



**Report by Chief Executive**

**Council Meeting: 25 November 2020**

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**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 September 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.

**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 September 2020 Council; and
  - (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.

**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 review of the tier levels for local government based on the basket of indicators previously outlined and Elected Members will continue to be updated on any potential change from the current Tier 3 level.

#### 4. **Main Issues**

##### **Tier 4 – Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020 – 6.00pm**

With effective from the above date the First Minister has today announced on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020 that West Dunbartonshire, along with a number of other local authority areas in the central belt, will move on Friday (20 November) to Level 4 - the highest tier of Covid restrictions.

Cases of the virus were declining in our area, however not at the rate necessary and the Scottish Government is introducing additional measures for a limited time in order to protect the NHS and ensure hospitals and intensive care facilities are able to cope over the winter. In addition the First Minister has said making the change now could enable a slight easing of restrictions at Christmas.

Level 4 is the closest to a full lockdown, similar to that introduced in March, and will see the closure of non-essential shops, leisure centres, gyms, hairdressers, barbers, beauticians, pubs, restaurants and cafes, although takeaways can still operate. Indoor visitor attractions and all leisure and entertainment premises will also close while the restrictions are in place. Schools are to remain open.

Similar to Level 3, visiting other people's homes is not permitted and travel outwith our own local authority area only for essential reasons such as to attend work or for medical appointments. Journeys within the area should be kept to an absolute minimum.

In our Local Authority Area the data continues to point to people meeting up in their homes as the main driver for transmission.

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 Elected Member briefing notes issued monthly and more frequently where required.

#### 4.1 **Changes to 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.

## **4.2 Key Current Live Issues**

### **4.2.1 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 September 2020 report.

### **4.2.2 Regulatory Services**

Legal Services have continued to provide advice to Council Services on maintaining service delivery in light of the evolving regulatory landscape. Up until the closure of licensed premises, Licensing officers continued to visit premises to provide advice to premises management, and to ensure compliance where required. Since the further restrictions on licensed premises were brought in, officers have assisted in determining what category premises may fall into (Bar, Café, Restaurant etc.) and latterly have been assisting colleagues in Economic Development with information to assist in the administration of grants to business owners. Visits to non-licensed hospitality premises by Trading Standards Officers continued. Legal work closely with Environmental Health for which the demands of covid-19 continue to be high. In addition to response to everyday service requests, it 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. Businesses are assessed for compliance with Covid related regulation and guidance during each phase of the pandemic public health controls and public health advice is provided as the regulations and guidance are produced. Registrars continue to provide the death registration remotely and since 31 July, there have been a further 13 Covid-19 related deaths registered in this area, of which ten of the deceased were residents of West Dunbartonshire and 3 were residents of Glasgow City. None of these deaths occurred in West Dunbartonshire Care Homes.

### **4.2.3 Education**

As COVID-19 cases have risen in the community at large, there continues to be a rise in cases that have presented in Education settings, resulting in case assessments with employees and pupils having to self-isolate. From the time of introduction of the streamlined procedure for case assessments there have

been **117** recorded cases in Education settings and approximately **1,873** individuals (pupils and staff) identified as close contacts who have had to self-isolate. The Campus@wdc is open to all pupils who are self-isolating. Class teachers also share course work via Google classroom.

'Safe Learning in Scotland: Building on our Success' was published on Friday 30 October with the expectation that progress would be made swiftly to implement the additional mitigations at Level 3 by Monday 2 November.

Meetings have taken place with Heads of Establishment to discuss the additional measures and to give support for their implementation. The advice on physical distancing is unchanged and requires regular reinforcement. Face Coverings should now be worn by all staff moving around buildings and in circumstances where a 2meter distance is not possible. Senior Phase pupils are now required to wear face coverings in class as well as in communal areas.

Guidance on Ventilation in schools is being progressed and to assess the financial impact of strategies that help balance the need for ventilation with keeping people warm. Further guidance has been issued for PE, Music, Drama and Dance and this will be updated as appropriate.

There will be no National 5 Exams this year and SQA will bring further clarity on the work that learners need to complete in subject areas.

We continue to work closely with our national partners, Head Teachers and Trade Union colleagues to ensure that all guidance is being followed and that we can continue to deliver the best experience possible for our children and young people.

