



Report by Chief Executive

Council Meeting: 22 December 2021

Subject: COVID-19 Update

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update in relation to COVID-19 in West Dunbartonshire since the previous update report to Council in October 2021.
- 1.2 To provide Members with up-to-date information on the additional support and advice that the council is providing to communities and businesses across West Dunbartonshire to help alleviate the impact of COVID-19.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - (a) Note the information provided on COVID-19 in West Dunbartonshire since the update provided to the October 2021 Council; and
 - (b) Note the information provided in relation to the additional support and advice that the council is providing to communities and businesses across West Dunbartonshire to help alleviate the impact of COVID-19.

3. Background

- 3.1 The COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the lockdown of society and services 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, we have a new variant of interest, and the pandemic continues to impact every-day 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 have been fairly static though they continue to be relatively high and it can be expected that ongoing disruption to service delivery will be inevitable as members of staff are amongst those infected and/or isolating, and gradual recovery is more likely than simply returning immediately to the previous “normal”.

- 3.3** During the First Minister’s update to the Scottish Parliament on 7 December 2021, she advised that given the very significant risks posed by Omicron, and the high and rising number of cases in Scotland, all current protections would remain in place with the need for additional protections being kept under daily review. [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) update: First Minister's statement – 7 December 2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Coronavirus-(COVID-19)-update-First-Minister-s-statement-7-December-2021)

The First Minister has urged heightened compliance with all current protections. i.e.: wearing face coverings in indoor public places; ventilating rooms by opening windows; and ensuring good hand hygiene.

Until the middle of January, people are being asked to work from home wherever practical and employers are being asked to enable them to do so. We continue to advise our employees to work from home where possible.

We are currently assessing the need to progress with phase 2 of the office return which means balancing the needs of the workforce, those of our communities and the safety of all.

Regular and repeat lateral flow testing continues to be recommended and enhanced contact tracing is underway by Test and Protect for Omicron cases. Where a positive case is identified, all household contacts are required to self-isolate for 10 days regardless of a negative result or vaccine status. Where a positive case is identified, all household contacts of the individual are required to self-isolate for 10 days regardless if they receive a negative result or have been double vaccinated.

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

4.2 Key Current Issues and Updates

4.2.1 Regulatory and Regeneration

Registrars continue to provide death registrations remotely and during the period Monday 11 October 2021 to Friday 26 November 2021 inclusive, there were 16 COVID-19 related deaths registered in West Dunbartonshire, of which 1 was not a resident of West Dunbartonshire.

Environmental Health Officers, the Public Health Compliance Officer along with Licensing and Trading Standards 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 and they continue to operate in a safe manner during the pandemic. The introduction of grants to improve ventilation is bringing significant challenges to the Regeneration Team as well as requiring work from Environmental Health and potentially Building Control.

New developments with the Omicron variant in COVID-19 cases is being closely tracked and Environmental Health are working in close liaison with Public Health colleagues and providing advice as needed.

The continuation of 'vaccination passports' for nightclubs and larger events remains a focus and monitoring of compliance continues with Environmental Health liaising with Licensing. The potential extension of the scheme to other hospitality is being viewed alongside the recent statement of the First Minister and the COVID-19 case numbers tracked by Public Health Scotland. Event organisers will continue to be made aware of the requirements for incorporation in event planning. Officers will continue work with event organisers and business owners providing consistent support and advice to the hospitality sector.

4.2.2 Education

Covid Guidance for schools and centres

Our staff are commended for their efforts in adapting and responding to any change and challenge brought by the pandemic. Senior officers supported by Health and Safety Officers have worked together to provide regular information sessions to ensure clear communication and consistent application of policy across all establishments. Updated guidance has been issued to schools and early learning centres following latest Scottish Government Advice. As we are in the winter period we have reminded staff to review/update individual risk assessments required for children and young people with additional support needs. Schools have also been advised to consider more flexible uniform policies during the winter months.

Support for Children & Families

This recruitment of additional teaching and support staff is enhancing educational recovery, facilitating opportunities to build resilience and providing additional

support for learners and teachers. It has allowed establishments to take forward their individual recovery plans to improve the outcomes of pupils, raise their attainment, effect empowerment and ensure the Health and Wellbeing of pupils is supported.

The promotion of positive emotional wellbeing for all children and young people remains a key focus of our recovery. The suite of counselling services available to all 10-18 year olds complements the range of whole school and targeted approaches in schools to promote mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of our young people. This counselling provision is also available during weekends and school holidays. We continue to build capacity in our staff by funding 13 staff to undertake COSCA Accredited Counselling Skills Programmes. A mix of 42 teachers and leaders have engaged in the Mind-set Teams Programme of learning to ensure we are equipped and skilled in supporting and developing the confidence, resilience and growth mind-set of our pupils.

To support the wellbeing of our workforce, 70 education staff attended 'Evolving Wellbeing Sessions' empowering our workforce in effectively managing their own emotional and mental wellbeing.

Early Learning & Childcare (ELC)

Although restrictions have been eased at our ELC, staff, children and their families continue to be impacted by the virus. The impact on numbers of positive cases by the new variant is not known at this time and it is too early to say how this will impact our ELC service. We are doing all that we can to protect our families and communities by adhering to the current guidance, last updated in October. We adhere to public health guidance and remain vigilant to ensure that transmission rates of the virus remain low.

