

**Report by Chief Executive****Council Meeting: 29 September 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 August 2021.
- 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.

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 August 2021 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; and
 - (c) Agree to the recommendation at 4.2.3 to cancel the 2021 firework events due to planning challenges linked to new Covid-19 restrictions, and the supply of fireworks.

3. Background

- 3.1** The COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the lockdown of society and services has provided an unprecedented challenge for delivery of council services. Since the start of the pandemic services have continued to run as far as is appropriate or allowed, often in different or reduced ways as the impact of COVID-19 continues to be managed in line with any Scottish Government

(SG) restrictions and guidance. It is evident that there will be material financial implications for the council though this is anticipated to be funded from additional Scottish Government funds.

- 3.2** The SG has now moved to below Level 0 in terms of the Scottish response to the pandemic. Infection rates continue to fluctuate and vaccination rates continue to increase which has allowed the SG to make this change. However, clearly the pandemic has not run its course and still impacts every day life. As the country, the Council and its residents move into the new regime it will take time for things to move toward a 'new normal' and we can expect to experience ongoing issues linked to COVID-19. Such issues might be around: shortages of Council staff due to COVID illness or isolation periods; or interruption to supplies of goods and services through shortages of staff in suppliers and/or delivery regimes. Over recent weeks infection rates across Scotland and within the Council area have been very high and it can be expected that ongoing disruption to service delivery has been inevitable as members of staff are amongst those infected and/or isolating, and gradual recovery is more likely than simply returning immediately to the previous "normal".

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** 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 Key Current Issues and Updates

4.2.1 Regulatory and Regeneration

Registrars continue to provide death registrations remotely and during the period Monday 2 July 2021 to Friday 10 September 2021 inclusive, there were 9 COVID-19 related deaths registered in West Dunbartonshire, of which one was not a resident of West Dunbartonshire. However, parents registering the birth of their child must attend the office by appointment. Licensing Services continue to focus on the regulation of licensed premises and taxi enforcement matters. Further Guidance is anticipated in relation to the mandatory Covid-19 vaccine certification scheme for certain higher risk premises and events. Licensing Services and Environmental Health will review and implement any such Guidance and monitor compliance.

The Business Support team has successfully distributed over £30m of Scottish Government grant funding to our local business community since the beginning of the pandemic restrictions. The team are continuing to work with local businesses to provide both advice through the Business Gateway and Council business grant support to assist them to recover and grow post pandemic.

4.2.2 Education

Covid Guidance for schools and centres

At the start of term Head Teachers and Heads of Centre delivered COVID training to all staff using Educational Services Covid Health and Safety Guidance updated with any new national guidance. The Senior Education Officers meet weekly with colleagues in health and safety and asset management to monitor and review the COVID mitigation measures in place and to update guidance to schools and early years. All Head Teachers attended health and safety briefing sessions in August with a second session planned for September. These sessions aim to support Head Teachers and Heads of Centre with managing COVID safety protocols to ensure consistent practice in all educational establishments.

CO2 monitoring

Schools and day care services for children are now engaged in monitoring CO2 levels in learning and teaching spaces. A protocol is in place for establishments to book the services of the central Technician team who arrange site visits for monitoring purposes. A working group made up of officers from across Corporate Health & Safety, Energy & Compliance, Environmental Health, Procurement, Asset Management, IT and Education is in place. They are working to expand the provision of monitoring devices, and develop a process for escalation should any readings taken exceed the 1,500 parts per million level. The group will continue with Trade Union representation to ensure staff engagement in the recording of data. Whilst Scottish Government announced on 3 August 2021 that there will be additional funding for all Local Authorities (£10m) to assist with the provision of further mobile or fixed devices, we await further details regarding our allocation of funding.

Early Learning & Childcare (ELC)

The SG guidance to support continued safe operation of ELC settings has been in place since 9 August 2021. The intention is to retain this guidance until at least the end of September. There were two important changes to the ELC guidance i.e. close contacts of positive cases are not required to self-isolate if they are double vaccinated, at least two weeks have passed since

their second dose and they take a PCR test that returns a negative result. For under 18's the blanket self-isolation requirement for close contacts was also removed. For those aged over 5 this is conditional on the child/young person remaining asymptomatic and receiving a negative PCR test. The exception is for under 5's - a PCR test may be recommended for under 5's, but their exemption from self-isolation is not conditional on this.

The ELC guidance has also been revised to reflect advice from the Advisory Subgroup on Education and Children's Issues that, the requirement will be for physical distancing of at least 1 metre. However, we retained the 2 metre physical distancing arrangements as it worked well, and did not limit capacity at our ELC. Parents are permitted to meet in a managed way at our ELC; however our parents are meeting with ELC staff outdoors at the moment due to the spike in cases. Staff understand the importance of ventilation and how they can reduce the risk of the virus which could be present in concentrated amounts in unventilated areas. Our ELC staff are vigilant regarding ventilation, regularly opening windows and doors, and providing learning outdoors for the children as much as they possibly can. Access to CO2 monitoring is underway to support the goal of all spaces within settings being assessed for ventilation issues, with a view to remedial action being taken if required. However, access to assessment of ventilation of areas is also available if individual ELC require this.

