

**To: Council**

**On: 24 September 2020**

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**Report by: Chief Executive**

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**Heading: Impact of COVID-19 on Renfrewshire's Communities.**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 On 25 June 2020, Council considered a report which outlined how the organisation would move forward from the initial phase of responding to the COVID-19 crisis and develop more detailed plans to support economic and social recovery across Renfrewshire's communities. The report recognised that communities would have to find new ways of living with COVID-19 over the medium term, and that as a result there was an ongoing requirement for the organisation to remain flexible and ready to respond to the changing needs and behaviours of local people, and to potential further waves or outbreaks of the virus at a local or national level.
- 1.2 In terms of recovery and renewal across communities, services have been working with partners to better understand the impact that the virus has had to date. Some of the initial data in terms of unemployment and poverty is stark, and there is ongoing concern that levels will increase as businesses make further redundancies or as the furlough scheme winds down.
- 1.3 In Renfrewshire, the impact of COVID-19 is likely to have exacerbated existing inequalities in terms of for example, educational attainment, health, poverty, and mental health. For some people, these inequalities have made them much less resilient and able to cope with social isolation or loss of income; whereas for many others the pandemic has impacted their income,

employment, housing or health and wellbeing in a new way or for the first time.

- 1.4 Prior to the pandemic, the Council demonstrated commitment and ambition in terms of working with partners to tackle these inequalities and to focus on improving the wellbeing of local people and communities. Significant progress had for example been achieved in terms of targeting unemployment, addressing the poverty related attainment gap and promoting health and wellbeing and community empowerment. An ambitious programme of economic and cultural regeneration has also been progressed, attracting huge levels of external investment and infrastructure developments such as AMIDS.
- 1.5 The strength of this partnership working was a crucial part of the pandemic response in Renfrewshire. Groups and organisation across all sectors worked with great commitment to support people through the lockdown phase of the pandemic, delivering food and prescriptions, reaching out to people who were struggling and at the most simplest level - looking out for their friends and neighbours.
- 1.6 In terms of moving forward, partners will need to work with local people and communities to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of the pandemic, and to consider how the activities and services that are delivered need to change in response. There will be a significant focus on ensuring that people receive the economic and wellbeing support that is needed, with a real opportunity to work in a different way, and to tackle some of the existing inequalities across communities as we do this.
- 1.7 To develop this deeper understanding, partners have agreed to undertake a Community Impact Assessment. Put most simply this means:
  - Talking to local people and communities about the impact of COVID-19
  - Undertaking more detailed research to consider the impact on certain groups in society who may have felt the impact of the pandemic more than others;
  - Building a picture of need in terms of the services and supports local people are accessing; and
  - Working with local partners to identify local priorities and maximise the value of resources available to support local people and communities.
- 1.8 In recognition that the impact of the pandemic will change and develop over time, partners anticipate that the Community Impact Assessment will continue for at least a period of 12 months. It is anticipated that the first phase will be complete by December 2020, and that the information gathered can be used to produce an outline Social Renewal Plan for Renfrewshire. This plan will set

out how partners will use the learning from the pandemic, to tackle inequality and wellbeing issues, through a more equal relationship between partners and communities.

- 1.9 Although it is important to build this intelligence through the assessment, it is recognised that local people and communities need support to manage the impact of COVID-19 now. Partners have identified a range of immediate priorities that they are taking forward currently: - some of these priorities build on programmes of work already in place such as the Tackling Poverty Programme, whilst others such as the bereavement service are new partnership initiatives. Section 5 of the report provides an overview of some of the current activities being progressed by partners now.
- 1.10 Regular updates on this programme of work will continue to be provided to elected members, and information in relation to local community engagement and listening events will be shared as this becomes available.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that members note:
- the approach being undertaken by the Council and partners to support local people and communities impacted by the ongoing pandemic; and
  - the initial priority areas and associated actions which have been identified and are being progressed now.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The coronavirus pandemic is now recognised as being the most significant challenge to have faced the international community in modern times. Since the crisis unfolded in early 2020, many local people and businesses have been impacted by the crisis, through for example bereavement, loss of income and isolation and loneliness.
- 3.2 The Council has worked intensively with partners, communities, businesses and residents to ensure that essential services continue to be provided across Renfrewshire and that vulnerable people receive the support and protection that they need. Many groups and organisations across all sectors, have worked tirelessly in local communities to support many thousands of people impacted by the pandemic, helping them to access support with food or to offer befriending or social activities. The collective efforts of all partners has been absolutely vital to the initial response to the pandemic in Renfrewshire.
- 3.3 On 25 June 2020, Council considered a report which outlined how the organisation would move forward from the initial phase of responding to the crisis. It was recognised within this report that:
- Society will have to continue to live with COVID-19 for some time in advance of appropriate vaccinations and treatments being developed.