There has been a great deal of work at each of our ELC settings to continue to ensure that our families and staff are safe. Each setting has an up to date risk assessment which reflects updates made to the ELC COVID-19 guidance from the Scottish Government. This is a reassurance to staff and families. The Care Inspectorate have also commented very positively on how our ELC are keeping children safe.

The core public health measures that underpin current operation of services to all children are:

- enhanced hygiene and cleaning practices;
- access to fresh air by maximising the use of outdoor spaces and effective ventilation;
- strict adherence to self-isolation for those who have symptoms, and to other Test and Protect measures for all;
- strict adherence to physical distancing between adults, including parents at drop-off and pick-up times;
- supportive use of face coverings; and

- ELC Summary Guidance, Reporting Protocol and Risk Assessments have been updated accordingly.

Our ELC settings have adapted their practice to ensure safety but they have also ensured that parents and carers feel involved in the life of the ELC and children's learning. We make best use of digital platforms for meetings to report to parents, phone calls, meetings outdoors, frequent newsletters and texts which all keep parents informed about the quality of the ELC and their child's learning process.

Carbon-dioxide (CO2) monitoring

Schools and day care services for children are now actively engaged in monitoring CO2 levels in learning and teaching spaces. Monitoring devices have been purchased for each learning and teaching space, with the majority of devices distributed from the supplier to establishments. Process document agreed across departments and with Trade Unions circulated to establishments, ensuring all staff are aware of how readings can be taken and recorded, and advice offered on how to improve ventilation in spaces if required. The process document outlines steps to escalate any space where steps taken to improve ventilation have not reduced CO2 levels to an acceptable level, whereby Corporate Health & Safety will convene a case conference to ascertain what next steps need to be taken. To date, this escalation process has not been required, as readings taken have been within an acceptable range.

4.2.3 Citizen, Culture & Facilities

Housing Repairs Contact Centre

We continue to apologise to tenants and Councillors for the ongoing issues in relation to the Housing Repairs Telephone Contact Centre. We have previously outlined the challenges of managing complex calls linked to the high number of repairs which Building Services is working its way through following the pandemic.

Citizen Services have now completed a recruitment process for three additional fixed-term call handlers, plus the recruitment of two further permanent vacancies, with start dates of 6 December 2021 for all. An induction and training programme will follow for these individuals with the benefits to the service following in the coming weeks.

We remain confident that the combination the three new posts being recruited, the filling of the two permanent posts, the partial return to an office environment, and the continued progress of Building Services to clear the open repairs will improve the performance of the Housing Repairs Contact Centre and the experience for our tenants. We will continue to keep Council and WDTRO updated on our progress.

Self-Isolation Support Grant (SISG)

Since the last Council meeting the outstanding volume of SISG has reduced from 350 to 24, and the wait time for residents is now a week. In total £0.600m has been issued to residents through the grants since April 2021. Citizen Services would like to once again thank colleagues from other Council teams who have assisted in clearing the outstanding volume of applications, and also thank the Council's small Welfare Fund team who have gone the extra mile to resolve this situation for residents.

Covid-19 Cleaners

The Facilities Management (FM) Team continues to provide enhanced cleaning of frequently touched surfaces within schools, nurseries, depots, offices and other operational premises across the Council as part of the actions taken to minimise spread of the virus. A total of 64 temporary Cleaners posts have been created during the pandemic. These postholders have fixed term contracts due to expire in March 2022 however, given that the virus is still circulating within the community and a new variant has also been identified nationally, management will be extending the contracts of all additional temporary COVID-19 cleaning staff until the end of the current academic year in June 2022.

The maximum cost of this additional provision will be £0.183m and was agreed by the Corporate Management Team on Monday 6 December 2021. The costs (£0.159m) for this enhanced cleaning regime until the end of the academic year will be covered by funding allocated by the Scottish Government for education recovery previously reported to Council.

The costs of the remaining element (£0.024m) which is primarily for enhanced cleaning in non-educational establishments will come from the Council's non-earmarked Scottish Government COVID-19 funding. Office and depot cleaning is also being supplemented by recruitment of additional employees funded through the UK Government's Kickstart scheme.

To further update Council, in recent months there has been an increase in the number and quality of applicants for vacant posts which has had a positive impact upon the ability to fill vacancies. This is an improved position from previously and the extension of the Cleaning contracts until summer 2022 will provide a further degree of stability in the coming months.

4.2.4 Building Services

Housing Maintenance and Repairs

As previously reported to Council, during pandemic, Building Services was often unable to deliver the full range of maintenance and repairs across housing and council assets. Delivering the plan to address the consequential backlog, and undertake the outstanding housing repairs is a significant priority for the team. Good progress has been made and we continue to clear all work reported prior to

26 April 2021, the priority is to undertake all repairs (which are out of target for completion) without significant delay.

All repairs

The team has completed 17,425 reactive repairs, during the period April to October 2021. These repairs include emergency, routine and non-emergency repairs. In October, a total of 2,919 reactive repairs were completed; of these 2,302 were non-emergency repairs. The total number of live repairs as at 2 December is 3,431; this compares to 4,254 reported to Council in October. During this period, there have been approximately 1,300 occasions where operatives have not been able to gain access to the property (no access) to undertake arranged repairs including some emergency repairs.

