

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

27 October 2021

Report by Chief Executive

COVID-19 RECOVERY - 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 since the previous update in September.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the Council note and comment on the report.

BACKGROUND

3. Details of the levels system introduced by the Scottish Government; the ongoing vaccination programme; and the subsequent move out of the levels system with the associated effects on case numbers have all been reported at length in previous update reports considered by the Council.

4. In addition, in the report considered by the Council on 8 September, further information was provided on how continuing to respond to the effects of the pandemic was impacting on the ability of departments to deliver “normal” services and had contributed to significant backlogs across all departments. The report also referred to challenges still ahead not least of which was managing public expectation that services should all be back to normal,

REPORT

5. 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](#), the [Council in December](#), the [Council in June 2021](#) and most recently [the Council on 8 September 2021](#).

Mass Vaccination Clinics

6. Barrhead Health and Care Centre opened as a vaccination clinic on 26 September 2021, having moved from the Foundry. Carmichael Hall (Giffnock) remains in use as vaccination centre. Both buildings will provide ongoing COVID-19 vaccinations, as well as seasonal flu vaccines.

7. The operation of these vaccination centres represents a significant commitment from both the Trust and the HSCP. To ensure that the vaccination centres work efficiently and safely, staff support the non-clinical day-to-day operation through facilities management of the buildings, queue management and daily liaison with clinical staff. Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire has been providing additional help with support roles, allowing Trust and HSCP staff to return to their substantial roles. Voluntary Action is also supporting residents who may need transport assistance to attend their appointment.

COVID-19 Testing

8. Testing remains a key aspect of the Scottish Government's response to the pandemic. The Mobile Testing Unit for symptomatic persons has continued to be located at the Greenlaw Works (Business Centre). This site operates on a Monday to Friday basis, with bookings made through the Government portal. Greenlaw remains a well-utilised site, reflected in its consistent usage since September 2020.

9. An Asymptomatic Testing Site (ATS) has been operational at the Cowan Park Pavilion (Barrhead) since 22 February 2021. It is open on a drop-in basis, to serve those living and working in the area. The site is staffed by NHS bank staff and will remain operational until the end of October 2021. In addition, a Mobile Testing Unit (MTU) will remain operational at the rear of the Spiersbridge Offices until the end of October, which is bookable and walk-in, and offers PCR testing.

10. The Council has recently taken delivery of a second Mobile Testing Bus, and these buses will be the main Community Testing offer going forward. They will be managed by Council officers and clinically staffed by the NHS bank staff who have been working at the ATS in Barrhead.

11. Should the need arise, the Council can request additional Scottish Ambulance Service operated MTUs similar to the one currently operating at Spiersbridge, as a supplement to the outlined testing arrangements. This allows targeting of specific communities where spikes of the virus have occurred, as well as enhancement of the testing offer where case rates are high.

12. All major Council buildings have been supplied with LFD test kits for staff members who wish to test themselves. LFD kits are also available online and at some local pharmacies.

Annual leave

13. A number of services have also continued to be affected by staffing issues due to self-isolation requirements balanced with annual leave requirements. There was a high level of annual leave carried over from 2020 to ensure service delivery during the height of the pandemic and it is important that managers support employees who have worked throughout to take appropriate breaks away from the workplace which can impact capacity within some of the services.

Environment Department

14. As is the case with other departments and as outlined previously, the Environment Department is certainly not in any way "back to normal". The Environment Department has dedicated considerable resources into supporting COVID response elements such as mass testing, mass vaccination and mobile testing. This has come through directing resources from other areas of work and as such has created a natural backlog. This will continue to build/exist while resources are so heavily devoted to key public health protective measures.

Economic Development

15. Economic Development continues to carry out the majority of their duties from home. The Council's employability team, Work EastRen, are bringing back face-to-face meetings with clients from their office. This change has been introduced following discussions with Health and Safety colleagues, to ensure the continued safety of staff and customers. Telephone meetings are still offered, where this is the preferred option by the customer.

16. All Economic Development staff have taken on additional responsibilities in relation to the processing and paying of COVID business grants. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the team have paid out just over £21m in grants to a wide range of local businesses and taxi drivers.

17. The service is returning to prioritising key elements of the service plan, to be delivered in the remainder of 2021/22. They will also continue to process the next tranche of Covid business support grants.

