



## Report by Chief Executive

Council Meeting: 23 March 2022

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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 February 2022.
- 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 Council in February 2022; 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 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 In terms of the Scottish response to the pandemic the SG position remains below Level 0. Infection rates continue to fluctuate and vaccination rates continue to increase which has allowed the SG to retain this position. However, clearly the pandemic has not run its course, with Omicron, a new variant of interest emerging

in recent months, and the pandemic continuing to impact everyday life. The Council and its residents continue to live with the pandemic with residents and employees becoming infected at different times and as a result it can be expected that there will be ongoing issues linked to COVID-19. Such issues might be around: shortages of Council staff due to COVID-19 illness or isolation periods; or interruption to supplies of goods and services through shortages of staff in suppliers and/or delivery regimes.

Since the end of September 2021 infection rates across Scotland and within the Council area remained fairly static although this position changed in December 2021 when as a result of the Omicron variant, cases increased locally and nationally to their highest level to date. Ongoing disruption to service delivery will be inevitable as employees are amongst those infected and/or isolating, and gradual recovery is more likely than simply returning immediately to the previous “normal”.

- 3.3** The majority of restrictions implemented during December were lifted from 24 January, including the maximum three-household limit for social gatherings and non-professional adult indoor sports able to resume.

In addition, changes were announced to testing with people returning a positive lateral flow test no longer required to take a PCR test to confirm and instead to log the lateral flow result online as soon as the test is completed.

The First Minister confirmed in an update to the Scottish Parliament on 25 January, that a phased return to offices could begin with a recommendation employers should consider implementing hybrid working – with workers spending some time in the office and some time at home.

A phased return to Council offices completed on Monday 28 February and offices opened to the public on an appointment basis from 7 March.

In recent weeks there has been an increase in Covid-19 cases nationally, with a recent ONS survey suggesting 1 in 18 people had the virus in Scotland. This spike has been reflected locally with cases in West Dunbartonshire currently above the NHS GGC board average.

Face coverings will continue to be required on public transport and indoor spaces including public buildings until April in response to rising case numbers, it was confirmed in the most recent update to the Scottish Parliament on 15 March.

Asymptomatic people will still be advised to test regularly until 18 April - with tests free of charge - and people with symptoms advised to continue to book PCR tests until the end of April when population-wide testing and contact tracing system will come to a close.

#### **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 ongoing pandemic presents to our Council and its service delivery. Elected Members will continue to be updated through the reports to Council, Elected Member briefing notes and more frequently where required.

## **4.2 Key Current Issues and Updates**

### **4.2.1 Regulatory and Regeneration**

For the period Monday 24 January 2022 up to Friday 18 February 2022 inclusive there were six deaths registered in West Dunbartonshire, all were residents.

Environmental Health, Licensing and Trading Standards teams continue to visit and provide advice and assistance to owners and operators of businesses to ensure they are aware of the health protection guidance that applies to their businesses. Environmental Health are also continuing to work in close liaison with Public Health colleagues and providing advice and guidance as needed. The dual testing site in Clydebank Community Centre is the most successful site in the pilot of five Local Authorities which operate dual testing facilities.

Business Support continues to deliver a range of sector specific Scottish Government COVID grants across our business community and engage across a number of services in this effort.

### **4.2.2 Education**

#### **Covid Guidance for Schools and Centres**

Key recent Covid updates for schools which came into force from 28 February represent the next step in the phased approach to easing of mitigations and have included:

- The removal of the requirement to wear face coverings in secondary school classrooms, while maintaining existing provision to wear a face covering in communal areas or when in close contact with others.
- The removal of the remaining restrictions on holding school assemblies.
- Transition experiences for children and young people entering P1 or S1 can now resume fully if appropriately risk assessed

Schools are still required to maintain maximum compliance with all appropriate ongoing safety measures to help to reduce transmission. It is also to be noted that while there has been some easing of mitigations, many schools continue to face challenges with the number of positive cases and staff absences. Staff have shown great commitment and effort to ensuring there has been minimal disruption to learning for children and young people.

## **Early Learning & Childcare (ELC)**

We are continuing to do all that we can to protect our families and communities by adhering to guidance and revisions to guidance by ensuring the mitigations required to suppress the virus continue to be adhered to. Further updates to the ELC Covid guidance was issued on 17 February 2022. This revision to guidance, is version 16 which has updates as follows:

- A revised approach to self-isolation for high risk contacts from 6 January 2022 taking account of the latest advice and progress with the booster programme;
- A new section on the importance of vaccination;
- Update to the self-isolation exemption, given the changes to the self-isolation policy;
- The section on testing has been revised to reflect the latest advice; and
- An addition to the section on cleaning practices covering sand.