Support for Children & Families

We are partners in the Joint Children's Services Inspection of Children at Risk of Harm. The timeframe considered includes the period of the pandemic and inspection will focus on supports provided for children, young people and families. We continue to work with our integrated partners to ensure the continuing development of key actions addressing issues of concern resulting from the pandemic. These include support to access mental health supports, access to schools counselling, addressing online abuse and language and communication development. We are currently planning support for those who are eligible to an alternative to free school meals over the October holiday period. This will take the form of a payment directly to parents' bank accounts.

4.2.3 Citizen, Culture & Facilities

Fireworks Event

Officers are recommending the cancellation of this year's firework displays in Dalmuir and Dumbarton in early November due to the high levels of uncertainty around the planning process.

The Scottish Parliament, on 9 September 2021, voted in favour of introducing vaccine passports for people looking to attend large events from 1 October 2021. The new ruling applies to any unseated outdoor live event with more than 4,000 people in the audience, and calls upon organisers to check adults attending had been fully vaccinated.

The fireworks displays in West Dunbartonshire have historically been free to attend, with no ticketing in place, and at open park sites with no barriers and limited stewarding. Spectator numbers have generally exceeded 5,000 at previous events.

To proceed in 2021 under this guidance will require new event management plans, new risk assessments, and the recruitment or procurement of additional stewards for the event, the hiring of significant fencing at both sites, and potentially the appointment of an event management organisation to assist. There is no budget in place to fund the additional costs, and there remains limited time and management capacity available to prioritise to this activity when the focus of officers from both within the Council and from West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust (who deliver events on behalf of the Council) is currently on the deployment of resources and recruitment of additional employees to maintain operation of schools, depots, offices and leisure centres during this period of recovery.

In addition, as of 15 September, the sector specific information relating to the new vaccine passport guidance has yet to be published by the Scottish Government so there remains uncertainty about the exact nature of the regulations and how these will be implemented.

In a further complexity, fireworks suppliers have intimated current difficulties in sourcing certain products and, whilst we anticipate it would be possible to host two displays, they may not be the same quality of spectacle as in previous years due to the product limitations.

Finally, it is presently not possible at this time to identify the level of additional expenditure that would be required for these adapted events. This would only be possible once full requirements are understood, and event planning meetings had taken place with relevant parties including Police Scotland, Health & Safety, Roads, and Greenspace to develop the event plans, and suppliers had undertaken the necessary site visits and provided quotes.

It is acknowledged that the period around 5 November is traditionally one of the busiest for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), and that without organised public events to attend some residents may choose to organise

private events. In recognition of this, in the weeks leading up to bonfire night the Council would continue to urge residents to follow SFRS advice and guidance about fire safety and the firework code. Similar to messaging used during this period last year, it will be focussed around safe setting, lighting and disposal of fireworks; use of CE marked fireworks; bonfire safety; and supervision of children. Further information is available from:
<https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/fireworks-safety.aspx>

Housing Repairs Contact Centre

We continue to apologise to tenants and Councillors for the ongoing issues in relation to the Housing Repairs Telephone Contact Centre.

We have previously outlined the challenges for employees of operating telephone services from a home environment during a pandemic such as isolation, intermittent loss of network access, new workstyles, barriers to knowledge transfer within the team, as well as COVID-19 related sickness absences. These all contribute to reducing our ability to deliver a normal level of service.

In addition, in 2021/22 the team have had to deal with the significant added pressure caused by the scale of outstanding repairs which Building Services is working its way through following the removal of Covid-19 restrictions. When restrictions eased in April 2021 there were approximately 5,101 repairs on the system of which 1,857 still remain outstanding. The Building Services section in this report highlights there are a total of 4,654 current repairs to be completed as at 20 September (including the 1,857 outstanding repairs).

The number of calls from tenants seeking updates on these existing repairs is placing significant additional demands on the telephone service compared to normal periods. This call type is lengthy for the tenant whilst we liaise with internal teams scheduling appointments. This type of call also reduces the number of other calls that can be answered in the same time period. A reduction in the number of outstanding repairs will significantly reduce these calls and improve access to other tenants calling the centre.

In recognition of the fact these open repairs will not be completed in the short-term, and the need to urgently deliver a better telephone service for our tenants, Citizen Services received approval to recruit three additional call handlers at the end of August. Recruitment is underway and this will have a positive impact, reducing call waiting times for our tenants, with costs of £112,500 to come from the COVID-19 funding allocated to the Council by the Scottish Government.