Corporate Health and Safety Unit

18. Corporate Health and Safety Unit officers continue to devote significant resource to COVID related issues. There was an exponential growth in demand for risk assessment reviews for service tasks and buildings following the removal of many restrictions on 9 August. A significant amount of this work has completed, and approximately 50% of the Service is now dedicated to recovery and business as usual activity.

19. As per the previous report, there remains concern that the Council is at risk of not meeting legal compliance requirements, due to COVID issues. The issues are partially that the service is not permitted to address these under remaining restrictions but primarily due to the demand placed on the service for updated risk assessments. The following are of particular concern:

- Fire risk assessments for council buildings, housing property and leased property.
- Health and Safety training – primarily in relation to face-to-face delivery limitations.
- Occupational health screening.
- Risk assessments.
- Face fit testing.
- HAVS measurements have been unable to be conducted.
- Lone worker system.

20. When able to return to normal working, the Corporate Health and Safety Unit will have a backlog of work, which will make new work difficult to fulfil. Additionally, there will be a need to ensure relevant Health & Safety policies and information are updated, particularly those that have not been progressed in light of the pandemic response. It is imperative that the focus of the Corporate Health & Safety Unit (beyond COVID-19 work) is on areas of legal compliance. As such, there is no capacity for other subjects, and there will not be for some time to come.

Neighbourhood Services

21. There remains a requirement to retain “work bubbles” to contain any possible spread of COVID-19 amongst essential frontline personnel, if positive cases are identified. Neighbourhood Services will continue this approach with the aim of avoiding large numbers of key frontline officers being required to isolate, protecting our staff and essential services.

22. Neighbourhood Services are regularly utilising additional agency staff to fill gaps and deliver priority frontline services. This necessitates a hiring and retention of additional fleet beyond the normal establishment.

23. In addition to self-isolation requirements, staff accumulated high levels of annual leave in 2020 – Service Managers are supporting employees using any carry over and 2021 allowances. Employees were unable to use allocated leave as they were ensuring continued service delivery when colleagues were shielding.

24. There remains concern in relation to the available pool of HGV drivers. A consequence of the widely publicised national shortage of drivers is that external employers are offering

improved terms to the available pool of HGV drivers. Additionally there remains delays to the DVLA renewal process for any employees who hold a licence. These factors may leave the Council in a position where it does not have the required HGV employee numbers to facilitate essential services, primarily the collection of residential and trade waste.

25. Driver shortages have been experienced by our contractors, particularly affecting our Household Waste and Recycling Centre at Barrhead, resulting in some build-up of waste. Neighbourhood Services are working in partnership with contractors to resolve this.

26. Refuse and recycling collections are in the main prioritised over other frontline services, which may consequently suffer backlogs. This may include grass cutting, weed spraying, street cleaning and ad-hoc cleansing complaints.

27. Should work bubbles continue to be required longer term, next season's grass cutting schedules could be considerably hampered.

Trading Standards

28. Trading Standards played a significant and leading role in enforcing and advising business on the Regulations restricting trading activities during COVID-19. This led to a significant shift in resources away from our core service plans for 2019/20 and 2020/21. The service is prioritising key elements of the service plan to be delivered in the remainder of 2020/21 while continuing to monitor and advise traders related to COVID-19. Key priority delivery has been supported through creative risk assessments and new ways of working.

29. The fuel shortage concerns of late September 2021 saw Trading Standards deployed. Officers were in regular liaison with local filling stations, understanding supply levels and any action undertaken by forecourts. While national emergency plans were not invoked, Trading Standards responded to the concerns by maintaining relationships with stations across East Renfrewshire, offering advice where required.

Environmental Health

30. All Environmental Health staff have undertaken additional COVID responsibilities, which have been unpredictable in complexity and often unique and very time consuming. The Service will continue to prioritise Coronavirus related enquiries, Test & Protect notifications, clusters, outbreaks, Community Testing forums, internal enquiries from other Services and supporting Asymptomatic Testing and Vaccination Centres. There are also additional enforcement duties arising from the recent vaccination certification legislation. The result is that the ability to perform the full range of functions in an effective manner has been compromised.

31. Compared to pre-pandemic levels, the significant rise in service requests, particularly related to public health, remains extremely high. The restarting of the food law interventions means that resources previously directed to Coronavirus compliance will be impacted. These interventions were paused in March 2020 by Food Standards Scotland, to enable environmental health officers to support the response to and enforcement of Covid emergency legislation.