Emergency Repairs

Of the 17,425 repairs completed during the period April to October 2021, a total of 3,392 were classed as emergency repairs. The target to complete emergency repairs is within 4 hours, however performance to the end of October shows an average completion time of 5.94 hours.

Repairs reported Pre 26 April 2021

Regular reports to Council have provided progress to date. At 2 December 2021 there remains 273 outstanding repairs, of which 132 are within Clydebank, and 36 within Dumbarton/ Alexandria. A further 105 will be undertaken by specialist contractors due to the nature of the repair (e.g. door entry systems). Included within the outstanding repairs, 116 require scaffolding. Although not all repairs have been completed, the service had made every effort to contact tenants and offer appointments prior to the end of October.

Repairs out with target performance

At 2 December, of those repairs reported after 26 April – 3,158 – unfortunately, a significant number – approximately 60% remain out with performance target time for completion. If a routine repair is not undertaken within 20 days then it is not meeting the agreed target. The team continue schedule appointments to improve this performance. While priority is given to completion of the outstanding repairs pre 26 April, the team are at the same time responding to new repairs reported. These are scheduled based on the nature of repair. However, it means the target completion time of within 20 working days is often not met. In turn, this is generating further calls from tenants seeking an update on progress.

Factors affecting progress remain as previously reported, including:

- **Difficulties recruiting additional resources**

With the increased demand for craft workers across the industry, and the resultant shortage in skills, we are not able to recruit the additional employees needed to address the outstanding repairs. This demand and skill shortage

has undoubtedly driven up the craft worker salary / remuneration levels which, in comparison to the private sector, make it very difficult for WDC to attract and retain permanent and temporary workers. Current workforce numbers are approximately 30 FTE lower than pre-pandemic. The skill shortage currently experienced within the team is mainly electricians, plumbers and joiners. The team are also experiencing difficulties in securing additional support from back up contractors who are reporting resource challenges.

- **Absence**

Since the start of this calendar year, we have seen high levels of absence across building services. In November, 1.73 FTE days were lost per employee. Of the days lost, 90 FTE days were attributable to short term absence (less than 6 days), 215.7 FTE days attributable to medium term absence (more than 6 days and less than 4 weeks) and 295.7 FTE days attributable to long term absence (over 4 weeks). Notwithstanding the above, the team continue to undertake the following:

- Management team weekly workforce planning meetings to review progress and agree further actions
- Dedicated teams set up to focus solely on the outstanding repairs.
- Reassigning team members from other projects as necessary
- Recruitment advert via myjobscotland etc. for additional craftworkers
- Temporary engagement of agency workers where possible
- Increased use of sub-contractors where possible
- Targeted overtime where possible.
- Continued communication with tenants through appropriate forums including tenant groups, housing news, social media, text messaging.
- Monitoring, management and mitigation of material pinch points.

4.2.5 Health and Social Care Partnership

Community Adult / Older Adult Services

Mental Health Services continue to remain open providing support face to face, by telephone or virtually. We have small levels of absence due to COVID-19, however these are spread out across services. We currently have a number of vacancies across our Community Services which we are continuing to try to fill and this has an impact on waiting times. In order to mitigate this we are making use of staff bank and overtime shifts to ensure cover across our services and reduce waiting times. We are actively involved in work across NHS GG&C to maximise access to services and prioritise the most at risk patients in the community.

Addiction Services

Addiction Services continue to provide services offering a hybrid model of options to provide treatment and support. These are a mix of face to face, by telephone or virtually and are assessed using RAG risk assessment based on individual need.

Staffing is continually monitored and processes are in place to ensure that caseloads continue to be managed in a safe and effective manner. Most staff are fully vaccinated including booster vaccines and continue to use lateral flow testing in line with guidance.

Learning Disability Services

The Learning Disability team in West Dunbartonshire provides a wide range of services and continues to offer a mix of face to face, telephone or online appointments and the integrated team uses a RAG risk assessment to prioritise those most at risk. The day service continues to provide building based support for critical cases, through a triage system, and there is ongoing review based on current guidance. In addition, regular wellbeing checks are being carried out where appropriate. Recruitment and retention of staff remains an ongoing pressure across health and social care and learning disability is no exception; staffing remains challenging. The West Dunbartonshire Learning Disability team also works closely with NHS GG&C Board wide Learning Disability services to: provide cover in extenuating circumstances to in-patient services, maximise access to inpatient services, prioritise the most at risk patients in the community and support the Collaborative Practice group, which has been established to support complex placements Board wide, to strengthen community based solutions going forward.

Care at Home

Care at Home staff continue to deliver care to our most vulnerable citizens and as such participate in regular PCR and LFT testing and absence levels due to COVID-19 are very low.

Care Homes

The instance of COVID-19 among staff and residents in our care homes is lower than in recent weeks and this reflects that the COVID-19 booster is effectively doing its job. We currently have only a very small number of staff and residents with COVID-19.

We continue to support care homes to implement all Public Health Scotland Care Home guidance and to respond to updates in guidance. Care Homes continue to implement Open with Care and are working with families to ensure all measures are in place to support residents to safely celebrate with their families over the festive period.