#### **4.2.4 Communication, Culture, Communities & Facilities**

The Facilities Management (FM) Team continues to provide enhanced cleaning of frequently touched surfaces within schools, nurseries, depots, offices and other operational premises across the Council as part of the actions taken to minimise spread of the virus. Given that the pandemic is showing no signs of ending, FM is extending the contracts of the 55 additional Covid-19 cleaners in schools until 31 March 2021. The cost of this extension to the Council is £184,000 and was agreed at the Finance Review Panel chaired by the Chief Executive, and updated to the Cross Party Working Group in October. The cost of this enhanced cleaning regime to the end of the financial year will be covered by funding allocated by the Scottish Government for education recovery and the financial flexibilities previously reported to Council in relation to the Scottish Government's three earmarked Education funds for ELC expansion, SAC and PEF.

Towards the end of September, the Catering teams returned to the provision of a full hot lunch menu within schools and early years' establishments. The menu has been developed in line with the current school food regulations. This has proven challenging due to the limited space in some school kitchens which makes physical distancing extremely difficult. Lunch service is taking longer than normal in some schools due to additional sittings in dining rooms. Operational arrangements have been modified on a kitchen by kitchen basis as necessary to support ongoing provision. Such modifications include the use of compostable disposable cutlery/plates where dishwashing is a challenge, modifications to working hours for some catering employees to reduce staff numbers in kitchens at any one time, and changes to pupil queuing arrangements at some serveries.

The Webteam has created new webpages and online forms at short notice for a range of Covid-19 supports such as the Kick-start Scheme, Self-Isolation Support Grant and Coronavirus Business Closure Fund. The Contact Centre continues to be the point of entry to the Council for the National Assistance Helpline. The main functions are capturing residents' details and requirements before completing online forms to the Crisis Support team or various other teams in the Council where necessary. The Welfare Fund team has enabled and managed the Self Isolation Support Grant and delivery of the same. There have been over 200 applications to the grant since go live on 12 October. Libraries continued to help combat isolation and support positive mental wellbeing with 25,467 virtual visits leading to 10,744 digital loans in September. During the month, 177 new users discovered the online library services. Children, young people and families enjoyed viewing our online Bookbug, storytime and activity videos more than 3,000 times. Library inductions were completed for 1,410 S1 pupils with over 1,000 loans issued in schools. Across the library network, there were 2,644 physical loans issued via the Book to Borrow scheme. November's Book Week Scotland will include video performances from authors which will be available for residents to view at their convenience.

The Performance & Strategy team continue to support national work on data reporting and analysis specific to the Covid-19 response and planning for recovery. The Arts & Heritage team has been working on a number of projects. These include a Covid-19 collecting initiative with residents to preserve West Dunbartonshire's experience of the pandemic for future generations; a social media drive to encourage residents to explore the Council's heritage, fine art and local history collections using the online database; and through social media team has also sought to inspire creativity in the absence of arts workshops and activities using short, instructional film clips demonstrating simple art techniques that people can try at home, craft

activities for children and families, and more involved tutorials to encourage people to attempt new ways of making art.

Corporate Communications has continued to work with a range of partners to engage and inform citizens and employees on the pandemic, restrictions, and available supports. Most recently the team has focused on providing updates on the new Strategic Framework and what this means for our communities and businesses. To help promote understanding and support compliance, a series of bespoke videos have been developed featuring a range of citizens and these will be shared on social media over the coming weeks. We continue to issue media releases regarding the pandemic and restrictions to partners and groups, including churches to ensure we reach as many people as possible.

#### **4.2.5 Free School Meals Expansion**

In March 2020, Council agreed as part of its budget decision to roll out free school meals for primary pupils in year groups P4-P7. This was in addition to the Universal Free School Meal provision currently in place for P1-P3. At that time, officers planned to introduce the extended provision in two phases with Primary 4 and 5 in October 2020 and Primary 6 and 7 in January 2021. This lead-in time was identified as necessary for planning of additional recruitment, purchasing of additional equipment and to facilitate any building works required.

Just days after the Council budget decision, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out across Scotland and disrupted planning for this significant project within Facilities Management. The team initially had to prioritise the successful operation of Education Hubs across West Dunbartonshire. Thereafter the team's focus was on the schools restart for August 2020 which involved the recruitment of 55 additional Covid-19 school cleaners, undertaking risk assessments for all Cleaning, Janitorial and Catering tasks and focussing especially on operations in all school kitchens to enable social distancing and safe working practices.

