



Supplementary Agenda

Special Meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council

Date: Thursday, 7 January 2021

Time: 14:00

Format: Zoom Video Conference

Contact: Christine McCaffary, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Dear Member

ITEM TO FOLLOW

I refer to the agenda for the above meeting that was issued on 23 December and now enclose a copy of **Item 5** which was not available for issue at that time.

Yours faithfully

JOYCE WHITE

Chief Executive

Note referred to:-

5 COVID-19 UPDATE

7 - 20

Submit report by the Chief Executive providing Members with an update in relation to COVID-19 in West Dunbartonshire since the previous update report to Council in December 2020.

Distribution:-

Provost William Hendrie
Bailie Denis Agnew
Councillor Jim Bolla
Councillor Jim Brown
Councillor Gail Casey
Councillor Karen Conaghan
Councillor Ian Dickson
Councillor Diane Docherty
Councillor Jim Finn
Councillor Daniel Lennie
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Councillor Douglas McAllister
Councillor David McBride
Councillor Jonathan McColl
Councillor Iain McLaren
Councillor Marie McNair
Councillor John Millar
Councillor John Mooney
Councillor Lawrence O'Neill
Councillor Sally Page
Councillor Martin Rooney
Councillor Brian Walker

Chief Executive
Chief Officers

Date of issue: 30 December 2020



Report by Chief Executive

Council Meeting: 7 January 2021

Subject: COVID-19 Update

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To provide Members with an update in relation to COVID-19 in West Dunbartonshire since the previous update report to Council in December 2020.
- 1.2** To provide Members with up-to-date information on the additional support and advice that the council is providing to communities and businesses across West Dunbartonshire to help alleviate the impact of COVID-19.
- 1.3** To provide Members with additional information regarding Education provision following the decision made a December 2020 Council in relation to level 4 restrictions.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** Members are asked to:
 - (a) Note the information provided on COVID-19 in West Dunbartonshire since the update provided to the December 2020 Council;
 - (b) Note the information provided in relation to the additional support and advice that the council is providing to communities and businesses across West Dunbartonshire to help alleviate the impact of COVID-19;
 - (c) Note the detail provided in relation to educational provision within schools as a result of Scottish Government instructions in relation to the reopening of schools after the Christmas break and within the current understanding of level 4 restrictions; and
 - (d) Agree the recommended approach in regard to the expected funding from the Loss of Income Scheme and to pass to the Leisure Trust the appropriate share of funding as described at 6.4 below.

3. Background

- 3.1** The COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the lockdown of society and services represents an unprecedented challenge for delivery of council services. Since the September 2020 report Scotland has remained at Phase 3 of the Scottish Government (SG) COVID-19 route map. Services have continued to return, often in different or reduced ways as the impact of COVID-19 continues to be managed in line with the route map and SG guidance. It is evident that there will be material financial implications for the council.
- 3.2** There continues to be regular SG reviews of the tier levels for local government areas based on the basket of indicators previously outlined. Elected Members will continue to be updated on any potential change from the current Level 4.
- 3.3** At Council in December 2020 a motion was agreed:

“Council thanks officers for the report and for the phenomenal work that has been done by Laura Mason and her Educational Services team at all levels to provide as safe a learning environment as possible during this pandemic. It is clear that our officers, from teachers and school staff on the front line right up to senior management, are all acting in the best interests of our pupils at this unprecedented time.

Council notes that a recent consultative ballot by EIS shows that 68% of their members (91% of a 75% turnout) would support industrial action if schools remain fully open should we return to protection level four. This result reflects the anecdotal evidence we have heard at Council previously about staff concerns.

Within the last couple of days, the Council Leader has reiterated in a face to face meeting with Scottish Government politicians, advisors and civil servants, that we stand ready to provide all the support that children could need through a blended learning model.

Council also stands ready and would be supportive of a blended learning approach for a period after pupils return to school, to enable better social distancing. The Council Leader has also made this suggestion to the Scottish Government.