There were further challenges at the Housing Repair Contact Centre in August in particular following Covid absence amongst the team, a resignation and pre-booked annual leave. This additional pressure, alongside an increase in average handling time, created a further spike and worsened the performance. This position has started to improve in September, and two new employees have joined the service to fill existing vacancies and improve resources available. In addition, existing Housing Repairs Contact Centre employees have been consulted to go back to the office to enhance the training of new staff. This has commenced and will also assist with the challenges of home working such as broadband speed.

We are confident that the combination of the recently appointed employees, the three new posts agreed in August, the partial return to an office environment, and the continued progress of Building Services to clear the open repairs will improve the performance of the Housing Repairs Contact Centre and the experience for our tenants.

Self Isolation Support Grant (SISG)

We would like to apologise to our residents who have applied for Self-Isolation Support Grants (SISG) and are experiencing significant delays in receiving their outcomes.

The SISG provides financial assistance for people on low-income who will experience reduced earnings as a result of them or their child being required to self-isolate to prevent the spread of COVID- 19.

From June 2021, Council has faced an unprecedented spike in applications to the Self Isolation Support Grant (SISG). This demand is a direct result of the very high levels of COVID-19 positivity in West Dunbartonshire in recent months.

To give context, the number of applications has risen by 731% from April to August 2021. The table below illustrates this situation:

Month	Applications received
April	54
May	32
June	242
July	483
August	449
September (as at 20/09/21)	577
Total	1,837

The Welfare Fund Team supports this activity as well as all their usual tasks relating to Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants. This surge has come at a time when the team of 7 Staff has had two resignations in July, and several staff absences with a total of 255 days of sickness absence between May and August (78 days lost in August). The combination of these factors has resulted in a significant impact on turning around applications. We currently have approximately 900 applications to process and the longest wait is approximately nine weeks.

A similar situation is being experienced by other Councils in Scotland with high rates of COVID-19 infection. COSLA recently issued a briefing that between June and August 2021 application numbers to the SISG have risen over 600% across Scotland and that this had resulted in a backlog of applications sitting in local teams.

The Welfare Fund role is a specialist role, which requires security access to Department of Work and Pensions systems, access to various Council systems, access to PayPoint to make payments on behalf of the Council, enhanced training and most importantly, clearance and approval from the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) membership scheme, managed by Disclosure Scotland. This makes it challenging to redeploy employees into the team when issues emerge.

Citizen Services has responded with a recovery and improvement plan using volunteers from within Citizen and Library Services to support the Welfare Fund by uploading forms for them to review and approve. Recruitment has been completed to replace the departed team members, and managers are continuing to offer overtime to employees. In addition Covid-19 rates now appear to be falling in West Dunbartonshire which should reduce the volume of applications. Management is tracking progress of completed applications on a daily basis to ensure the recovery plan is making a positive impact.

The processing of Self Isolation Support Grants (SISG) is a high priority task, and we remain committed to significantly improving the current levels of service during this difficult time. We can confirm that to date we have paid out £102,500 in successful grants in 2021/22.

Facilities Management

Facilities Management continues to face significant disruption as a direct result of COVID-19 as it attempts to deliver its services for school catering, building cleaning and janitorial.

In recent weeks there have been a considerable number of employees self-isolating or absent due to COVID-19 as well as a number of non-COVID related absences. In addition the service has more than 20 vacancies for existing posts which are proving challenging to fill in what is a competitive labour market at this time.

Officers are actively progressing recruitment on an ongoing basis, and particular focus is being given to the recruitment of the additional 18 temporary office cleaner positions which will support the Council's return to work. Management has been proactive in attempting new approaches to increase demand, and that has included updating the job advert wording, and using channels such as social media and LinkedIn to highlight the opportunities as well as utilising the Kickstart recruitment scheme. Progress continues to be made on this front.

In the meantime the leadership team continue to dynamically manage resources so that employees are deployed to those schools and buildings where the need is greatest. The situation remains very fluid due to the significant number of premises serviced by Facilities Management and the unpredictability of absences.

West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust

The Leisure Trust remains committed to hosting a residents open evening at the new Dalmonach Community Centre, as requested at a previous Council meeting. However due to the increases in West Dunbartonshire of COVID cases and resulting requirements for self isolation, there have been a number of staffing issues across the WDLT service. These have prevented the Trust from organising this additional event but this will be taken forward as soon as the position improves.

4.2.4 Building Services

Housing Maintenance and Repairs

As previously reported to Council, Building Services continued to undertake emergency and essential repairs throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as void housing and homeless unit repairs, and gas servicing - all within appropriate government restrictions. After the first lockdown, all external capital and revenue funded repairs resumed and continue to be delivered. However, during the period November 2020 until 25 April 2021 (almost 6 months), whilst external repairs continued, in line with Government restrictions Building Services could only respond to emergency / essential internal housing repairs.

The full housing repairs service resumed from 26 April 2021. However, given

routine housing repairs could not be undertaken, significant levels of repairs reported prior to 26 April remained outstanding.

