



## **Report by Chief Executive**

**Council Meeting: 26 May 2021**

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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 2021.
- 1.2** To provide Members with up-to-date information on the additional support and advice that the council is providing to communities and businesses across West Dunbartonshire to help alleviate the impact of COVID-19.
- 1.3** To seek Members approval of spend plans for a number of Scottish Government funding streams that are available in 2021/22.

### **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 February 2021 Council;
- (b) Note the information provided in relation to the additional support and advice that the council is providing to communities and businesses across West Dunbartonshire to help alleviate the impact of COVID-19;
- (c) Note the planned expenditure on education recovery during 2021/22 and the extended Summer Holiday Programme for 2021 as detailed at 4.3.3 of the report;
- (d) Agree the extension of contracts for the COVID-19 school cleaners as detailed at 4.3.4 of the report;
- (e) Agree the planned use of the further Tier 4 Support funding from Scottish Government as detailed at 4.3.10 of the report; and
- (f) Agree the planned use of the further Scottish Government funding to support those at financial risk as detailed at 4.3.10 of the report.

### **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. 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 current Scottish Government (SG) restrictions and guidance. It is evident that there will be material financial implications for the council though this is anticipated to be funded from additional Scottish Government funds.
- 3.2** The SG is in the process of implementing a gradual easing of lockdown restrictions as infection rates have reduced significantly since the February 2021 report. Elected Members will continue to be updated on any potential change from the planned approach by the SG with WDC currently being at Level 2.

### **4. Main Issues**

#### **4.1 COVID-19 Protection Levels**

Since the last report to Council infection rates have reduced significantly both across Scotland and within West Dunbartonshire. The Scottish Government has updated its timetable for easing restrictions. The First Minister confirmed that from 17 May 2021 all mainland council areas with the exception of Glasgow and Moray will move from level 3 to level 2, which will allow people to visit other households indoors. Most islands will move to level one. There has been a cluster of outbreaks in the south side of Glasgow and in the north of Scotland. People are still urged to work from home where possible.

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

#### **4.2 Governance Arrangements**

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

#### **4.3 Key Current Live Issues**

##### **4.3.1 Finance and Resourcing**

The restrictions imposed on businesses, including the Council; by the SG arising from the pandemic has resulted in a significant operational and financial impact. The absolute financial impact is not currently clear in totality as recovery processes and approaches develop and how the stages of the SG COVID-19 route map will

actually affect Council services and finances is not clear as yet. This report provides an update on financial implications since the January 2021 report.

#### **4.3.2 Regulatory and Regeneration**

##### Environmental Health

The team continues to lead on COVID-19 cluster investigations in community settings and support Test and Protect. 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, including business settings. A Public Health Compliance Officer is now in post for the duration of 2021/22 to assist with COVID regulation in business and community settings.

Current provision for COVID-19 testing includes:

- Two Symptomatic Community Local Testing Sites: Napier Hall, Old Kilpatrick and Risk Street, Dumbarton; and
- Two Asymptomatic Testing Sites: Leven valley, Dumbarton and Clydebank East Community Centre, Clydebank.

As high street businesses, gyms and licensed premises have begun to open to the public, Licensing, Trading Standards and Environmental Health Officers have arranged a series of visits to ensure that owners and operators are aware of the legislation/ guidance and are operating in a safe manner.

##### Business Support

The Business Support team has continued to administer and pay business support grants. Since the Pandemic restrictions, the service has distributed over £30m of grant funding to our local business community. As at the date of writing, the most recent statistics for COVID business support schemes are as follows:

- The Strategic Framework Business Fund opened on Friday 13 November 2020 to provide financial support to businesses directly affected by the COVID-19 restrictions and regulations during the lockdown period. This fund closed for applications on Monday 22 March 2021. 626 applications were approved with financial support totalling £5,118,175. In addition to this, the team have also provided retail, hospitality and leisure top-up grants to 457 eligible premises, which totals £3,214,000 and supported 542 eligible businesses with transition/re-start grants which total £4,849,000;
- Financial support has also been provided to Travel Agents, Brewers and Indoor Football Centre premises through the Contingency Fund Plus Grant which totals £120,000. Exclusive Use Venues, large self-catering premises and small accommodation providers paying Council Tax have also been provided with grant support which totals £58,000;

