

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL**30 June 2021****Report by Chief Executive****COVID-19 RECOVERY ACTIONS - UPDATE****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide Elected Members with a further update on response, recovery and renewal work taking place across the Council and the Trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the Council note:-
- a) the ongoing work on response, recovery and renewal;
 - b) that ongoing service delivery levels are still affected by staff involvement in response and recovery activities as well as the less efficient operating practices required to meet Coronavirus protocols; and
 - c) the continued additional workload of many staff.

BACKGROUND

3. As Members are aware, as part of the route map for moving through and out of the COVID-19 crisis, the Scottish Government introduced a new protection level system. The system contains 5 levels ranging from the level with least restrictions (level 0) to that with the most stringent restrictions (level 4). Members will recall that initially East Renfrewshire was placed in level 3. However levels were reviewed in light of an increasing number of COVID-19 cases across the country and East Renfrewshire along with a number of other areas in the central belt was placed in level 4. This was the position in December.

4. Much has changed since then. The vaccination programme got under way across the country and testing has become much more widely available. There has also been a continuing relaxation of restrictions, with all council areas now in either level 1 or 2. East Renfrewshire sits in level 2 at the time of writing.

5. Case numbers remain high in some areas, including in East Renfrewshire. There has also been an overall increase in case numbers since the introduction of the most recent relaxations. The Scottish Government continue to monitor the figures but to date have not taken any decisions about reintroducing restrictions in any area.

REPORT

6. The purpose of this report is to provide a further update to Members on work being carried out across the Council since the previous report, and should be read in the context of the previous update reports presented to the [Emergencies Committee in May](#) the [Council in June](#) the [Council in October](#), and the [Council in December](#)

7. The information is provided in 3 sections:
- Response – how the Council has responded to the challenge of the pandemic
 - Recovery – how far services have recovered and any remaining challenges
 - Renewal – some of the ongoing renewal activities across the council

Section 1 – Response

Mass Vaccination Clinics

8. Vaccination clinics were set up by Council and Culture and Leisure staff at Carmichael Hall (Giffnock) and the Foundry (Barrhead). They have been operational from Monday 1 February and will continue at these locations until the end of September 2021. Discussions are ongoing with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) and the HSCP about future arrangements to deliver both COVID-19 and seasonal flu vaccinations beyond September 2021.

9. Additionally, three drop-in clinics have been available at the above sites on 4, 5 and 12 June. Over 1,000 attended these sessions.

10. The operation of vaccination centres represents a significant commitment from the Trust. Its buildings have been available for a considerable length of time and its staff support the non-clinical day-to-day operation of the vaccination centres. However, as more leisure facilities are able to open and staff return to their substantive posts, there will be a transition for some support centre tasks to volunteers.

HSCP Vaccination Programme

11. The HSCP COVID-19 vaccination programme commenced in December 2020 with the majority of care home residents vaccinated over a two week period, by staff volunteering from nursing teams across the HSCP. In January, the team vaccinated additional residents and care home staff, as part of a mop up exercise. At the end of each session, any spare vaccine was used to vaccinate HSCP care at home staff outside the care homes. Second doses were administered mid-February and mop up doses at the end of March completing the programme. Overall, the HSCP has vaccinated over 400 care home residents and 400 staff administering 1,663 doses in our local care homes.

12. District nurses supported by other HSCP staff have carried out COVID-19 vaccinations in residents own homes for those unable to attend vaccination centres due to frailty or other health issues. The team have administered 1,053 first doses and 1,098 second doses to people referred by GPs or the vaccination clinics. This is on top of the 3,500 visits they undertake to deliver care to people in their own homes each month.

PPE

13. Through the PPE hub, set up and run by HSCP support staff, the HSCP has successfully distributed essential protective supplies (1,764,020 gloves, 812,757 aprons, 933,500 masks, 2,146 litres sanitiser) to those who needed them, including HSCP and partner providers' staff, carers, and personal assistants.

COVID-19 Testing

14. Testing is a central tenet in the Scottish Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the last report, East Renfrewshire had a Mobile Testing Unit located at the Greenlaw Works (Business Centre). This site has remained operational since

September 2020, continuing to be in place on a Monday to Friday basis. The Greenlaw Mobile Testing Unit is utilised for symptomatic persons, with bookings through the Government portal.

15. Asymptomatic testing is considered a key way to break chains of COVID-19 transmission; by identifying those who carry the virus, but do not display symptoms. In 2021, asymptomatic testing has been a focus of the response to the pandemic. 2021 has witnessed the establishment of asymptomatic testing centres and provision of at home test kits: especially for school pupils and many frontline staff.