All Repairs

The team have completed 11,839 reactive repairs, from the beginning of this financial year until the end of August. This figure includes emergency repairs, routine and non-emergency repairs. As an example, during the month of August, a total of 2,451 reactive repairs were completed; of these 1,902 were non-emergency repairs. The target completion time for non-emergency repairs is up to 20 days and the performance against this target in August was 90.33%.

The number of current repairs to be completed as at 20 September is 4,654.

Emergency Repairs

Of the total number of repairs completed since April until end of August 2021, 2,243 were classed as emergency repairs. The target to complete emergency repairs is within 4 hours, however current performance is averaging 6 hours completion time. During the months of July and August it has emerged that while 1,100 emergency repairs were completed, a further 105 emergency repairs were cancelled as “no access.” This means that the tenant was not at home when the building services employee arrived to carry out the emergency repair. This issue is currently being further examined. During the period April - August there have been a total of 1,018 no accesses recorded.

Repairs reported Pre 26 April 2021 (referred to as outstanding repairs)

Regular reports to Council have provided progress to date with the plan to complete the outstanding repairs by end October 2021. There are 1,857 outstanding repairs as at 15 September 2021. This represents a reduction of 809 since the report to Council in August.

The team are continuing to schedule appointments for the remaining outstanding repairs. Of the 1,857 approximately 70% of these are within the Clydebank area and are mixed trade in nature. Across West Dunbartonshire, approximately 45% require a single trade response with 55% requiring a multi trade response. Tenants are being contacted to check that the repair is live and contact details are up to date.

While progress is being made to complete the repairs pre 26 April, the team are at the same time responding to new repairs reported. These new repairs are being scheduled based on the nature of repair. However, given the commitment to addressing the outstanding repairs (pre 26 April) it means the target completion time (within 20 working days) is often not met. In turn this is generating further calls from tenants seeking an update on progress.

Factors affecting progress remain as previously reported, including:

- **Difficulties recruiting additional resources**

As previously reported to Council, with the increased demand for craft workers across the industry, and the resultant shortage in skills, we are not able to recruit the additional employees needed to address the outstanding repairs. This demand and skill shortage has undoubtedly driven up the craft worker salary / remuneration levels which, in comparison to the private sector, make it very difficult for WDC to attract and retain permanent and temporary workers. Current workforce numbers are approximately 30 FTE lower than pre-Covid. The skill shortage currently experienced within the team is mainly electricians, plumbers and joiners. The team are also experiencing difficulties in securing additional support from back up contractors who are reporting resource challenges.

- **Absence**

Since the start of this calendar year, we have seen month on month increase in the levels of absence across building services. From April, a total of 3,284 FTE days have been lost to absence, with the peak in the month of June with 2.23 FTE days lost per employee. The quarter April to June saw 6.05 FTE days lost per employee, with 2.15 FTE days lost in July and 1.81 FTE days lost in August.

In August, of the 605.58 FTE days lost, 58 FTE days were attributable to short term absence (less than 6 days), 187 FTE days attributable to medium term absence (more than 6 days and less than 4 weeks) and 388 FTE days attributable to long term absence (over 4 weeks). A total of 90 FTE days were lost to COVID-19 - "notifiable disease." There were no absences reported as a result of "long covid" in August.

As at 20 September, a total of 36 employees are absent which equates to 10.8% of the Building Services workforce. 9 are reporting COVID-19 as the reason for absence, with 7 off more than 10 days.

Notwithstanding the above, the team continue to undertake the following:

- Management team weekly workforce planning meetings to review progress and agree further actions whilst continuing to meet demand across all other delivery areas;
- Where possible, completing backlog repairs in chronological order i.e. oldest first where this meets tenant's requirements;
- Dedicated teams set up to focus solely on the outstanding repairs;

- Reassigning team members from other projects as necessary;
- Temporary engagement of agency workers where possible;
- Increased use of sub-contractors where possible;
- Targeted overtime where possible;
- Continued communication with tenants through appropriate forums including tenant groups, housing news, social media, text messaging; and
- Monitoring, management and mitigation of material pinch points.

4.2.5 Health and Social Care Partnership

Mental Health, Learning Disability and Addictions

Mental Health, Learning Disability and Addiction Services continue to remain open providing support face to face, by telephone or virtually. Staffing is continually monitored and processes are in place to ensure that caseloads continue to be prioritised to reflect need. Adult Support and Protection activity has recently been inspected and this has now been concluded with an Action Plan in development to monitor improvements.

Learning Disability day services continue to provide building based support for critical cases and there is ongoing review around increasing the service user numbers based on current guidance. Those unable or not wishing to attend the day service are offered support in their home, where appropriate, or regular wellbeing checks. There has also been work carried out to ensure that Carers are supported during this time.