32. Concurrently, there has been new legislation enacted, which will place additional burdens on the Service. These include new requirements arising from EU exit; changed regulations to interlinked heat, fire & carbon monoxide detectors in residential properties; new requirements from the Drinking Water Quality Regulator (DWQR); and forthcoming changes to the animal welfare licensing regime.

33. The workload of Environmental Health continues to increase in line with the number of other Council Services working through their own backlogs. Areas such as planning applications, which require an Environmental Health input, have begun to increase.

Housing

34. Homeless and Housing Advice services have reintroduced face-to-face meetings in homes and in Council buildings. Telephone interviews are still offered, where the customer prefers this. The reintroduction took place following discussions with colleagues in Health and Safety, with a view to ensuring the continued safety for customers and staff. Housing Officers have also reintroduced face-to-face visits in tenants' homes to provide support and assistance.

35. While allocations of housing remains relatively unaffected by Coronavirus restrictions, there remains a significant pressure on homelessness. There continues to be a backlog of homeless households awaiting a permanent offer of accommodation and in temporary accommodation. Within the allocations waiting list, approximately 100 are homeless group A.

36. Rent arrears have continued to rise through 2021/22, in light of the negative impact the pandemic has had on family incomes. The return of home visits means that officers are able to discuss issues in the tenant's home to address arrears. Additionally, Housing are taking advantage of the Tenants Grant Fund provided by the Scottish Government. This fund will be used to prevent both social and private tenants losing their homes due to the financial impacts of COVID-19. While formal recovery actions, such as notice of proceedings and the courts, have resumed; these actions will only be taken where all other options to prevent arrears and recovery actions have been exhausted.

37. There remains potential for delays to non-essential repairs if trades staff are required to self-isolate.

38. Planned improvement works such as kitchens are expected to commence in the autumn, commencing with the 2019-20 backlog. Housing Services are currently undertaking the required procurement works to have appropriate contracts in place. However, the construction industry is experiencing a shortage of some materials, as well as changeable pricing. This may cause delays to the planned works.

Property and Technical Services

39. The construction industry continues to face supply chain issues, which drives up prices and can delay completion. Additionally, some contractors are facing staff shortages or have not fully recovered. Both Property and Technical Services continue to work with other services and with Procurement to mitigate both cost and time impacts to projects.

40. Technical Services continue to support services to realise their agreed capital plan aspirations as well as the challenges faced by planned capital works. Technical Services are working with partners in essentially seeking to deliver two years' worth of project ambitions into a compressed period.

41. Ventilation in schools remains a primary focus for the Property Services Team. Ventilation has been identified as a key factor in reducing the risks of Coronavirus and will be crucial in protecting our staff, pupils and the public. Staffing resources require to be allocated to ensure that vital compliance maintenance works are undertaken particularly as more buildings reopen or increase occupancy.

42. As part of the ventilation programme, Property Services are liaising with engineers to assess properties. This will include undertaking any minor works identified to comply with Government Guidance. Technical Services will progress the procurement of works specified

by completed designs agreed with the ventilation engineers. Similar to other works, progress in the ventilation programme will be dependent on the availability of contractors, materials and access to buildings.

43. The Scottish Government have additionally announced that Carbon Dioxide monitoring works will be required within classrooms, with £10m funding made available nationally, which is coupled with a requirement for fortnightly returns on progress. The timescales and reporting involved in this project will represent a significant undertaking for Property Services and as a result, affect their ability to undertake other tasks.

Development Management and Building Standards

44. Development Management and Building Standards are able to carry out their statutory duties, with protective measures in place to minimise the risk of COVID-19. Site visits are kept to a minimum, and are either pre-arranged or have limited officer attendance. Both services continue with limited public interaction, with officers primarily working from home. Intermittent IT and equipment issues have provided some constraints in the ability of officers to offer the same level of service as pre-Coronavirus.

45. Developers are asked to provide Building Standards with photographs or videos as evidence, to supplement site visits. This approach has increased workload, requiring extra communications for most submissions. There has also been an increase in completion certificate refusals where satisfactory evidence of the work undertaken has not been produced resulting in extra work for the officers.