16. An Asymptomatic Testing Centre was established at the Cowan Park Pavilion (Barrhead) on 22 February 2021. It is open on a drop-in basis, to serve those living and working in the area. The centre was initially staffed by a combination of Council / Trust staff and the Armed Forces; and is currently staffed by a combination of Council / Trust and NHS officers. Home testing kits are available for collection from Cowan Park. It is currently intended that Cowan Park will remain operational as a testing facility to September 2021.

17. In response to the May 2021 surge in positive cases within East Renfrewshire, the Council identified testing as a key community reassurance; as well as a method in stabilising the increasing case rate. Additional asymptomatic testing was established at the Woodfarm Education Centre car park (Thornliebank) and the GHA Rugby Club car park (Giffnock), through Scottish Ambulance Service operated Mobile Testing Units. Both sites offer walk-in testing, as well as home test kit collection. Woodfarm is open Monday to Sunday; while GHA is open Monday to Friday. Both sites will remain in place until at least 25 June – but this will remain under review in light of Covid rates in East Renfrewshire.

18. During the surge in positivity, work was undertaken with community leaders and the voluntary sector to distribute home testing kits. To date, approximately 1,000 kits have been distributed to residents across East Renfrewshire. Additionally, significant steps were taken to promote Asymptomatic Test Sites, with details delivered to all town centre commercial properties. Enhanced social media presence, a digital advertising vehicle and community radio have also been utilised to extend the reach of messaging.

19. East Renfrewshire has also implemented a Vehicular solution to support asymptomatic testing in communities. This allows the vehicle to be placed in communities with rising or concerning COVID rates. Again, this facility allows walk ins and the collection of home testing kits. The vehicle has been operational since week commencing 24 May, initially being located at Newton Mearns Baptist Church.

20. HSCP district nursing and care home liaison nursing staff have supported COVID testing for those unable to access testing centres, mostly our care home and housebound populations. They supported care home staff to undertake a range of testing including PCR and Lateral flow testing. HSCP admin staff have linked with laboratories, pharmacy, and NHS transport to put in place easy access to testing including running out of hours on call arrangements for many months.

Support to Care Homes

21. In addition to testing and vaccination, the HSCP has developed and coordinated many services and supports to care homes. Care homes have been caring for some of our most vulnerable residents over the course of the pandemic. Care home liaison staff have supported homes to manage residents' care, with advice on pressure area care, food, fluids and nutrition and individual nursing issues. Along with NHSGGC colleagues, they have offered infection prevention control advice and supportive visits. Commissioning and contracts staff have supported homes with daily welfare calls, and arranged virtual meetings and workshops for

managers, updating them on changes to guidance and providing a forum for peer support. The HSCP adult support and protection team has worked closely with homes advising and investigating to keep the most vulnerable individuals safe from harm. Twelve care home support and assurance visits were completed in April/May 21 by senior health and social work HSCP managers. They were humbled and inspired by the care home staff and managers and were shown many examples of where they had provided care and end of life care in the most difficult and unprecedented circumstances. Bespoke support has been offered to care homes particularly affected by the pandemic and the wellbeing of staff and residents continues to be a high HSCP priority.

Environmental Health and Trading Standards

22. Environmental Health officers are the Council's public health professionals, playing a key role in liaising with NHSGGC. Work takes place with the Public Health Protection Unit, Test and Protect, etc. to investigate case clusters in commercial settings to prevent COVID-19 spread in the community; additionally Environmental Health have taken part in NHS led Problem Assessment Groups and Incident Management Teams. The collaboration between agencies has been pivotal in identifying elements of concern as part of the recent surge.

23. The Coronavirus Regulations assigned enforcement roles to Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers. The Services have collaborated to undertake inspections of businesses. They have been proactive in supporting other Council services and East Renfrewshire's business community in COVID-19 protective and preventative measures, linked to the lifting of restrictions by the Scottish Government. To assist with this function, the Scottish Government granted one year's funding for a Public Health Compliance Officer.

24. A significant facet of the work undertaken by Environmental Health and Trading Standards has been liaising with East Renfrewshire's business community by undertaking the "four Es" approach to the Coronavirus Regulations (Engage, Explain, Encourage and Enforce). This has ensured that the majority of businesses are aware of any variations to the restrictions arising from level changes, understand the implications when changing levels and abide by the relevant safety measures.

25. Unfortunately, the number of scam-related crimes continues to be an issue during the pandemic. Trading Standards Officers have continued to work with Police Scotland and other partners to achieve a safe, fair trading environment with informed and confident consumers.