Our ELC staff continue to be impacted by the virus and the numbers of positive cases amongst staff has recently increased. The Care Inspectorate temporarily adjusted their policy position on adult to child ratios however this was withdrawn at the end of February. Our ELC are continuing to operate without this adjustment and ratios are being adhered to.

Guidance for schools was amended recently to allow children from Early Learning and Childcare settings to visit primary schools to help facilitate smooth transitions into primary school. Changes to the ELC guidance also allows primary school teachers and senior school staff to visit ELC settings as part of that transitioning process. Enabling visits for children to familiarise themselves with their school environment and likewise, for school teachers and staff to visit ELC settings for the purpose of supporting positive transition experiences for children entering primary 1. This cannot be overstated in its importance for children transitioning to P1 which can also be especially important for children with additional support needs.

## **Carbon-dioxide (CO2) monitoring**

Close monitoring of levels of CO2 across our learning estate continues. Monitors measure levels of CO2 in learning and teaching spaces, as well as other areas that staff use without pupils. Using our reporting mechanism, all spaces reported fall within acceptable levels, with no space requiring further intervention. The Scottish Government has confirmed requirements to access additional funding and in response we are considering where improvements to heating or ventilations systems may be beneficial.

## **SQA Examinations**

In February SQA confirmed that 'Scenario 2' would run, whereby additional support materials would be provided for students to aid revision ahead of the scheduled examinations in summer. Scottish Government also confirmed additional funding for Easter Revision programmes, specifically to target Senior Phase learners undertaking NQ exams in 2022 within three categories - from the most deprived backgrounds; with additional support needs; and whose attendance and/or attainment has been most acutely affected by Covid-19. Schools are presently developing these programmes for implementation

### **4.2.3 Citizen, Culture & Facilities**

#### **Facilities Management**

The Facilities Management (FM) service continues to provide enhanced touch point cleaning during the day in Council premises including schools, nurseries and also in the offices which have recently re-opened. The FM service has over 600 posts and it has recently been challenging to maintain operations whilst supporting staff absence/isolation due to Covid. There has been very little impact on our service provision and we continue to be grateful for the efforts of our staff who are working extremely hard to mitigate against any potential disruption.

#### **Housing Repairs Contact Centre**

The repairs contact centre continues to demonstrate an improved performance following the recent investment in staffing. It should be noted there have been numerous named storms resulting in increased call volumes throughout February. Despite this weather related demand, we continue to answer calls in just over two minutes and have answered 81% of calls throughout the month.

#### **Self-Isolation Support Grant (SISG)**

SISG applications remain steady in numbers with 340 received during February, from 498 applications received during January.

Currently there are 86 applications outstanding with a processing time of one week. In total, £0.938m has been issued to residents through SISG since April 2021.

### **4.2.4 Building Services**

We are working hard to attend to and reduce the number of housing repairs and we appreciate the ongoing patience from tenants across West Dunbartonshire. The overall trend of active repairs is reducing as we address the backlog.

## **Active Repairs**

As at 9 March 2022, there were 3,280 active repairs. These can be broken down further as, 830 urgent, target to be completed within 10 days; 1174 non urgent, target to be completed within 20 days and 1276 planned/reactive, target to be completed within 40 days. In addition to these active repairs, the team attend to emergency repairs – target to be completed within 4 hours and right to repair – target to be completed 1 day.

While we aim to complete the outstanding repairs first, we are at the same time responding to newly reported repairs and these are scheduled based on the urgency, priority and nature of the repair. This does affect those repairs which are less urgent and in turn the ability to meet our targets.

For all repairs completed in the month of January, 91.8% were completed within their performance target times. However, of the total active repairs (3,280), 58%, (1,962) of these remain outwith target time for completion. The target to complete an emergency repair is 4 hours, however the performance to the end of January shows an average completion time of 5.73 hours.

## **Repairs Completed**

Building Services completed 25,776 reactive repairs during the period April 2021 - January 2022. Of these, 5,167 were emergency repairs, the remaining being non-emergency, reactive/ planned repairs. Of the 25,776 repairs completed during the period, 23,661 – 90.6% were completed within their target times; the performance in January was 91.8%.

In January 2,872 reactive repairs were completed and of these 2,190 were non-emergency repairs. Unfortunately, during January there were 152 occasions where operatives have not been able to gain access to the property to undertake arranged repairs including emergency repairs.