46. One of the unforeseen consequences of COVID-19 and increased home working of people has been increased householder applications, particularly for extensions and garden rooms. The additional workload has resulted in a backlog in processing planning applications, which the Development Management Service is currently working to clear. This has been exacerbated by staff shortages and additional online demand from members of the public seeking advice, reporting unauthorised work and complaining about service problems/delays.

47. Public and business demand on Development Management continues to be very high, likely because of the requirement for lifestyle / employment changes across society, arising from COVID-19. There remains a substantial backlog caused by new and existing applications to be processed.

48. In addition, the demands on internal and external stakeholders arising from COVID has affected their ability to provide consultation responses to Development Management. Consequently, the determination of some planning applications, particularly large and complex applications have been unavoidably delayed.

Strategy/Local Development Plan

49. As referenced in the previous report, there had been delay in the receipt of the Examination Report of the Proposed LDP2, by approximately three months. The Council has now received the Examination Report and this will allow the progression of the Proposed LDP2 to adoption and future development of LDP3. Timescales for the preparation of the annual Housing Land audit, Vacant and Derelict land and employment monitoring have also been impacted by COVID restrictions.

Roads & Transportation

50. Roads and Transportation are continuing to recover with road inspections almost back on track. Roads are also continuing with their revenue and capital programme without any significant issues at present.

51. Significant concerns remain in relation to issues surrounding HGV drivers and their potential to present issues with delivering winter maintenance. This concern is only exacerbated if we were to face any outbreak of cases or significant levels of self-isolation. The service currently experiences absences of staff who have tested positive or who are isolating, and this scenario is likely to continue; with impacts on service delivery.

52. The Road Service also relies on Neighbourhood Services to deliver Winter Maintenance. Given they will face the same issues outlined above, this could further adversely affect the delivery of the Winter Maintenance programme.

Education Department

Response & Recovery

53. The Education Department continues to experience relatively high levels of disruption resulting from the ongoing impacts of Covid. Schools and nurseries across the authority are continuing to deal with Covid on an ongoing basis, balancing their response with their approaches to recovery following an unprecedented period of disruption over the last 18 months, including two extended periods of closure.

54. Whilst schools and nurseries have operated as a 'near normal' service for a number of months since early spring and have been recovering well, Covid continues to present a number of significant challenges across the whole Education Department.

Response to Covid within Schools and Nurseries

55. In September, updated guidance was published by the Scottish Government, refining the approach to contact tracing and self-isolation requirements for pupils and staff within education establishments. Importantly, the guidance reiterated that contact tracing was to be undertaken by Test & Protect and would not be the responsibility for school staff, apart from in very specific exceptional cases. Whilst this support has been welcome, school staff continue to face significant additional workload pressures as an ongoing impact of Covid.

56. With the new approaches to self-isolation, whereby individuals can end isolation following a negative PCR test, schools and nurseries have continued to experience significant levels of pupil and staff absence. Whilst this can often be short term, with individuals able to return to work or education following a negative test, it continues to place an additional burden on establishments requiring to provide cover and being unable to fully benefit from the additional staffing resources being deployed, including the deployment of staff to target children and young people to address learning loss.

57. In addition, whilst the new approach has been beneficial in reducing the requirement for whole class isolation in the event of a positive case being identified, this has placed an additional impact on staff to support the provision for remote learning. Given high rates of individual pupil absence, teachers are facing additional pressures in ensuring appropriate levels of remote learning provision whilst also providing in-person learning within the classroom. Again, head teachers are utilising additional recovery staff to provide this support.

58. Whilst absence rates have been significantly higher than average, due to the ongoing impacts of Covid and the support of families and staff to adhere to the testing requirements, the rates of cases within schools and nurseries appear to have been decreasing in recent weeks. This is in line with the general decrease in Covid rates across East Renfrewshire over recent weeks following the initial spike in late summer.

59. All of our schools and nurseries remain vigilant to the risks of Covid transmission and continue to review their risk assessments, with the support of health and safety, to ensure they can remain as safe as possible for our staff and pupils. The Scottish Government continues to review the national guidance to ensure that all appropriate mitigations remain in place and a further review is anticipated in the coming weeks.