Business Grants

26. Economic Development continue to spend considerable time processing and paying a wide range of Scottish Government COVID support business grants to local businesses. This has also required assistance from other departments in processing payments. Since March 2020, 2962 payments have been processed to the value of £19,489,510.

27. The most recent grants programme relates to top-up payments to Taxi Drivers and Operators, as well as new localised Level two and three restrictions support. The ever-changing nature of restrictions locally and continual development of new grant programmes has posed a significant staffing resource issue.

Education

28. All schools and nurseries across East Renfrewshire continue to operate as normal with a range of mitigations and measures in place to support the continuation of learning for our children and young people whilst minimising the potential risks of transmission. All risk

assessments and mitigations are monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis by the department's health and safety team as well as by staff across each establishment to ensure safety remains a priority at all times.

29. Case numbers in schools and nurseries have continued to fluctuate in line with the increase in positive cases across different communities, however, the impact has been minimised by the robust approaches to risk management across all establishments. Behaviours such as social distancing, regular hand washing, the wearing of face coverings and maintaining good ventilation have become embedded practice for both staff and pupils and contribute to the continued low instances of COVID across most establishments. Specific Scottish Government funding to support the safe re-opening of educational establishments continues to be targeted at maintaining the enhanced cleaning regime within establishments, the supply of PPE resources across the estate and additional Pupil Support Assistant (PSA) hours to assist with pupil supervision and help to embed COVID safe behaviours and practices.

30. As part of the approach to minimising the risks of transmission within schools and nurseries, at home Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing was introduced earlier this year for all education staff and secondary school pupils. The LFD test kits are available on a voluntary basis, with staff and pupils encouraged to take a test twice weekly to identify any asymptomatic cases and alert the individual to not attend work or school.

31. The ongoing response to the pandemic unavoidably includes a significant administrative burden for senior management and business support teams across the department. As well as the rollout of testing initiatives the recording, reporting and communications round positive cases remains a challenge. In order to mitigate this to some extent an element of Scottish Government recovery funding is being used to provide some temporary business support additionality until March 2022.

32. Grants to support our partner providers in the early learning and childcare sector have been administered by the department, both in terms of the initial Transitional Support Fund for Childcare Providers and thereafter the grants made available to these organisations during the further periods of temporary restrictions.

Education - Supporting Families

33. Throughout the pandemic, there has been a continued recognition of the impact on lower income families struggling financially and requiring additional support. Working alongside the Scottish Government and the Council's Accounts Payable (Creditors) section, the department has provided Winter and Spring Hardship Payments in advance of the Christmas and Easter school holidays, to provide families with additional support over these periods. The hardship payments provide £100 for each child accessing free school meals and are paid directly to the parent or guardian. A subsequent Summer Hardship Payment is being paid in advance of the summer holiday, with a further payment due by December 2021. In addition, in recognition of the winter weather and the greater emphasis on outdoor learning within school, an additional £25 payment was made to all School Clothing Grant recipients in advance of the 2020 Christmas holidays, enabling the purchase of additional warm clothing.

34. Since March 2020, the Education Department has provided food packs, throughout all periods of school closure, including school holidays to families who would normally access free school meal provision within school. Approximately 1,350 food packs were delivered to families on a weekly basis, with significant efforts being made by Facilities Management and Environment Transport staff to ensure distribution.

35. In light of the easing of restrictions and with more families now returning to work, the department has recognised the need for a more sustainable flexible solution to support the

provision of food over the holiday periods. For the summer holidays, a new voucher scheme has been launched which provides families with a flexible voucher to use across a range of different retailers, enabling greater choice. As a new scheme, we will be seeking feedback over the coming months and ensure that this is considered when developing solutions for future holiday periods.

CRMT Sub-Groups

Humanitarian Support & Assistance

Isolation Support

36. The Humanitarian Support workstream continues to oversee the Council's proactive outbound calling to those asked to isolate by Public Health Scotland; administering the Self-Isolation Support Grants (SISG) via the Scottish Welfare Fund team; answering queries from East Renfrewshire residents to the National Helpline; and keeping an overview of the requirements of those on the shielding list. There is close liaison with Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire, who continue to provide excellent support to local residents through their Community Hub, including wellbeing calls to those who may be isolated or lonely.

37. It is expected that the Scottish Government will require continuation of the Isolation Support service and SISG until at least the end of September 2021, however there are indications that this service may extend further into the autumn and even winter as encouraging isolation is likely to be a key step in mitigating the need for further lockdowns. We are currently looking carefully at the resources for provision of this service and this is causing some operational challenges for the Community Wardens service, given that two of their staff have been the operational leads for Isolation Support calls and time-consuming screening and evidence gathering for the SISGs prior to processing by the Benefits team.