- The Taxi Driver & Private Hire fund went live on Thursday 21 January 2021 and closed on Thursday 25 March 2021. The Business Support team worked in partnership with Licensing to check the eligibility of applicants. This fund has provided 351 taxi drivers with financial support which totalled £526,500; and
- The Discretionary Business Fund provided grant support to local businesses that were experiencing immediate financial challenges as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions and regulations that had not been able to access the Strategic Framework Business Fund. Prior to the fund closing on 30 April 2021, the fund assisted 444 individuals/businesses with financial support which totalled £1,457,000. These figures includes an additional top-up grant of £1,500 which was provided to eligible approved taxi drivers in addition to the financial support already provided through the Taxi Driver & Private Hire Fund.

#### Registrars Service

Registrars continue to provide the death registration remotely and during the period Wednesday 13 February 2021 to Friday 14 May 2021 inclusive, there were a total of 24 COVID-19 related deaths registered in this area; all 22 were residents from West Dunbartonshire.

### **4.3.3 Education**

#### Return to education

Following a second national lockdown from 26 December 2020, in February 2021 a phased re-opening of schools began. The first phase of this saw the part time return of those senior phase pupils who were required to complete practical course work for SQA Assessment purposes, along with a full time return for all primary one to primary three pupils. The second phase saw the full time return of all primary four to primary seven pupils and all secondary pupils returned on a part time basis. On 19 April 2021 all pupils returned full time to school.

Our children and staff at ELCCs have had an uninterrupted reopening since 22 February 2021. Although mitigations for the virus are in place, children, staff teams, and parents have adapted very quickly to the new way of working: face masks, two metre distance, frequent cleaning, bubbles of children, increased time outdoors, no parents in buildings, staggered drop offs and pick-ups. The children who attend ELCCs 9.00am to 3.00pm (1,140 hours) which ELCC leaders are telling us has made a difference to how children have settled back to the rhythm of the learning day.

The use of digital technology has also helped parents and carers to stay in touch and has resulted in creative ways for ELCCs to share learning. The longer ELCC session also allows parents more time to join the children's learning remotely. This new way of working would not have happened so readily if we had not had lockdowns and developed our learning at home programme. Transitions to school

are planned carefully to take place in gardens and school grounds with bubbles of children. What would seem different a year ago is now normal.

The response of schools and ELCCs across the Council to the second period of school closures between January to March showed strong and effective leadership across all schools. Evident, was a high level of commitment to providing equitable access to quality experiences for children and young people. Staff worked tirelessly and collectively to overcome barriers to engagement of learners in remote learning. A strong culture of collegiality and collaboration allowed staff to share innovative ideas and experiences to best support the remote learning opportunities for children and young people in West Dunbartonshire Council.

### Education Recovery

The SG has provided significant funds to assist in education recovery which have been reported to Council in previous COVID-19 Update reports. Most of this funding is intended to be used in financial year 2021/22, as follows, totals £2.967m:

- £70m - Education recovery (from 2020/21 – WDC £1.146m) £0.959m;
- £45m – Education recovery (from 2020/21) £0.897m; and
- £60m – Support needs of children and young people 2021/22 £1.111m

The Chief Education Officer and Leadership Team have developed an improvement strategy, which recognises the challenging and unique period of COVID-19. The first stage of this strategy is to work collaboratively with school and ELCC leaders to support their recovery and improvement planning. Appendix 1 provides details of the planned use of the SG funding provided to assist education recovery in 2021/22.

In addition to education recovery funding, the SG has also provided funds to support the employment of additional staff. We have 37.6FTE additional teachers and 6.0FTE additional learning assistants.

The wellbeing of our children and young people continues to be our primary concern as we plan our recovery and their return to school. Our Education Leaders have been supported by our Educational Psychology team and central officers to plan supports and interventions which address the range of loss, trauma and disconnection many of our pupils have experienced. We have well established processes to ensure effective multi-agency working to support Team Around The Child Planning and support interventions for individuals and families. This includes support to transition back into school for those who find this difficult and the extension of our Interrupted Learner Service to ensure continuity in education.