Recovery

60. Given the significant disruption to education throughout the pandemic, detailed work has been undertaken, in line with the department's annual performance monitoring, to understand the impact on children and young people to ensure that we take the most appropriate and supportive approach to recovery across all of our schools and nurseries. This work has included ongoing performance monitoring of attainment in addition to wider consultation exercises with all of the department's stakeholders, including children and young people, staff and families.

61. In September, a report to Education Committee ([link](#)) provided further detail on the scale of the impact of the pandemic on children and young people in school and nursery. The report outlined that progress made towards the four national priorities as set out in the National Improvement Framework has been negatively impacted by the periods of closure and disruption, with decreases in attainment levels for pupils at certain stages. Most notably, the efforts to close the attainment gap had been negatively impacted, with attainment amongst those in the lowest SIMD being most affected. In addition, the report recognised the ongoing, longer term impacts of the disruption on specific children and young people. There will be a need to have a continued focus on the support offered to this group of learners to prevent any longer term legacy of the pandemic.

62. The department has produced the *Building Back Better and Fairer* framework, establishing key priorities to support schools and nurseries as they recover from the pandemic, and complementing the existing activities outlined in the Local Improvement Plan (LIP). This framework is being implemented within schools throughout the current school session and the department will be continuing to report on progress alongside the LIP throughout the year.

Staff & Pupil Wellbeing

63. Healthier Minds, the multi-stakeholder recovery team, has continued to provide vital support in the areas of mental wellbeing. The number of children and young people accessing this service continues to increase and as a result, there are plans in place to increase the capacity of the team through additional staffing. From November 2020 to October 2021, the hub received 339 referrals with the main reasons for referrals anxiety and low mood.

64. The Healthier Minds website continues to provide information, guidance, resources and signposts to further resources in order to support children and young people, parents and carers and school staff. The website is updated on a continual basis as a result of feedback from staff, children, young people and their families. All schools took time to refresh their knowledge of the resource during the August In-service Day. The Educational Psychology Department created a [short video](#) to support staff navigate the resource.

65. Specific support has been offered to staff in schools in recognition of how challenging the past 18 months have been. This has included the development of a Mindfulness Course for senior leaders, re-convening the Education Recovery Group, Pastoral Heads of Service meeting with Cluster Management Groups and Educational Psychologists supporting staff during collegiate time.

66. There continues to be an increase in the impact of the wellbeing of children and young people and how they are communicating their anxieties. Close partnership working with partners such as HSCP and Children1st has enabled the department to continue to support children and young people, families and staff but there remains a pressure on the department and our partners.

67. Due to the success of the Get into Summer programme and we were able to use the remaining funding to enable a further 80 places for vulnerable children and young people in the October holiday camps. These were delivered by the ERCL Trust and the primary focus was on supporting care experienced children and young people to participate. The success of the summer programme was built on the very strong working relationships that already exist across East Renfrewshire's children's services. These relationships and the level of partnership working, have only strengthened further during the pandemic.

68. The Education Department is continuing to work closely with CHSU to ensure that lets within school buildings are able to resume as quickly as possible to further support the wellbeing of children and young people. With many out of school activities having been unable to operate for the entirety of the pandemic, and with the poorer weather, the department is committed to ensuring that these facilities will be available, through the Trust, to clubs and groups as soon as possible.

69. The department has taken a 3 phased approach to the resumption of activities in school buildings:

- a. Phase 1 – ERC and Trust lets – this has included activities such as after school clubs, out of school care provision, community sports activities and HSCP lets. These are all currently underway.
- b. Phase 2 – children and young people sports clubs and activities – this includes sports clubs and other groups (such as Scouts, Guides, etc). It is intended that these groups will resume as quickly as possible in October.
- c. Phase 3 – adult sports clubs and activities – this includes all remaining lets. The timing for this will be dependent on the timescales for phase 2.

70. All of the above activities remain subject to ongoing risk assessments and the department will continue to ensure that the safety of staff and pupils, as well as those attending such clubs, is considered fully ahead of these plans being put in place.

Education Support Services

71. The wider Education Department has continued to recover well over recent months, in spite of the continuing challenges the department faces as a result of Covid. Throughout the pandemic, staff have primarily been working from home, with all staff across our support services having been set up to work remotely. With schools and nurseries having now returned to a 'near normal' service, staff across some specific teams have begun a limited, phased return to the office with the primary purpose of being able to offer a higher level of support to both education establishments and the departmental leadership team.