To date, progress on the Free School Meal expansion project has been limited. Surveys have been issued to all Catering Managers to ask their views as to what impact the P4-P7 free meal rollout would have on their kitchen/dining operations. This information needs to be collated and then individual action plans worked up for what needs done on a physical basis in each kitchen – such as more, plates, cutlery, pots & pans, additional staffing, additional freezer capacity, additional ovens (which often means an electrical upgrade of the kitchen power capacity by Asset Management), etc. Discussions will also need to take place with Head Teachers to determine the most suitable arrangements for the expected increase in meal uptake. Once

we have all necessary information we can identify realistic timescales for completing the actions and propose an estimated roll-out date for the FSM expansion but delivery of this is no longer possible in 2020/21.

It is appropriate at this point to highlight the further concern that it will be difficult to expand the number of meals being produced and served by up to 50% at a time when we are already struggling with social distancing in the kitchens and some schools already have a significant number of meal sittings due to COVID-19 safety arrangements. As a result, the delivery of this project will be impacted until such time as the virus is reduced and school/workplace measures are relaxed.

#### **4.2.6 Housing and Employability**

Significant focus has been placed on communicating with our service users and communities about appropriate and safe behaviours to limit the spread of COVID-19. Our Housing and Homelessness services have increased signage in common spaces within our properties and sharing practical information with tenants, tenant groups and other landlord's / support providers through regular tenant/resident liaison meetings and Housing News articles. The Communities Team continues to share new Council public information through its network of community organisations. Working4U is cascading information through all its networks including the Youth Alliance.

All services are operating effectively, primarily based on remote working arrangements, with limited essential client services being delivered in the community under safe processes. This includes letting of vacant houses and support to vulnerable households.

Homelessness levels in West Dunbartonshire continue to be higher than in previous years, however the percentage increase is slowing and the year on year increase has been below 10% in the last 2 months. Our new build programme have been progressing well within safe working practices and within the last month we have taken delivery of new homes for tenants in the St Andrews and Haldane developments.

Where required, we can provide access to crisis support for people who are identified through the Test and Protect process. We know from data provided by NHS there has been approximately 650 people in West Dunbartonshire traced to date. Of those subsequently contacted, 57 have required additional support for welfare/benefits advice and/or access to emergency food supplies. The crisis team has continued to provide support for local residents and is currently dealing with an average of seven requests for support each day.

Work is on-going to support our most vulnerable citizens through the Crisis Support and Volunteer Management teams (VMT). The priority for the VMT is to support and manage the core repeat clients to ensure they receive or are sign-posted to the most appropriate services to meet any long-term needs. The service continues to address the on-going demands for PPE to be delivered to carers and care homes across the authority.

#### **4.2.7 Winter Planning and Resilience**

The Winter Plan is reviewed and updated annually and sets out the carriageway and footway treatment actions in accordance with the Well Maintained Highways code of practice and the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. The plan has been updated to reflect the implementation of additional resilience measures to reflect the current COVID-19 position and the Council decision in relation to additional footway gritting. Pedestrian and vehicular routes to the testing centres have been added to the winter gritting programme. The winter gritting programme commenced on the 1 November. The successful delivery of the winter gritting programme is determined by the following:

- Driver availability
- Vehicle maintenance
- Salt availability

Measures have been put in place to provide driver and vehicle resilience and the trigger for ordering salt has been reduced to mitigate impact of a salt shortage or potential delivery issues.

In addition, the Council attends the Mutual Aid working group with city region partners to provide resilience, resources and/or share advice throughout winter.

#### **4.2.8 Asset Management**

Compliance checks to continue in operational buildings being used including fire alarm systems and legionella checks. All required works being carried out via specialist contractors to ensure building re-openings are safe to do so. Continue to implement Property Recovery plans for offices, assisted Education with Schools reopening and work with HR&OD following workforce styles return to establish which offices are required to open for immediate returners.

Coordinating the Store requirements of HSCP by Asset Management continues to operate well. Proposal for one combined now in operation and processes being reviewed regularly. Request to move the Mobile Testing Unit



from the Meadow Centre Carpark to the Church Street office car park has been fully implemented with compliance arrangements carried out to allow access to the office for welfare facilities. Work with Scottish Government and WDLT to open Napier Hall in Old Kilpatrick as a new walk through COVID testing facility.