Care Homes

The move to open respite beds in the two Local Authority Residential Care Homes has been delayed due to staffing issues however, we remain committed to facilitating this service as soon as staffing is resolved.

The raised incidence of COVID-19 in the community has affected staff in some care homes, but to date only a few residents have tested positive and this has sometimes correlated with visits they have had outwith the homes with their family and friends.

Care at Home

Care at home continues to face challenges in terms of staffing in common with many other services across the country, however they have continued to respond to hospital discharges and have no delayed discharges for clients assessed to return home.

Population Covid Vaccination Programme/Flu vaccination

As we move towards the 2021 Flu/COVID-19 vaccination programme there has been comprehensive NHS GGC and Local Authority partnership planning to deliver this. The model this year will continue on that being used for the COVID-19 vaccination programme and start from the end of September 2021.

Those who received their vaccination during phase one of the national COVID-19 vaccination programmes in Scotland will be invited to receive booster injections from 20 September 2021. This follows advice from the JCVI which has advised that the booster dose can be given alongside the flu jab and should be offered no earlier than six months after completion of the primary vaccine course.

Frontline health and social care workers will be able to book their appointments online at NHS Inform from 20 September 2021 and from that date residents in care homes for older people will be offered both flu and COVID-19 booster vaccinations. Within West Dunbartonshire the District Nursing Service will administer the vaccinations in care homes and also to those deemed housebound by GP's.

Adults aged 70 years and over and adults aged 16 years and over who are on the highest risk list (previously known as the shielding list) will be contacted soon, either by letter or by their GP.

People on the highest risk list, who were severely immunosuppressed at the time of their last COVID-19 vaccination, will be offered a third primary dose instead. Other eligible groups - including all those aged 16 to 49 years with underlying health conditions, adult carers, unpaid and young carers, adult household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals and all adults over 50 - will be able to book online from October 2021.

Currently overall rates within West Dunbartonshire for first dose are 92.7% and second dose 85.9%, compared to a NHS GGC rate 89.0% and 81.8% for first and second doses respectively.

The table below illustrates this by age band:

	West Dunbartonshire		NHS GG&C	
Age Band	First Dose	Second Dose	First Dose	Second Dose
16-17	63.1 %	6.8%	64.3%	8.1%
18-29	74.9%	58.4%	71.1%	56.1%
30-39	84.2%	73.3%	79.2%	69.5%
40-49	94.8%	88.5%	92.2%	86.0%
50-54	94.2%	90.7%	95.3%	91.4%
55-59	98.6%	95.6%	99.7%	96.7%
60-64	100%	99.7%	100%	100%
65-69	100%	100%	100%	100%
70-74	100%	100%	100%	100%
75-79	100%	100%	100%	100%
80+	100%	100%	99.8%	96.6%

4.2.6 **People & Technology**

Vaccination Support

It has recently been confirmed that clinics and capacity will be required to expand to support the seasonal flu and COVID booster programmes. This will result in the Concord being 'stood' back up to operate on a Sunday. This is considered necessary to best support Cohort 1 (JCVI) which includes the most vulnerable and may be less able to travel across the authority area.

Within West Dunbartonshire, the addition of 'drop in' clinics will commence on Wednesday 22nd, Thursday 23rd and Friday 24th. Whilst set up to accommodate 12-15 year old group, they will also receive any adult seeking 1st or 2nd dose. Clinics from 24th will be appointed unless indicated otherwise.

The first group of Kickstart employees are coming to the end of their 6 months, with the next two groups ending in October and November respectively. In order that support to the centres can continue, some will be offered a fixed term contract until February 2022.

Impact on Employees

As at 14 September 2021, there were a total of 187 employees absent/isolating as a result of COVID-19. Demand for counselling through the Occupational Health service remains high with no indication that this new level of demand will reduce in the coming months. Given that the top reason for sickness absence Council wide from April to August this year is personal stress, it is encouraging that usage of the counselling service remains so high

and strongly suggests that employees are accessing supports available to them. Additionally, further sessions of the Access to Work (Mental Health Support Service) have been scheduled and this service can be used on a standalone basis or will complement any support that employees are receiving through counselling. The wide range of wellbeing supports continues to be promoted through a range of communication channels to help ensure that as many employees as possible are aware of the support available; this includes the continuation of the well-received Wellbeing Round Up's that sign post to a number of internal and external supports. Whilst there is no information available on the number of West Dunbartonshire Council employees who are accessing national supports provided through Scottish Government, these continue to be promoted through the usual communication channels. The holistic review of stress management within the Council has now begun and will involve benchmarking against best practice and focus groups with employees, management representative and Trade Unions colleagues to ensure that key feedback is captured and that employee wellbeing is at the centre of the review.

£500 "Thank you payments" to Employees

The third claim will be submitted to Scottish Government in October which includes further leavers and outcomes of the decision review process. It is anticipated that there will be a limited amount, if any, of future payments requiring to be made.