Following the cancellation of the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) Examination diet, work is continuing across our secondary schools to support young people in the Senior Phase who are being assessed this year under a Revised Alternative

Certification Model (ACM). Two additional in-service days have been scheduled for secondary schools on 1st and 11th of June to provide teaching staff time to prepare evidence for each student. A quality assurance process has been established at local authority level, ensuring that assessment pieces meet verification standards, and that there is a shared standard of assessment through a system of moderation of student work. As part of a national review of the quality assurance processes relating to the ACM, Her Majesties Inspectors commented favourably on our preparedness to deliver the ACM; our approach to using technology to aid this process; and the very high level of collegiality displayed by WDC. All schools are following guidance from SQA on the ACM and the deadline for submission of provisional results to SQA is Friday, 25 June 2021.

#### Summer Holiday Programme

We will continue to support our children, young people and families during the summer holiday period with our well established and successful Summer Holiday Programme. This year, the programme will be extended supported by £0.276m funding from Scottish Government; aligned to their social renewal agenda which is focused on getting it right for every child by promoting the wellbeing of children and young people, as Scotland recovers from COVID-19. This complements the free school meal replacement supports for those eligible on the basis of low income. All of our Early Years children, P1-3's and eligible P4-S6's will receive this as direct funding into bank accounts.

The priority of our programme is to ensure our families are supported in accessing a mixture of free, fun, child and family activities over the holiday periods which provide opportunity to socialise with others with access to free food an integral feature. We anticipate the activities will help address the negative impacts associated with extended periods of isolation and lack of participation in normal activities during the pandemic, which our research tell us has been a hugely difficult for our children, young people and families. This will provide opportunities for them to socialise and reconnect with peers and others during the summer, through a programme delivered across a range of WDC settings and involving a range of partners working in collaboration to ensure a wide reaching menu of activities using local venues and outdoor spaces.

#### **4.3.4 Citizen, Culture & Facilities**

##### Cleaning in Schools

The Scottish Government Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance on reducing the risks in schools published on 24 March 2021 and updated on 19 April 2021 advised that it was imperative that schools and local authorities continued to take a precautionary approach. It was clear this meant that every step should be taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff in schools. As a result of this guidance and the desire to ensure that schools are kept operational, it has been agreed to extend the contracts of all temporary COVID-19 school cleaning staff until the 2021 October break. The additional costs for this – estimated at

£184,000 - will be paid from the funding provided by the Scottish Government for Education recovery in West Dunbartonshire. Facilities Management Services in several other Councils have updated officers that they are planning similar approaches in the 2021/22 Academic year. Taking this proactive action now allows the Council to retain the COVID-19 cleaners over the summer break when otherwise they may well have sought alternative employment.

#### Library re-opening

Following the move to Level 3, West Dunbartonshire Council re-opened its libraries on Monday, 26 April 2021, for limited public use in line with current Scottish Government guidance and expectations. This includes PC use and limited browsing of physical stock. The Alexandria and Clydebank branches remain closed at this time while major refurbishment work is undertaken.

#### Events 2021/22

Following meetings with representatives of the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association (RSPBA) and representatives of Loch Lomond Highland Games Committee (LLHG) it has been regrettably announced that both the 2021 Loch Lomond Highland Games and the 2021 Scottish Pipe Band Championships have been cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

#### **4.3.5 West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust (WDLT)**

In line with Scottish Government guidance the West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust has re-opened a range of popular services including allowing key tenants back into Community Centres; the return to use of sports halls (limited activities), gyms, swimming pools (no water features), and Live Active; and the commencement of Sports Development Programmes including Swimming Lessons. Further activities will begin as West Dunbartonshire moves into lower levels.

#### **4.3.6 Building Services**

From 26 April 2021, in line with Scottish Government guidance, Building Services resumed full service delivery. This means undertaking works and projects which have been restricted in lockdown periods, including non-essential internal housing repairs and capital funded improvement works such as Kitchen, Bathroom, Shower and uPVC window / door installations.

This update has been communicated through an Elected Member Briefing note, council website and social media platforms. The next edition of the Housing News publication will also include information for tenants regarding the programme for addressing outstanding repairs and improvement works. We appreciate our tenants continued patience and understanding.

In 2019/20 the service completed 30,661 reactive housing repairs and 5,592 emergency repairs compared with 22,521 and 5,151 respectively in 2020/21. In

considering these statistics therefore, it is prudent to recognise that there may be an unknown additional demand for repairs yet to be reported.