Our third cycle of care assurance visits is complete. These were undertaken by a Senior Nurse and Senior Social Worker from the HSCP. The visits aim to provide additional clinical input, support and guidance to care homes. This work aligns to the Executive Nurse Directors responsibilities set out by Scottish Government in which they were to provide nursing leadership, professional oversight, implementation of infection prevention and control measures, use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and quality of care within care homes. The new roles

and responsibilities of the Executive Nurse Directors extends until June 2022. Outputs from the assurance visits have been analysed, these were encouraging, revealing what care homes are doing well and areas where care homes would like to strengthen practice as part of their continuous improvement journey. Going forward Scottish Government funding enabled the creation of the NHSGGC Care Home Hub model which will ensure that care homes enjoy access to enhanced support and expertise (e.g. Dieticians, Tissue Viability, Infection Control) to support the quality of the service they provide.

Care assurance visits are just one part of the supportive framework around care homes and sit alongside HSCP day to day relationships with individual care homes, HSCP oversight Huddles and the twice weekly meeting of the multi professional Care Home Oversight group. As part of our winter planning we are working with care homes to mitigate any risks, strengthen resilience and ensure that staffing levels remain optimal during this challenging period.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Hubs

The HSCP PPE Hub remains operational in line with terms of the memorandum of understanding. Adult social care providers can access the PPE Hub for supplies if their existing supply routes fail. This support continues to be available to adult social care providers across the sector including unpaid carers and personal assistants.

Winter contingency plans are in place which will see a 25% increase in stock to the Hubs to mitigate any risk over the winter and festive period. Plans are in place to provide emergency access to HSCP PPE Hub over the festive holidays should this be required. Plentiful supplies of PPE are available and no emerging risks to supply chains remain robust.

COVID-19 Immunisation

This is 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, particularly over winter 2021/22 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.

Programme Acceleration

Evidence on waning immunity following the primary course means it is essential that individuals are offered a further vaccine dose to boost immunity at the earliest point in line with recently updated JCVI advice. As we approach the festive season, the vaccination programme is scaling up efforts so that as many people as possible are given additional protection through booster vaccinations. In order to do so vaccination delivery will again be increased, specifically for the three week period between 29 November 2021 and 20 December 2021.

The vaccine programme continues to follow the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advice calling forward priority groups to ensure the most vulnerable are offered flu and booster vaccines first. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines can be safely co-administered.

Updated guidance on COVID-19 Booster Eligibility

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recently updated their guidance on COVID-19 booster eligibility, specifically:

- The recommended timing of this booster dose is 6 months. Changes to guidance have introduced operational flexibility to provide this at 5 months, for example within a care home or where a person is coming for another purpose such as flu vaccine;
- All adults over 50 plus and those in COVID-19 at risk groups were eligible for a booster from 14 September 2021;
- As of 15 November 2021, eligibility has been extended and all adults aged 40- 49 years should now be offered a booster six months from their second dose; and
- The JCVI continues with ongoing review of the situation to determine whether the booster vaccination ought to be extended to others.

Updated Advice on COVID-19 Vaccination for Young People Under 18 Years

- All 16 and 17 year olds were eligible for a single dose from 4 August 2021;
- 16 and 17 year olds deemed to be in at risk categories were offered two doses of the vaccine at an interval of eight weeks;
- The JCVI consider that there is now more certainty in the data regarding the benefits from vaccination compared to the data regarding the risks in this age group and recommend;
- On 5 November 2021 The JCVI determined that all 16-17 year olds should be offered a second dose of vaccine. This has been found to provide more durable protection against COVID-19, a further reduction in the risk of serious COVID-19 and a further reduction in the risk of infection and symptomatic disease;
- 16 and 17 year olds who are not in a clinical risk group there should be a 12 week interval between doses (booking mechanism to be confirmed); and
- Children and young people aged 12 to 15 years who are in recognised risk groups should receive two doses of vaccine at an interval of at least eight weeks.

Introduction of a Rolling Vaccination Programme

Scottish Ministers recently decided on a national policy to provide a real time rolling programme offer of COVID-19 vaccinations to those newly eligible or those who have not yet taken up the offer of a vaccine for both the initial programme and the booster programme. The following potential scenarios where the rolling programme offer is particularly important have been identified:

- Those who develop a new health condition or become household contact of immunosuppressed individual;
- Those 11 year olds turning 12 who will be eligible for 1 dose of the vaccine;
- Those 15 year olds turning 16 who will be eligible for a 2nd dose of the vaccine;
- Those 39 year olds turning 40 who will be eligible for a booster vaccination;
- Any eligible person who has not yet taken up the offer of a vaccine; and
- People returning or moving from overseas who have either not been vaccinated or require further vaccination to complete a dosing schedule.