Council notes that it is not within our power to close or move all of our schools to a blended learning model. This would require a direction from the Scottish Government or an Act of Parliament to give us the power to do so.

Council agrees that the Council Leader will continue to lobby the Scottish Government to give Councils the flexibility to implement blended learning across our schools, especially if we end up in protection level 4 after Christmas.

In making such representation, Council acknowledges that the Scottish Government must take into account all of the data and factor in not just the risk of harm to staff, pupils and their families, but also to the wider community.

Any blended learning model introduced by the Council must seek to protect those children we know need positive adult contact in schools and must be able to accommodate children whose parents/guardians are not working from home and who are unable to provide a suitable at home learning environment for their children.

In the meantime, Council agrees that we will continue to do everything we can within our power to keep staff and pupils as safe as possible.

Should the Scottish Government place West Dunbartonshire Council into Level 4 restrictions again, this Council will convene an emergency special Council meeting to consider what urgent additional measures are required to protect our staff.”

4. Main Issues

4.1 Covid Protection Levels – Saturday 19 December 2020

On Saturday 19 December 2020 the First Minister announced that tougher restrictions would be put in place as a result of the new variant of the Covid-19 virus.

WDC (along with almost all Councils in Scotland) moved to Level 4 from midnight on Saturday 26 December in line with the guidance from SG. There continues to be a need for a cautious approach and there will be ongoing challenges and risks over the next few months.

The intranet has been updated with the latest news and updates including details of the wellbeing supports available along with all of the workforce updates are being issued and circulated for managers and employees. Managers will continue to brief staff who do not have internet access.

The Strategic Resilience Group (SRG) and the Operational Resilience Group (ORG) continue to meet to discuss the challenges and issues the Tier changes present to our Council and its service delivery. Elected members will continue to be updated through the reports to Council, monthly Elected Member briefing notes and more frequently where required.

4.2 Governance Arrangements

Normal governance and committee meetings continue. Elected Members continue to receive monthly briefings and there is a monthly Cross Party and Leaders meeting.

4.3 Key Current Live Issues

4.3.1 Finance and Resourcing

The restrictions imposed on businesses, including the Council, by the SG arising from the pandemic has resulted in a significant operational and financial impact. The absolute financial impact is not currently clear in totality as recovery processes and approaches develop and how the stages of the SG COVID-19 route map will actually affect Council services and finances is not clear as yet. This report provides an update on financial implications since the December 2020 report.

4.3.2 Regulatory Services

Environmental Health continues to support Test and Protect and provides a Public Health Covid-19 case assessment for the Education Service and a daily response to Public Health notifications of cases associated with community settings including business settings. Close working continues within the different teams in Regulatory along with Police Scotland through a joint working protocol. Registrars continue to provide the death registration remotely and since the last report (16/12/20) there have been 3 Covid-19 related deaths registered in this area. Due to annual leave over the festive period a further verbal update can be provided.

4.3.3 Education

All ELCCs and schools closed for Christmas on Tuesday 22 December. As a consequence of the First Minister's announcement on Saturday 19 December the Service had to move at pace to make the required arrangements for the return of schools and Early Learning and Childcare Centres (ELCC) on 6th January 2021.

The Chief Education Officer wrote to Scottish Government requesting an exceptional closure day for all schools for Wednesday 6 January and this was granted in terms of the powers available under section 133 (4) of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1980.

Important Dates

- **6 January** – Exceptional Closure Day – no children / young people in school /ELCC to allow all staff time to plan the provision for vulnerable children and young people, key workers' children and learning.
- **6, 7, 8 January**
Early Years practitioners, teaching and support staff will attend school / ELCC. Head Teachers will make local arrangements with staff to share the work of supervising the young people and developing the remote learning provision.
- **7 January onwards** - Our vulnerable children and key worker children and young people will have access to ELCC/school.

- **11 January** - all children and young people to engage in remote online learning until **at least** 18th January 2021.
- **18 January** - schools open to all staff and pupils for in-person teaching and learning as normal, unless otherwise directed by Scottish Government.