As at 5 May 2021, there were 5,101 active housing repair orders. It is estimated that it will take up to six months to work through the outstanding repairs and improvement projects, as well as continuing to respond to new and emergency repairs. The backlog will be managed by completing repairs in chronological order i.e. the oldest first. Requests for repairs continue to be monitored closely.

#### **4.3.7 Corporate Asset Management**

Compliance checks continue in operational buildings being used including fire alarm systems and legionella checks. All required works are being carried out via specialist contractors to ensure building re-openings are safe to do so. The team continue to coordinate PPE requirements as well as working with Scottish Government and Military in setting up Community Testing sites and Vaccination centres.

All projects continue on site with appropriate COVID-19 site management plans approved via the Health & Safety team prior to re-starting non-essential construction works.

#### **4.3.8 Health and Social Care Partnership**

##### **Care Homes**

All care homes in West Dunbartonshire remain free from COVID-19 and are open to admissions with no restrictions in place. A range of opportunities to support care home staff and managers wellbeing have been offered via the SG and NHSGGC and we have encouraged care homes to engage in these opportunities.

The care homes continue to cautiously extend visiting in line with the expectations of Open with Care guidance, with all care homes now supporting indoor visiting opportunities. A second round of Care Assurance visits was undertaken by HSCP Nursing and Social Work Staff during April. These allow the HSCP to work collaboratively with care home providers to ensure that infection prevention control measures are optimal, provide assurance around care quality, and offer support to care home staff and leadership teams. The latest round of visits was positive with high compliance with infection prevention control standards; no significant issues were identified and there was evidence of innovative practice within care homes to promote and support resident wellbeing.

##### **COVID Vaccination in Care Homes**

Across all care homes in West Dunbartonshire, all residents who consented and were eligible have now received both COVID vaccinations (>95%) and we have systems in place for new admissions to receive immunisation if required. Public



Health Scotland Data reports uptake of 94% and 91% for first and second doses respectively amongst care home staff in West Dunbartonshire.

## **PPE**

There is a plentiful supply of PPE and supply chains remain robust. The Memorandum of Understanding with respect to the PPE Hub extends to June 2021. There is an expectation that this will be further extended by the SG and we await confirmation to this effect. Contingency planning is underway to consider: firstly the role of the HSCP PPE Hub in West Dunbartonshire in the context of the MoU expiring in June 2021 and; secondly ongoing staffing of the PPE Hub should the MoU be extended beyond June 2021.

## **Testing**

Lateral Flow Device testing has been extended to all staff groups within the HSCP. Concentrated efforts have been made to encourage all staff to undertake lateral flow testing twice weekly and emphasise the importance of recording their results (whether positive or negative) on the national portal. Whilst it is not compulsory to undertake testing, in client facing areas, all staff are complying with the testing guidance. Testing plays an important role in the early identification of asymptomatic positive cases of Covid 19 and therefore is a key strand in our ongoing management of the Pandemic.

A number of teams across the HSCP, including Care at Home and Care Home staff continue to carry out PCR testing in addition to Lateral Flow testing.

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

Challenges directly related to the pandemic have continued, particularly in our children's houses. Residential staff and managers have managed this well and they have demonstrated even greater commitment and caring to our young people. As restrictions have eased recently, children's and justice social work services have finalised their restart plans to enable greater face-to-face contact with users of services and thereby ensure that the organisation meets its statutory duties around risk and protection from harm.

Domestic abuse continues to be a significant area of concern across services – the implementation of multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) last year in West Dunbartonshire has raised the profile of women and children at high risk of harm and a local MARAC steering group has been established where future resource requirements to meet need will be examined.

Involvement in other multi-agency work includes the development of community mental health and emotional wellbeing services; this is particularly important, given the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on children and young people. An interim report on research commissioned from Glasgow University will inform joint work with young people to identify the additional services and supports they need to meet

their needs, as part of the national children and young people's mental health framework.

For Justice Services, the easing of restrictions has enabled more unpaid work placements in the community to be undertaken. Alongside this, an innovative online project with the third sector organisation, Streetcones, has been working with local women in the justice system to look creatively at issues affecting them and their involvement with services, to improve their insight into their offending and inform future service development.

### **Vaccination Programme**

The Vaccination Programme continues to be delivered across West Dunbartonshire in line with national guidance and with support with a number of new staff from the Kickstart programme. The programme continues to be delivered from 3 centres, and is currently focused on vaccinating those aged between 40 and 50.