Recognition Payment for Teachers Supporting the Alternative Certification Model

Following the advice issued by the Scottish regarding the payment, those eligible have now been identified and payment will be made in the September pay run with communications issued to relevant employees.

Recruitment of Cleaners

Since April 2020 (since the beginning of the pandemic) to date HR Connect has received and actioned 105 requests for Cleaner posts, a mix of Permanent and Fixed Term posts. Over this period, 704 applications were received with the appointment of 112 external applicants and 79 internal applicants, totalling 191 cleaners appointed. There continues to be challenges for the service to recruit and retain cleaners despite a range of measures to attract candidates to this vital role.

Currently the service has 41 COVID specific Cleaners appointed. The first of these appointments were August 2020 when schools returned. Current service headcount is 238 Cleaners across all Services. Council Wide Relief Covid Cleaner posts have been established in both Primary and Secondary

Schools with a combined budget of 996.5 hours, with a current balance of 263 hours remaining vacant.

There are currently 5 adverts running for various posts ranging from 14.25 hours to 20 hours per week. These are made up of 10 permanent posts (both 52 week and term time), 2 fixed term and term time roles in schools. Additionally there is a rolling advert for Relief Cleaners across all 3 geographical areas.

Workstyle Exercise/Return to Offices

The workstyle exercise is complete and there has been an increase in those wishing to work remotely from 339 to 399. The reopening of offices was due to begin on 17 September and unfortunately has had to be delayed. The phased reopening is reliant on enhanced cleaning and the Scottish Government guidance remains to work from home where possible. Like many other organisations, we are experiencing a challenge in filling many of our cleaning vacancies and urgent recruitment of additional cleaners is ongoing with additional steps being taken, including advertising the posts on social media channels to ensure we reach as many people as possible. We are also looking to maximise use of the Kickstart Scheme to offer roles to young people seeking employment.

We are seeing the impact of increased cases of employees isolating or Covid positive within this area of the workforce and are prioritising cleaning resources on buildings which are already open, particularly schools and early learning centres. As always, the safety and wellbeing of the workforce is paramount and the reopening of buildings will proceed once employees are in place to ensure an enhanced cleaning regime can be implemented. We have continued to liaise with our Trades Unions colleagues throughout and they share the view that cleaning is a critical aspect in order that they can endorse the return of employees.

It is our intention to make an assessment of the position in early October with a view to identifying a suitable date in October for the restart process to begin. This will reintroduce teams within the first phase to the first floor of Church Street and depots. This will ensure workstyle, desk allocation and service needs are covered and understood appropriately. Meantime preparations are well underway to review risk assessments, protocols and return to work supports.

Cyber Security and ICT Technical Support

The most recent changes applied in August 2021 to the Citrix and remote access infrastructure were successful and a phased migration of users to the

upgraded infrastructure is in progress which allows for any issues to be investigated and resolved. The 'connection interrupted' issue remains a source of frustration for end users and has been raised as tickets on Freshservice system but being handled as formal complaints by the ICT Management team who are liaising with the appropriate managers.

Officers are exploring options to support the changed demand for remote working and associated technology changes.

In addition to managing, imaging and applying security updates to 'off network' devices, users who are returning to Council Offices have been attending appointments for the latest major Windows 10 upgrade to be applied. The volume of resources required to fulfil all of the appointment has resulted in a backlog and an alternate approach was devised. ICT designed a solution that 'forces' the update onto devices that are not running on the correct operating system version. ICT are working with Estates and HR teams to liaise with returning users and their managers about these upgrades which can take up to 2 hours to apply.

4.2.7 Housing and Employability

As communities recover from the pandemic the Communities Team continue to provide support and advice to groups and communities across the authority to re-start their meetings and activities. This includes the work of the Community Alliance, Community Councils and other local community groups. With enquiries steadily increasing, the overall aim is to promote increased levels of participation and restore or create strong social networks that are essential to the creation of active, empowered communities.

Whilst homelessness levels in West Dunbartonshire had began to stabilise in the last quarter of 2020/21, there was an increase of almost 15% in quarter 1 of 2021/22 compared to the same period in 2020/21. This is being monitored closely to see if this increase continues. There has also been an increase in repeat homelessness, 19 households re-presented within a 12 month period a key contributing factor was linked to domestic abuse. The higher levels of households in temporary accommodation, which has been a consistent impact as a result of the pandemic remains and stood at 287 at the end of August though only 26 households contained children. We are actively working with these households providing high levels of support and are focused on securing long-term housing solutions so that every household has safe and secure accommodation.

We have ramped up considerable focus on homelessness prevention activities over the last quarter and have worked closely with a number of landlords to avoid evictions into homelessness, this activity will be further strengthened through the introduction of a Tenant Support Fund in late September, which is funded by the SG through the Tenant Support Grant of £0.277m referred to in the table at 5.4 below.