- Services will need to continue to be alert and be able to respond flexibly to local changes in the transmission of the virus, as we have seen in Renfrewshire and across Scotland through a variety of different outbreaks and local lockdown measures being put into place by the Scottish Government.
- The resources that the Council has available to provide services have been fundamentally impacted by the pandemic, with significant financial pressures likely to be experienced going forward.
- The needs and behaviours of citizens, communities and businesses have changed as a result of the pandemic and the way that society has had to adjust to a position of living with the virus. The council will need to continue to adapt to these changing needs and behaviours.

3.4 Within this paper to Council, it was recognised there would be three phases to the Council's recovery process:

- **Restart** - incrementally restarting service provision in line with national guidance.
- **Recover** - rebuilding levels of service capacity, confidence and resilience and supporting reconnection with communities and residents.
- **Renew** - reimagining / building better and resetting Renfrewshire's ambition and vision for the future.

3.5 In line with the Scottish Government's own Routemap for recovery, many services have now been allowed to restart and are adapting to new ways of operating in line with Scottish Government guidance. As this work progresses, consideration is being given to the next phase of recovery, which is often referred to as **renewal, or a process of building back what you do in a better way**. One of the most important elements of this next phase of recovery and renewal, is more fully understanding the impact that the pandemic has had on local people and communities.

#### 4. Impact of COVID-19

4.1 Renfrewshire's Community Plan recognises the significant inequalities that exist across Renfrewshire's communities, with partners working together to connect communities and to ensure local people are able to benefit from opportunities arising from the area's ambitious regeneration plans. These inequalities will undoubtedly have contributed to the impact of COVID-19 in local communities, however it is clear that the services and supports partners have developed over time have also been critical to supporting local people through this initial period of the pandemic.

4.2 From the initial data available to the Council, it is clear that the pandemic has fundamentally impacted local people, businesses and communities, but in many different ways. For some people, COVID-19 has exacerbated these existing inequalities or wellbeing issues, whilst for others it may be the first time that certain issues such as unemployment or ill health have been experienced.

- 4.3 For example, local people have been affected by bereavement and illness, mental and physical wellbeing has been impacted by lockdown measures, the learning experience of children and young people has been significantly impacted and many people have been affected by redundancy or furlough. Many businesses have had to close for an extended period of time, and are having to adhere to new guidance and legislation whilst trying to ensure the financial sustainability of their business going forward.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that the true impact of the pandemic on individual wellbeing will take time to fully emerge, particularly around issues such as physical and mental health, domestic violence, alcohol and drug misuse and wider risk of harm. Some groups of people will have been more disproportionately impacted than others, with potentially more significant impacts on women, young people, people with a disability and within the local BAME population. Much will depend on the starting point of each individual, with potentially more significant impacts on those people already experiencing wellbeing issues. A summary of some of the key impacts are highlighted in the table below:

### The Impact of COVID-19 on Renfrewshire's Communities

#### Social Impacts

- The impact of lockdown and school closure on families and young people in terms of learning, achievement and life chances.
- Evidence is emerging that some groups have been more impacted than others eg people with a disability, BAME, young people and women
- The impact of lockdown in terms of social isolation and loneliness and the loss of connection, particularly for people living alone and for those shielding.
- The impact of bereavement for families, who have lost close relatives, with people living in deprived areas 2.1 times more likely to die from COVID 19.
- Potential hidden impact in terms of family relationships, domestic violence and alcohol and drug use
- Many behaviours have changed with people accessing services online, using their care less, and utilising outdoor space much more.