## **Difficulties recruiting additional craft workers**

Shortages and increased demand continues across the industry. This demand and skill shortage has undoubtedly driven up the trades / craft worker salary, which, in comparison to the private sector, make it very difficult to attract and retain permanent and temporary workers. The skill shortage continues to be mainly electricians, plumbers and joiners. External contractors are reporting similar challenges. As previously reported, work is underway in conjunction with Trades Unions, to consider the workforce elements of the Building Services improvement plan, including the jobs, salaries, working hours and increasing modern apprentice numbers.

## **Absence**

High levels of absence continue to impact significantly on the ability to address the outstanding repairs. In January, 1.99 FTE days were lost per employee. Of the days lost, 23 FTE days were absences between 1 – 3 days; a total of 31 FTE days were due to short term absence of less than 6 days; a total of 226.2 FTE days were absences of between 6 days and 4 weeks) and 195.7 FTE days were long term absences of over 4 weeks. February is showing a reduction in absence with 1.37 FTE days lost per employee and reduction in particular in the number of days lost to long term absence.

## **Action Plan**

The team continue to undertake the following to address outstanding repairs and improve performance:

- Management team weekly workforce planning meetings to review progress and agree further actions
- Additional planners / job schedulers recruited and team now at full capacity
- Dedicated teams set up to focus solely on repairs which have missed target
- Reassigning team members from other projects where possible
- Recruitment advert via MyJobScotland and social media which remains live until end March 2022
- Temporary engagement of agency workers where possible
- Increased use of sub-contractors where possible
- Targeted overtime where possible
- Seeking volunteers to participate in standby / call out and respond to emergency repairs
- Continued communication with tenants through appropriate forums including tenant groups, Housing News, social media, text messaging
- Monitoring, management and mitigation of material pinch points

### **4.2.5 Health and Social Care Partnership**

Whilst we have seen rising levels of infection in our community, to date services are being sustained across the Health and Social Care Partnership. Undoubtedly we are seeing the benefit of a high rate of vaccination in reducing the impact upon both communities and our staff. Whilst in pockets of services there have been some challenges, these have been mitigated through the flexibility and co-operation of our staff.

## **Care at Home**

Whilst Covid related absences have risen recently staff are responding to cover shifts at short notice to ensure care packages continue to be delivered to the most vulnerable in our community.



## **Residential Care**

We are seeing some increase again in Covid related absences and staffing levels are being managed to maintain appropriate staffing levels.

## **Care Homes**

A number of our care homes are currently experiencing Covid 19 outbreaks affecting both staff and residents. This reflects the continuing high rates of Covid 19 in the local community. Encouragingly most residents are experiencing only mild common cold type symptoms indicating the success of the vaccination programme in preventing the more severe complications of Covid -19 in this vulnerable group. There are no indications of waning immunity and the next round of booster immunisation for Covid 19 will commence in April for all eligible care home residents.

Care home staff have been similarly affected, care home business continuity plans have ensured that staff absence has not adversely impacted on the quality of care provided to residents. The NHSGGC Care Home collaborative has required to provide mutual aid in terms of staffing on only one occasion this month. The reduction in the period of mandated self-isolation following infection or exposure to Covid-19 further mitigates this risk to safe staffing within care homes. HSCP day to day relationships continue with individual care homes, the HSCP multi professional Care Home Oversight group continues to meet weekly ensuring that the most up to date information and guidance is shared.

West Dunbartonshire HSCP is harnessing this NHSGGC Care Home Hub resource to support continuous improvement in the standards of care within our care homes. All care homes which have experienced recent outbreaks have received infection prevention control (IPC) visits from NHSGGC Care Home Hub ICP Nurses. This provides a further layer of assurance that IPC practice within care homes remains optimal. Care homes have also received support from the NHSGGC Hub in relation to pressure ulcer prevention and care and implementation of food, fluid and nutrition standards.

In December 2021, the Care Inspectorate undertook a comprehensive inspection of Queens Quay Local Authority Care Home which opened in December 2020, this was the care home's first inspection since opening and results were very positive. The inspectorate noted the caring and compassionate way in which residents were cared for.

We are about to embark on our next round of care assurance visits to all care homes. These visits are undertaken by senior nursing and social work colleagues from the HSCP. Due to the extensive work already undertaken the approach will be one of appreciative enquiry and collaboration to support all care homes on their journey of continuous improvement.

## **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Hubs**

PPE supplies remain plentiful and supply chains continue to be robust. The local HSCP PPE hub continues to operate. The memorandum of understanding has been extended until September 2022, albeit with more stringent criteria in place and greater expectations on providers to demonstrate failure of business as usual routes prior to accessing hub support. This does not apply to unpaid carers and personal assistants who will continue to access all PPE via the HSCP PPE Hub.