72. Given the legislative requirements of the work undertaken in support of schools and nurseries, it has not been possible for this to have been postponed or delayed throughout the pandemic disruption. Staff across all teams have been working to support schools and nurseries across the last 18 months, with no significant backlogs in essential work having occurred throughout this period.

73. Following the return of schools and nurseries in August, demand for services, primarily from external customers, has continued to be very high, with an expectation of normal service

having now resumed. Teams are continuing to experience a significantly increased workload which has resulted in lower priority activity now having to be delayed. The department's leadership team continue to monitor the situation and work with managers to ensure support is available where required.

HSCP

74. The HSCP, in common with health and social care services across Scotland is under considerable pressure. A combination of increased demand across all services and staff absence is creating significant problems with capacity. This is particularly acute in care at home, but is evident in all services. We continue to experience higher rates of referrals and more complex presentations as a result of the pandemic.

HSCP Vaccination Programme

75. In October 2021 the HSCP commenced the COVID-19 booster and flu vaccination programme for care homes. Mirroring the vaccination programme in December 2020 the majority of care home residents are to be vaccinated over a two week period, by staff volunteering from nursing teams across the HSCP. At the time of writing, the nursing team have attended five care homes with 284 flu vaccinations and 275 Covid booster vaccinations administered.

76. District nurses supported by other HSCP staff are also now underway with the COVID-19 booster and flu vaccination programme for residents in their own homes. These residents are unable to attend the vaccinations centres due to frailty or other health issues. The housebound vaccination programme will see over 1500 residents vaccinated at home. This is in addition to the 3,500 visits they undertake to deliver care to people in their own homes each month.

PPE

77. The HSCP continues to run the PPE hub set up and run by HSCP staff. Distribution of essential protective supplies to HSCP staff, partner providers, carers and personal assistants. To date we have issued 916,662 gloves, 81,000 aprons and over 1 million masks.

78. HSCP district nursing and care home liaison nursing staff continue to support 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

79. In addition to testing and vaccination, a multi-disciplinary Care Home Oversight Group continues to meet twice weekly to provide co-ordinated support 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. 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.

Supporting people at home

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

81. 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. In the current phase of the pandemic the service has been experiencing capacity pressures with higher than expected levels of staff absence and increased waiting times to access support. As a result of pressures and resource issues, in the last week of September there were: 11 people in hospital awaiting a package of care to facilitate a safe discharge; 18 people in the community awaiting services or an increase in support; and 5 people who have chosen to accept an intermediate care bed whilst awaiting services. External market provision has played a significant role in East Renfrewshire HSCP's previous track record and timely provision of care and support services. However the volume of referrals accepted by partner providers has reduced by circa 50%.

82. Our Hospital to Home team work to support timely and appropriate discharges from hospital. During the pandemic we have experienced significant issues around supporting 'adults with incapacity' and establishing appropriate guardianship/Power of Attorney arrangements. We are currently seeing an increase in delayed discharges. This is being driven by the pressure on care at home services which is restricting access. A majority of care at home provision in East Renfrewshire is delivered by partner providers and we are seeing limited capacity internally. We continue to work with partner providers to encourage and assist them to take on complex cases as people are discharged from hospital.

83. Our community rehabilitation teams continue to experience increased pressures due to the impact on the older population of reduced physical activity and deconditioning secondary to lockdown, with an increase in frailty and frailty related falls. The Rehabilitation Teams were one of the few services operating almost as 'normal' undertaking face to face visits throughout, and have seen a significant increase in additional caseload in the absence of a number of other specialist and community based services. There are continued increased numbers of urgent/prevention of admission to hospital referrals from GPs and an increase in out of hours/A&E referrals to the teams. Individuals are being discharged home earlier from hospital which results in more complex intensive rehabilitation goals to be achieved over a prolonged time within the community setting. The average of 40-50 referrals per week in 2019 / early 2020 has risen to and been sustained at 70-80 per week over the past 18 months.