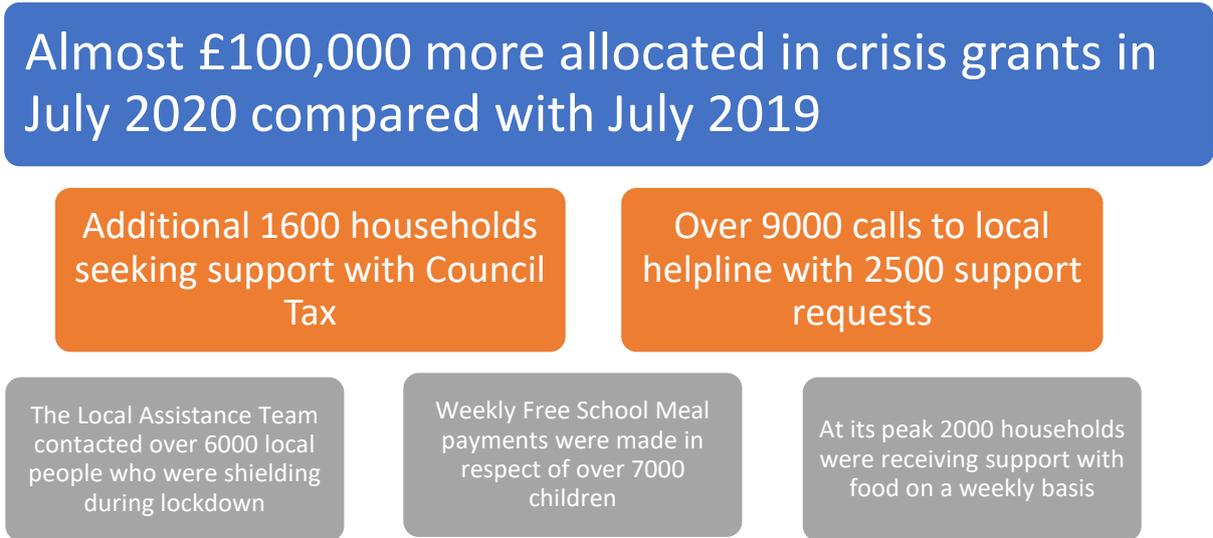
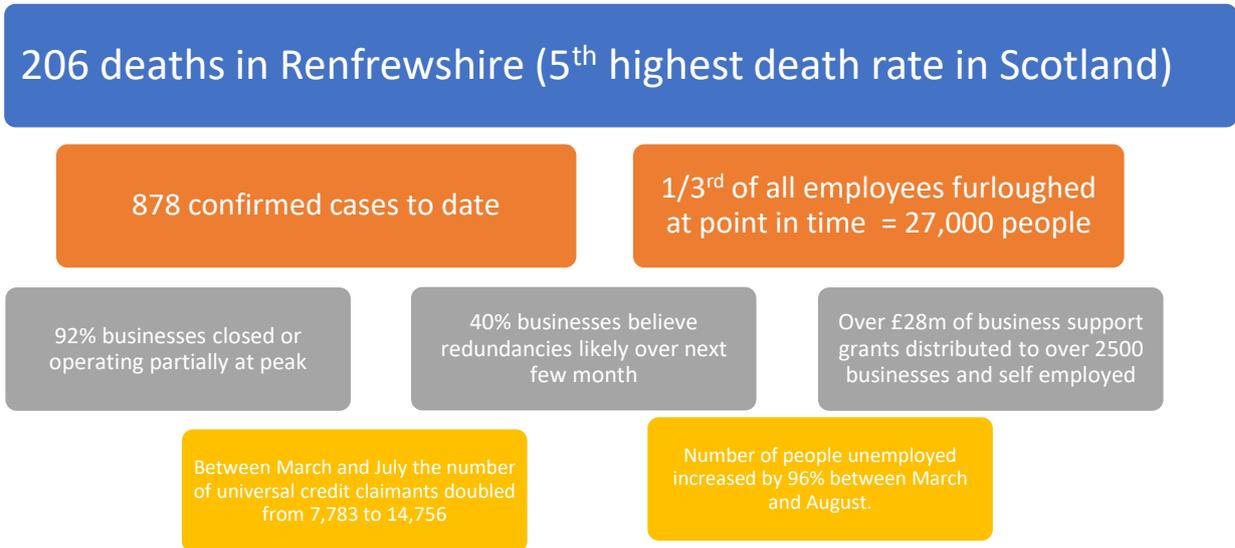
#### Economic

- Many people have been furloughed or made redundant that have never experienced unemployment – the number of people experiencing unemployment is anticipated to rise shortly in the next few months
- It is estimated 60% of people in employment are living in poverty – low income and insecure employment will have made people much less able to manage financially
- People on low incomes and impacted by poverty have required increased support to access food and crisis grants
- Mortgage payment and credit card “holidays” have been put into place, with the impact of loss of income on levels of debt and housing yet to be assessed.