Humanitarian Support Funding

38. In response to COVID-19, the Scottish Government released several funds to local authorities throughout 2020/2021 to support residents in financial hardship; those struggling with the restrictions and guidance in place; those shielding and isolating as part of Test & Protect. Cabinet received an update on the Humanitarian Support funds on 3 June 2021 and noted that over the last year this funding has been used in various ways, in consultation with services and our third sector partners, Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire, to support local communities. This has included establishing and running the Humanitarian Food Hub which operated between April and September 2020; supporting running of Voluntary Action's Community Hub; supply of supermarket vouchers and emergency hardship grants via Money Advice and Rights Team's (MART) discretionary fund; helping with costs of prescription deliveries to those isolating or shielding; additional support for MART and the Scottish Welfare Fund to cope with increased demand; helping those on clothing grants with additional costs of winter clothing for outdoor education; supporting vulnerable Social Work clients and families with activity and wellbeing packs to ease tensions in households during lockdown; provision of digital devices to young people via Community Learning and Development services; supporting the establishment of local food larders as a longer-term solution to poverty-related food needs in East Renfrewshire; and additional support to the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

39. Cabinet noted that over £700,000 of one-off funding was available to the Council in 2021/22 for COVID-19 humanitarian support purposes. It was agreed that the MART local discretionary fund would continue for the remainder of the financial year, with provision also being made for shopping vouchers for food, short-term fuel support via Citizens Advice Bureau and officer time to manage increased demand on services responding to residents in socio-economic need (e.g. via the Scottish Welfare Fund).

40. It was noted that, whilst we do need to reserve a proportion of the funding to meet any emerging COVID-support needs over the year ahead, the focus of proposals is to build long-term, sustainable solutions which will help towards ongoing support for our most vulnerable residents as we recover from the pandemic. Cabinet agreed a 4-tier approach to managing the humanitarian funds for 2021/22:

- a) Reserving a proportion to respond to any emerging COVID support needs in 21/22
- b) Progressing a number of internal proposals from Council and HSCP services
- c) Conducting community engagement and research to inform the broader recovery strategy and a community bid process
- d) Conducting an East Renfrewshire community-bid process later in the autumn 2021 which will be open across the whole East Renfrewshire area and findings from the research will shape the criteria for the bids. This will be open to all community and third sector (not-for-profit) organisations with a focus on capacity building and sustainable solutions and will be delivered in partnership with our Third Sector Interface, Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire.

41. Further to the Family Pandemic Payments outlined above in the Education section of the report, households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction (c.4,500 households in East Renfrewshire) are also each to receive a Low Income Pandemic Payment of £130 by the end of October 2021. This will be administered by the Revenues and Benefits Service.

Section 2 – Recovery

Environment Department

42. As is the case with other departments and in previous reports, the Environment Department is certainly not in any way “back to normal”. Urgent COVID related issues take up considerable amounts of staff time. In particular, there is significant Environment Department staffing and resources dedicated to Business Grants, Testing and Vaccination Centres.

Environmental Health and Trading Standards

43. With Environmental Health playing a significant role in COVID-19 response, there is limited capability to recover fully to pre-pandemic levels. Requests for the service to investigate other public health related matters such as pest control, air pollution and food hygiene issues remain high.

44. The Scottish Government permitted a pause in Food Law related inspections in March 2020, to support COVID enforcement. This has resulted in a backlog of premises subject to inspections, engagement and potential interventions. Food Standards Scotland has indicated that it expects Environmental Health to recommence inspections from September 2021. A Food Recovery Plan is in place to recover this backlog but activation of the Plan will affect both “back to normal” and COVID response actions.

45. Environmental Health and Trading Standards have also been providing advice to businesses with alcohol licences. Engagement is linked to the COVID-19 level restrictions introduced by the Scottish Government; with the advice seeking to support premises reopening and introduce control measures to ensure that this can safely take place.

Corporate Health and Safety Unit

46. Corporate Health and Safety Unit (CHSU) Officers have been heavily involved with the pandemic response since March 2020. A proportion of their time continues to be dedicated to COVID related issues as other council services endeavour to recover and comply with changing restriction levels. They continue to receive requests for advice on guidance changes and how these reflect on the services, with risk assessment reviews of service tasks and buildings being undertaken on an ongoing basis to reflect such change. All CHSU activities have been reviewed and legislative compliance tasks prioritised. Approximately half of the Service is dedicated to recovery and business as usual activity.