Health and Safety

ELCCs and schools are expected to operate within the existing risk assessments and building protocols to reduce risks. It will be crucial to pay enhanced attention to applying all of the preventative and mitigating approaches to reduce risk in ELCCs/school and on school transport. The use of targeted remote learning remains an important contingency for ELCCs / schools. There may be circumstances, based on clear evidence and public health considerations, or other relevant factors that may require an establishment to close, or to implement further remote learning for some children and young people, for a defined period of time. All such decisions will continue to be made by local incident management teams working in partnership, and led by Health Protection Teams on behalf of local Directors of Public Health. Similar decisions may require to be taken by local authorities in conjunction with schools where staffing constraints or other matters make such a move unavoidable.

Access to School

Each ELCC/school has considered which children and young people will have access from the 7th January. These groups include our most vulnerable children and those whose parents are keyworkers with no means of supporting their children due to their work commitments. The previously agreed definitions of key workers from the Scottish Government will continue to apply and we have extended the range to include Council workers. There is flexibility to consider unique circumstances of individual requests for access during this period. To date we have received requests for 927 places for children of key workers and 948 places allocated for our vulnerable children and young people.

Transport

The eligibility requirements for school transport remain the same and contracts with transport providers are being amended. We will continue to provide transport for those eligible. Children and young people who require access to school, who already receive school transport, will continue to have transport provided for them. Anyone who does not already qualify for school transport will not be provided with it.

Free School Meals

Free School Meals will be provided for All Early Years children and P1-3 pupils who request this in West Dunbartonshire. Families who have opted to will have a payment made to cover the two weeks of holiday and the additional days of remote

learning. All other pupils who are eligible for free school meals will receive the same.

If children and young people are in attendance the week of the 11th to 18th, then it is expected they will have a packed lunch provided from home for those days. In normal times, secondary pupils can leave the school grounds to purchase food from local retailers at lunchtime – we are recommending that this does not take place for young people attending secondary schools during this time, and that they remain in school.

The additional cost for FSM for the period to 18th January will cost £125,000 and funds will be allocated from Scottish Government.

Blended Learning

Plans for blended learning are being reviewed by schools/ELCCs should this be required at some point in January/February 2021. We continue to add to our campus@wdc, ourcloud homepage and google classrooms.

The EIS has reiterated their position that blended learning is purely voluntary and that teachers may not wish to do this. Discussions continue and we have offered professional learning support for those teachers who require it.

Learning Provision

It is expected that all children and young people in West Dunbartonshire will be supported through direct contact with teaching and support staff whether in school or at home from 11th January. As ELCCs/schools are open to staff then it is expected that timetables are delivered where staffing compliment is sufficient.

We have a duty to ensure our children and young people receive their 'taught' entitlement to learning whether at home or in school. Any child or young person who does not engage in remote learning would be considered vulnerable and encouraged to attend learning in school.

Digital Inclusion

Chrome books

If any children or young people require a Chromebook to support their learning at home for week beginning 11 January these will be available for collection from school on Thursday 7 or Friday 8 January.

Connectivity

If a parent / carer advises that they do not have connectivity in their home, there will be a limited number of MIFI hotspot devices available for distribution in each of our secondary schools, (one MIFI device can support multiple devices in one house).

All arrangements outlined in this update will be kept under review to ensure that we are ready to respond to future announcements on protection measures in our schools and ELCCs.

4.3.4 Building Services

As before, it has been necessary to suspended Housing non-essential internal works from 26/12/20 for 3 weeks following the move to Level 4 for many authority areas. Front line craft workers have been reassigned to alternative projects and those repairs deemed essential for this period and, given the previously agreed 3 day suspension of most routine services (29-31/12/20), it has not been necessary to apply for furlough.

Building Services continue to provide all services with the exception of non-urgent Kitchen, Bathroom and Shower installs. Arrangements have now been put in place and these will commence in January 2021. Cochno Street Depot will remain open where the Council's out of hours emergency service is delivered from. The emergency service will have additional resilience over the festive period with back up stand by team members available if demand is high and also contact details of team members who will be available if a large scale emergency situation arises.

