

Dear Colleague,

I hope you are keeping well and are continuing to balance the many priorities of home and work. Today is the day we have all been waiting for as the Welsh Government sets out the road map that signals the start of our emergence from the current coronavirus restrictions.

The First Minister has just delivered the outcome of his three weekly review and his announcement contained a number of key developments:

From tomorrow (Saturday 13 March):

- The 'stay at home' requirement will be replaced with a 'stay local' requirement (with a guidance of 5 miles), which will be in place for the next three weeks.
- Four people from two households will be able to meet outdoors, including in gardens (children under 11 and carers are not included in this numbers).
- Outdoor sports facilities, including golf courses, can reopen. Maximum of 4 people from two householders will still apply.
- Indoor care home visits will restart, for single designated visitors.

From Monday 15 March:

- All primary pupils and those in years 10 and 12 will be able to return to school. Students in exam years and those doing similar qualifications in colleges will return. There will be in-school check-ins for all other pupils.
- Hairdressers and barbers will re-open for appointments.

From Monday 22 March:

- Non-essential retail will begin to re-open, starting with those shops currently open, by lifting the restrictions on what they can sell.
- Self-contained accommodation will re-open from 27 March.
- Organised children's outdoor activities will also be able to restart and libraries will be able to re-open.

Looking further ahead,

- From 12 April, all pupils will return to school after the Easter break. All shops and close contact services, including beauty, should be able to open on 12 April, mirroring the timetable in England.
- In the three-week review in April, if there continues to be an improving public health picture, consideration will be given to whether it might be possible to extend household bubbles and reopen outdoor hospitality.

You will note that for the time being hospitality, tourism, leisure and non-essential retail businesses will remain close. In order to help these businesses, an extra £150m is being made available to top up the non-domestic rates grants.

I welcome this phased and cautious approach which will allow us to move forward as safely as possible. It can be so easy for people to think we are now ok to go about our normal business but this virus is still very much with us and has the potential to increase very rapidly. Yes, the vaccination programme is going really well, deaths are decreasing, case numbers are decreasing and the capacity in our hospitals is increasing. But this is offset with a number of significant risks - we don't yet know for certain the effectiveness of the vaccine on transmission rates, the risk of new variants is still with us and public compliance with the restrictions is still a key requirement.

The most recent modelling of the virus, even under the best case scenario, shows the potential for a further peak during May/June. So the scientists remain very nervous. We know that as soon as the rules are relaxed and people begin to mix again, there is a risk that infections will rise. So, if relaxations are too great and too rapid there is risk of a new wave of infections. So, in summary we must still remain vigilant and your personal behaviour is so, so important.

What happen next for CCBC?

Our Covid services still remain as relevant as ever. The Track and Trace service is still very busy, the mass vaccination centre at Newbridge leisure centre will remain in operation for some months yet, we continue to support our businesses and enforcement of the regulations through our environmental health teams remains key. So, we still very much remain in our response phase. However, I accept that many of you are now beginning to wonder about the next steps in terms of our return to the workplace. I want to reiterate that our current 'work from home' arrangements will remain in place for the foreseeable future for all those of you who are able to do so.

However, I am using the next few months to prepare us for a return to the workplace in accordance with our agile working plans. CMT and Leadership Team are reviewing and reshaping the way we operate in future as part of our ongoing transformation programme.

We are developing a phased approach, to fully implement our agile working plan, as it will take a number of months to fully develop and even longer for it to fully embed into everything we do. The early phases will include some reconfiguration of Penallta House to encourage the creation of an agile working hub and shared workspace for the future. The plans are being developed at present and I will share the phased work programme with you shortly. In the meantime, please continue to keep in close contact with your managers to discuss any concerns or queries you may have about your current working arrangements.

The Senedd and Police and Crime Commissioner elections have now been confirmed and they will be taking place on the 6th May. If you are interested in being involved, please let me or Dave Beecham know. It really is an interesting and exciting process.

Finally, I wanted to advise you that a special meeting of council will take place next Thursday to consider a claim to the Employment Tribunal by the former Chief Executive.

Councillors will be asked to consider a number of options to determine the next steps in this process. They will also be asked to consider whether the report should be discussed in a closed session due to the confidential nature of the contents. I'm sure you will appreciate that I am unable to provide any further details at this time but I anticipate it will attract media interest. I will offer you a further update next week.

Also, next week will see the conclusion of the Operation Jasmine inquest which has been ongoing for a number of weeks. Again it is likely to attract media attention and we will respond accordingly.

So a busy week ahead!

I know we are all busy, juggling so much and sometimes we don't achieve what we set out to do. Take a look at the attached quotation, which reminds us to be kind to ourselves and celebrate the great things you have achieved.

Have a great weekend and take care.

Christina