Uptake in West Dunbartonshire

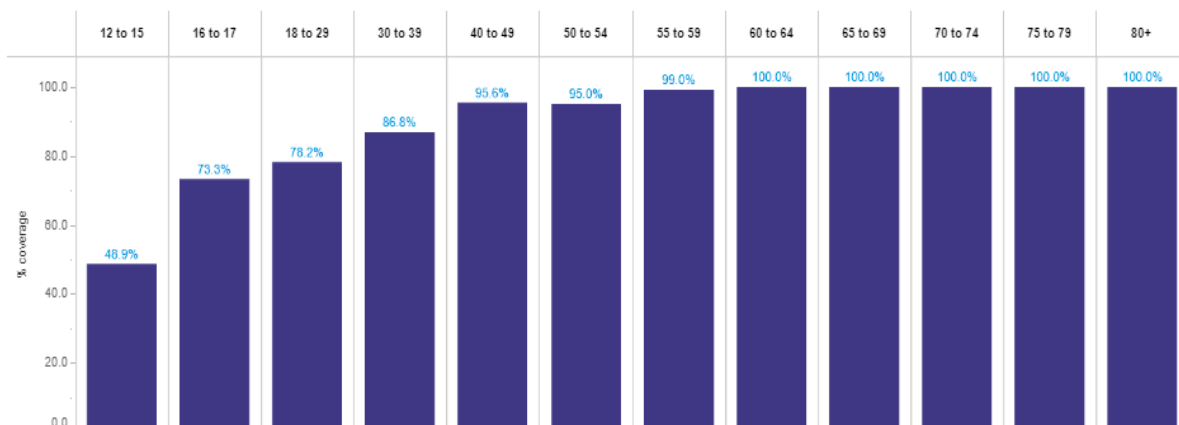
All eligible care home residents have received their booster COVID-19 and flu vaccinations. Public Health Scotland latest information as of 7 December showed that, for West Dunbartonshire Council population aged 12 and above the uptake is as follows:

- 1st Dose 91.3%;
- 2nd Dose 83.6%; and
- 1.3rd Dose 45.2%.

1st Dose

Select NHS Board | Local Authority

Total % coverage by age group in West Dunbartonshire



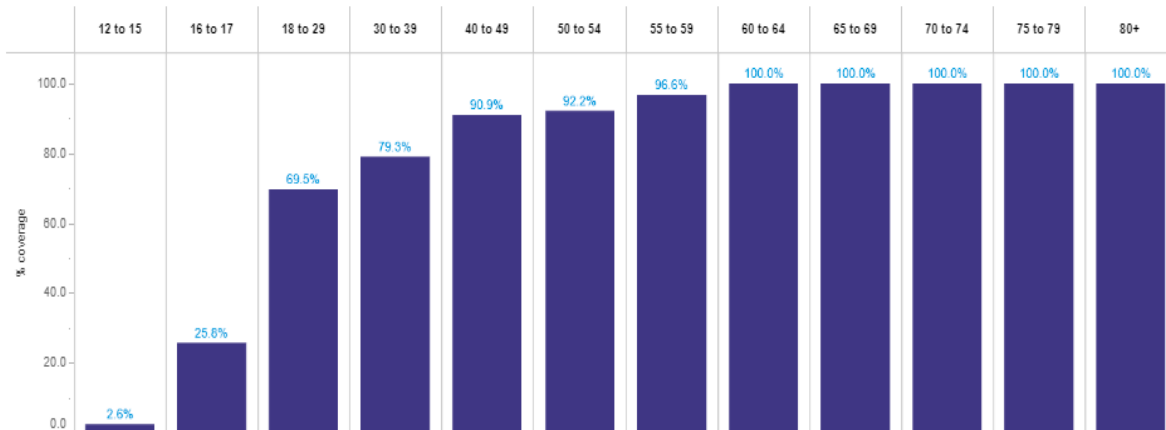
Age group breakdowns use the age of the individual as at 31 August 2021. Denominator populations for age/sex groups and area breakdowns are sourced from National Records of Scotland mid-2019 estimates (the latest available).

2nd Dose

Select NHS Board | Local Authority

West Dunbartonshire

Total % coverage by age group in West Dunbartonshire



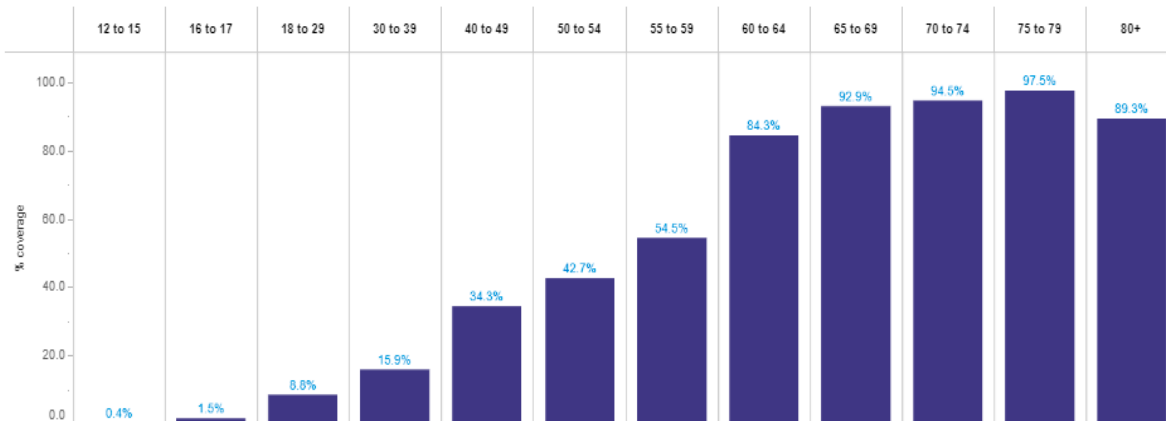
Age group breakdowns use the age of the individual as at 31 August 2021. Denominator populations for age/sex groups and area breakdowns are sourced from National Records of Scotland mid-2019 estimates (the latest available).

Booster or 3rd Dose

Select NHS Board | Local Authority

West Dunbartonshire

Total % coverage by age group in West Dunbartonshire



Age group breakdowns use the age of the individual as at 31 August 2021. Denominator populations for age/sex groups and area breakdowns are sourced from National Records of Scotland mid-2019 estimates (the latest available).