4.3.5 Economic Development

The Business Support team continues to administer and pay business support grants. The most recent statistics for current live support schemes is as follows:

Fund	Applicants	Rejected	Processing	Paid	Value Paid
Strategic Framework	417	104	24	289	£615,750
Furlough Fund	46	5	3	38	£61,050

The SG has announced further business support funding, as follows, to be administered by councils and expected to go live during January as guidance is provided and finalised from SG:

- Newly Self-Employed Grant;
- Discretionary Fund;
- Top-up Support for Larger Hospitality Businesses;
- January Grant for Hospitality Businesses;
- Taxi and Private Hire vehicle Driver Support Fund;
- Mobile Close Contact Services;
- Self-catering Accommodation Support Fund;
- Travel Agents – Contingency Fund;
- Brewer Support Fund;
- B&B and Guest House Support Fund; and
- Indoor Football Support Fund

4.3.6 HSCP Services

Care Homes and Care at Home

Whilst across West Dunbartonshire we have seen a rise in the rate of infection in recent weeks, at the time of writing, this has not significantly impacted upon either our care homes or the availability of our social care workforce.

4.3.7 Vaccinations

In line with guidance received from the Chief Medical Officer on 24 December, as vaccine supply increases, the national aim is to work through the priority list outlined below with the aim of completing this by the end of Spring 2021:

1. Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2. All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
3. All those 75 years of age and over
4. All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
5. All those 65 years of age and over
6. All individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality
7. All those 60 years of age and over
8. All those 55 years of age and over
9. All those 50 years of age and over

To date, significant numbers of district nurses, care home staff, staff working in community assessment centres and mental health inpatient staff have been vaccinated at clinics in both Louisa Jordan Hospital and the Vale of Leven Hospital.

On Friday 18 December, we began the first round of vaccination for care home residents with this due to be completed by 31st December 2020.

Local planning is underway to take forward clinics by mid-January for the further rollout of community vaccination. Further detail of this will be shared as and when it is confirmed.

4.3.8 Scottish Community Testing Programme

The Community Testing Programme is in addition to the expansion of asymptomatic testing programmes in Universities, Health Care and most recently a pilot in School settings, and provides a reactive and targeted response to high prevalence and the need for enhanced testing in local areas to break the transmission cycle. It sits alongside the expansion of symptomatic testing through additional Local Test Sites, Mobile Testing Units, Regional Test Centres, rural satellite hubs and improved home test kit coverage. The programme will be supported by dedicated teams within the Scottish Government and NHS National Services Scotland, and the creation of a Programme Delivery Board and a Scottish Government funding

package is being created to cover all reasonable costs associated with the programme.

Authorities in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area have been invited by Scottish Government-Testing Policy and Delivery, to consider delivery of community testing. This will be considered by the Strategic Resilience Group on 6th January 2021 once resource implications are known. Proposals will thereafter be considered by the Community Testing Programme Board, responsible for the prioritisation of available national resources against demand.

4.3.9 Shielded Group

As most of the country moved into Tier 4 on 26 December, The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) issued new guidance directly to people in the shielded group or with significant vulnerability indicators.

This does not recommend a return to the full lockdown experienced earlier this year. Instead, shielded people are advised that they can shop or exercise outdoors like the wider population, but taking appropriate precautions. In addition, they should follow the general advice for everyone and work from home if they can, and employers should support employees to work from home where possible.

The CMO advises that in the circumstance that an individual cannot work from home, their employer should take steps to ensure the workplace is safe. In a case where a person's workplace cannot be made safe or they are unable to travel safely to work from home, the letter from the CMO will act as a fit note for as long as that person is living or working in a level 4 area.