84. Across all mental health and recovery services, work is continuing to provide person-centred care throughout the challenges that COVID-19 has presented. The Primary Care Mental Health Team continues to offer psychological interventions remotely, working through the backlog and marginally keeping within the national target. The Older Adult Mental Health Team continues to offer in person support meeting the needs of our most vulnerable population, despite COVID-19 challenges that have affected the workforce. The team implemented a split workforce system of team A and team B to reduce the risk of spread. The Community Mental Health Team continues to see our most vulnerable population with a diagnosis of severe and enduring mental illness. We are currently experiencing challenges with staffing medical clinics, and planning work is underway to review our current model of care and practices. Peer support workers are continuing to prove value, assisting people to make a plan that helps maintain their mental health and wellbeing. The Community Addictions Team continues to see clients through a hybrid model of office, community and virtual appointments. They are offering additional groups to facilitate peer support and enhance

recovery. The Mental Health Officer (MHO) team have filled some vacant positions recently, increasing the capacity to support the most vulnerable individuals who require statutory measures for their care and treatment. There are challenges in relation to covering the MHO duty rota, however, this has been alleviated with support from the hospital to home team who have offered to collaborate to fill some slots.

85. Our locality social work teams are seeing a growing backlog of overdue community care reviews (currently 217). This has resulted from a combination of additional support being required in the community and from the requirement for teams to focus on our pandemic response and most urgent need. As we progress our recovery and adapt to changing need we need to recognise this additional work pressure on our teams. We are currently looking at options to replicate the model used to undertake outstanding reviews of our residents within care homes, and take on additional staff to undertake these reviews.

Support to Children and Families

86. Over the course of the pandemic 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%). Within Youth intensive services contact levels with young people remained very high, averaging at 81% of young people having contact at least once per fortnight

87. 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. Our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team (CAMHS) is under considerable pressure and having to prioritise those young people with the most urgent need. The creation of the multi-agency Healthier Minds Team is helping to support young people with less urgent, but no less distressing, need for support with their mental health.

88. As a result of the pandemic there has been a significant increase in the number of children with complex and additional support needs who have become looked after. Currently 17% of looked after children have a disability evidencing that the pandemic has significantly affected families with children who have additional support needs.

Support to Carers

89. 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.

Corporate and Community Services Department

90. As is the case in other parts of the Council, the Corporate and Community Services department is not back to business as usual in any sense. Covid related requirements combined with major line of business system changes to Council Tax and benefits, HR and

Payroll and customer management systems during the last year while staff were working from home has taken considerable amount of staff resource and created backlogs. Priority is being given the working through these whilst continuing to meet the new and increasing demand coming in to services.

HR

91. Reductions in the number of employees absent as a result of COVID-19 including those employees reporting sick, isolating, and unable to work from home had been seen by the end of August however numbers sharply increased again and a peak was seen mid-September with 94 employees unable to work and a further 74 employees affected however able to work from home. Numbers are now declining in line with the national picture.

92. During 2020 there was a decrease in sickness absence which was attributed to covid absence being reported separately and a proportion of the workforce working from home so more likely to be able to attend the workplace remotely and less likely to be affected by cold/flu-type illnesses due to less mixing with other people. Sickness absences are again increasing. Stress (non-work related) continues to be the top absence reason and there has been an increase in the number of employees accessing counselling services in the past 12 months. It is important we continue to support the health and wellbeing of our employees during this time and a number of measures are in place to continue to provide this support.

93. Recruitment volumes remain high as a result of additional COVID funding received specifically in Education and HSCP, natural turnover and services now returning to recruit roles and undertake organisational change.

Customer First

94. In Customer First customer contact continues to be high across all contact channels. As part of the recovery Contact Centre staff returned to the office on 29 April which provided improved call management. Initially our call handling rate was lower than normal due to a number of factors including an extremely high call rate, longer than normal call times and staff absences. Call times are taking longer with customers often contacting about multiple and more complex issues.

95. During the summer period there was a high volume of enquires in relation to cleansing and council tax e-mail enquiries and support was given from these services to help the customer service team achieve better call handling rates and response times for customers overall.

96. Call volumes are now at more manageable levels and our call answer rate has improved and recently returned to pre-covid levels. Staff absence rates have improved and whilst there has been some self-isolation cases this has not significantly impacted service delivery.

97. The number of death registrations has increased and at the covid peak in September we recorded 181% more deaths compared to last year (165 September 2021, 91 September 2020). Death registration continues to be carried out remotely, which takes longer compared to face to face and there has been a significant increase in email enquiries from undertakers and families related to death registrations and also follow-up calls compared to pre-covid. There continues to be a high volume of enquires about arranging wedding dates. There has also been a high demand for copy certificates as a result of Glasgow City Council closing this service to focus on their high volume of death registrations. The timescales for copy certificates has been extended to support this and we continue to monitor this closely to allow the team to focus on our statutory registration services.