4.2.6 People & Technology

Vaccination Support

WDC continue to support the seasonal flu and COVID-19 booster programme and more recently the introduction of pop up clinics. In preparation for the winter months and to build resilience across the team, there are volunteers (both pupil and adult)

keen to be involved to supplement resources. Waiting periods have improved but are still proving a challenge at times but the number of vaccinators is set to improve now that the army and trainee dentists are to be deployed in this capacity. There are early indications that the clinics will run to the end of this financial year, rather than being complete by the end of January, which was the original aim. At the request of NHSGGC, multiple additional dates have been added to the clinic schedule in the run up to the festive period and can be resourced from within the existing team. Further additions and expansion of the booster programme in the New Year will require a consequential increase in workforce and/or volunteers to support.

Impact on Employees

As at 17 November 2021, there were a total of 76 employees absent/isolating as a result of COVID-19. In October, 10.24% of sickness absences were attributed to confirmed COVID-19 cases, a reduction of 6.6% compared to September, making it the 5th top reason for absence. Whilst there has been an overall reduction of 296 working days lost in October compared to September, the number of working days lost attributed to minor illnesses has increased by 371 Council-wide. The roll out of the seasonal flu vaccine has begun, both nationally and internally which should help in reducing the spread amongst employees. Education support, Facilities Management, Early Years workers and Teachers have been included in the national immunisation programme this year. Employees working within HSCP can access the national immunisation programme for front-line workers and Council employees delivering essential services have been given priority access to the annually procured Council flu vaccinations. Communications to those working in essential services have been issued via the usual communication channels inviting them to book a vaccination appointment.

Return to Offices

The reopening of offices on 18 October began with the return of teams to the first floor of Church St. This has received positive feedback from employees, managers and trades union on the support received and safe working practices. Plans for phase 2, involving the ground floor in Church St, Municipal Building and Clydebank Town Centre Office are underway with an anticipated entry date of mid-December. Liaison with Trades Unions colleagues has continued on a weekly basis throughout the preparation alongside support to all teams due to return. Use of desk allocation, appropriateness of workstyle and service needs will continue to be monitored to ensure any impact is understood.

As information on the new variant becomes available and the infected cases are seen around the globe, the phased return will continue as planned albeit cautiously and with encouragement to work from home if possible. It remains too early to say how this new variant will impact wider plans to return.

The Strategic Resilience Group have considered this emerging threat against the backdrop of the need to return for service delivery enhancement, elected member

and community desire to have a wider return to enhance their engagement experiences and decreased case numbers in the local area.

There are a number of restricted groups based on the ground floor Church St plus some critical 'duty' teams that need to return to a workplace, this occurring in phase 2. This will be kept under close review and will not hesitate to pause return if case numbers and/or advice suggests this. Weekly dialogue with the joint trades union will continue throughout.

The number of 'phase 1' employees attending at Church Street has dwindled significantly in recent weeks and often there are fewer than 20 onsite over the course of a week. While this is set to increase with Phase 2 returners, it is felt prudent to close the building from 24th Dec until 5th January 2022. Anyone planning to work will be asked to do so from home or can be accommodated in Bridge Street.

ICT

The 'connection interrupted' issue is reducing in both volume and impact but work continues with supplier involvement to address the issue fully.

Supporting users in a remote working environment continues to be more time consuming due to the increased variables and, in parallel, ICT continue to support office returns using floor walkers to best assist with device updates. ICT have initiated a service review to identify process and technology improvements needed to best support the future hybrid working environment. Some of the technologies being investigated include those used to scan devices remotely, remote call logging software and to allow remote control of devices when off-site, i.e. not at a Council location.

The 365 project has resumed following the successful recruitment of a replacement project manager and an initial batch of mailbox migrations is being planned to test the process and identify user impact.

The annual network security testing has resumed and this is likely to result in additional system upgrades and security patching which can be more disruptive to those users working remotely. Appropriate communication will be initiated as needed.

As is being seen across the country and in many sectors, a poor response to a recent recruitment exercise coupled with long term sickness absence is impacting service delivery timescales for the service.

Pay Award

COSLA Leaders in their offer to the trade unions stated that best endeavours would be made to pay before Christmas 2021. However, as a result of the last ballot closing on 29th November and SJC AGM being held on 1st December, this rendered payment in the desired timescale impossible to satisfy. The 4 weekly paid

employees received their pre-Christmas December pay on 9th December and that run closed just 5 days after the UNSION ballot.

The Joint Trade Union Convenor Group are aware of this and that processing a pay award involves significant time resource, involves complexities in backdating arrears across two tax years, multiple percentage increases related to spinal points, the different percentage increases being applicable for various periods of time per individual, and the degree of accuracy required. There is a considerable level of pressure on our small transactional teams who are responsible for processing this award and it is crucial that they are supported at this time.

That said, preparations are in place in order that payments can be processed in time for the late January/early February pay (dependent on pay frequency). This is on the basis that arrears are paid in a single payment as spreading over multiple payments adds a significant volume of administration likely delaying the award payment schedule further for all and potentially causing detriment for those in receipt of Universal Credit.