The Scottish Government PPE Strategy & Governance Board continues to work with partners such as the NHS to ensure that Scotland is fully prepared for any future pandemic situation.

## **Covid-19 Testing**

On 22 February, Health Care Workers were directed to reduce the frequency of their lateral flow device (LFD) testing and to revert back to twice weekly LFD.

Social care staff continue with their daily testing regime prior to each shift. Social care colleagues and Public Health Scotland are considering what, if any, changes there will be with regards to asymptomatic testing for social care staff and will publish their own director's letter once this review has been completed.

## **Covid Immunisation**

Covid immunisation continues to be the most complicated, largest vaccination programme ever undertaken by NHS Scotland. The primary objective of the COVID-19 immunisation programme is to maintain protection against severe COVID-19 disease, specifically hospitalisation and deaths, in order to maintain protection in those most vulnerable, and to protect the NHS. With the support of West Dunbartonshire Council & HSCP Colleagues the NHSGGC programme is progressing well within West Dunbartonshire.

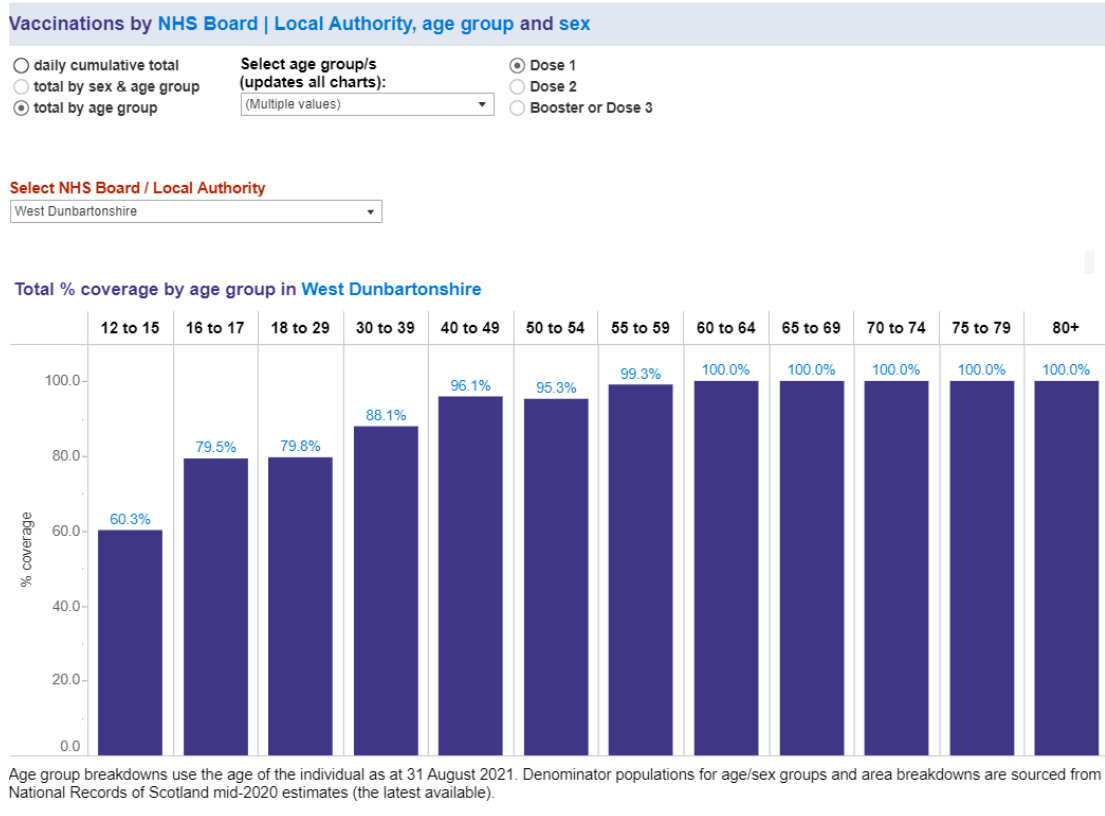
- **Spring Dose**  
The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has advised that as a precautionary strategy COVID-19 a spring dose for certain individuals at higher risk of severe Covid, around 6 months after their last vaccine dose.
- Adults aged 75 years and over;
- Residents in a care home for older adults
- Individuals aged 12 years and over who are immunosuppressed
- **Universal Offer for Children aged 5 -11 years old**  
The JCVI advised that a non-urgent offer of two doses vaccine be offered to children aged 5 to 11 years of age who are not in a clinical risk group. The two doses will be offered with an interval of at least 12 weeks between doses. This advice on the offer of vaccination to 5 to 11 year olds, who are not in a clinical risk group, is considered by the JCVI as a one-off pandemic response

programme. This one off programme applies to those currently aged 5 to 11 years, including those who will turn 5 years of age by the end of August 2022