The letter sent to children and young people, to be read and actioned with their parents or guardians, outlines the enhanced guidance previously issued, the week-long extension to the school holidays and subsequent online learning that will take place between 11-18 January 2021. The current enhanced guidance for children on the shielding list advises that they should not attend nursery, child care school, school or college in Level 4 areas. However, in some cases a child's parent or guardian may wish to contact their child's secondary (hospital) clinical team who may be able to advise that an individual risk assessment with the school, college or nursery may be appropriate and special arrangements put in place to enable the child to attend.

People on the shielded list, who are isolated and any households advised to self-isolate can continue to access support through West Dunbartonshire Council's Crisis Team and Volunteer Team. Demand for this service has been consistently low for several months, and a verbal update of demand over the festive season can be provided at Council if required.

4.3.10 People & Technology

The SG announced a £500 “bonus payment” to be paid to Local Government employees (amongst others) involved in the provision of social care. We await confirmation from the SG as to the scope and eligibility for this scheme however the intention of the scheme to include those who have supported social care delivery could expand the pool to be paid. It is understood that employers will be asked to offer the payment in instalments over three months to minimise any impact on Universal Credit awards. The intended payment months pay prove challenging as March coincides with year end and returns for HMRC and pension administrators.

As at 23 December 70 employees had been referred for testing via the employer portal, there are currently 43 employees absent/isolating as a result of Covid. OH referral numbers for counselling remain high from frontline services.

4.3.11 West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust (WDLT)

Level Four restrictions means the closure of Leisure and Community facilities along with associated services with restrictions due to be lifted from Saturday 16 January 2021.

However, WDLT will continue to offer the following outdoor activities on our Synthetic Pitches:

- Group Fitness Classes;
- Bookings for non contact training for all ages following strict guidance; and
- A range of Sport Development – We Do Sport programmes

Online group fitness and exercise sessions will continue to be offered via social media and the WDLT App.

Furlough

The majority of the workforce will either be furloughed or flexibly furloughed from Saturday 26th December 2020 until Friday 15th January 2021 (with some employees potentially returning to work earlier to prepare to reopen. Many employees are already using annual leave and this will be honoured. The approach is very similar to what was previously agreed and has been shared with the workforce and trade unions.

The ongoing pandemic will continue to impact the WDLT finances and the position continues to be monitored and updated as the impact of the pandemic changes over time.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

Financial Implications

- 6.1** The lockdown has had, and continues to have, implications in terms of service delivery and in relation to the Council's agreed budget for 2020/21 as a result of additional spend requirements, lost income offset by some cost savings due to services reducing/stopping. The SG has provided additional funding to support Councils. Total net cost implications of COVID-19 on the General Fund will not be clear for some time as the Council moves through the phases of easing of lockdown often will not be clear until they happen.
- 6.2** Since the imposition of lockdown the SG has implemented a number of approaches to mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on citizens of Scotland, businesses, charities and Councils. The majority of the funding that the SG has distributed for various purposes has been derived from Barnett consequential from UK Government funding provisions, though some will have come from re-prioritised SG funds. As the second wave of the virus has increased incidences of infection and hospital admissions the SG has implemented an approach to implementing local restrictions and has provided further funding linked to this.
- 6.3** The COVID-19 Update report to December 2020 Council reported a total of £6.444m funding from the SG, with further funding from the Loss of Income Scheme to be advised.
- 6.4** The Loss of Income Scheme funding has now been advised. It should be noted that the funding is a total of £90m for Scotland which is based on a Barnett Consequential arising from the English Loss of Income Scheme. The £90m being indicative based on initial estimates provided by English councils. This figure will vary as the year progresses and the actual losses are advised to the UK Government. The WDC indicative share – based on £90m – has been advised as £0.795m. Part of this relates to loss of income for ALEOs, of which WDC has one: The West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust. Of the £0.795m a sum of £0.196m has been advised as being in support of our ALEO's lost income. On this basis it is recommended that this is passed to the WDLT to assist with its financial sustainability and to support the lost income experienced during 2020/21. This would provide £0.599m for WDC.
- 6.5** The December report detailed a number of funding streams have been notified either via letters from the SG, or via reports to COSLA Leaders, but where the allocations to WDC had not yet been advised, these have been updated as follows (or no updates have been provided where "TBC" remains in place:

