well and please take a look at the attached infographic that contains a few much-needed wellbeing tips for us all. (See below)

Have a great weekend – let's hope the England-Wales rugby match goes our way!

Take care
Christina

How to spot Wellbeing red flags among your colleagues

It can be hard enough to spot when someone is struggling but working remotely makes this even harder. The lack of genuine human connection makes it easy to go unnoticed and we can miss the cues we would usually pick up on inside the office.

Keep these red flags in mind and check in on your colleagues.

The long sigh

Sighing can be the body's way of regulating breathing during times of stress. It's also used as a subconscious message of upset or distress without having to verbally say so.



"I'm alright"

But what does 'Alright' actually mean? Is it good or bad? Often we can hide our true feelings behind 'alright' if we don't feel comfortable sharing what's really going on.



"I'm exhausted!"

Lack of sleep or exhaustion are often precursors to burnout. It's the body's way of telling you to rest.

We might accept it as normal with our busy lives but listen to what your body is saying!



Overwhelm

Does someone look worried or stressed when new work comes in?

They may be overwhelmed because they're running low on time, emotional capacity and energy.



"Fine! Whatever!"

Is someone becoming irritable or curt? Sometimes we can have an unintended outburst if we're feeling stressed or anxious.

Try to understand, leave them to it for now and offer them support later on.



Withdrawing

Is someone not turning up to meetings or keeping their camera and microphone off? Withdrawing is a common sign that someone is struggling.

They may genuinely be busy but it can be worth checking in with them.



"I forgot"

Poor memory or concentration can be a sign that someone is struggling with their mental health. It can also be another sign of overwhelm.



"I'm sorry"

If someone is apologising a lot or becoming overly self-critical it can be a red flag that they're struggling.

Poor mental health can cause low self-esteem and confidence



If you're worried about someone's wellbeing try this simple tip

Ask how someone is doing twice.

This encourages people to give a more thoughtful and deeper response to how they're really doing.

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