Our new build programme has been progressing well under Covid-19 compliant working practices. Over the course of the pandemic we have delivered 236 new homes, including the completion of the Creveul Court, Alexandria and Aitkenbar, Dumbarton. We have reviewed our working practices and have enabled a smoother moving in process with the provision of carpets, window coverings and white goods to allow new tenants to move into their new homes in a safe and practical manner. The More Homes Delivery Team have also provided a wide range of practical assistance to ensure all new tenants maximise the enjoyment and living experience of their new homes.

Our ASB teams are now fully deployed back into the community providing much needed resource for our tenants and Police Partners. This service is now operating seven nights per week working from 15:00 – 02:00. Alongside our Neighbourhood teams who operate from 13:00 – midnight, ensures increased physical resources available in communities to respond to ASB.

We are actively looking to identify options within the community that we can utilise for staff as a drop in facility to use whilst out in the estates. To date we have secured one drop in base at Mitchell Way, Alexandria which has been fully risk assessed for staff use and has been positively received by staff in this area. We are actively looking at options for our Clydebank team to use as a drop in facility, which will enable our staff to increase their time within our estates and contribute to our recovery plan.

In respect of rent arrears our Housing Operations team continue to review individual eviction cases with exceptionally high balance which may otherwise have resulted in court action with the aim of finding sustainable solutions wherever possible, however giving due consideration to escalation where the tenant fails to engage or does not take reasonable steps to maintain payments. Legal action and eviction will always be a last resort and Housing and Corporate Debt teams will always seek to offer assistance to households struggling to afford rental payments in the first instance. Any action will take cognisance of guidance and regulations which may change in the weeks ahead. Work is due to be undertaken by

the Housing Operations Team in conjunction with the Corporate Debt team to complete an assessment of our tenants in arrears to determine if they meet the criteria set by the Scottish Government for potential assistance through the Scottish Government's Tenant Hardship Fund.

As we continue to recover from COVID-19 restrictions our full focus continues to be around increasing our estate management, house letting and tenancy related activity.

Part of this recovery includes carrying out a full appraisal of the condition of our estates, developing estate recovery action plans across the authority, in conjunction with Greenspace and the WDTRO; further detail on this will be presented to October committee.

In respect of letting and tenancy related activity, we continue to carry out sign up's for new tenancies, ensuring completion of risk assessment checks prior to meeting occurring. With regards to tenancy related activity, we continue to promote online and telephony methods where possible, however are now reviewing existing practices with a view to re-introducing a range of tenancy related visits as part of our recovery plan. In line with above, visits to any tenancy will only be undertaken following completion of a risk assessment on the individual circumstances to ensure the safety of all parties involved.

Working 4U had fully established remote services for all staff and continued to deliver employability, welfare and learning services. The teams have established remote community hubs and deliver one to one and group support services from these virtual hubs.

Progress has been made on developing the local employability partnership and delivery of major programmes such as the Young Person's Guarantee Parental Employability Support and managing 'Kickstart' (access to employment opportunities for 16-24 age group).

While complying with health controls the teams have explored ways to re-establish face to face support focussing on those who cannot readily connect through digital platforms. We have, for example, begun community learning and 'Improving the Cancer Journey' service deliveries from libraries. We are also exploring approaches for delivery in premises where services have resumed. This includes ongoing discussions about delivering employability services from local jobcentres and service delivery partners as well as embedding welfare support in four GP Practices.

Demand for the Crisis Support team remains low but steady and the service will be available to anyone in need of support. This includes the delivery of practical support from the Volunteer Management Team.

4.2.8 Roads & Neighbourhood

The Service are experiencing high levels of absence in relation to COVID-19 following positive tests, self-isolation if identified as a close contact and delay in test results being made available.

In Waste Services driver availability has a major impact on the operational service delivery. The Service will prioritise resources on the collection of residual waste with potential impact to other collections such as glass and neighbourhood recycling centres.

In Grounds Services resources will be prioritised in bereavement services, street cleaning and litter collection. Any gaps in resources will impact grass cutting.

In Roads Service the response to emergency and urgent defects will be prioritised and from 1 November onwards the winter gritting programme. The Winter Plan is reviewed annually and it is updated to reflect the implementation of additional resilience measures to reflect the current COVID-19 position.

5. Financial and Procurement Implications

Financial Implications

- 5.1** The pandemic has had, and continues to have, implications in terms of service delivery and in relation to the Council's agreed budget for 2020/21 and into 2021/22 as a result of additional spend requirements and 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 in 2020/21 were reported in the draft annual accounts for 2020/21 which showed that of the £20.430m of SG funding received for COVID-19 costs and targeted interventions in 2020/21, £13.692m was used and £6.738m carried forward. Of the carried forward sum £4.765m was for SG funded interventions and £1.973m was from the SG general COVID-19 support funds.
- 5.2** For 2021/22 the position will not be clear for some time as even though Scotland is now beyond the SG COVID-19 levels the pandemic continues and services continue to be affected. At present a COVID-19 financial impact is estimated at between £2.800m and £3.000m for 2021/22, though clearly this

will be subject to ongoing monitoring and finalising, and this excludes spend on areas where SG has provided specific funding.