#### Health

- With health services focusing on the crisis response, there is concern that many people will not have sought help for medical conditions
- Many people have not been able to attend existing appointments or their treatment for a condition has been impacted.
- Many of the models of care and support that are in place to support vulnerable people have been under significant stress and opportunities to change these are being considered?
- It is anticipated that the hidden impact of COVID19 on individual circumstance may significantly increase the numbers of people requiring support for mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, or for issues relating to alcohol and drugs

4.5 Services have been working to consider the data that is currently available from local and national sources on the impact of the pandemic. Key points to highlight from this data are:



4.6 In addition to the range of more negative impacts highlighted above, it is also important to recognise that the pandemic has had a positive impact on some aspects of life including:

- Community – local people and communities rallied round to provide support local people during this first phase of the pandemic. Very positive relationships were built between all partners, with collaboration around community food provision and in developing the new neighbourhood hubs model. Local groups and organisation successfully accessed nearly £0.7m in external funding to support their local initiatives.
- Volunteering – significant numbers of local people signed up to volunteer through the Scotland Cares Campaign. At a local level, around 800 volunteers were active at any one time supporting some of the Council’s community partner organisations. In partnership with Engage, a local

Volunteer Reserve Bank was also established with 250 volunteers signed up to this.

- Climate change – during the lockdown there was a significant fall in the use of all modes of travel. Due to ongoing restrictions, significant numbers of people are working from home and are not using cars or public transport, with more people also utilising public space outdoor, including cycling and waling routes. These positive changes in travel behaviours and use of public space should they continue, could support local work to reduce carbon emissions in Renfrewshire.
- Digital – Local partners in Renfrewshire have been working to address digital inclusion in recent years. Through lockdown and the ongoing restrictions, partners have developed new and innovative ways to support people to stay connected, to receive support or to access services. The Connecting Scotland programme has enabled partners to distribute nearly 300 devices and connectivity to those most vulnerable, with national plans to extend this further.

### **Renfrewshire's Community Impact Assessment**

- 4.7 Whilst the data summarised at Section 4.5 is helpful in supporting the Council and its partners to identify the key actions that need to be taken immediately to support local people, much more work is required to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 in Renfrewshire. It is important that the Council and partners listen to the experiences of local people, in order to find out how their lives have changed and what needs to happen to support them. There is growing consensus at a local and national level that the impact of COVID-19 has changed lives in such a fundamental way, that it may be possible to fundamentally change the way in which we work together to tackle inequality and improve wellbeing in the future.
- 4.8 In order to respond to this new and pressing challenge, partners in Renfrewshire have agreed to take forward a Community Impact Assessment. The purpose of this is to:
- Ensure that partners continue to work together on the immediate pandemic response, and have the information they need to adapt services to the needs of local people as they change over time;
  - Involve local people in this process, and ask them to help us to develop new solutions to the issues that are being experienced across communities and;
  - Allow partners over the longer term to adapt what they do and to target or even redirect resources to where they are most needed.
- 4.9 **This learning and listening approach**, aligns very closely to the work being undertaken by the Scottish Government as part of the COVID-19 response, with a Social Renewal Advisory Board established in Summer 2020 to tackle poverty and inequality in Scotland in the wake of the pandemic.
- 4.10 In taking forward the community impact assessment it will be important to gain the support of all partners, local people and elected members, in order to

ensure that this assessment fully reflects the needs and experiences of local people across Renfrewshire. Specifically the assessment will involve:

- Analysing all of the information that partners have on the use of key services and how this is changing over time
- Using local and national research to consider the impact of COVID-19 on specific groups within local communities
- A community voices campaign - Engaging with local people and community groups and organisations to understand their experiences of COVID-19, and to strengthen the Council's relationships with these groups.

4.11 The Community Voices campaign is the most significant part of the impact assessment. Partners are working on proposals for the campaign, with key elements likely to include:

- A programme of listening events intended to engage with people from across Renfrewshire, with a strong focus on engaging with people who may have been more disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. A particular focus agreed by partners will be on the impact on young people.
- Using our next Public Service Panel survey to ask local people about the changes in their lives and what they might need to access in their local community to support them.
- Working with the 7 Local Partnerships to identify the issues being experienced by local communities;
- Maintaining an ongoing dialogue with third sector and community groups so that partners can learn from the experience and knowledge that is being gained every week in local communities.