#### **4.3.9 People & Technology**

##### Vaccination Support

The three vaccination centres previously supported by CCF are now supported by People & Technology teams specifically the vaccination team which consists of a lead officer, 3 co-ordinators and support assistants resourced through the Kickstart programme. Two intakes of support assistants have been secured to date with the third and final intake scheduled for the end of May. The vaccination centres are running well and the transition from CCF was seamless, handover support being provided by the previous teams. The centres are not presently running at the anticipated capacity and indications are that provision will reduce to 2 centres in the coming months. The frequency and notice of change in vaccination clinics is still a challenge but is well managed.

##### Impact on Employees

As at 6 May 2021, there were 15 employees absent/isolating as a result of COVID. Occupational Health referral numbers for counselling remain high from frontline services and additional funding has been provided to ensure this demand is met. The programme of wellbeing supports continues to be offered and promoted to all employees; this includes support on a 1-1 basis and more general supports in the form of webinars, Wellbeing Round ups and signposting to external resources.

The furlough scheme has been accessed again for a small group of employees from Building Services who could not attend work whilst the restrictions were in place due to their health or caring responsibilities. This will remain under review.

##### £500 "Thank you payments" to Employees

The SG £500 "thank you payment" administration is well in hand. Extensive communications have been issued to eligible employees in accordance with the criteria set by SG. The WDC initial claim was submitted at the end of April 2021

and this has now been received in full. The claim was for 1,416 employees with a value of £699,094. Individuals were offered the option of receiving the payment over a 3-month period to minimise any impact on benefits and 42 people took advantage of this. Payments to eligible employees have been processed in the May pay (and in equal instalments thereafter for those who opted to receive the payment over 3 months).

Further claims will be submitted to the SG circa July 2021 that will take account of eligible leavers, casual workers and other employees nominated by their Chief Officer. There are a number of nominees for whom a determination cannot be made. Communications are being prepared for those employees and it is anticipated that they will be directed to the SG complaints process. Our trade union colleagues have been fully informed of the progress, eligible roles and support for members in the complaints process.

#### Workstyle Review and Support for new ways of working

The workstyles exercise concluded this week with all managers having now returned the details of their teams. Work is underway to assess the workstyle returns to allocate desk requirements in line with social distancing guidance. Estimates will be based on 2 metre, 1 metre and 0 metre. For employees whose workstyles have changed, variations to contracts will be issued in due course.

The technologies for home working (thin client and netscaler) were initially implemented in 2014 and continue to support the significantly increased volume of circa 2,750 users from both Council and personal devices providing secure access to all systems and shared folders via Citrix storefront. Additional license monitoring processes were implemented during 2020 and licenses redirected and repurposed, where possible, to avoid unnecessary spend and maximise asset use.

#### Cyber Security and ICT technical support

Since the emergence of COVID-19 there has been a significant increase in the volume of cyber-attacks across the country and the increase in remote working has introduced further technological challenges. WDC have had to implement changes to end user device patching as devices would traditionally have been located on site or regularly brought to site for updates. Home working has changed this landscape significantly and a solution has now been developed to update these devices remotely. Additionally a risk-based approach to assess data and system security impact of technical changes prior to implementation has been developed. Work will continue to maintain and improve the security posture within WDC in accordance with best practice and guidance from organisations such as the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). A further cyber session will be presented to September's Joint Consultative Forum (JCF).

With the increased adoption of video conferencing collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, an impact on the remote access solution has been

evident particularly during periods of high usage. We have been working with the software manufacturers directly to implement a short term resolution to some of these issues and with 3<sup>rd</sup> party providers to secure a more permanent design solution should the need for significant numbers of remote users remain.

Providing technical support to home working users is more challenging and exacerbated by the majority of the ICT team also home based. Additional documentation and user guides are available and ICT continue to deliver an appointment based device support service when remote support can't resolve the issue.

#### **4.3.10 Housing and Employability**

##### General

Significant focus has been placed on communicating with our service users and communities about appropriate and safe behaviours, and adherence to guidance to limit the spread of COVID-19. Our Housing and Homelessness services have increased signage in common spaces within our properties including our new build homes and sharing practical information with tenants, tenant groups and other landlords / 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 as effectively as possible, primarily based on remote working arrangements, with limited essential client services being delivered in the community under reviewed safe processes. This includes letting of vacant houses and support to homeless and vulnerable households.