- 5.3** The Appendix to this report summarises the SG funding the Council has been notified of in revenue funding for 2021/22, currently totalling £9.710m. Based on current infection rates and plans to ease lockdown restrictions it is likely that any further SG COVID-19 related funding will be limited (clearly this is dependent on the future of COVID-19 and any future impacts, restrictions and whether there is any further UK or Scottish Government funding required).
- 5.4** In the August 2021 COVID-19 Update report to Council the SG funding to support deployment of CO2 Monitors of £10m (mixed revenue and capital funding) was reported and at that time the WDC share was not known. The distribution for this has still not been advised at time of writing this report. Since the August 2021 report the following new SG funding has been announced relating to COVID-19 support in 2021/22 from the SG (these are included in the attached appendix and the value noted above):

Revenue Funding	Scotland	WDC
Scottish Child Payments - Bridging Payments	£25.830m	£0.600m
Tenant Grant Fund	£10.000m	£0.277m

The Bridging Payments referred to in the table provide a “hardship” payment in each quarter of the year, with Spring and Summer payments already paid and Autumn and Winter payments due in October and December 2021.

- 5.5** Of the £9.710m of SG funding currently provided for 2021/22, £4.488m is in the form of a general grant allocation, the remainder being for specific SG defined support. This is in addition to the sums noted at 5.1 as being brought-forward from 2020/21.

HSCP Financial Implications

- 5.6** The HSCP continues to record additional COVID-19 related costs for submission to the SG on a quarterly basis, with the next return (Quarter 2) due on the 27 October. The current projections anticipate that the full allocation of the COVID Reserve of £4.970m will be required to fund costs related to additional front line health and social care staffing costs, provider sustainability, loss of income and some delays in implementing agreed efficiencies. While the SG appreciate that the ongoing response to COVID-19 continues to impact the delivery of planned savings they expect HSCPs to maximise the in-year efficiency opportunities to deliver in line with planned targets and have requested additional information regarding the steps that are being taken to mitigate any risk.

5.9 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.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 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.

6.2 The most significant risk relates to the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council and any potential shortfall in funding support from the SG. This risk has been significantly mitigated as 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. This has resulted in significant financial support being provided for 2020/21 and 2021/22 which it is expected will be sufficient to cover the identified costs of COVID-19 to the Council.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

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

8. Consultation

8.1 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.

9. Strategic Assessment

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

9.2 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: 22 September 2021

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Appendix: SG COVID-19 Funding provided to WDC in 2021/22

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;
9. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 7 January 2021;
10. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 24 February 2021;
11. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 26 May 2021;
12. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 23 June 2021;
13. Delivery of Services during Public Health Emergency – Council 23 June 2021; and
14. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 24 August 2021.

Wards Affected: All

Appendix

Local Government COVID-19 funding 2021/22	Scotland £m	WDC £m 2021/22
<u>REVENUE</u>		
<u>Funding directly to support Local Government (non-ring fenced)</u>	£262.000	£4.522
Non-recurring Covid-19 funding for 2021/22	£259.000	£4.488
Business Support Grants - Administration 2021/22	£3.000	£0.034

<u>Funding to support individuals/families/communities</u>	£127.844	£2.992
Family Pandemic Payments, incl. Admin	£23.860	£0.554
Low Income Pandemic Payments, incl. Admin	£68.154	£1.561
Scottish Child Payments - Bridging Payments, incl. Admin.	£25.830	£0.600
Tenant Grant Fund, incl. Admin.	£10.000	£0.277

<u>Funding for Education Recovery</u>	£155.000	£1.916
Additional Teaching and Support Staff	£50.000	£0.331
Additional Teachers (2 nd tranche)	£30.000	£0.198
Support needs of children and young people for 2021/22	£60.000	£1.111
Summer Activities for Children and Young people	£15.000	£0.276

<u>Test and Protect Funding/Public Health/Supporting People</u>	£5.373	£0.112
Test & Protect - Outbound calling – to cover up to 30 June 2021	£2.275	£0.046
Test & Protect - Outbound calling – to cover up to 30 September 2021	£2.275	£0.046
Self-Isolation Support Grant - Additional Administration - 2021/22	£0.823	£0.020

<u>Health & Social Care funding and passed to LG for Local Mobilisation Plans:</u>	£0.000	£0.027
COVID Emergency Fund - Women's Safety & Support	Not Known	£0.027

<u>Other</u>	£7.900	£0.141
Environmental Health Officers (20/21 and 21/22)	£2.900	£0.027
Parental Employee Support Fund Boost	£5.000	£0.114

TOTAL REVENUE FUNDING	£558.117	£9.710
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