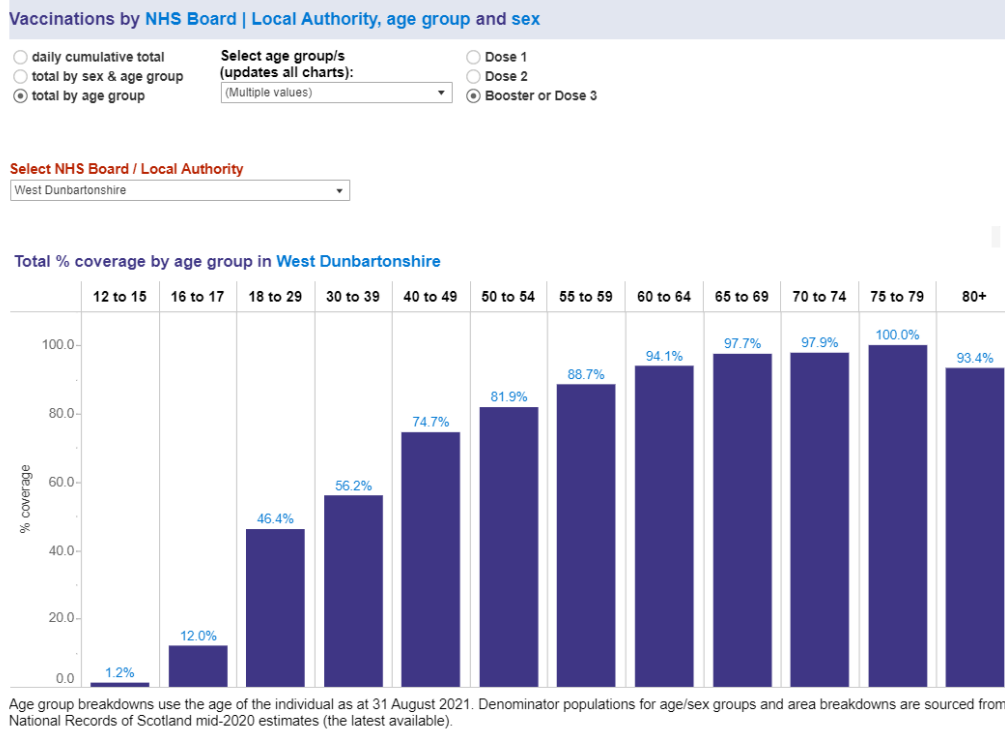
As the COVID-19 pandemic moves further towards becoming endemic in the UK, the JCVI will review whether, in the longer term, an offer of vaccination to this, and other paediatric age groups continues to be advised.

## Introduction of a Rolling Vaccination Programme & Uptake in West Dunbartonshire

### Uptake of Vaccination % of Population who have received 1st Dose



## Uptake of Vaccination % of Population who have received 3rd Dose



### 4.2.6 People & Technology

#### **Vaccination Support**

There has been a reduced provision of clinics over the last couple of months, and resources have been reduced accordingly with the flexibility to scale up as required to respond to the shifting landscape. There are ongoing discussions (through the Single Point of Contact Group, SPOC) about the future need with the last clinic scheduled for 4th April (Concord), with a view to concurrent spring and autumn programmes to follow.

#### **Impact on Employees**

As at 1 March 2022, there were a total of 162 employees absent/isolating as a result of COVID-19. In February, approximately 25% of sickness absences were attributed to confirmed COVID-19 cases, making it the top reason for absence however this was a decrease of 6% compared to January. There has also been an overall decrease of approximately 2014 working days lost in February compared to January. Furthermore, the number of working days lost attributed to minor illnesses, acute medical conditions and personal stress, has decreased by a total of 375 working days Council-wide. This decrease is particularly encouraging given they are the top reasons for absence following COVID-19. It is also positive to note that every service has reported a reduction in sickness absence compared to January. Additionally, when comparing sickness absence in February 2020 (pre pandemic) to February 2022 and excluding absences attributed to COVID-19, there

is a small increase of approximately 100 working days Council wide. Given the wider impact that the pandemic has had on the health of the nation, it is encouraging to note that the increase isn't more significant at this time.