47. The new service plan has been created which in the main looks at targets not completed last year and the team have commenced work on this plan. There continues to be increased demand on officer time from services to undertake “normal” activities in terms of supporting services. These are addressed as and when resources are available.

48. CHSU will continue to monitor changing Scottish Government advice in relation to Coronavirus and provide support to services with the requirements these bring. The focus now is on delivery of the new service plan that includes fire risk assessment, inspections, management of hand arm vibration and the continued progression of the new health and safety management system.

Housing

49. The provision of Homeless and Housing Advice services continues to be mainly by telephone, because of limited staff access to Council buildings. Whilst service standards in terms of timescales are maintained, there is a dilution of quality of service in the absence of face-to-face interviews. Looking forward, we will consider how to re-introduce face-to-face housing advice and homeless interviews within the restrictions imposed on both limited staff numbers in the offices and continued restrictions on public access to buildings.

50. Allocations of housing remains relatively unaffected by the restrictions imposed. However, despite prioritising properties for homeless applicants, there remains a backlog of homeless households awaiting a permanent offer of accommodation and in temporary accommodation.

51. Housing Officers are able to perform their duties in relation to environmental inspections of estates and their letting process role; however, COVID restrictions in place have prevented house visits except in the most urgent circumstances. This has had a significant impact on the level of support provided in tenancy conditions disputes and anti-social behaviour. As restrictions ease, there will be a refocus of staff priorities and duties to include and encourage face-to-face interviews in tenant’s homes to provide support and assistance.

52. Rent arrears has continued to rise into 2021/22 as the effects of restrictions on family incomes continue to be felt. The number of council tenants in receipt of Universal Credit has more than doubled during the pandemic. Officers continue to provide support and assistance, predominately by telephone, owing to the current restrictions. Housing Services are undertaking preparations for the lifting of statutory measures, which have prevented rent arrears recovery processes to ensure that tenants continue to be supported whilst income levels to the Council are maximised.

53. Non-essential repairs resumed on 26 April, however due to backlog of inspections and repairs reported during lockdown, work requests are prioritised on the basis of – revisiting older ones; making sure homes are secure; and air and water tight. The backlog of non-essential repairs is expected to be addressed by the end of June, with normal service response

times returning. Planned improvement works are gradually resuming, starting with the 2019-20 backlog. However, with the furlough scheme in place to the end of September 2021, some of our suppliers and contractors might not be able to provide required services before this time.

Development Management and Building Standards

54. While Development Management and Building Standards are able to carry out the majority of their duties, there are still protective measures in place to minimise the risk of COVID-19. Site visits are typically kept to a minimum, being either pre-arranged or limited in terms of officer attendance. Additionally, within Building Standards, developers are asked to provide photographs or videos instead of typical site visits. Both Services continue with limited public interaction, in light of visits to offices not being possible.

Neighbourhood Services

55. Neighbourhood Services continue to operate in a strong recovery position, delivering all related frontline essential services to residents. The Service is significantly challenged by the need to retain “bubbles” within our frontline crews. Bubbles ensure any possible outbreak of COVID-19 is quickly contained and its impact minimised across our workforce. However, this system of operation means that the deployment and movement of employees between crews and activities is severely restricted and at times service delivery has been slower.

56. In order to ensure Neighbourhood Services still operate to the standards required, there has been increased revenue spend in both agency workers and in overtime in order to protect the safety of our teams and deliver services to our customers. On occasion, certain service delivery issues have not been able to be resolved as quickly as desired. This is because even with the use of overtime and agency personnel, employee bubbles cannot be broken. The risks to ongoing service delivery could be compromised if diligence around employee deployment to work activities is not applied in this respect.

Economic Development

57. Economic Development have dedicated significant resources to Business Grants throughout the pandemic, the continual development of new grants and changing of existing grants continues to pose resource challenges. Areas of strategic work that had been planned; such as developing strategies in economic development, tourism, employability and community wealth building, have been delayed due to staff resource shortages.

58. All referrals to the Work EastRen team are being allocated and routine assessments are taking place. There has been a significant increase in the levels of referrals to the team; primarily from Department of Work and Pensions and self-referrals. During the pandemic, there has been increased demand from groups the team do not normally see, for example job-ready, skilled unemployed residents. Business growth, Business Gateway, Town Centre, Place and Community Benefits work continues to be delivered remotely.

59. Looking forward, the Work EastRen team are hoping to be able to gain access to their new office in Lowndes Street, Barrhead, where they will be able to meet clients that are more vulnerable. It is expected that there will be an increase in demand from local residents for the employability team services once the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ends in September 2021.

