

Dear Colleague,

Earlier this week we marked the first anniversary of lockdown with a day of reflection, allowing us to look back on the past 12 months and remember all those who have been affected by the global pandemic. Sadly there have been many deaths and I know that many of you have been personally affected by the loss of a loved one. We have also seen so many acts of kindness and generosity in so many different ways and I have been both humbled and so proud of everything each and every one of you have achieved over the last year – collectively we have made so much of a difference to our people and place.

This significant milestone also reminds us that we need to start looking to the future as we begin our Covid-recovery journey, so with that in mind, I want to use today's update to provide you with an overview of our next steps over the coming months. The Cabinet recently agreed our Covid recovery plan and also our Covid economic recovery plan. These documents set out our recovery plans for both our communities and the organisation. They also embrace the important elements of our Team Caerphilly transformation agenda. Let's not forget that we were already committed to greater agile working as part of our ambitious transformation programme, but the pandemic has certainly helped accelerate the pace of this change!

Whilst I recognise that we are not out of the woods yet and coronavirus stills remains a very real threat, I want us to begin planning for our 'new normal' and as part of our wider recovery plans I want to share with you the beginnings of our agile working plans.

You have certainly demonstrated over the past 12 months that we are able to work in a different way whilst continuing to seamlessly deliver our services. Although we need to recognise that over the past year or so we have been predominately working from home, which is quite different to agile working. Whilst you have shared with me the many benefits you have experienced whilst working from home, you have also shared with me some of the 'down-sides' too. Our agile working principles aim to harness those positives whilst addressing the negatives you have experienced.

As I have shared with you recently, I am working with colleagues across CMT and Leadership Team to agree a structured timeframe which will see our agile working plans delivered in a number of distinct phases over the next few months.

One of the first things we need to focus on is ensuring our working environments within our physical buildings, are fit for purpose and reflect our agile working aspirations before we make a return. So we have a small window of opportunity to get some key things done.

Our ultimate plan is to consider all our buildings, but initially we will focus on Penallta House as it is the main corporate hub. We need to consider the current layout and how it fits with our agile working requirements.

We are beginning with the ground floor - in particular the reception area, staff restaurant and main meeting rooms. We are keen to develop a shared working space that can be utilised by staff and partners in a modern, relaxed setting. I intend to share some exciting proposals with you next week and I really would welcome your views, as it could set the blueprint for how our overall workspaces could look and feel.

Secondly Heads of Service will also be asked to work with their teams to review the working areas on each floor and consider the best ways to configure the space to best suit the needs of the service. It will also be a great opportunity to digitise documents, tidy up, de-clutter and a general clear out of cupboards, storerooms and desks.

Thirdly, there are a number of HR policies that will need to be amended to support our agile working and these will be undertaken over the next few months and each will be subject to appropriate consultation and engagement at the relevant time.

I recognise this is a fundamental shift in our overall approach and staff and trade union engagement is an essential part of this process and your feedback is helping to inform our decisions. A further staff survey will be issued shortly which will ask a range of key questions linked to our agile working agenda, so it is really important that you take the time to complete the survey and have your say about your future.

Much more information will be announced over the next few weeks. I'm sure you will appreciate that the move to a completely agile workforce will take some time to embed across the organisation completely, and this of course, will be subject to prevailing Covid restrictions. However, this is the beginning of something quite exciting and I look forward to shaping it with you together.

Pre-election period

Now, turning to the forthcoming elections. As the Returning Officer for the elections, I wish to advise you of the restrictions that are in place during the 6 week pre-election period that begins today (Thursday 25th March).

It basically means that we need to be careful that we do not promote or give unfair advantage to any candidates that are standing for election in May.

During 'normal' times the main consideration we would need to consider would include the exclusion of election candidates from events, photo opportunities; speeches and any other platform that would provide an opportunity for promotion. We would also stop council-owned buildings from being used by candidates for meetings or electioneering etc. – but of course most are now closed so that is not so much of an issue for us at this time.

Generally speaking, the restrictions should not have any impact on your day-to-day work, but we all need to be mindful of a few things such as not holding meetings with candidates, not providing information that could be used for political purposes,

no banners or signs on council buildings or assets or the use CCBC resources to benefit candidates.

I have attached a guidance document for you to read through, but if you have any questions, concerns or queries please contact Dave Beecham (Electoral Services Manager) or Steve Pugh (Head of Communications) for advice.

I know many of you will be taking time off over the next two weeks for Easter, so I hope you enjoy some time to unwind and indulge in the odd Easter egg (or two)!

I know I will!

Take Care
Christina