##### Homelessness and COVID-19

Homelessness levels in West Dunbartonshire have continued to stabilise and the levels of homelessness in the last quarter of 2020/21 were almost identical to the previous year, although there has been increase in homeless households with children, young people and households experiencing domestic abuse over this period. There are also higher levels of households in temporary accommodation which has been a consistent impact as a result of the pandemic, which stood at 304 at the end of April 2021. We are actively working with these households providing high levels of support focused on securing long-term housing solutions so that every household has safe and secure temporary accommodation.

##### Capital Investment – New Builds

Our new build programme has been progressing well under COVID-19 compliant working practices. Over the course of the pandemic we have delivered 122 new homes, including the completion of the Creveul Court

development in Alexandria. We have reviewed our working practices and have enabled a smoother moving in process with the provision of carpets, window coverings and white goods to allow new tenants to move into their new homes in a safe and practical manner. The More Homes Team Delivery Team have also provided a wide range of practical assistance to ensure all new tenants maximise the enjoyment of their new homes.

#### Support to Tenants and Communities

Our Housing Officers have continued to provide assistance to tenants struggling with food and utilities, in addition to prioritising allocations for homeless households and those with medical needs. Estate Caretakers and the Neighbourhood Team continue to ensure cleanliness is maintained within our high-density housing and our Anti-Social Behaviour team has dealt with an increased volume of cases owing to the greater proportion of time tenants and residents have been at home.

Where required, we can provide access to crisis support for people who are identified through the Test and Protect process. 3,058 have been assisted by the Crisis Support Team. 1,299 were from the shielded group and 181 required additional support as a result of the test trace, isolate process. The crisis team has continued to provide support with welfare / benefits advice and / or access to emergency food supplies to an average of ten households each week.

#### SG Funding – Tier 4 Support – second tranche

Following the move to Tier 4, Scottish Government funding of circa £264k was utilised to support households who had developed rent arrears caused or influenced by the pandemic, particularly those who had recently moved house and those in receipt of Universal Credit. This resulted in 811 households receiving direct assistance towards their rent payments.

In addition, the Council administered the Scottish Government's Winter Hardship Payment which was specifically aimed at supporting families from disadvantaged backgrounds where the difficulties they experience were intensified as a result of COVID-19. In effect, we focussed our efforts on supporting those with one or a combination of consumer debt and housing arrears, food and fuel insecurity and limited digital connectivity. Through the use of funding made available in January through to March we supported 513 families, providing them with a grant to assist them to address some of their immediate concerns.

Since April 2020 the Crisis Support Team assisted 1,245 households with emergency food supplies and we have referred 861 people to further practical support provided by the Communities volunteer management team. The Volunteer Management Team has continued to meet demand for on-going support, a situation the team will continue to monitor. The introduction of the

NHS Medicine Delivery Service is welcomed and the team will signpost those eligible to this.

As set out above, there are a number of emergency short term funding streams created by Scottish Government to support vulnerable groups during the pandemic. This includes food insecurity funding, Winter Support Payments, Spring hardship Payments and two rounds of Tier 4 Flexible Funding. For the second round of Flexible Funding for 2021/22, a further £0.264m has been awarded to WDC. There are no specific requirements for providing updates on spend to Scottish Government but the proposed method to distribute this round of funding is set out in the following paragraphs.

Use of the funds will take into account the availability of other funds such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). In addition, Housing and Working4U services will ensure that any vulnerable households are appropriately referred for wider support.

We have identified five specific cohorts for this funding that are consistent with Scottish Government conditions for funding, are deliverable and will support many vulnerable households in a time of crisis, as follows

**1. *Supporting households who have fallen into Council Tax arrears as a consequence of Tier 4 restrictions - £0.136m***

- a. This initiative will mirror the earlier scheme for rent arrears, to support households who have developed Council Tax arrears caused or influenced by the pandemic, particularly those who have recently moved house and those in receipt of Universal Credit.
- b. Analysis shows that there are a significant number of Council Tax accounts which have gone into arrears during this period.
- c. These households can be supported with a credit to their account, freeing up limited income to spend on other exceptional costs.
- d. Tenants do not need to apply for this fund; eligibility is being identified by the Housing and Corporate Debt teams.
- e. Assistance may also be provided to RSL and private sector tenants for circumstances in which hardship is evidenced and sector specific schemes cannot assist.