### **Return to Offices**

All council offices were open from the 28 February with a gradual return of employees and members of the public initially by appointment. We continue to monitor capacity and space usage, with Church St users being asked to refrain from meeting with external partners and dispersed teams during March for the continuing safety of all. Currently all office spaces are adhering to 1m distancing, masks when moving around and in communal areas, and signing in/out of the buildings. We will continue to monitor changes in Scottish Government (SG) guidance and will adapt to anticipated changes at the end of March as the SG pandemic route-map evolves.

Trades Union colleagues continue to be updated on a weekly basis to ensure any issues are identified early and that all teams are being supported with the changes.

### **ICT**

The dedicated ICT 'floor walker' support for office returns continues and automated, remote device updates are being piloted and tested for remote workers.

Heightened global tensions have resulted in a hardening of security controls and users are being asked to contact ICT in advance of any intended working while abroad. Further process improvements will be implemented in line with changes in the security landscape and technology changes to support users in a hybrid working environment applied.

The 365 project implementation continues with the initial group of user mailboxes migrated. The pilot group undertook mailbox housekeeping prior to migration and are already experiencing increased user mobility and better MS Teams integration but with some restrictions until future real time collaboration within Sharepoint and one-drive services are available.

### **Transactional HR**

The ongoing support for advertising and recruitment to specific COVID recovery posts continues with more than 80 positions being supported across the WDC establishment and over 50 positions within our Vaccination Support Teams to date (in addition to the usual business and workload). Additional Scottish Government monies to support HSCPs will result in HR Connect, the Council's HR service centre, recruiting around 50 additional positions across a range of teams. HR Connect is also the first point of people-centred enquiry and support such as annual leave, terms and conditions, contractual changes and issue of contracts, COVID isolation rules and employee wellbeing amongst other topics.

#### **4.2.7 Housing and Employability**

The Communities Team continue to deliver a full service while largely working remotely. Over recent weeks there has been increased presence within communities to support individuals and groups who are keen to increase their engagement levels. This will continue in a safe manner into the Spring and Summer months. Work is progressing well with established work streams focussed on increased community participation and empowerment.

To support the many groups that continue to meet remotely the Zoom meeting facility remains available. Virtual meetings can be facilitated by the Communities Team on request.

The Volunteer Management Team continues to operate and supports a number of repeat clients with food and pharmacy deliveries. The team also continues to provide regular PPE deliveries. A review of long-standing clients and their needs will be undertaken by the team in the coming weeks to ensure we are the most appropriate service to meet those needs.

In terms of our Housing Development and Homelessness service area, there has been a continued notable increase in homelessness levels of around 16% up to the end of February compared to the same period the previous year. This is being monitored closely to see if this increase continues. There is also an increase in youth homelessness, although the recent changes to our allocation policy has the policy intention to promote the prevention of homelessness within our young people.

There has also been an increase in repeat homelessness, 11 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 281 at the end of February including 90 children within these households. All these households are supported by our teams who have continued to provide much needed person focussed support throughout the pandemic. The recent percentage increase to the number of offers made to homeless households with Council housing stock will positively impact on this figure and we will be asking our housing association partners to replicate this.

The Homelessness Service has been fully operational throughout the pandemic and ensured there were no episodes of rooflessness or destitution within the local authority area. We have increased our focus on homelessness prevention activities over the last quarter and worked closely with a number of landlords to avoid evictions. This has been further strengthened through the introduction of the Scottish Government funded Tenant Support Fund of £277k in late

September. To date we have awarded 148 grants to households preventing homelessness. Any unspent funds can be carried over into new financial year.

Our new build programme has been progressing well under ongoing safe working practices. Over the course of the pandemic we have delivered 316 new homes, including the completion of the St Andrews, Creveul Court, Alexandria and Dumbarton Harbour, Dumbarton. The More Homes Delivery Team have provided a wide range of practical assistance to ensure all new tenants maximise the living experience of their new homes. The development at Creveul Court was recognised at the national Association for Public Sector Excellence (APSE) awards.

Our Caretaking service has continued to deliver front line community based services within all our estates to ensure quick and effective local responses are delivered to our tenants. This includes our MSFs ensuring any potential fire hazards are responded to immediately. This service has been critical throughout the pandemic and will be an essential as we move forward in terms of our recovery and progression of our estate walkabouts, by helping keeping our estates and tenanted buildings safe, clean and tidy.

In terms of our ASB and Neighbourhood teams they continue to be operational and responsive within our communities, providing critical services during and out with normal daytime working hours. Our team has also been working on the development of our ASB policy document, which will help provide an overview of our ASB service for our tenants and residents.

Our Housing Operations teams are now delivering services in a hybrid model, with a combination of office, community and home based working. The Dumbarton/Alexandria team continue to use Mitchell Way and Clydebank staff are now utilising the Clydebank Town Centre Office as their office bases. Along with the use of these offices, we will continue to deliver a blend of methods to deliver our services, which include home visits, online, telephone and have commenced office based appointments from 7 March.