#### **4.2.9 Housing Capital Investment**

In line with restart guidelines the majority of Housing Capital work programmes have recommenced, the team are fully working from home and managing all communications to tenants involved in programmes and maintaining email contact links. All restarted work programmes are being managed under the new circumstances and working with our contractors to ensure all sites and work are carried out safely in line with COVID management processes. The team continue to update all investment and housing databases to assist with ongoing records, programme monitoring and year end returns. Private Sector Housing Grants applications and processing is also active and managing this in line with COVID management processes.

#### **4.2.10 Building Services**

Building Services continue to provide all services with the exception of non-urgent kitchen, bathroom and shower installs which we hope to commence early in January 2021. It has been necessary to have a temporary pause in tenant reporting new non-urgent repairs for a 4-week period where the service will concentrate on clearing the repairs reported prior to the COVID-19 lockdown. This is from 19 October until 16 November 2020 when tenants will be able to start reporting repairs again.

The Scottish Government new 5 level tiered COVID-19 alert system allows construction activity to continue in all levels and we will continue to deliver all services unless the guidance changes. All employees, available for work, were back at the end of August 2020.

Whilst all services and all team members are back at work, the necessary COVID-19 compliance measures and restrictions have and will continue to have an affect on the productivity and activity of the workforce.

#### **4.2.11 Economic Development**

The Business Support team in partnership with the Rates team have successfully administered the Coronavirus Business Support Fund on behalf of the Scottish Government and by the close of the scheme the team has approved 1,400 applications from local businesses and provided funding which totalled £14,780,750.

The Scottish Government recently announced a new and temporary COVID-19 Business Closure Fund and a Business Hardship Fund which are being administered by local authorities. These funds provide one-off grants to hospitality and other businesses required to close or that have been very directly impacted by the restrictions implemented on 9 October 2020. To date, the business support team have received over 134 applications which are currently being processed. Further grants for soft-play and nightclub establishments who have been impacted by closures along with support for business that have previously been support furloughed staff have also been announced by the Scottish Government, to be administered by local authorities.

A Business Recovery programme has been developed and promoted to local businesses to assist them to recover after the lockdown period. The Business Recovery programme includes a range of free webinars, 1-2-1 expert help and grant support to assist businesses to adapt their properties, purchase capital equipment and to encourage them to review their business strategies and improve their on-line presence.

The focus for the Business Support service is to progress with the Business Gateway programme and engage and support the business community in the recovery phase from the Pandemic. Together with the Chamber of Commerce the service is supporting a Scottish wide 'Love Local' campaign with local retailers to stimulate our Town Centres as they commence the recovery process.

In terms of regeneration works the District Heating Network at Queens Quay has been progressing well and 'heat on' occurred in October 2020 with a series of further testing procedures required and supply being provided to first set of customers before end of 2020. Discussions are progressing in terms of wider site connections with housing developers and importantly the expansion opportunities of connecting to the Golden Jubilee Hospital and progressing opportunity of securing LCITP funding from Scottish Government. The Regeneration infrastructure works at Queen Quay with a £15.62m contribution is almost complete with landscaping works and cathodic protection works at the basin commencing with these final elements due for completion prior to end of 2020. The Council City Deal project at the ExxonMobil site is progressing with the key milestone of conclusion of missives for the site completed in September 2020 with the view of transfer site ownership on completion of ExxonMobil remediation works in two years' time.

### **HSCP Services**

#### **4.2.12 Test and Protect**

West Dunbartonshire's response to Test and Protect is being triangulated between Mental Health Services, The Humanitarian Hub and The Scottish Welfare Fund Team. We are proactively calling residents who have been asked to self-isolate and sign-posting to support, where required, through the Humanitarian Hub or the Scottish Welfare fund. This can include facilitating access to the Scottish Government's Self-Isolation Support Grant. This additional activity is being consumed within existing staffing resources at present; however, this may be reviewed depending on demand and capacity.

#### **4.2.13 Mental Health, Addictions and Learning Disabilities**

Since the beginning of the pandemic, an emergency service has been available offering: assessment and treatment via telephone/video link, where possible, and in person when required. Services are now offering a more routine service with activity levels at just below pre-COVID levels. However, all staff are prepared for the possibility of returning to an urgent service should the Scottish Government guidelines / restrictions require this and relevant contingency plans are in place to support this.

HSCP continues to work closely with commissioned services to support continuity of service and minimise isolation in service users and stress within the commissioned service staff group.