Capital Grants:

Funding	Scotland	WDC
Regeneration Capital Grant Fund – additional funding	£12.000m	TBC
Bus Priority Rapid Development Fund	£10.000m	TBC

Revenue Grants:

Funding	Scotland	WDC
Council Tax Reduction – additional funding	£25.000m	TBC
Young Person's Guarantee – support to 16-24 year-olds	£30.000m	£0.675m
Discretionary Housing Payment – additional allocation linked to covid-19 financial impact	£3.000m	TBC
Newly Self-Employed Hardship Fund	£15.000m	TBC
Local Authority Administration Grant – to support ongoing implementation of Business Support schemes	£5.000m	TBC
Winter Welfare Fund: Flexible funding Welfare/Social Support for Level 4	£15.000m	£0.264m
Winter Welfare Fund: Support for low income families - £100 per Free School Meal eligible pupil (80% distributed)	£22.000m	£0.350m, plus admin £0.011m
Winter Welfare Fund: Funding to reduce the risk of Homelessness	£5.000m	£0.156m

- 6.6** Total net cost implications of COVID-19 on the General Fund will not be clear for some time with financial implications as the Council moves through the phases of easing of lockdown often won't be clear until they happen. Budgetary Control reports to Council and Committees will provide up-to-date financial projections of the Council's financial performance, including the net projected impact of COVID-19 with the next report being finalized for the Council meeting on 25 November 2020. There is no further update in relation to the three financial flexibilities announced by the SG and officers await guidance on implementation of these from the SG.
- 6.7** It is highly likely that there will be a net financial impact to the Council from COVID-19 in both 2020/21 and 2021/22 with potential for additional bad debt provision and clearly it will be important that further funding is secured from Government and/or appropriate financial flexibilities are provided to Councils to mitigate the impact in these years.
- 6.8** Procurement Implications
There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report, however we continue to remain vigilant to any potential future supply chain issues which may develop due to changes in COVID restrictions / council levels.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** In accordance with the Council's Risk Management Framework, a Strategic Risk has been developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This, along with the organisation-wide, operational risks sitting beneath, will be reported in the bi-annual

risk updates to Corporate Services and Audit Committees. The first draft of the risk is appended to this report.

7.2 The most significant risk remains the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council and the potential shortfall in funding support from the SG. COSLA has continued to engage with the SG to evidencing the financial impacts on Councils and the need for further financial support or financial flexibilities. The outcome of this will be important in terms of the future financial position of the Council.

7.3 There remain risks around how the UK exits the European Union. The current budget assumptions are based on the UK budget announced in the autumn of 2018 which stated that in the event of a “no deal”, or a deal less favourable than hoped for, it was likely that the UK Government would require to reset the country’s finances. Such a move or any other impact of Brexit could have a significant impact on the Council and its financial position for 2020/21 and subsequent years, which has the capacity to compound any ongoing COVID-19 financial impacts.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 No equalities impact assessment was required in relation to this report.

9. Consultation

9.1 Discussions on the issues herein have been had with the Trades Unions on an ongoing and regular basis and a copy of this report provided in advance of the publication.

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 All actions and plans around COVID-19 have been done in order to continue to achieve the Council’s strategic objectives.

10.2 Sound financial control and good governance remains a key approach in minimising the risk to the Council and the ongoing capacity of the Council to continue to deliver its strategic objectives in the longer term.

Joyce White
Chief Executive

Date: 30 December 2020

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Background Papers:

1. Member Briefings and FAQs on COVID-19 issues;
2. Budget Report – Council, 4 March 2020;
3. Minute of Council meeting – 4 March 2020;
4. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 24 June 2020;
5. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 26 August 2020;
6. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 30 September 2020;
7. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 25 November 2020;
8. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 16 December 2020.

Wards Affected: All