60. The team continue to deliver a wide range of programmes to our residents including the European Social Fund and the Scottish Government’s No One Left Behind framework that includes the following: Employer Recruitment Incentives; Parental Employability Support; Employability Support for Disabled Parents and Local Redundancy Support. The team have completed their Service Delivery Plan for 2021/22.

Technical Services

61. Technical Services continue to support services to realise their agreed capital plan aspirations. However, the recovering construction industry is challenged by intermittent materials supply and raw material shortages, which are both driving up prices and causing delays to completion. It is anticipated that this will continue to affect projects for at least the next six months. Technical Services continue to work with other Services and with Procurement to mitigate both cost and time impacts to projects.

Property Services

62. Ventilation in schools remains a primary focus for the Property Services Team. However, staffing resources have also required to be allocated to ensure the vital compliance maintenance works are undertaken, particularly as more buildings reopen across the estate as the Council follows the Government road map for recovery.

63. Property Services are now liaising with ventilation engineers to ensure that the education estate is fully assessed before moving to complete the assessments of the remaining properties across the Council estate, this will include undertaking any minor works identified to comply with the Government guidance. Technical services will continue to progress the procurement of works specified by the completed designs, which are now being agreed with the ventilation engineers. Progress of the works will be dependent on the availability of contractors, materials and access to the buildings to complete the works with increasing challenges being faced across all construction sectors with regard to the availability of materials and with rising costs.

64. The Estates team have also been heavily involved in their usual day-to-day asset valuation work alongside taking a lead role in the creation of Community Asset Transfer procedures and COVID related debt cases work.

City Deal

65. While City Deal service provision has continued through home working, projects have been adversely impacted due to restrictions arising from coronavirus. For example, the lockdown resulted in delays on the Balgraystone Road Project. These works are now complete and the road is open to the public, and is very well used.

66. The proposed Barrhead South Train Station and Aurs Road projects continue to be significantly delayed, because they require extensive engagement with Transport Scotland and Scottish Water. Both partners have understandably experienced similar difficulties brought by COVID-19 and as a result are prioritising emergency work.

67. Going forward, staff will continue to work successfully from home. However, the risks to the Council with regard to City Deal Projects continues to lie in relation to essential consultation with and consents from statutory agencies such as Transport Scotland and Scottish Water. Both continue to provide a restricted service due to Covid-19 and staff holidays. This has resulted in a delay to the programme and increased costs. The City Deal Projects and budgets have been realigned to take into consideration all of the aforementioned and was presented to Cabinet on 3 June 2021, and will considered by the Council at this meeting.

Return to the Office

68. Scottish Government guidance for Levels 4 to 1 in the Protection Levels Framework is that people should work from home where possible. Within Level 0, the advice is that working from home remains the default, but a phased and limited return to offices

can begin. It should be noted that at this time, the Scottish Government have not confirmed a revised date when it expects all areas to move to Level 0 and / or below that.

69. To prepare for future returns, office accommodation within the Council has all been risk assessed to comply with the necessary rules around ventilation, sanitation and social distancing. All risk assessments have been recently revised to take account of any changes to guidance that may have been introduced since the start of the pandemic. It is anticipated that additional Scottish Government guidance relating to office accommodation will be issued prior to moves to Level 0 or below – which will likely lead to reassessments and changes to be implemented within our offices.

70. The need to adhere to social distancing has resulting in capacity reductions of around two thirds. Until social distancing requirements are changed, it is difficult to increase this capacity further without significant cost and disruption. Once social distancing is reduced, further re-occupation will occur.

71. The lessons learned during the pandemic, especially around how effective home and agile working can be, are being reviewed to assist considerations on how the Council will be able to operate in the medium to long term. This piece of work is entitled “The Way We Work” and will be the subject of a separate report to Cabinet in the future.

Education

72. Following the second period of school closure announced during the Christmas holidays in December, and lasting from January to March 2021 there was a phased return to school for children and young people, with all returning to school and nursery on a full time permanent basis from Monday 19th April. As outlined earlier in the report, all establishments have a range of mitigations in place to ensure they can continue to operate safely and continued to support the learning of children and young people.

73. Regular reports on the recovery of schools and nurseries, and the wider department, have been considered by the Education Committee over recent months. Specifically, the Committee considered a report on the quality of remote learning provision at the meeting of 11 March 2021, receiving presentations from two head teachers on their own approaches in their schools. Additionally, at the meeting of the 22 April 2021, Committee considered a report on the approach to Getting it Right for Every Child, again hearing presentations from schools on their focus on supporting young people throughout the challenges experienced over the last 18 months.