#### **4.2.14 Residential Care Homes**

The weekly multi-disciplinary oversight group including Public Health and the Care Inspectorate continues to meet and as at 27 October, West Dunbartonshire had an overall RAG rating of 5 at amber and 7 at green. This reflects the mass testing that was ongoing as a consequence of staff testing positive during routine screening.

Testing of all care home staff continues on a weekly basis. Where a member of staff or a resident develops symptoms or tests positive, then mass testing of all residents (with consent) and staff is carried out. To date, well over 1500 tests have been carried out.

Where any resident or staff members tests as positive, the care home is required to close to new admissions for 14 days. At periods during the last number of weeks, up to 5 care homes in West Dunbartonshire have been closed for this reason, resulting in delays for some individuals in being discharged from hospital.

The testing process for staff working in West Dunbartonshire care homes are planned to move from the UK Social Care Portal, using the Glasgow Lighthouse Lab, to NHS GGC Laboratories. Administrative and logistical

processes are currently being put in place and it is anticipated that the full transfer will be completed by week commencing 23<sup>rd</sup> November.

#### **4.2.15 Care Home Visiting**

No care home visiting can take place in the 5 amber care homes until their outbreak status is ascertained, however outdoor visiting continues for the remainder. Following the communication from Scottish Government about implementing the further staged approach to visits and activities in care homes, the Director of Public Health for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde issued a letter to all local care homes advising that despite the communication from Scottish Government, care homes in the area should not allow indoor visiting at this time. We have been working in partnership with local care homes and supporting them to undertake the requisite risk assessments to enable them to plan and be prepared for when it is possible to reinstate indoor visiting. We continue to be guided by our Public Health Colleagues and are firmly sighted on the importance of care home residents having contact with family members to maintain their wellbeing. This has been a particularly difficult time for care home residents and their families and we hope that the measures in place will enable indoor visiting to happen safely in the near future.

#### **4.2.16 PPE**

Contingency plans are being strengthened to mitigate possible disruption to supply in the event of adverse weather. There are plans in place to deal with any increased demand due to a higher number of aerosol generating procedures being carried out in the community.

#### **4.2.17 Children & Families and Justice Services**

Work has continued to increase the capacity for supervised contact between children and their families within premises across West Dunbartonshire. In addition to existing contact rooms in Clydebank and Dumbarton, further contact space has been agreed and final building works are being completed which will allow the capacity for supervised contact to increase from 10 to 25 contacts per week. Staff continue to utilise other locations for contact as well as use of technology for remote contact and further work with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration is continuing to identify further needs as new Orders are made.

Activity levels more closely mirror pre-lockdown demands, including child protection activity where weekly visits continue to children who have child protection plans. Increasing workloads are also reflected in universal and specialist children's health services, where more children and families are

being seen face-to-face, alongside use of 'Attend Anywhere' virtual appointments.

Within Justice Social Work Services, unpaid work placements continue to be provided on a restricted basis to ensure compliance with Public Health Scotland and professional guidance. A combination of backlog from pre-lockdown and new Orders mean that this is a priority area for the service – whilst shelter, appropriate indoor placements and toilet facilities limit fuller expansion of the service, reflecting the position in other areas, this is being continually reviewed with placement providers to identify opportunities to scale up unpaid work placements across the area.

#### **4.2.18 Testing**

##### **Testing Facilities**

Local testing facilities remain available in West Dunbartonshire through 2 routes. The first is the Mobile Testing Unit operating on alternative days from Church Street. The second is the Local Testing Unit operating out of Napier Hall, Old Kilpatrick, from 8am till 8pm 7 days per week. Both facilities continue to be well used.

##### **Testing of Staff and Residents**

Testing of care home staff continues on a weekly basis, with other HSCP staff being tested if symptomatic. In the period between 15<sup>th</sup> May to 8<sup>th</sup> October, 10,223 staff tests have been processed. The vast majority of these tests can be attributed to residential care staff, with 129 tests relating to Care at Home staff.

Residents in care homes are tested (with consent) if they develop symptoms, or if another resident or staff members tests positive. In addition, 10% of all residents are tested each week. Since 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1,704 care home residents' tests have been carried out.

#### **4.2.19 Police Enquiry in Care Homes**

The Lord Advocate directed that from 21 May 2020, Covid-19 or presumed Covid-19 deaths where the deceased might have contracted the virus in the course of their employment or occupation or where deceased was resident in a care home when the virus was contracted should be reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). That decision also applies to deaths which had already occurred before that date.