**2. *Supporting households who are experiencing additional cost as a consequence of moving home during Tier 4 restrictions - £0.029m***

- a. This initiative will support vulnerable households who live in inappropriate housing or are homeless, to move to a new home safely and affordably during Tier 4.
- b. It will support the costs of rent abatements where tenants are liable for rent on two properties for a short period. Due to Tier 4 restrictions and consequent delays in moving home, there are a higher number of tenants in this situation.

- c. The initiative will also support the exceptional costs of white goods and soft furnishings which during Tier 4 are inaccessible or prohibitively expensive.
- d. Tenants will not require to apply for this funding as the housing and homelessness teams will identify eligible tenants through their services and client relationships.
- e. An example of the good use of this fund in the first round of this funding was assisting tenants with high support needs moving into the new accessible housing development in Creveul Court in Alexandria.

**3. *Supporting households who are experiencing additional fuel poverty as a consequence of Tier 4 restrictions – £0.035m***

- a. This initiative will provide those in hardship with fuel vouchers for the purchase of power cards.
- b. Fuel costs are a real issue in lockdown and households already in poverty are feeling this most intensely.
- c. Specifically households with pre-paid meters are generally paying more for fuel from an already stretched budget.
- d. Using Tier 4 funding will be a reasonable approach that we can evidence with data about which households have been assisted.
- e. We are working with CAB to get the money out as they already run a fuel poverty initiative, so we don't have to set up a new voucher distribution process, and it demonstrates partnership working with a community organisation. This approach will continue in the second round of this fund.

**4. *Digital Exclusion - £0.030m***

- a. This initiative will seek to support disadvantaged households who do not have broadband, or experiencing high costs for digital connectivity during the pandemic and lockdown periods.
- b. Families where multiple members require to be online is a suitable example. Other examples include young care leavers and people with additional needs.

**5. *Food insecurity - £0.035m***

- a. Supporting vulnerable households who cannot afford to eat properly during the pandemic.
- b. Funds will be directed through our partner food bank organisations.
- c. Operational and financial controls are already in place to ensure appropriate use of this fund.

The above proposed breakdown of the fund will be kept under review to ensure we can respond flexibly and appropriately.

**SG Funding to Support Individuals at Financial Risk**

The COVID-19 Update report to the December 2020 Council proposed a use of the £0.481m SG funding for support to individuals at financial risk. At the December 2020 Council the following use was agreed and the funds for this use have now been used:

Foodbank Support	£0.120m
Homelessness welfare support and people with no recourse to public funds	£0.025m
Scottish Welfare Fund top-up (to include funding for fuel costs and general wellbeing)	£0.200m
Discretionary Housing Payments top-up	£0.136m

The SG has provided a second tranche of this funding, also for £0.481m for WDC and it is proposed that this is used for the same purposes as the first tranche.

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

### Financial Implications

- 5.1** The lockdown has had, and continues to have, implications in terms of service delivery and in relation to the Council's agreed budget for 2020/21 and into 2021/22 as a result of additional spend requirements and lost income, offset by some cost savings due to services reducing/stopping. The SG has provided additional funding to support Councils. Total net cost implications of COVID-19 on the General Fund in 2020/21 will be finalised as the financial year-end processes are completed and actual variances checked against assumptions. The outcome of this will be reported to a future Council meeting along with the draft annual accounts for 2020/21.

For 2021/22 the position will not be clear for some time as the Council moves through the phases of easing of lockdown that are currently planned. An exercise will be carried out to start to estimate any financial impact of COVID-19 in 2021/22 and the outcome and ongoing consideration will be reported to future Council meetings. 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.

- 5.2** The SG has implemented a number of approaches to mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on citizens of Scotland, businesses, charities and Councils. The majority of the funding that the SG has distributed for various purposes has been derived from Barnett consequential from UK Government funding provisions, though some will have come from re-prioritised SG funds. As the second wave of the virus has increased incidences of infection and hospital admissions the SG has implemented an approach to implementing local restrictions and has provided further funding linked to this. Attached for information as Appendix 2 to the report is an updated list of SG funding streams announced and attributed to COVID-19.
- 5.3** As can be seen from the Appendix the Council has been notified of a total of £31.947m in revenue funding from the SG for 2020/21 and £8.706m for 2021/22. Based on current infection rates and plans to ease lockdown restrictions it is not



likely that further funding will be announced during 2021/22 (clearly this is dependent on the future of COVID-19 and any future impacts and restrictions).