98. MART continue to see an increase in Income Maximisation referrals and enquires, these continue to be time consuming and intensive. The Team have supported residents through the application process for the Low Income Pandemic Payment and have provided support processing Self Isolation Support Grants.

Community Safety

99. The Community Wardens have returned to normal working practices with staff being able to go into households when required, subject to Covid screening questions and windows being opened. Parking enforcement resumed during in August 2021 and vehicles can now be double crewed in line with mitigating factors within the H&S Risk Assessment. Two members of the Community Warden team are still seconded to the isolation support calls team for assessments for support grants.

ICT

100. The ICT Service continues to operate a blended approach with continued increasing levels of support calls and service requests. A new safe screened-off support area has been created at Barrhead with a new Safe System of Work in place. If support is required our users will be invited to attend. This will further enhance the ability to provide face to face support in a safe and comfortable manner. The Service Desk team remains under significant pressure. The service is still unable to accommodate low priority service requests due to the current working conditions and service pressures.

Democratic Services

101. With the continuing relaxation of restrictions and to ensure the service is ready to respond to increasing numbers of Elected Members returning to the office more regularly, the vacant Leaders Secretary/Members Services Officer has now been filled. In relation to hybrid meetings, the company carrying out the upgrade works have been inundated with orders leading to long delays in installation. Negotiations for as early an installation date as possible are ongoing.

Isolation Support

102. Via Community Safety, the Council continues to provide an Isolation Support service for those asked to isolate by Public Health Scotland. This includes text messages to all who have consented to have their details passed to the Council and follow-up outbound phonecalls to each household. The team also deals with inbound COVID contacts via the National Assistance Helpline. After a spike in recent months, the volume of isolation support contacts has now stabilised. This service will remain in place until at least the end of December 2021. It is expected that the Scottish Government will require this to be carried on into 2022, but this has not yet been confirmed. Self-Isolation Support Grants (SISG) are also continuing, with initial assessment and evidence gathering by the Isolation Support team and final assessment by the Benefits/Scottish Welfare Fund team. Discussions are also ongoing with Greater Glasgow councils and the Scottish Government about the provision of isolation support during COP26, particularly in the event that isolation accommodation is required when the city's hotels are at capacity. East Renfrewshire Council has made some contingency provision for isolation accommodation or homelessness needs during the COP 26 period.

Pandemic Payments

103. The Council is currently administering Low Income Pandemic Payments (i.e. payments of £130 per household to those on Council Tax Reduction) to c.5000 households during October. In addition, payments are being processed for October Family Pandemic Payments paid on a 'per child' basis to those entitled to Free School Meals as a result of Low Income, c.1800 children. Further payments to this group will also be made in December and then

quarterly in 2022. New business grants are also being worked on and we are currently awaiting details of the requirements on councils following the UK government's announcement of a Household Support Fund to support those on low incomes in the context of rising prices, the end of furlough, and the end of the £20 Universal Credit uplift.

Humanitarian Support Research & Funding

104. Humanitarian support research and engagement is continuing to inform the Council's approach to recovery and renewal. Early findings suggest that it may be too early for groups to engage with the community bid process for humanitarian funding that is available on a one-off basis. Timescales for the community process are currently being reviewed.

Chief Executive's

Accountancy Services

105. Most Accountancy services staff are still working from home and are managing to cover all of their usual duties. We are, however, continuing to experience increased workloads due to the demands for COVID related financial information, returns and grant monitoring and staff are struggling to keep up with all demands. This has also affected progress in developing the new financial system, introduced in 2019, with a view to maximising efficiencies and so the anticipated benefits for staff across the Council have not yet been achieved. Despite these challenges, work on the 2022/23 budget preparation is now back on schedule.

106. Our external auditors have recently confirmed that, due to the continuation of remote working, the external audit of the Council's 2020/21 accounts will take longer than usual with the statutory deadline for accounts sign off being once again extended to 30 November rather than 30 September. As a result of this, the sign off of the Council's 2020/21 accounts has been delayed until 25 November 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS

107. That the Council note and comment on the report.

Report Co-ordinator
Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager
577 3023

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