4.12 Engage Renfrewshire recently hosted Renfrewshire's first listening event in partnership with the Council, which was held in support of the Social Renewal Advisory Group. 12 groups and organisations involved in the pandemic response in Renfrewshire contributed to the session, and it was a fantastic opportunity to hear about the experiences of these organisations.

## **5. Recovery and renewal - responding to the pandemic and its impact**

5.1 Prior to the pandemic, the Council had been progressing its Right for Renfrewshire programme, which with partners, would allow the Council to deliver on its ambitions for Renfrewshire, as set out in the Council and Community plans.

5.2 Recognising the significant inequalities that exist across local communities, community planning partners agreed collectively to ensure Renfrewshire was a place where people felt connected and were able to access opportunities to improve their quality of life and wellbeing. It was recognised that these ambitions were challenging, with a need to address long term challenges around poverty, alcohol and drug misuse, and mental and physical health and wellbeing.



- 5.3 With partners, the organisation has responded to these challenges by prioritising work to reduce the poverty related attainment gap, by tackling poverty and supporting financial inclusion, providing targeted support to access training and employment, and working with communities in different ways to encourage participation and engagement. A nationally recognised programme of economic and cultural regeneration has been progressed, to maximise the opportunities from City Deal investments and with developments such as AMIDS ensuring that Renfrewshire was viewed as an exciting location for external investment.
- 5.4 **Whilst the starting point for this work has changed for everyone – individuals, communities, businesses and partners – it is possible to use this opportunity to tackle many of the complex issues faced in Renfrewshire such as poverty and inequality in a different way, as we move forward in the pandemic response.** Many leading organisations such as Carnegie Trust, refer to this approach as social renewal.
- 5.5. A key element of our local approach will be to absolutely align what partners do to support both economic and social wellbeing in response to the pandemic. An Economic Recovery Plan is being developed in Renfrewshire, as reported in a separate report on economic impact, to this full Council meeting. The report recognises the need to develop an inclusive growth approach at a local level, so that all local people can access opportunities for fair work. In a recent report by Carnegie Trust, the importance of fair work to social and economic recovery from COVID-19 is recognised:

- Work enables people to provide for themselves and their families
- It allows people to buy goods and services that they need
- It helps to build connections in communities and
- It fosters a sense of individual and collective identity.

5.6 Whilst the longer term social recovery and renewal plan is being developed, it remains absolutely critical for partners to focus on what can be done to support local people and communities now.

**What do we need to focus on now?**

5.7 From the data available to the Council and its partners currently, there are several issues which have been identified as an immediate priority as highlighted in the diagram below:



5.8 A number of the key actions being progressed with partners are highlighted in the table below. As this work is ongoing, new opportunities are being identified and progressed on an ongoing basis.

Issue	Local Response planned or underway
Income and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners to support community food provision to ensure this is resilient over the winter months;</li> <li>• Working with local advice partners to launch a campaign to encourage people to seek support on income and debt issues;</li> <li>• Supporting employees to access help and advice on financial issues;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with the Poverty Alliance as part of the Get Heard campaign to listen to the experiences of local partners;</li> <li>• Review current programmes supported through the Tackling Poverty Programme and make recommendations on future allocation with a key focus on child poverty;</li> <li>• Work has commenced through the Local Employability Partnership to look at options for the youth guarantee scheme recently announced;</li> <li>• Preparing a bid for the new Kickstart Scheme - a £2 billion fund to create hundreds of thousands of 6-month work placements aimed at those aged 16 to 24 who are on Universal Credit and are deemed to be at risk of long term unemployment.</li> <li>• The Council will deliver the Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) which is a government funded (£0.2m) two-year pilot programme aimed at tackling in-work poverty in Renfrewshire.</li> </ul>
Social isolation and loneliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A range of alternative culture and leisure opportunities are being offered by Renfrewshire Leisure, including the Libraries Direct service. These will continue to be developed alongside core provision.</li> <li>• Neighbourhood hubs are now in place and are building strong resilient networks with local groups and organisations and handling referrals from local people.</li> <li>• Strategic Planning Group (sub group of IJB) will lead programme of partnership working on connection, with Cllr Jacqueline Cameron identified as champion for social isolation and loneliness.</li> </ul>
Think local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services are identifying opportunities to ensure more local suppliers are able to access contracts advertised by the Council and partners</li> <li>• Local Community Benefits Forum adapting its approach to maximise opportunities for local people and communities.</li> <li>• Spend Local campaign supported by Council and partners</li> </ul>
Mental health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HSCP recently launched a new bereavement support network in partnership with local hospices and partners</li> <li>• Mental health support helpline piloted by RAMH – Hear for You.</li> <li>• Support for Families helpline operated by Education Psychology Services</li> <li>• Final report and recommendations of the Alcohol and Drugs Commission due to be finalised by December 2020.</li> </ul>
Family support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work is ongoing to assess the impact of COVID-19 on local families. Services such as Families First, Homelink and Community Learning and Development work proactively with schools and early learning establishments to identify and support families experiencing difficulties.</li> </ul>