Of this funding in 2020/21 a total of £11.479m was distributed via the WDCHSCP. The majority of the SG funding is provided for specific purposes, with £10.526m general funding for 2020/21 and £4.639m for 2021/22. In addition £0.701m of SG funding to support capital spend has been allocated in 2020/21, all for specific purposes.

- 5.4** The February 2021 COVID-19 report detailed a number of funding streams that had been notified either via letters from the SG, or via reports to COSLA Leaders, but where the allocations to WDC had not yet been advised, these have been updated as follows:

**Revenue Grants:**

<b>Funding</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>WDC</b>
Education Recovery – second part of original funding held by SG until costs evidenced	£30.000m	£0.491m
COVID-19 General funding allocation to Councils for 2021/22	£259.000m	£4.488m
COVID-19 pressures in 2021/22	£275.000m	£3.963m
Financial Insecurity Funding additional funding	£20.000m	£0.481m
COVID Spring Hardship Payments – children in receipt of FSM	£17.200m	£0.402m
Education Recovery – further funding for 2020/21	£40.000m	£0.655m
Support needs of children and young people for 2021/22	£60.000m	£1.111m
Financial assistance to help low income households in 2021/22 (£100m announced – now clear not all via Councils):		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family pandemic Payments - £100 per family linked to Free School Meal eligibility for two payments – at summer and winter holidays 2021, including administrative costs</li> </ul>	£23.860m	£0.554m
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low Income Pandemic Payment - £130 per household linked to Council Tax Reduction eligibility to be paid by October 2021, including administrative costs.</li> </ul>	£68.154m	£1.560m
Mental Health Recovery & Renewal Fund in 2021/22 (not clear whether via Councils or NHS)	£120.000m	TBC

In addition, since the February 2021 report the SG has announced further revenue funding to WDC as follows:

<b>Funding</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>WDC</b>
Free School Meals period to 1 April 2021	£4.711m	£0.132m
Early Years – further funding Childcare Providers – rounds 2 and 3 (Temporary Restrictions Fund), including administration costs	£6.820m	£0.097m
Summer Activities for Children and Young People	£15.000m	£0.276m
Test and Protect – outbound calling to 30 June 2021	£2.275m	£0.046m
Self Isolation Support Grant administration costs 2020/21	£0.802m	£0.024m
Self Isolation Support Grant administration costs 2020/22	£0.823m	TBC
Community Living Change Fund – to 2024	£20.000m	£0.357m

- 5.5** In relation to the three financial flexibilities and as reported to Council on 22 March 2021 it is not currently anticipated that the Council will require to utilise these flexibilities. However as stated above the financial year-end processes are underway for 2020/21 and this position could change if unexpected costs are identified.
- 5.6** There is a significant risk that the financial and economic impact will be longer-term – depending on the speed and depth of economic recovery. The financial flexibilities provided by the SG will be considered with the longer-term impact in mind though as stated at 5.6 above the use of these are not anticipated in 2020/21.
- 5.7** Procurement Implications  
There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report, however we continue to remain vigilant to any potential future supply chain issues which may develop due to changes in COVID restrictions / council levels.
- 6. Risk Analysis**
- 6.1** In accordance with the Council’s Risk Management Framework, a Strategic Risk has been developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This, along with the organisation-wide, operational risks sitting beneath, will be reported in the bi-annual risk updates to Corporate Services and Audit Committees. The first draft of the risk is appended to this report.
- 6.2** The most significant risk relates to the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council and the potential shortfall in funding support from the SG. This risk has been significantly mitigated as COSLA has continued to engage with the SG to evidencing the financial impacts on Councils and the need for further financial support or financial flexibilities. This has resulted in significant financial support

being provided for 2020/21 and 2021/22 which it is hoped will be sufficient to cover the identified costs of COVID-19 on the Council.

## **7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

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

## **8. Consultation**

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

## **9. Strategic Assessment**

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

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

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

**Date: 20 May 2021**

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**Appendices:**

1. Education Recovery Planned Spend 2021/22; and
2. SG Funding provided to WDC in relation to COVID-19

**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; and
10. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 24 February 2021.

**Wards Affected:**

All