COPFS has established a dedicated COVID-19 Death Enquiry Team who are working closely with Police Scotland to obtain the information which it requires to identify and investigate these deaths. The COPFS have stated that the involvement of the police for this purpose at this time does not of itself mean

that a crime is being investigated. The police are one of the many agencies that are working together to provide COPFS with information about deaths that have occurred from Covid-19.

The stated purpose is to understand the circumstances of the death, to prevent future deaths in similar circumstances and to take any necessary action where it is appropriate to do so.

Three Care Homes in West Dunbartonshire have been included in the enquiry to date. These are 2 care homes provided by the independent sector, and 1 in house care home. Care home managers have been asked to provide a range of information relating to former residents, including care plans, and the guidance and protocols in place at the time. All 3 care homes have provided the information requested.

#### **4.2.20 Health and Safety Executive Assurance of Care Homes**

We were informed on 22<sup>nd</sup> October that the Health and Safety Executive have made changes to their process for assuring appropriate measures are in place in Local Authority owned care homes, to minimise the spread of corona virus.

The tiered process will involve spot check phone calls to care homes to review measures being taken to minimise spread of the virus in the care home and to protect workers as they care for residents.

Where the initial phone call raises concerns, the care home will receive a second phone call to explore the issues in more detail. If, after the second call, the care home has not provided sufficient assurance about control measures, a further intervention may include a visit on a suitable date.

At the visit, HSE will check that a suitable and sufficient COVID-19 risk assessment has been carried out and that the necessary control measures in line with current guidance are in place.

The HSE have stated that inspectors and visiting officers will seek to take a proportionate approach, focusing on what is reasonable and achievable in each situation.

HSE anticipates that advice will be enough to resolve issues, but if serious risks are encountered, they can take enforcement action to protect people's health and safety. HSE will share the outcome of the spot checks and any follow-up action with the Care Inspectorate.

All relevant care homes in West Dunbartonshire have been made aware of this process. In addition, over the course of the last 6 months, we have

initiated spot checks on our in-house care homes in relation to management of COVID-19.

#### **4.2.21 New Queen's Quay Care Home**

The work on the new state of the art Queen's Quay Care Home is almost complete and the facility will be handed over to the Local Authority on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November. Moving residents from one care home to another takes detailed planning at any time, but in a pandemic, has required very meticulous planning, involving the residents and their families, the residential staff team, Care Inspectorate, Infection Control, Health and Safety and Public Health.

A detailed migration plan follows handover, including staff and family visits (including the option of a virtual visit), furniture deliveries, transfer of client's personal belongings, and deep cleaning. It is anticipated that the first residents will move in on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> December. The 2 existing care homes of Mount Pleasant House and Frank Downie House will transfer into the new home, but will remain in the group or 'bubble' of their current home for 14 days after the move.

The new home offers a wonderful array of spaces, including a cinema, bistro, art studio, activity rooms, courtyards and terraces. The residents will be able to enjoy these spaces, in managed smaller group, during this 14-day period.

We look forward to facilitating virtual tours for elected members prior to the residents moving in.

### **5. People & Technology**

Teams across People & Technology (ICT, H&S, HR, OD, Change & Digital and Transactional HR and Pay) have been and continue to be redirected as and when needed to best support the organisation.

#### **5.1** Two key aspects of the teams' work involved mobilising extensive homeworking, i.e. beyond that already established and our employee engagement focus.

Our approach to homeworking was already well established as we had been encouraging a move to a more agile workforce for some time and already had a large number of office based employees enabled with technology to work from home prior to Covid albeit not fulltime nor in the number we have now. Whilst culturally we were well prepared to make the shift to remote working, it was clear immediately that we did not yet have the collaboration online meeting tools required (this being in our plans for 19/20). Within a matter of weeks, we had enabled a rapid deployment of MS Teams across the council. This has been hugely successful and will support the wider Office 365 project,

supported by approximately 100 MS Team Ambassadors across all council teams. Feedback and peer support has seen MS Teams become a key means of communication and support with Virtual cuppa sessions and a book review club.

The technologies for home working (thin client and netscaler) have been available since 2014 and used regularly but not at high volume at any given point. The technology has continued to work for the significantly increased volume of users. Many users able to use their personal devices to securely access all their systems and shared folders via Citrix storefront.