4.2.7 Housing and Employability

The Communities Team continue to deliver a full service while largely working remotely. Through partnership working we have established a number of community based facilities for shared use by the team when they do need to be in the community. While many community groups prefer to meet remotely, the level of demand for capacity building work continues. The team are delivering the Participatory Budgeting pilot in collaboration with HSCP and Greenspace. This includes the work of the Community Alliance, Community Councils and other local community groups with the overall aim of promoting increased levels of participation.

In terms of our Housing Development and Homelessness service area, there has been a notable increase in homelessness levels of almost 21% in the first 6 months of 2021/22 compared to the same period in 2020/21. This is being monitored closely to see if this increase continues. There has also been an increase in repeat homelessness, 19 households re-presented within a 12 month period a key contributing factor was linked to domestic abuse. The higher levels of households in temporary accommodation, which has been a consistent impact as a result of the pandemic remains and stood at 277 at the end of October though only 13 households contained children. All these households are supported by our teams who have continued to provide much needed support throughout the pandemic.

We have increased our focus on homelessness prevention activities over the last quarter and have worked closely with a number of landlords to avoid evictions into homelessness; this activity has been further strengthened through the introduction of a Tenant Support Fund in late September, which is funded

by the SG through the Tenant Support Grant of £0.277m. Awards through this fund are now being made and this provides support to private and social rented tenants.

As we prepare to ensure full service provision across the festive period we will initiate our winter resilience planning which will ensure 24/7 access to homeless services throughout the holiday period. Additional Scottish Government funding will also be utilised to ensure homeless households and those faced with destitution will avoid financial insecurity.

Our new build programme has been progressing well under 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 Aitkenbar, 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.

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

The Housing Operations team has secured access to buildings to provide drop in facilities for employees working in our estates. To date we have secured Popular Road, Dumbarton for the ASB team and Mitchell Way, Alexandria for operational staff, both of which have been fully risk assessed for staff use. We have been using short term options for our Clydebank Team in the Titan Building and are finalising arrangements for the use the St Andrew's assisted living facility, whilst we wait on our longer term solutions to become available. We have also been involved in discussions with Assets with regards to making arrangements for the Phase 2 return to Clydebank Town Centre and Church Street buildings. All of these moves have been received positively by staff.

As we continue to recover from COVID-19 restrictions our full focus continues to be on estate management, house letting, rent arrears and tenancy related activity and improving our performance and services across all of Housing Operations.

In respect of letting and tenancy related activity, we continue to carry out sign up's for new tenancies, ensuring completion of risk assessment checks prior to any visits occurring. With regards to tenancy related activity, we have now reviewed and updated our risk assessments to allow the safe re-introduction of other tenancy related visits for all parties involved.

We have now implemented our temporary team change from generic to specialism following consultation exercises with employees and Trade Unions. In practice this will mean that we will have dedicated teams split into two geographical areas of Dumbarton/Alexandria and Clydebank who cover specific functions of allocation/void management, rent arrears and estate /tenancy management. Although we have a significant backlog to work through, which will take time to show the impact of these changes in our performance, initial feedback has been positive. We are confident that this temporary change will allow our teams to focus on improvement to key service areas and address the backlog created due to COVID-19.

We have also introduced a pilot telephone contact system in the Dumbarton/Alexandria area, whereby a duty Housing Officer will receive calls from tenants, as opposed to these calls going to individual mobile numbers. This is at initial stages, but are hopeful this will provide a more efficient service to our tenants. We will continue to monitor this pilot and take the learning from this to consider how this can be replicated for the Clydebank area going forward.

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

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

We have also completed the West Dunbartonshire Local Child Poverty Report, and the Community Learning and Development Three Year Plan. These documents contain further information about plans for recovery.

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

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

5. Financial and Procurement Implications

Financial Implications

- 5.1** The pandemic has had, and continues to have, implications in terms of service delivery and in relation to the Council's agreed budget for 2020/21 and into 2021/22 as a result of additional spend requirements and lost income, offset by some cost savings due to services reducing/stopping. The SG has provided additional funding to support Councils. Total net cost implications of COVID-19 on the General Fund in 2020/21 were reported in the draft annual accounts for 2020/21 which showed that of the £20.430m of SG funding received for COVID-19 costs and targeted interventions in 2020/21, £13.692m was used and £6.738m carried forward. Of the carried forward sum £4.765m was for SG funded interventions and £1.973m was from the SG general COVID-19 support funds.
- 5.2** For 2021/22 the position will not be absolutely clear until the financial year end as, even though Scotland is now beyond the SG COVID-19 levels, the pandemic continues and services continue to be affected. At present a COVID-19 financial impact is estimated at between £2.800m and £3.000m for 2021/22, though clearly this will be subject to ongoing monitoring and finalising, and this excludes spend on areas where SG has provided specific funding.
- 5.3** The Appendix to this report summarises the SG funding the Council has been notified of in revenue funding for 2021/22, currently totalling £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** Since the October 2021 report the following new SG funding has been announced relating to COVID-19 support in 2021/22 (these are included in the attached appendix and the value noted above):

Revenue Funding	Scotland	WDC
Test & Protect - Outbound calling – to cover up to 31 December 2021	£2.275m	£0.046m
Test & Protect - Outbound calling – to cover up to 31 March 2022	£2.275m	£0.046m
Flexible Funding to tackle Financial Insecurity	£25.000m	£0.575m

- 5.5** 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.