74. Commendably our schools have adapted their learning and teaching provision from face to face, to remote and back to face to face, with ease, whilst maintaining a focus on high quality experiences for learners. Almost all our schools report that children have continued to make progress during this time and are working towards appropriate learning targets and goals. Schools have addressed gaps in learning by selecting appropriate interventions and strategies based on evidence from robust analysis of data, effective self-evaluation and research. Through an external scrutiny exercise undertaken by Education Scotland, the approaches of schools across East Renfrewshire were endorsed with recognition of the supports in place.

75. Whilst the vast majority of children and young people have adapted well to the changing provision of education over the last 16 months, a small number of children have struggled to adjust to the restrictions and the subsequent return to school and may require more intensive support to support the recovery of their learning. This can be very demanding on resource and the department is continuing to work with schools to identify where further support may be needed.

76. Further tranches of specific Education Recovery funding are being utilised to extend the additional recovery teaching resource through to the end of financial year 2021/22 as well as now also providing some staffing additionality within the early year's sector to support the transition to primary school and for family support. A Pupil Equity Fund premium for 2021/22 has recently been confirmed which provides a 15% uplift in funding this year in recognition of the new and additional challenges associated with tackling the poverty related attainment gap as a result of COVID-19.

77. All schools have access to our Healthier Minds Service, where children and young people in school are offered more timely and appropriate support for their mental and emotional wellbeing in order to ensure the right support is given at the right time. The multidisciplinary team includes personnel from CAMHS, Children's 1st, Educational Psychology, Social Work, RAMH and School Nursing. During the period of 09/04/21 – 04/06/21, there have been 103 referrals, with the most common reasons for referral being anxiety/stress, low mood and emotional support/regulation.

78. The department is working with colleagues from across the HSCP and Trust to deliver East Renfrewshire's Summer of Play programme, being supported by the Scottish Government. A range of activities are being planned to support children and young people across the authority with a strong emphasis on wellbeing. A full programme of activities is being put in place for the summer holiday period and being shared with schools to support those children and young people who will benefit most.

79. In the secondary sector, schools have been implementing the Alternative Certification Model (ACM), established nationally following the cancellation of the 2021 Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) exams. Supported by the Education Department, ERC schools have worked collaboratively to validate assessments and moderate evidence. Following a rigorous quality assurance process, provisional estimates have been shared with pupils and submitted to the SQA.

80. In recent years there has been a significant investment by the Department in digital technologies and, specifically, the provision of devices for lower income pupils to supplement their learning opportunities. Throughout the last year, the department, working alongside the Scottish Government, has continued to invest in devices and mobile connectivity, with over 1,500 additional devices being distributed to schools. This has been an essential part in ensuring that schools have been able to continue to support the learning of children and young people when having to work remotely, both during periods of school closure but also, unfortunately, through instances where pupils are having to self-isolate.

81. More widely, the Education Department continues to provide high quality customer focussed services, with staff predominantly continuing to work from home. Over the last year, a number of significant processes, such as Early Learning and Childcare applications and school transport applications, have moved online, enabling easier access for customers and improving efficiency within the department. The continuing efforts of all staff across establishments and the department was recognised through the recent Customer Service Excellence report, noted by Education Committee, with 31 'compliance plus' notes. This is a significant increase on previous years and recognises the adaptability of the department in ensuring all customers can continue to access the appropriate level of service. The department will be continuing to consider the further opportunities for improvements in the months ahead to develop more online solutions.

HSCP**Supporting people at home**

82. Whilst the HSCP had to close our day services our learning disability staff worked with our provider partners to develop outreach and wraparound support for individuals and their families and our older people's Kirkton service staff were redeployed to support care at home.

83. Care at home has seen additional pressures due to a desire from more people to be supported at home and with more complex discharges. At the start of the pandemic some families wanted to limit the number of people coming into their homes and asked for their services to be suspended but as more people have been vaccinated the majority have reinstated services.

84. Our rehabilitation teams have experienced increased pressures in the absence of a number of specialist rehabilitation services and earlier discharges from hospital; the average of 40–50 referrals per week in 2019 / early 2020 has risen to 70-80 per week over the past 10 months.

85. For many people recovering from mental health and addiction the lockdown has been challenging. Despite the significant challenges presented by COVID-19, we have worked with individuals with lived experience and our partner Penumbra to design and develop a peer support service. Peer support is where people with similar life experiences offer each other support, especially as they move through difficult or challenging experiences. The East Renfrewshire service had its first referrals in early September, initially offering opportunities to meet face-to-face, within the restrictions at that time. More recently, peer support is being offered via phone or video call, in line with individuals' preferences.