We continue to focus on estate and tenancy management, house letting and rent arrears in order to address the backlog and performance issues created by the pandemic. All staff involved in this have worked extremely hard, during challenging circumstances and steady progress has been made. However further work is still required to help us get back to pre-pandemic service and performance levels. Therefore in consultation with staff the specialist Housing Officer role has been extended for a further 6 month period.

We undertook a comprehensive review of our Housing Allocations Waiting List in order to cleanse the data on our allocations system. This has been a significant piece of work and we expect the process to be completed by mid-

April 2022. This review will have a positive impact on the day to day operational practices of the team and greatly assist in the allocation matching process, which will provide a more efficient service to our applicants.

We have also recently completed a Fit for Future review on our Housing Allocation and Void processes. Our show and tell session was held in February and we are now waiting on our Recommendations Report to determine areas we now need to take forward in terms of service improvements. A Voids Working Group has been established to carry out a comprehensive review of the void process, including reviewing existing letting standards and developing a Void Letting Policy.

Duty telephone contact systems are now in operation. A duty Housing Officer will receive calls from tenants, as opposed to these calls going to individual mobile numbers. Contact details on this will be provided via social media and also by text/email to our tenants. In terms of future plans, we have now submitted our project proposal to ICT for the development of a more robust housing operations phone system that will provide one overall number for our service. We envisage this new options/queuing will be positively received by our tenants as this will provide one overall phone number to contact for housing operations enquiries, therefore much more user friendly.

We have also changed the way we gather customer feedback by moving to online customer satisfaction surveys, via texting and emailing rather than phoning method. The surveys have also been adapted to allow service users to provide their contact details, should they wish to be contacted to discuss in more detail any areas of feedback received. We are hopeful these revised methods will increase our customer feedback returns and allow us the opportunity to speak to tenants to gather more information on areas we can use to improve our services.

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 we have established a competitive grant for service providers delivering employability support in Phase 2 of No One Left Behind. Over the next period we will award a number of grants that will increase the availability of specialist employability service provision with a focus on families most likely to experience disadvantage.

We are continuing to deliver major programmes such as the Young Person's Guarantee; Parental Employability Support and we are preparing for the



delivery of an apprenticeship pathway. These projects are making a strong, positive contribution to our preparations for recovery. Council has approved funding for the continuation of the successful Apprenticeship Investment Fund. As such we will consolidate gains and further develop our plans for both Modern Apprenticeships and Foundation Apprenticeships.

We are finalising the details of a three-year Employability service plan and together with the Community Learning and Development Plans and plans for Information and Advice Services we will have a comprehensive approach to dealing with disadvantage and contributing to Covid recovery.

While complying with health controls the teams had explored ways to re-establish face to face support focussing on those who cannot readily connect through digital platforms. This included the delivery of community learning and 'Improving the Cancer Journey' service from libraries. This development was held in abeyance because of the Omicron variant. However, recent changes to health controls have allowed us to re-establish these services while planning for return to offices in Phase 2 of the Councils return to office plan.

We are continuing to deliver services in partner agency offices. This includes ongoing discussions about delivering employability services from local jobcentres as well as embedding welfare support in four GP Practices.

Demand for the Crisis Support team has remained steady but very manageable. The team has prepared the process for distributing Household Support Funds; assisting those most in need with access to a grant to address fuel, debt, rent area costs that have grown as a result of their circumstances. The fund's focus is on household of 'previously 'shielded' people facing hardship; families likely to be affected by poverty/disadvantage and single-person and older households facing hardship. As it started in late February and is at its early stages we have provided access to 50 support grants with a further 34 families receiving either fuel vouchers or home heating support.

## **5. Financial and Procurement Implications**

### **Financial Implications**

- 5.1** The pandemic has had, and continues to have, implications in terms of service delivery and creating pressure on the Council's agreed 2021/22 budget and estimated budget in 2022/23. 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 Scottish Government (SG) COVID-19 funding received £13.692m was used and £6.738m was carried forward. Of the carried forward sum £4.765m was for SG funded interventions and £1.973m was from SG general COVID-19 funds.

**5.2** Whilst the full financial impact in 2021/22 will not be absolutely clear until the financial year end, officers have updated their estimates and are currently projecting a 2021/22 COVID-19 financial impact of £3.454m on the revenue budget. This will be funded from the general COVID funding made available by the SG. This will continue to be monitored and it should be noted it excludes spend on areas where SG has provided specific COVID-19 funding.