- 5.2** We have a robust risk-based approach and logging system introduced for all COVID-related technical changes. Regular review of this change log is in place as part of the ICT bi-weekly COVID meeting. Initially we put a hold on all technical changes to ensure stability of technical environment (at start of lockdown). Gradually we have reintroduced technical changes especially server security patching with majority now delivered during working hours to ensure ICT availability in case of emerging issues.
- 5.3** The ICT teams have built and deployed 300+ laptops to increase the number of users with access to systems (these devices were taken from stock held as part of the annual device replacement programme). Within the initial 2 months, over 400 users required additional tools and their accounts and devices were changed from being thin build to Virtual Private Network (VPN) build mostly to accommodate demand for local installs of MS Teams and VOIP telephony for home working. At same time ICT continued to investigate and test MS Teams and VOIP being delivered via thin client storefront and subsequently deployed from June. This ensures MS Teams and VOIP roll out can be done automatically via Citrix storefront and does not require users to come on site.
- 5.4** Existing low cost voice conferencing facilities were enhanced / increased in March and a business requirement for video conferencing tools was then accommodated with a rapid deployment of Zoom in April and MS Teams by mid-May. The roll out including training by the OD, Change and Digital team continues. Technical support is provided by ICT at all OD training, senior management and committee video calls. MS Teams live events plug is implemented for committee/council meetings. Providing technical support to users who are home working is more challenging and ICT produced broadband best practice guidance and issue to users monthly as well as creating support videos that could be sent to users via text to assist with remote access set up and a range of other useful guidance.



- 5.5** The work we have been doing around the organisational culture has helped the workforce make this transition a smooth one with lots of tools and supports to help. Some examples like replacement of the bureaucratic annual PDP to one more focused on valued conversations and building relationships, with an enhanced focus on development, improved communications and relationship building. The biggest area of change in this culture space is around developing workforce trust, removing the formal flexi system, trusting employees to manage time and managers to work with increased flexibility to ensure the best service delivery. This coupled with senior managers' role modelling the message that working in differing ways was expected and not frowned upon. This approach was further supported with the re-launch of our refreshed, collaborative and holistic approach to wellbeing addressing physical, financial, mental aspects. The learning & development support offered further demonstrates the commitment to employees whilst ensuring they feel listened to and valued. This has involved reviewing policies to ensure language and tone supports our values and approach and ensuring that we have policies that support an agile and flexible workforce. Via the Wellbeing Strategy we now have approximately 70 wellbeing Advocates and manager group who promote supports currently in place and listen to feedback on what would help and how best to provide this. We have provided increased mental health support via webinars from various SME and increased mental health support/counselling. WDC have been shortlisted in HR Excellence for best Health & Wellbeing Strategy, up against large private sector companies.
- 5.6** The commitment to Digital Transformation has focused on supporting employee skills (inclusion), improving communication and, where possible, to introduce a digital and automated response to repetitive, mundane tasks with a view to improving job quality and service delivery for users.
- 5.7** We have also looked at how we best use data to inform decision making and this includes our wellbeing dashboard and workforce console. This provides managers with real time information and facilitates intelligent decision making as well as removing the need for large spreadsheets and gives info on % of MSK absence to Physio referrals, overtime working, employees working in excess of 48 hours, turnover, and more.
- 5.8** We have developed an induction App and are looking at various other ways to support and communicate with employees, new and established via online means. We have employees networking externally and taking part on numerous partner and external learning/sharing opportunities and always looking at good practice and how best we continue to support our work in this area.

As we now face further uncertainty, we additionally created a return to work ready pack to support employees and line managers who were required to return to an office space and these are all available via <https://intranet.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/chief-executive/people-technology/hr-online/support-for-employees/employee-wellbeing/covid-19/>.

- 5.9** At the end of October, 45 employees had been referred for testing via the employer portal.

## **6. Financial and Procurement Implications**

### **6.1 Financial Implications**

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 won't 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 Scottish Government has implemented an approach to implementing local restrictions and has provided further funding linked to this.