5.6 £25m SG Funding: Flexible Funding to Tackle Financial Insecurity

As reported above, at 5.4, the Council has been allocated £0.575m from this fund, per the SG, to adapt interventions to meet emerging needs. Actions suggested by SG include supplementing local budgets for the Scottish Welfare Fund to meet demand, boosting local funding for Discretionary Housing Payments, proactive assistance for those likely to experience hardship – including people who may have been impacted by the recent UK Government cut to Universal Credit and those who may not be eligible for mainstream support - and other action to support wellbeing.

Officers have reviewed the above and identified the following planned allocation of this funding for use between now and the end of the current financial year.

Residents will be directed for fuel support, etc. through the Working4U partnership to the Council's Scottish Welfare Fund Team, whilst support for foodbanks, homelessness, etc. will be managed through the Communities Team. Officers may vary the distribution noted in the following table as need and demand arises during the rest of the financial year.

Foodbank Support	£0.150m
Scottish Welfare Fund top-up	£0.120m
Scottish Welfare Fund top-up to assist with fuel poverty	£0.080m
Support for housing rent and Council Tax pressures	£0.225m
Total	£0.575m

HSCP Financial Implications

5.7 The ongoing financial impact of Covid-19 on the recovery and remobilisation of health and social care services will require careful monitoring and consideration as the demand for these services increases over the winter period. The Scottish Government continues to provide assurances that all Covid-19 related costs will be funded and additionally has announced a winter funding package of approximately £300 million for 2021/22 with a number of the funding streams recurring in 2022/23.

The HSCP submitted its Quarter 2 Local Mobilisation Plan (LMP) Financial Tracker on the 28 October which detailed a projected year end spend of £6.616m against an earmarked Covid-19 earmarked reserve balance of £4.970m. The Quarter 3 LMP is due in mid-February 2022 and the Scottish Government has indicated that any projected costs in excess of the earmarked Covid-19 reserves will likely be funded once they are satisfied all compensating offset savings have also been maximised.

5.8 Procurement Implications

There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report, however we continue to remain vigilant to any potential future supply chain issues which may develop due to changes in COVID-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 evidencing the financial impacts on Councils and the need for further financial support or financial flexibilities. This has resulted in significant financial support being provided for 2020/21 and 2021/22 which it is expected will be sufficient to cover the identified costs of COVID-19 to the Council.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

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

8. Consultation

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

9. Strategic Assessment

- 9.1** All actions and plans around COVID-19 have been done in order to continue to achieve the Council's strategic objectives.
- 9.2** Sound financial control and good governance remains a key approach in minimising the risk to the Council and the ongoing capacity of the Council to continue to deliver its strategic objectives in the longer term.

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Date: 15 December 2021

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

Background Papers:

1. Member Briefings and FAQs on COVID-19 issues;
2. Budget Report – Council, 4 March 2020;
3. Minute of Council meeting – 4 March 2020;
4. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 24 June 2020;
5. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 26 August 2020;
6. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 30 September 2020;
7. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 25 November 2020;
8. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 16 December 2020;
9. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 7 January 2021;
10. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 24 February 2021;
11. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 26 May 2021;
12. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 23 June 2021;
13. Delivery of Services during Public Health Emergency –
Council 23 June 2021;
14. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 24 August 2021;
15. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 29 September 2021;
and
16. COVID-19 Update Report – Council 27 October 2021.

Wards Affected: All

Appendix

Local Government COVID-19 funding 2021/22	Scotland £m	WDC £m
<u>Funding directly to support Local Government (not ring-fenced)</u>	£262.000	£4.522
Non-recurring Covid-19 funding for 2021/22	£259.000	£4.488
Business Support Grants - Administration 2021/22	£3.000	£0.034
<u>Funding to support individuals/families/communities</u>	£152.844	£3.567
Family Pandemic Payments, incl. Admin	£23.860	£0.554
Low Income Pandemic Payments, incl. Admin	£68.154	£1.561
Scottish Child Payments - Bridging Payments	£25.830	£0.600
Tenant Grant Fund	£10.000	£0.277
Flexible Funding to tackle Financial Insecurity	£25.000	£0.575
<u>Funding for Education Recovery</u>	£165.000	£2.091
Additional Teaching and Support Staff	£50.000	£0.331
Additional Teachers (2 nd tranche)	£30.000	£0.198
Carbon Dioxide Monitoring	£10.000	£0.175
Support needs of children and young people for 2021/22	£60.000	£1.111
Summer Activities for Children and Young people	£15.000	£0.276
<u>Test and Protect Funding/Public Health/Supporting People</u>	£9.923	£0.202
Test & Protect - Outbound calling – to 30 June 2021	£2.275	£0.046
Test & Protect - Outbound calling – to 30 September 2021	£2.275	£0.046
Test & Protect - Outbound calling – to 31 December 2021	£2.275	£0.046
Test & Protect - Outbound calling – to 31 March 2022	£2.275	£0.046
Self-Isolation Support Grant - Additional Administration	£0.823	£0.020
<u>Health & Social Care funding and passed to LG for Local Mobilisation Plans:</u>	£0.000	£0.027
COVID Emergency Fund - Women's Safety & Support	Not Known	£0.027
<u>Other</u>	£7.900	£0.141
Environmental Health Officers (20/21 and 21/22)	£2.900	£0.027
Parental Employee Support Fund Boost	£5.000	£0.114
TOTAL FUNDING	£597.667	£10.550