**5.3** The Appendix to this report summarises the 2021/22 SG revenue funding made available to the Council, currently totalling £10.550m. 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** Of the £10.550m 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.

**5.5** In February 2022 the Scottish Government announced an £80m Local Authority COVID Economic Recovery (LACER) Fund. Distribution of the fund is still to be confirmed but it is estimated the Council's share will be £1.458m. The fund is to be provided via General Revenue Grant and Scottish Government expectations are that it will be fully utilised during 2022/23. The Scottish Government has proposed the following principles of spend to guide how the fund should be used by local authorities – the expenditure must meet one or more of the following:

- Interventions that support local economic recovery and contribute to businesses being able to move from surviving the period of trading restrictions towards recovery, growth, adaptation and building resilience.
- Projects that can rebuild consumer confidence and stimulate demand and economic activity in their specific contexts.
- To support the low-income households that are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis, to become more economically active.

This funding was reported to Council as part of the budget report presented on 9 March 2022 and the budget agreed on the day included some areas of expenditure to be funded either from LACER or general COVID funds. The Council's Chief Officer – Resources will review the agreed budget to determine which COVID monies are most appropriate.

### **2022/23 Estimated COVID Cost Pressures**

**5.6** The budget report presented to Council on 9 March 2022 identified estimated COVID costs in 2022/23 of £2.058m (£1.977m estimated plus £0.081m committed) which will be funded from the Council's carried forward general COVID funds. Note however this figure is likely to change throughout the course of 2022/23.

## Supporting Communities

- 5.7** The Business Support team continue to administer the Taxi and Private Hire Driver and Operator Support Fund on behalf of the Scottish Government. To date, 289 Taxi Drivers and 187 Taxi Operators have been supported with grants which total £431,250.

During January/February, the Business Support team delivered Scottish Government funding to Hospitality and Leisure businesses to provide financial assistance to sectors affected by the COVID restrictions introduced on 27 December 2021. In total, 290 grants have been provided to Hospitality & Leisure businesses which total £870,700.

- 5.8** In addition the Council received £575,000 of funds from the Scottish Government to supplement DHP and Social Welfare Fund and address fuel poverty and food insecurity. Working4U is using some of the £575,000 funding for:
- Food insecurity (£150,000) - working with local food banks to address immediate food insecurity and paying them to deliver emergency food supplies.
  - Hardship grant (£100,000) - providing 'cash first' grants of up to £350 to families not eligible for support elsewhere who are facing significant fuel debt family crisis.

## HSCP Financial Implications

- 5.9** The additional costs of delivering delegated health and social care services impacted by COVID and associated variants continues to be closely monitored and reported to the Scottish Government and HSCP Board through the Local Mobilisation Plan (LMP) Financial Tracker.

The 2021/22 Quarter 3 return was submitted in late January 2022 with a projected cost of £3.950m. This projection has reduced from the Quarter 2 submission as a proportion of costs related to additional care at home staffing, overtime and agency costs have now been aligned to the Winter Pressures funding received from the Scottish Government. This funding was detailed in the previous update report to Council.

The final LMP return is due in late April and will reflect all allowable COVID related costs offset by any savings directly attributable to changes in service delivery because of the pandemic. It is anticipated that the final, actual cost (subject to audit) will be covered by the COVID earmarked reserve of £4.970m created last year from advance Scottish Government funding.

On the 25 February, the Scottish Government released further COVID funding totalling £981m to all NHS Boards (£362m) and Integration Authorities (£619m) for 2021/22 (based on Qtr 3 LMP returns) and advance funding for 2022/23 continuing costs.

While the February funding letter sets out indicative allocations further detail has been requested on how the individual shares have been allocated. West Dunbartonshire HSCP's current share is £7.741m to be directed to tackling the backlog of demand and increasing unmet need across day care services, care at

home, mental health, and support unscheduled care (unplanned admissions and delayed discharges) alongside sustainability payments to social care providers. Any expenditure aligned to this funding "should be agreed by the IJB Chief Finance Officer and the NHS Board Director of Finance".

This advance funding must be carried forward in an earmarked reserve for COVID purposes to be used for the continuation of costs which were funded in 2021/22 as approved through the Scottish Government Local Mobilisation Planning process.

#### **5.10 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-19 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 evidence 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 continue 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 undertaken in order to continue to achieve the Council's strategic objectives.

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

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

**Date: 11 March 2022**

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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;
14. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 24 August 2021;
15. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 29 September 2021;
16. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 27 October 2021;
17. COVID -19 Update Report – Council 22 December 2021;
- and
18. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 9 February 2022.

**Wards Affected:** All