- 6.3** The COVID-19 Update report to August 2020 Council reported that £5.582m of funding had been allocated to WDC to provide financial support, including funding for provision of support to the community for food provision, additional Social Welfare Fund payments, additional Discretionary Housing Payments and additional Council Tax Reduction payments (the latter has not yet been allocated). The September Council reported a further £0.862m linked to the further Barnett consequential of £49m, giving a total of £6.444m

- 6.4** Since the September report a number of further funding streams have been notified either via letters from the SG, or via reports to COSLA Leaders. In some instances, COSLA Leaders have agreed distribution methodologies, though distributions have not all yet been advised by SG, as follows:

**Capital Grant:**

<b>Funding</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>WDC</b>
Town Centre Fund – additional funding	£18.000m	£0.307m
Regeneration Capital Grant Fund – additional funding	£12.000m	TBC
Bus Priority Rapid Development Fund	£10.000m	TBC
School Transport– school transport	£1.500m	£0.018m

**Revenue Grants:**

<b>Funding</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>WDC</b>
Administration of £500 payments to individuals financially impacted by local covid restrictions	£0.906m	TBC
Test and Protect – “Support for People” teams retention	£0.597m	£0.012m
Test and Protect – “Outbound calling” to period to 11 January 2021	£2.275m	£0.046m
Business Support Grants – linked to business restrictions in central belt	£13.440m	£0.270m
Business Support – Covid-19 Restrictions – support for business forced to close or restricted	£48.000m	£0.400m
Business Support – Covid-19 Contingency – support for soft play and nightclub businesses		£0.195m
Furlough Support – Furlough support to businesses required to close and furloughed staff		£0.183m
Council Tax Reduction – additional funding due to covid-19	£25.000m	TBC
Young Person’s Guarantee – support to 16-24 year olds in employability and skills support	£30.000m	TBC
Discretionary Housing Payment – additional allocation linked to covid-19 financial impact	£3.000m	TBC
Environmental Health Officer Support Funding (2020/21 and 2021/22)	£2.900m	TBC
Addressing Future Need to Support Individuals at Financial Risk – flexible funding	£20.000m	£0.481m
Free school meals over holiday periods in winter period	£6.950m	TBC
Mental Health - on young people’s mental health issues with a focus on those brought about by COVID-19	£15.000m	£0.233m

- 6.5** In relation to additional costs being incurred by the WDHSCP, as reported to the August 2020 Council meeting the SG has advised that such costs will be funded. The HSCP updates its current and projected annual cost projections for the impact of Covid-19 on a monthly basis and submits to the Scottish Government as part of the NHSGGC consolidated Local Mobilisation Plan financial return. The submission on 23 October projects a combined Covid-19 cost of £6.931m across health and social care services.

In addition to the £2.647m already allocated to the HSCP for social care costs, the Scottish Government released further funding in early October to the six Glasgow HSCPs of £47.028m to cover a proportion of health and social care costs incurred and projected. The HSCP's proposed share of this is £1.747m based on a combination of actual costs incurred to the end of September and an allocation to part fund the projected costs between October and the end of March 2021.

- 6.6** The September 2020 report advised that COSLA and SG had written to the UK Government around the potential for such flexibilities to be provided to Councils over 2020/21 and 2021/22. There has now been confirmation that three financial flexibilities have been agreed, the value of these for WDC has yet to be advised and SG and COSLA are working on the guidance around these flexibilities currently. The flexibilities approved are:

- The use of capital receipts – can be used to fund Covid costs in 2020/21 and 2021/22;
- Allowing a loans funds principle repayment holiday – this can only be used in one of the two years 2021 or 2022; and
- PPP debt rescheduling – implement this change in either 2020/21 or 2021/22 – just once and continues until the PPP schools are no longer in debt.

The letter from SG advising of the above agreed flexibilities advised that they were worth around £600m; however this figure is subject to confirmation and will depend on technical accounting guidance, particularly in relation to the PPP option. The value and availability of the flexibilities will vary between Councils depending on availability of e.g. capital receipts, extent of PPP/PFI type funding in place, etc. The letter also advised that SG expect councils to use some of the reserves to deal with the Covid costs and that any implementation of the above flexibilities should not be used to maintain or increase reserves.

The first two options may be limited for WDC to use due to already planned use of capital receipts for Loans Fund principal payments, though officers will consider available options once the guidance has been received.

- 6.7** As reported to the September 2020 Council there will be further a Barnett Consequential arising from the Loss of Income support scheme which the UK Government is implementing in England. The value of this consequential has been estimated at £90m, though the final value will depend on the claims made by Councils in England under the English scheme.
- 6.8** 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.
- 6.9** 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 into 2021/22.

**6.10 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, some of which will be also required to be advised to the UK Government. 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.

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**Joyce White**  
**Chief Executive**

**Date: 19 November 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;  
and
6. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 30 September 2020.

**Wards Affected:** All