Digital inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Strategy approved by Leadership Board on 17 September with digital inclusion as key focus.</li> <li>• The Council worked in partnership with local community and third sector orgs to distribute 270 devices locally to vulnerable people. The next phase of this work has now commenced.</li> <li>• Devices were provided to children and young people to support home learning and further devices will be distributed to children in Renfrewshire, supported by national funding.</li> </ul>
Participation and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrating Renfrewshire fund for young people now open which will us participatory budgeting to allocate funds to local groups</li> <li>• First community listening event in the Community Voice programme held on 4 September 2020.</li> <li>• Learning from volunteering experience during COVID-19 is being reviewed in partnership with Engage Renfrewshire. This will ensure Renfrewshire is well prepared to support people to volunteer, particularly as a route to access employment in the future.</li> </ul>
Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A range of partners, including Youth Services, have adapted their approach to working with young people during the pandemic. Digital solutions have been progressed and some face to face activities have started to resume in the community.</li> <li>• Youth Services also worked with Renfrewshire Youth Voice to set up the ‘Unheard Voices Campaign’ – to find out how lockdown and the COVID-19 virus has affected young people and those who support young people</li> </ul>

## 6. Next steps

- 6.1 In taking forward the community impact assessment and the subsequent social renewal plan, officers will engage with all partners, residents and communities in a way that reflects the Council’s values:

We are **fair**: we treat each other and everyone we deal with respectfully and work hard to build trust in Renfrewshire Council

We are **helpful**: we care about getting things right and are always approachable.

We are great **collaborators**: we work as one team and with people who care about this place.

We value **learning**: to help us innovate, improve and deliver better services.

- 6.2 It is recognised that a significant proportion of the Council’s employees live in Renfrewshire, and have also been impacted by COVID-19 in many ways. The

HR and OD team have recently conducted a review of the support that the organisation provides to the Council's workforce, with a particular focus on health and wellbeing in light of COVID-19. The impact on employees will continue to be subject to regular review.

- 6.3 In terms of further updates to Council, it is proposed that services work with partners and submit a draft renewal plan to Council in December 2020. In developing the plan, services will aim to involve as wide a range of local people and groups, and provide information on local events to elected members as part of this process.

### Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – the pandemic has had and will continue to have a significant impact on the resources available to the Council. Given the anticipated longer term financial challenges facing the Council, the requirement for targeting of resources in priority areas will be essential.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - the commitment of the Council's workforce since the pandemic emerged has been fundamental to the ability of services to continue to support local people, businesses and communities. A significant proportion of the Council's workforce live locally in Renfrewshire, and many of the social impacts outlined in the report are also being experienced by our employees. Targeted support is being offered to employees in order to address issues such as financial insecurity and mental health and wellbeing.
3. **Community/Council Planning** – There has been a strong partnership response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Renfrewshire with community and third sector organisations working closely together to maximise the resources available at a local level to meet the needs of local people and communities. This will be a critical focus going forward as partners work collectively to mitigate the impact on those most negatively impacted in our communities.
4. **Legal** - New legislative requirements have been put into place by the Scottish Government to support the country's response to COVID-19. There may be further changes to these requirements or further legislation as the lockdown measures ease, which the Council will require to respond to.
5. **Property/Assets** - none
6. **Information Technology** – none
7. **Equality and Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health and Safety** - none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** - none
12. **COSLA Policy Position** - none
13. **Climate Risk** – none

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### **List of Background Papers**

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