Support to Children and Families

86. HSCP Children's Services have maintained high rates of contact with children. (Childs Plan contacts averaged 72%/week; Child Protection averaged 100%/week; Throughcare/aftercare averaged 90%/week.), and have successfully managed to support the highest number of looked after children in school (57%). Our teams are seeing increasing complexity particularly for children with diagnosed neurodevelopmental disorders and a higher prevalence of families in crisis leading to more of these children coming under child protection and an associated increase in numbers coming into care. Despite this, 95% of children under child protection are supported in our local communities. Intensive Family Support packages of support and intervention have been designed to prevent breakdown and will be a focus for 2021/22.

Support to Carers

87. Working with ER Carers, we have been ensuring carers have access to guidance and PPE. Check-in calls to carers were introduced by ER Carers, and carers have been offered support to set up and manage a peer support Facebook Group. The Mental Health Carers group continues to run virtually. The pandemic has impacted on carers, with the lack of resources and stimulation for the cared for person impacting on the health and wellbeing of all individuals. We have worked with the Care Collective to refresh our Carers Strategy. East Renfrewshire's Short Breaks Statement has also been updated to ensure all advice and information is current and includes the development of creative, COVID-19-safe online breaks that meet the outcomes of the Carer and the cared for person.

HR

88. In December 2020 there were 60 employees absent as a result of COVID-19 including those employees reporting sick, isolating, and unable to work from home. The numbers increased again to 90 employees in March, decreased to 6 employees in May with numbers increased again although there are signs that the number of people affected is currently levelling off with the number of employees reporting sick, isolating and unable to work from home sitting at 32 employees. A significant resource is required to support managers and employees through these sickness absence situations and this support is ongoing. All employees continue to be supported and we continue to keep up-to-date with government and Public Health Scotland updates to ensure that the manager and employee guidance reflects the national position and that we communicate these changes to our employees. We continue to meet regularly with the Trade Unions and concerns raised are discussed and reviewed in a timely manner. The council continues to encourage staff to work from home where possible, as per current guidance, with the appropriate equipment and health and safety guidance provided to support employees in doing so. For those staff coming into buildings the numbers are tightly controlled to ensure all social distancing measures are maintained.

Customer First

89. In Customer First while registration services and a small number of staff continued to work from the offices throughout the majority of staff were working from home using a temporary telephony system for call handling with the service centres closed to the public. In line with the Scottish Government guidance Barrhead Service Centre including cash collection opened to the public on 26 April with appointment only available at Giffnock. During this period call volumes to our contact centre were extremely high which resulted in longer waiting times for our customers which were difficult to manage on the temporary telephony system so as part of recovery the Contact Centre staff all returned to the office on 29 April to respond to this situation.

Community Safety

90. The Community Wardens continue to work albeit with some restrictions to service still in place and some of the team diverted to support the isolation support calls and assessments for support grants. The wardens will be supporting the joint Safe East Ren summer plan with Police Scotland over the summer period.

Section 3 - Renewal

91. A cross-party Member Officer working group (MOWG) was established in 2020 to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on local communities and services and consider the strategic issues and opportunities for renewal. The outcome of these discussions was to help and shape the Council's Vision for the Future and other plans and strategies in the Council, rather than develop a new renewal plan in its own right.

92. Commencing in July 2020, the group has since had discussions on the impact of COVID-19 in East Renfrewshire; economic recovery; poverty and inequality; educational attainment; mental health & wellbeing; and digital and there was also a session for Elected Members on climate change in April 2021.

93. It is recognised that the Council and HSCP is likely to need to continue to run response, recovery and renewal activities in parallel for the rest of the year. The output of the MOWG renewal discussions, together with insight from the Humanitarian research that will be conducted over the summer, will be used to update the Vision for the Future paper, which was last considered by Council in February 2020. There are likely to have been considerable shifts in specific areas of the document over the last year, not least in the community and green

priorities. There are opportunities now to get back on course and continue some of the conversations and engagements we had hoped to have before the pandemic reshaped the focus for the last year. A refreshed Vision for the Future will be brought back for Council consideration later in the year.

CONCLUSIONS

94. As Members will see, significant staff resource is still being applied to deal with the effects of the pandemic. Although this had had the consequential effect of diluting the resource directed towards recovery and renewal activities, there has been significant progress achieved in both areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

95. That the Council note:-

- a) the ongoing work on response, recovery and renewal;
- b) that ongoing service delivery levels are still affected by staff involvement in response and recovery activities as well as the less efficient operating practices required to meet Coronavirus protocols; and
- c) the continued additional workload of many staff.

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